



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

# House of Commons Debates

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VOLUME 146 • NUMBER 066 • 1st SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT

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OFFICIAL REPORT  
(HANSARD)

**Tuesday, December 13, 2011**

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**Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer**

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# HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, December 13, 2011

The House met at 10 a.m.

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*Prayers*

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## ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

●(1005)

[*Translation*]

### ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

**The Speaker:** I have the honour to lay upon the table, pursuant to subsection 23(5) of the Auditor General Act, the report of the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development to the House of Commons, dated December 2011, with an addendum on environmental petitions from January 1, 2011, to June 30, 2011.

[*English*]

This report is permanently referred to the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development.

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### 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 13 petitions.

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### INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARY WATERS TREATY ACT

**Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC)** moved for leave to introduce Bill C-383, An Act to amend the International Boundary Waters Treaty Act and the International River Improvements Act.

He said: Mr. Speaker, finally, I am proud today to rise to introduce my private member's bill, an act to amend the International Boundary Waters Treaty Act and the International River Improvements Act.

This enactment would amend the International Boundary Waters Treaty Act to prohibit the bulk removal of transboundary waters. Some definitions and exceptions that are currently found in regulations would be transferred to the act.

This enactment would also provide for measures to administer and enforce the act.

Last, it would also make a consequential amendment to the International River Improvements Act. This would protect all waters that now are not under provincial regulation.

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

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## PETITIONS

ASBESTOS

**Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I have a petition signed by literally thousands of Canadians who call upon the House of Commons and 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 industrial or occupational causes combined. Yet Canada remains one of the largest producers and exporters of asbestos in the world.

The petitioners also criticize the fact that Canada spends millions of dollars subsidizing the asbestos industry and blocking international efforts to curb its use.

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

HUMAN RIGHTS

**Mr. Kennedy Stewart (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank Helen Chang, a Burnaby—Douglas constituent, for providing me with a petition concerning hate crimes.

The petition requests that the Attorney General of Canada enact a hate crimes statistics act and implement a standardized mandatory hate crime reporting system.

### Government Orders

Unfortunately, intolerance remains a major issue right across Canada, whether it pertains to hate crimes against women, visible minorities or the LGBTQ community. However, community actions such as this petition, or Kaitlin Burnett's Purple Letter Campaign about implementing a gender identity and sexual orientation policy for all B.C. schools, demonstrate how we can come together and stop hate crimes.

#### COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY

**Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to present this petition today from dozens of people in places like St. Charles, Chandler, Sturgeon Falls and West Arm and a lot of senior citizens in my community who live in rural areas. The petitioners are seniors and property owners of mobile homes.

It is public policy for the Government of Canada to assure that all Canadians have access to modern communications technology. The petitioners call upon the House of Commons and Parliament to petition Bell Canada to bring telephone services to their community and to petition the CRTC to use its good offices to apprise Bell Canada of its obligations to Canadians and, specifically, to Canadians who live in rural areas.

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#### QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

**The Speaker:** Is that agreed?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

## GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1010)

[English]

#### FAIR REPRESENTATION ACT

**Hon. Tim Uppal (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC)** moved 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 third time and passed.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to begin the last stage of debate today on the government's Bill C-20, the fair representation act. Now that we have had the benefit of second reading debate and committee review, the value of this bill has become even more clear. There is no question that Bill C-20 represents the most practical and fair approach to improving representation in the House of Commons.

This bill would address a series of important points for Canadians. Most importantly, it would address the serious and increasing under-representation of our fastest growing provinces: Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta. This under-representation means a number of things. It means Canadians in these three provinces are not represented properly in terms of number of members of Parliament. It means that the votes of citizens living in each of these three provinces do not have nearly the same weight as the votes of citizens living in the other seven provinces.

Certainly, we must strike a balance within our constitutional framework between voter equality and effective representation across the country. The principle of voter equality and representation by population is an important one. Many Canadians would agree it is the single most important principle. That is why we need to ensure we have a seat allocation formula that, to the greatest extent possible, provides equal weight to every Canadian's vote. I believe this is the fair thing to do and many Canadians would agree with that.

The seat allocation formula instituted in 1985 does not provide anywhere near the equality of vote that we need. We must change it. Not only is the current formula not as fair as it should be to all provinces and Canadians, but it is also increasingly unfair to Canadians in the three fastest growing provinces, which also happen to be three of the four largest provinces. This problem is significant now and is only going to get worse if we continue with the status quo.

Over 60% of Canadians live in these three provinces and so more than 60% of Canadians are under-represented in the House. To me, to many of my colleagues here, to my constituents and to our government, this is unacceptable. Therefore, we are addressing this problem.

We are keeping our promises to Canadians and those promises are worth repeating. In the last campaign, we made three distinct promises on House of Commons representation to Canadians. 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 representation of Quebec according to population. We are delivering on each of those promises with this bill. We have promised to ensure that any update to the formula would be fair for all Canadians and all provinces, and we are doing just that.

The opposition has brought forth alternatives, but those alternatives would not keep our promises to Canadians. Each proposal has numerous flaws. We disagree with the opposition's approach. We promised specific things to Canadians on this issue and we are going to deliver on our promises. We are going to deliver a principled, reasonable and fair bill for all Canadians.

I would like to address the proposals from the NDP and the Liberals. Their proposals compromise the democratic representation of some Canadians in pursuit of political statements. This is something we are not doing. The NDP has proposed a bill that would add an element to our seat allocation formula that would violate the constitutional principle of proportional representation. It would guarantee a province a fixed percentage of seats in the House regardless of its share of the population. This would not be in keeping with our goal of moving all provinces closer to representation by population.

*Government Orders*

•(1015)

The NDP proposal would introduce a new factor that would cause further under-representation of the fastest growing provinces, the very provinces that we need to treat more fairly. Furthermore, to alter the principle of proportional representation would take a constitutional amendment that requires the consent of the provinces through the 7/50 amending formula. This change proposed by the NDP is not something this House and our Parliament can do on its own. From that perspective, this proposal is unconstitutional without that element of provincial consent.

We have seen that the NDP is more than happy to put a political statement in one province ahead of fair representation for all Canadians. What is more, the NDP cannot tell Canadians just how many extra seats it plans to provide. Canadians do not know what to expect from the NDP. It uses out-of-date numbers and cannot give Canadians any certainty on seat numbers.

We have been clear with Canadians. Canadians know exactly what to expect from our bill and our government. We made sure to use the most accurate numbers we have, and we made sure Canadians would know exactly what to expect from their government.

The Liberals present a proposal that would be a recipe for provincial anger and conflict. It would go directly against our second promise to Canadians, that we would protect the seat counts for smaller, slower growing provinces. This point was made eloquently by my colleague from Wellington—Halton Hills last Tuesday afternoon, and I think he is correct.

The Liberals' proposal would take seats away from the smaller, slower growing provinces, and give those seats to the larger, faster growing provinces. Simply shuffling the deck is not as easy as it sounds. It may be the practice in some other countries, as some colleagues have correctly pointed out, but it has not been the practice here in our country.

The Liberal proposal would lead to seat losses for the provinces of Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Quebec, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland and Labrador. Nine seats would be lost by those provinces.

Despite the challenges put forward by the Liberal members from Saint-Laurent—Cartierville and Winnipeg North, I do not think that the people in the governments of those five provinces would happily endorse the proposal.

We make no apologies for addressing the significant and increasing under-representation of ordinary Canadians. Our bill does that, just as we promised to do. We also believe, and make no apologies for believing, that this problem should not be fixed by inflicting seat losses on other provinces. Just as we would ensure that no province could move from being overrepresented to being under-represented as a result of the formula, we would also ensure that no province loses seats through this formula.

That is consistent across the whole of our bill. We have demonstrated this consistency when making our commitments to Canadians during past elections. Consistency, however, is not a feature of the Liberal position. Let me give some examples.

The Liberals have enjoyed quoting from committee reports from 1994. What they leave out is that the Liberal government at the time rejected the very advice and principles that the Liberals are trying to promote today.

The Liberal government of the time had no interest in fixing the obvious flaws of the current formula. It had no intention of reducing the number of seats in the House, freezing the size of the House or taking seats away from any provinces.

I am certainly not going to argue that our Conservative government has much in common with that previous Liberal government, quite the opposite in fact. Our Conservative government has continued the hard work of fixing many of the problems that the Liberal government did not care to deal with during its 13 years in power.

My point is this: the Liberal proposal is not firmly grounded in our country's history or any particular principle. The Liberal position is politically convenient. That is it. What is more, we are not exactly sure how the Liberals propose their plan would work in the future.

We have been clear. Our formula is fair, nationally applicable and permanent. Rules that would be applied in this readjustment would be applied in the same way in the next readjustment.

•(1020)

We have been clear in our bill. The Liberals have not even tabled a bill. They only held a press conference and presented a couple of charts. The member for Saint-Laurent—Cartierville has been passionate about their ideas, but they have not tabled a bill, so we do not know how they plan to solve some of the major problems of their bill. Their proposal, as with the current formula, would quickly run up against the effect of the constitutional seat force, in this case the Senate floor rule.

Their proposal would continue to take seats away from smaller, slower growing provinces and give them to the larger, faster growing ones until they could not do that any more. The smaller, slower growing provinces are all very close to their Senate floors. Quickly it would become impossible to take seats away from them to give to the provinces that deserve increased representation. The Liberals have not put forward a bill that lays out how they propose to deal with this situation. I do not think Canadians should let them skip over this problem.

The Liberals' proposal immediately brings Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia down to their Senate floors. New Brunswick and P.E.I. are already at their Senate floors. After one readjustment, no more seats could be removed from Atlantic Canada.

*Government Orders*

Saskatchewan and Manitoba have some room to fall further, but then those provinces, which are significantly larger than any of the Atlantic provinces, would have the same or fewer seats than those Atlantic provinces. That cannot be fair at all. Saskatchewan and Manitoba's combined population of over 2.3 million could have fewer seats than New Brunswick and Nova Scotia's combined population of just over 1.7 million. In fact, Saskatchewan and Manitoba have approximately the same population as all four Atlantic provinces combined. To remove seats from these prairie provinces at all is clearly unfair and unjust to Canadians living in those provinces.

I suppose the Liberals could suggest taking even more seats away from Quebec. The Liberals have proposed taking three seats away from Quebec this time around, and I can only suppose that they would not see any problem with taking even more away.

What do the Liberals propose to avoid this situation? They have no idea because they have decided these issues are not important enough to them to table an actual bill.

I come back to my point that the Liberals' proposal is simply politically opportunistic. It is an attempt to score political points while ignoring the very real consequences of their proposal. They can do this because they do not have to worry about their proposal actually becoming law and a part of our Constitution. They know their proposal is flawed, that it will not become law and that they are not responsible for ensuring fairness for all Canadians.

Our Conservative government has responsibility for all these things. We have a responsibility to govern for all Canadians and to ensure fairness for all Canadians. That is why our proposal is fair for all Canadians. It is our job to make it that way and we have done exactly that. As I said, we made promises to Canadians. These principles form the basis of the bill and we are not going to move away from them. We are confident that we have struck the right balance and that our bill provides the most fair, practical and accurate way to move forward to what is fair representation.

Earlier in my remarks I made note of the committee stage this bill went through. I would like to return to that point to emphasize some of the strengths of the bill and our approach. One point I would like to emphasize is the source of our proposal to streamline the boundary readjustment process. Ultimately, these changes would help to complete the process faster which in turn would provide clarity to Canadians sooner with respect to their riding boundaries.

With these changes, we project that it will be possible to bring forward the completion of the boundary readjustment process in early 2014, instead of late 2014 under the present timelines. During the hearings of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, both the current Chief Electoral Officer, Mr. Marc Mayrand, and the former chief electoral officer, Jean-Pierre Kingsley, noted that these amendments are consistent with previous recommendations made by them and that there would be no problems associated with the timelines.

• (1025)

Mr. Mayrand stated:

We are confident that we and the commissions will be able to proceed and implement the new formula and the remainder of provisions of the legislation without too much difficulty, provided it's enacted in time.

Mr. Mayrand also stated that the best scenario was for this bill to be passed and in place in time for the February 8, 2012 start date of the readjustment process. During his testimony at committee, he spoke about the importance of having the legislation adopted as soon as possible and the danger of further delay. He said:

The best date, in our mind, would be before the commissions are set up in February. Otherwise, commissions will have to start their work, the legislation will come into place later on, and they will have to restart again. That may, of course, generate additional costs, but also quite a bit of confusion, depending on what time the legislation comes into place.

It is our intention to heed the advice of Canada's Chief Electoral Officer and prevent this sort of additional cost, duplication of effort and confusion.

I will also point out the changes of data source for the allocation of seats by provinces as a strength of this bill. This is the requirement in the bill that Statistics Canada's population estimates be used to determine the allocation of seats by province instead of the decennial census figures. The population estimates are the most accurate data available because they are adjusted to account for under-coverage of the census itself. These 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.

As Chief Statistician Wayne Smith stated during his testimony before the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs:

—it is Statistics Canada's view that the currently available estimates of population at July 1 represent the best available evaluation of the population of the provinces and territories that is available at this time or that will be available on February 8. It is therefore appropriate, in our view, that they should be used for the purposes of Bill C-20.

Mr. Smith's comments represent a strong endorsement of our government's decision to use the best available data for each stage of this process. The census numbers will of course continue to be used for the electoral boundary readjustment process because they provide a level of geographic detail that is necessary to draw the boundaries, again the best data available for this stage of that process.

To conclude, for over two decades Canadians from Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta have become significantly under-represented in the House of Commons due to population growth. They will continue to become even more under-represented if action is not taken to correct the status quo. Clearly, this increasing and significant under-representation is not fair. Every Canadian's vote to the greatest extent possible should carry equal weight. Since forming government in 2006, our Conservative government has consistently demonstrated its commitment to fighting the significant and increasing under-representation of ordinary Canadians in the House of Commons.

Given that the decennial boundary readjustment process begins February 8, 2012, tonight's vote is the last opportunity for members to say to Canadians that the status quo is unacceptable. I encourage the opposition to vote in favour of this legislation which is fair for all provinces and which moves every single Canadian closer to representation by population.

*Government Orders*

[Translation]

**Mr. Marc-André Morin (Laurentides—Labelle, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the member from the other side made a very impressive speech. I cannot imagine being so sure about so many things.

Our societies are becoming increasingly complex, and demagogues are always tempted to find simple solutions that generally do not work. The member said that the main problem is representation by population. That might be true if we lived in the United States or elsewhere in the world, where that is a basic principle. But I do not understand how he can ignore all of the other factors, such as the representation of aboriginals, women and visible minorities, and historic facts, such as the notion of the founding peoples of Canada.

How can he ignore all of the other issues and conclude that there is only one problem?

• (1030)

[English]

**Hon. Tim Uppal:** Mr. Speaker, the main problem, and the problem we are addressing, is the under-representation of the fastest growing provinces. We made a commitment to Canadians that we would address that.

Those fastest growing provinces represent 60% of the population. Those populations include women, aboriginals, new Canadians and visible minorities who happen to live in those provinces more so than the other provinces. Therefore, new Canadians and visible minorities become the most under-represented among all Canadians.

We made a commitment to Canadians to address that under-representation. That is what we are doing with this bill. This bill moves all Canadians, no matter where they live in Canada, closer to representation by population. Essentially we are making the system more fair for every single Canadian.

**Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the minister delivered his best speech since the beginning of debate, and it is only a couple of hours before the final vote.

If he would have been willing to engage the opposition to look at amendments, I think we would have come up with a much better bill than the one on which we will be voting.

He repeated again and again that the government does not want to pick winners and losers. That is empty rhetoric. The world is doing that. Canada did it. This House has been the same size for 25 years now. Provinces are doing that all the time. Canadians told him in the latest poll yesterday that four out of five of them do not want his plan and accept the idea of keeping the House a reasonable size.

He mentioned the future. I would be pleased to discuss the future with him. If we accept the high growth scenario of Statistics Canada, we would end up with a House with 392 seats with his plan. It may not be this one, but even the middle growth scenario would give us a House with 354 seats.

He said that no province should have fewer seats than a province that is less populous. We all agree. I said many times, if we did not table the bill, it is because we were willing to amend the government's bill and to work with the minister. Why did he not want to work with us? Why, in the last hours of debate on the bill, is he not commenting on the substance of our proposal and asking

valid questions, to which I would have given him valid answers? We would have been able to improve the law of the land for Canadians. Why is it impossible to work with the government?

**Hon. Tim Uppal:** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the hon. member's comments and his input on debate on the bill. From the entire opposition we have had good debate on the bill.

As I mentioned in my speech, the opposition has come forward with proposals. We have discussed those proposals, including the government's proposal, here in the House of Commons. We have done that in committee. We have had good discussions at committee. The bill has come back to the House of Commons and now we are speaking to it for the final time.

We have had those discussions. It is time to vote on one of the bills, the bill that is presented here. We have a bill that is fair for all provinces. It is clear that we are following through and keeping our commitment that we made to Canadians that we would bring every Canadian closer to representation by population.

**Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the minister for a great job not only on his speech today, but on the background work that has gone on to bring us to where we are today.

I serve on the procedure and House affairs committee with many of my colleagues. We heard from Jean-Pierre Kingsley, and from Marc Mayrand, who is the current Chief Electoral Officer. We also heard from the Chief Statistician of Statistics Canada. Without exception, they affirmed the direction in which we are going with this bill.

There is one part I would like my colleague to comment on again. That is the area of the timing, of getting the bill into force so that the electoral boundaries commissions can get on with their work and not incur undue cost for Canadians.

• (1035)

**Hon. Tim Uppal:** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's question and also his work on the committee. The committee did great work on this bill.

As he said, it is important that we pass the bill as soon as possible. The commissions will start their work in February and we need this new formula in place to avoid duplication of their work. The Chief Electoral Officer has said that if we do not get this done in time, they will begin their work, and when the bill eventually passes, they will have to restart their work, which could cost more money and would definitely cause confusion to Canadians.

To avoid the duplication of work of those independent non-partisan commissions, it is important to pass the bill as soon as possible. That is why we are voting on it tonight.

I ask the opposition to support this very fair and principled bill.

*Government Orders*

**Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the minister made reference to “fair for all Canadians” several times during his speech. Given the fact that northern Ontario is bigger than most Canadian provinces, and that most ridings are bigger than most European countries, will the minister commit here today to not removing a seat from northern Ontario to give its people, as the minister said, fair representation for all Canadians?

**Hon. Tim Uppal:** Mr. Speaker, we will commit to ensuring that the process of redrawing the boundaries continues to be independent, non-partisan, and at arm's length of the government at all times. This bill presents a formula to give seats to the different provinces.

In February the process will begin for the independent non-partisan commission to look at where the population is and to redraw those boundaries. It will be consulting with Canadians to get their suggestions. It will be consulting at some point with members of Parliament as well.

Therefore, we will commit to ensuring that this continues to be, as has been our history in Canada, a non-partisan independent process, which is a very important principle for redistribution of those boundaries.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, Bill C-20, the more politicians bill, is really what the bill is all about.

In fact, I want to go to what the Prime Minister used to say about members of Parliament. This is a quote from our current Prime Minister just a few years ago. He stated, “The size of the House should be capped. Maybe even the size should be lowered”. In fact, the current Prime Minister used to say that we only need 265 to 295 members of Parliament at the most.

The current government has had a flip-flop on the issue. Now it believes we should increase the size of the House of Commons, which contradicts what a vast majority of Canadians want. The bill would increase the size and the number of members of Parliament. The vast majority of Canadians do not want that. They do not want more MPs.

At one point, the current Prime Minister used to be onside with Canadians. My question to the minister is very simple. What caused the Prime Minister to change his mind? Why, at one time, did he believe we should reduce the numbers and now he wants to increase them?

**Hon. Tim Uppal:** Mr. Speaker, the Liberals came to the table with a proposal that would essentially pick winners and losers, and pit provinces against other provinces. Their proposal would hurt the representation of rural Canadians. They have no plan for what would happen in the future with population growth or what we would do with those provinces that have already hit their seat floor. Their proposal is not an effective proposal.

Our bill that we have brought forward is fair and principled. It is upfront with Canadians as to how many seats will be available to all provinces. It brings every Canadian closer to representation by population. This is a commitment we made to Canadians and we are following through on that commitment.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in this House again here today to

speak to Bill C-20, which has already reached third reading. This bill is going through the House of Commons faster than flu in winter. While Canada is taking a beating, the government can use the word “fair” to describe the bill all it likes, but it is nothing of the sort. I hope the minister sees how ironic it is that this bill is being rammed through the House so quickly. He is the Minister of State for Democratic Reform and although the substance of this bill has to do with democracy, its form has absolutely nothing to do with it. It is appalling that today is the one and only day set aside to debate this bill at third reading. It is almost a joke.

The government can go ahead and say that this bill absolutely must pass and receive royal assent before February 8, 2012, but that argument falls flat because the long list of transitional provisions that were added to the bill deserves our full attention. Not only did this government anticipate what will happen if this bill passes after February 8, 2012, but it has planned for several different scenarios. We realize that this would not be an ideal situation, but when it comes time to reflect on national issues like this one, the NDP recommends taking a careful, collegial and consultative approach. Everyone has a right to express their opinion. But no, the Conservative government is using time allocation motions to tell us not to blink, otherwise we will miss Bill C-20 as it passes through the House. It is shameful.

I have already said many times in the House that the Canadian public's cynicism toward politicians is toxic. Yet I see that the Conservative government has no problem adding to it.

Certain incidents of note occurred as this bill passed through the stages of debate. I am fortunate enough to sit on the Committee on Procedure and House Affairs with many of the members who are here today. In the clause by clause analysis of the bill, the committee had the pleasure of hearing from the former chair of the Electoral Boundaries Commission for Quebec, who was in office during the last redistribution. He suggested some amendments that should be made to the bill with regard to the time frames for drawing boundaries. He is of the opinion that the time frames set out in Bill C-20 are too short.

In good faith, the NDP proposed amendments to the committee and sought to have these time frames adjusted as per the witness' recommendations; however, the Conservative members quickly rejected these amendments. The amendments would have made this complex process more flexible but the Conservative members summarily rejected them. What does this tell us? Have the Conservative members been instructed to reject any proposals made by the opposition even if they make sense? I am having difficulty seeing the logic behind their actions.

There are other ways to resolve all of the problems associated with representation by population in the House of Commons. One of these methods involves analyzing the situation in each province individually. Each province has urban centres and large rural areas. The readjustment of electoral boundaries is a delicate process requiring almost surgical precision. Not only must each riding have approximately the same number of constituents, but there has to be some consistency across ridings. Although this issue is very relevant, it is not addressed in the bill.

*Government Orders*

The logic behind the concept of “community of interest” becomes clear when we look at the issue from that perspective. The needs, concerns and realities of the residents in the riding of the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay are certainly not the same as those of the residents in the riding of the hon. member for Hamilton Mountain. The same logic applies to the magnificent riding of Louis-Saint-Laurent, which I represent, and the riding of the hon. member for Manicouagan. Looking at the redistribution exercise in this light would be an interesting starting point for a different approach to correcting this problem. Urban areas, suburbs and rural areas create a very complex demographic mosaic. As the hon. member for Nickel Belt mentioned in his question, the division of all the regions, northern and urban included, is complicated. Nevertheless, as of tomorrow, Bill C-20 will be in the hands of the unelected Senate, an institution that lacks legitimacy. That is unfortunate.

From 1980 to 2011, we have had successive Liberal and Conservative governments. What has been the result? Two referendums on Quebec's sovereignty and constitutional negotiations that are seen today as so painful that no one wants to talk about them. Their approaches have proven not to work. The NDP has a new solution that includes Quebec. We will leave constitutional crises to the Liberals and the Conservatives. The Conservatives are inept at handling these constitutional matters with any sensitivity. Need I remind hon. members that Quebec still has not ratified the Constitution, but everyone sitting here has the same democratic legitimacy nonetheless? Is this a fair democratic reform? No, the government just wants to quickly add more seats to give the impression that it is taking action when, really, this is nonsense.

• (1040)

The NDP is far better equipped to defend the interests of Quebec. My colleagues from across Canada, whether from Alberta, British Columbia or Ontario, support Bill C-312. What more tangible evidence do you need? Are they any less committed to their own constituents?

Who would have thought? A national party in Canada that understands, defends and respects Quebec.

The NDP is working with Canada as a whole to build a more united Canada that brings everyone together. We are not pitting any province against the others. We are not trying to exacerbate tensions, nor are we trying to promote national differences and differences within the Canadian confederation.

The NDP wants to work on uniting us in respect and mutual understanding. Quebecers sense that our party is capable of this. That is why they voted for us. Quebecers gave us a stable, strong and unequivocal mandate to create a country in keeping with the aspirations and ideals of everyone, whether they are Quebecers, Canadians, francophones, anglophones, aboriginals or Acadians. That is our orange revolution.

Our bill does not just concentrate on Quebec. Alberta is under-represented. If it feels under-represented within the Canadian federation, we agree that that must be corrected. Historically, it suffered a long time from isolation and poverty, and too often it was not heard. Now that its people contribute so much to the Confederation, we must address its issues and listen. But the Conservatives are using Alberta's natural resources and prosperity to

boost themselves. What is worse is that they are using history to separate the province from the rest of Canada. They are even looking to pit it against Quebec, creating the illusion of an “Albertocracy” in Canada. But this is a sham. We cannot prosper as Canadians by exacerbating historic and regional differences to divide and conquer.

Ontario is the most populated province in Canada. That is obviously because of its wealth in terms of people, culture and economics. Furthermore, it is magnificent. It is the product of North American prosperity and we are fortunate that it is in Canada. So it makes sense that it has faster demographic growth.

Now, what about British Columbia, our jewel of the west and destination for Asian immigrants? Its population is rising as well. And yes, it should also be recognized.

In short, we recognize that each province and each nation has specific needs, and we respect that. To get to the bottom of their individual needs, we have to consult with them and work with them. That is not at all what is proposed in Bill C-20. The Conservative government seems to see the provinces as municipalities in a united, monolithic state. And it is not the only federalist party in this House that has had that kind of vision.

The third of the founding peoples is represented—in its entirety—by a single federal department. We have seen where that has got our aboriginal brothers and sisters. If we are to truly have fair representation in this country, I propose that we start there.

I am not saying that as a Quebecker I do not understand the needs of the other provinces. The NDP's Bill C-312 regarding the redistribution of the seats in this chamber very fairly addresses their needs. Bill C-312 simply adds Quebec's demands to the legitimate demands of Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia.

What did previous governments do for Quebec and the aboriginal peoples? Were these not half measures? Their record on reforms is not very inspiring and weak. In general, they opted for the status quo. They are in no position, nor do they have the moral legitimacy, to criticize the NDP's approach. How does this bill change the representation of aboriginal peoples in this House? It is fortunate that Nunavut has already achieved the status of a territory within Confederation. It was a great initiative. However, that is just one among dozens of peoples. How do we encourage them to vote and participate in our democracy? How can we believe that the third founding nation will take an interest in this country when just one federal department has been made responsible for addressing all its ambitions and issues? Furthermore, I am sad to say that this department is headed by a minister who does not appear to understand the issues or be doing a good job.

The sovereignty of aboriginal peoples has been eroded to the point that they have been relegated to one department, Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. It is a very unfortunate precedent. No matter what they say, the threat to Quebec is clear: You are next.

*Government Orders*

And what about democratic reform and fairness? Members are surprised that I am using the example of aboriginal peoples to illustrate the extent of this failure. Do we want Quebec to be a failure as well? Previous governments, whether Liberal or Conservative, almost pushed Quebec to the same extremes. By dint of band-aid solutions, as we see today with Bill C-20, we are surely balkanizing the country. The idea of fairness, as presented by this bill, is inevitably linked to the idea of pan-Canadianism, no matter what the cost.

• (1045)

The tragedy is that it does not apply to Quebec. What does that tell us? It tells us that the Conservatives do not understand Quebec. That does not mean that Quebecers have no interest in federal affairs; far from it. The NDP members realize this. Quebec, working alongside Canada, simply wants its special status within the federation to be respected and protected. That is the rationale behind why Quebecers voted for the NDP. We have respect for Quebec. But what of the Conservatives' response? It is imperialist and reductionist, hence Bill C-20. The NDP's response, on the other hand, is collegial and inclusive, hence Bill C-312.

I wanted to believe the fine words and grand rhetoric from the minister of state, but upon reflection, I find his promises to be empty and insensitive. How many times have I heard from our English-Canadian compatriots that their Canada included Quebec? The Conservatives are disregarding these people and their perception of civilization. The electoral map proves this. The Conservatives now want to reduce Quebec's political weight in the House. Quebec has not achieved its distinct society. Moreover, Quebecers were given the label "nation". And yet, little by little, the Conservatives are slowly chipping away at Quebec's identity.

The Conservative government is trying to solve a national problem with a mathematical equation. This equation is based on random, artificial data. The government is trying its hand at "science" and offending very powerful regional and national interests, which are far more powerful than a simple equation based on equitable considerations. Quebec has been very clear: its National Assembly voted unanimously against a reduction in Quebec's political weight in the House of Commons. The Quebec nation's position within Canada is a balancing act. It is very tricky. The proof is in the pudding: there have been two referendums on sovereignty.

The four seats of Prince Edward Island, which is dear to us, are the key to this whole argument. These four seats are completely warranted and attest to a far more inclusive way of thinking when it comes to Canada than simple fair representation by population.

This is the key to the NDP's argument. Assuming Prince Edward Island is overrepresented strictly in terms of its population, is it really so when one considers its cultural, agricultural and historical contribution to the nation? Not at all. It is entirely deserving of its four seats. Perhaps the Founding Fathers had a far more sophisticated vision for this country than this government. What is at stake here is a legal and constitutional precedent that no one questions. Once again, this is what is at the heart of the NDP's thinking on the matter.

The number of seats does not have to be strictly proportionate to a province's population. The number of seats must be commensurate

with the historical and cultural weight of a province as a part of a whole. The Conservatives misapply the word "fair". I doubt that the Islanders are concerned about the word. The Conservatives see themselves as lords distributing seats as tokens of their appreciation. A nation is not created by stealth. It is a matter of sitting down and understanding the situation.

If the Conservative equation was strictly applied, there would be but two members for the whole of Prince Edward Island. It is calculating, to the point, no questions asked, like it or lump it. If Conservative logic were strictly applied to the three territories, together they would be entitled to one single seat based on the formula. Their combined population does not exceed 111,000 people. Yet, no one is considering taking away their seats. This is proof that fair representation is but an illusion. The definition of fairness is rooted in arbitrary premises. Nunavut's very creation is more or less based on such premises. We realized that Nunavut was a community of interest that deserved to be represented in the House, and so Nunavut now has a seat.

The logic is the same: there are four seats for Prince Edward Island and one seat for Nunavut. Mathematical equations would not produce that result, and yet that is the present situation. Clearly Canada is not built on a cold mathematical equation. Quebec needs more seats, and that must not be achieved at the expense of Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia. Adhering to the 24.35% political weight of Quebec in the House of Commons must not be achieved at the expense of Canada. That is the substance of Bill C-312, which the NDP has introduced. It is a sensible bill, and it is sensitive to regional needs and to the fabric of which our Confederation is made.

If a democratic reform that tackled our democratic problems at their root were the goal, Quebec's sensibilities would have to be respected, and that is not being done. A feeling of unity would have to be created in the Commons, and that is not being done. The aboriginal nations would have to be included, and that is not being done. The Senate would have to be abolished, and that is not being done. Public funding for political parties would have to be restored, and that is not being done. The voting system would have to be reformed, in an intelligent way, and the government certainly has no intention of doing that.

• (1050)

These are the only ways to genuinely combat the disillusionment and cynicism the Canadian public feels toward politics. But what is this government doing? It is repeating the mistakes of the past. It is perpetuating the curse that divides our country. The Conservatives have the audacity to think they are being clever when they do it. This is unbelievable.

*Government Orders*

I will briefly conclude by saying that the status quo has to end here. The NDP is proposing a pragmatic and intelligent solution that kills two birds with one stone: Bill C-312. It fixes the under-representation of Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta; that is sensible. Quebec gets 24.35% of the seats in the House of Commons, the proportion it had when this House adopted a motion recognizing the Quebec nation in a united Canada; that is rational. By doing this, we contribute to building a country where everyone is respected and where each province feels that it is properly represented in this House. It is intelligent and it would not bring about a constitutional crisis.

• (1055)

**Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague. I really enjoy listening to her. She is very knowledgeable, her speeches are well written and she makes them very personal. The problem is that she constantly talks around the subject. It is not her fault. It may be that her party does not have the courage to do what it needs to do.

There are two problems. The first is that the NDP has never quoted a single legal expert who has stated that this Parliament has the right to freeze Quebec's representation at 24.35%. Never. The experts who appeared before the committee said, on the contrary, that it would require a constitutional amendment involving the provinces.

The second problem is that the NDP wants to please everyone and his brother: Ontario, British Columbia, Alberta, Quebec, everyone. How many seats will there be in the House of Commons? I did the calculation and with 350 seats, we would still not accommodate everyone. Why will the NDP not use this opportunity today to say how large the House of Commons would be if we adopted their plan?

**Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, who always makes very pertinent and interesting comments. I would like him to work with us more often in order to make more effective progress on this matter.

To answer his question, personally, I really do not see a problem. All we are saying is that Quebec has been recognized as a nation and Quebecers have the right to retain their political weight in the House of Commons. We just want to settle this matter and say that it is important for the Canadian nation that has recognized the nation of Quebec, to do this for them.

These were not just words or a bone tossed to Quebecers to keep them quiet. There was substance to the recognition. Something we can do at this point to recognize the Quebec nation as such, is to maintain its weight in the House of Commons. As for the figures, we introduced our bill and he knows as much as we do, given that he has very likely read it. Thus, I believe that we have provided everything that is needed to evaluate this matter.

[*English*]

**Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it is nice to be back in the House after a week of being gone.

I want to comment on my colleague's speech, because she is absolutely right. What the government is proposing here is not going to be fair. I need to be very clear on this point.

[*Translation*]

The NDP was the first party to introduce a bill to give more seats to the provinces with the fastest-growing populations and more seats to Quebec.

My riding of Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing is a large riding. It takes me two days to drive from one end to the other, unlike some members who can drive through theirs in half an hour.

When this government introduced a bill in the last Parliament, it gave Ontario more seats than it is proposing in this bill. I know the population in Ontario has grown. We really need to make sure that representation is fair. I wonder if my colleague could comment on that.

**Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse:** Mr. Speaker, I sincerely thank my colleague from northern Ontario. I truly understand her concerns.

Canada is a very complex country. As the member explained, her riding is huge and she must represent all of her constituents from across her region. She has to take care of all the places and natural resources in her riding. She really has a lot to manage in her riding, compared to a riding like mine, which probably has more people, but whose geographic area is quite small. We are in completely different situations.

Reducing the distribution of seats to simply saying that a certain number, more or less, is needed and that is that—without asking any other questions—completely ignores the problem of communities of interests and the representation of geographic and cultural differences, which are sometimes huge.

Something is really missing from this bill and I do not think it solves the problem my hon. colleague was just talking about.

• (1100)

**Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I commend the hon. NDP member for her comments on the importance of defending the interests of Quebec.

As my colleague already mentioned, there are no numbers, but I understand that the NDP's policy and plan would require 30 more seats. An additional 30 seats would cost a lot. On the contrary, the Liberals have a plan that is fair for Quebec and the other provinces and it does not add any seats.

In the hon. member's riding, as in mine, are there people who want more money for researchers, for Fisheries and Oceans, for scientists working on climate change, who want more money to narrow the gap between rich and poor? Do the hon. member's constituents think that spending more money to have more MPs is a better plan than using that money for other things we need in our society?

**Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse:** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for Vancouver Quadra for her question.

*Government Orders*

The financial aspect is very interesting. Canadian taxpayers are currently paying more than \$100 million a year for the other house of Parliament, which is made up of unelected people who have not received a democratic mandate from anyone. We are paying millions of dollars for that. The cost of adjusting the number of members here in order to have better representation is not very high when we compare it to the cost of other place.

If we truly want to cut the cost of our Parliament, it would be much more accurate to say that we no longer need that chamber. It is a relic of days gone by. It was probably necessary at the time, but it no longer serves any purpose and we really have a problem with that.

If money is what is needed to improve our democracy, then let us just abolish the Senate and get on with it.

**Mr. Jean Rousseau (Compton—Stanstead, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to commend the hon. member for Louis-Saint-Laurent for that marvellous demonstration of democracy.

I would like to thank her for the many references she made to Bill C-312. It is just a small bill, yet it seems to really scare the Government of Canada. It is strange how a nation of founding people that was recognized by the House on November 27, 2006, by a motion introduced by the Prime Minister at the time, the member in seat no. 11, across from us, can cause such a stir.

My question pertains to the many realities we have in Canada. How can we better acknowledge Canada's characteristics—particularly those that have been recognized by many previous court rulings—and thus support an undivided, united Canada, as the Conservatives are currently proposing?

**Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse:** Mr. Speaker, of course, I would like to thank the hon. member for Compton—Stanstead for the excellent bill that he introduced in the House.

I think that he has hit the nail on the head. Our country is multicultural. It has many communities of interest and many peoples. Canada has three recognized founding peoples. This country is so complex that we cannot merely decide to divide it like this or like that, rural ridings versus urban ridings, Quebec versus the rest, Alberta versus Canada and so on. It does not make sense. That is not how Canada works. Our party recognizes this. Canadians come from all over and we are able to reconcile our differences, come to an agreement and find common ground with everyone involved. That is what we want to work toward, and that is why we support Bill C-312.

• (1105)

**Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, at the beginning of November, when we started debating Bill C-20, which aims to more fairly allocate seats by province in the House of Commons, I said that Parliament should be united when democracy itself is at stake.

This topic should bring us together as democrats, and take us beyond our partisan differences.

Unfortunately, it seems that we will not achieve this desired unanimity because of the Minister of State for Democratic Reform and the Conservative government, who stubbornly wish to needlessly inflate the House by an additional 30 seats.

In absolute numbers, this would be the largest increase since Confederation, as pointed out by Professor Louis Massicotte from Laval University, one of the experts who testified before the committee.

The Liberal opposition proposed an amendment formula for Bill C-20 that would give Canadians a House that is completely fair—just as fair as with Bill C-20, but without adding any seats to the existing 308.

As set out in Bill C-20, Ontario would have 36% of the seats, Quebec would have 23%, British Columbia would have 12%, and so on, but the total number of seats in the House would not increase.

But as the experts who testified in committee repeated many times, what counts is not the absolute number of seats, it is the proportion of the total.

The Liberals' proposal was very well received across Canada by Canadians of all political stripes, analysts and experts.

Even a number of Conservative and NDP colleagues admitted to me that they preferred the Liberals' proposal. Of course, I will not reveal their names, since those were private conversations.

The Green Party has made a proposal similar to ours. The NDP has taken itself out of the debate by refusing to give any numbers. Instead, it is looking to please everyone by creating a House that is even more bloated than the one proposed by the Conservatives.

[English]

According to an Abacus Data poll released yesterday by *The Hill Times* online, no less than 57% of Canadians preferred the Liberal Party's proposal to keep the number of seats as it is, while shifting their distribution; 22% preferred the status quo; while only 21% want more seats. Hence, four out of five Canadians reject the Conservative plan.

[Translation]

It comes as no surprise that the Conservatives are trying to fast-track the vote on this bill. They know very well that the longer we debate it, the more backlash they will get from the public.

Support for the Liberal Party's position also comes as no surprise. Canadians do not want more MPs; they do not want more politicians. They really do not need them, especially in these tough times when the Conservative government is asking people to tighten their belts. Canadians want a House of Commons that is fair, but they do not want a bloated one.

And that is true across Canada. In my province, for instance, nine out of ten Quebeckers oppose the Conservative plan and 57% of Quebeckers support the Liberal plan.

That said, it is true that some federal and provincial politicians have indicated their preference for the Conservative plan for 338 seats. Only politicians want more politicians.

Canadians are telling us that since we can achieve a House with fair representation with 308 seats, it would be pointless, reckless and irresponsible to add 30 seats. Most of the experts who appeared in committee are of the same opinion as the general public: “yes” to redistributing the seats; “no” to increasing the total number of seats.

*Government Orders*

• (1110)

[English]

In the words of Professor Andrew Sancton from the University of Western Ontario, “But I cannot support any formula that has the effect of adding significantly more MPs than we already have”.

Professor Ken Carty from the University of British Columbia went right to the crux of the matter when he told the committee, “We’re increasing it not because we think there’s a good reason for increasing it; we’re increasing it because it is seen to be the easy way out of dealing with redistribution”.

Canadians have no appetite for a ballooning House of Commons. They are fed up with a lazy government that keeps seeking the easy way out. They want leadership. They want their politicians to do the right thing. They want an equitable House of Commons, but they are happy with its present size.

Canadians have every right to be upset when they see the Conservative government trying to gorge itself with more politicians while it slashes the public service and services to the public.

Canadians have every right to be upset when they see the federal Minister of Finance slashing the federal public service by 10% while the government inflates the number of federal politicians by 10%. That is the Conservative way.

Citizens are asked to tighten their belts while Conservative politicians loosen theirs. The Conservatives have already given themselves a record-size cabinet and a record-size PMO, and now they want a record-size House of Commons.

Canadians have every right to be upset when they see the lack of principles shown by Conservative politicians. No principles, no consistency.

In 1994 a young Calgary MP declared he wanted to decrease the size of the House to 273 seats. Could it be the same man now, the present Prime Minister, proposing to increase the House to 338 seats? He wanted 273 seats yesterday, 338 seats today. That is 65 more seats. Talk about a king-size flip-flop. Excuse me, a royal flip-flop. Could the Prime Minister explain to Canadians what exactly made him change his mind? No principles, no consistency.

In 1996 Ontario’s then progressive conservative government implemented the fewer politicians act that decreased the number of provincial seats from 130 to 103. Our current federal Minister of Finance, Minister of Foreign Affairs and President of the Treasury Board were members of that provincial government. Today, the same trio that wanted less provincial politicians want 30 more federal politicians. Yesterday, it was the fewer politicians act; today, it is the more politicians act. No principles. No consistency.

[Translation]

That is an example of politicians serving themselves rather than serving the public. Canadians do not appreciate that. Consider what is happening elsewhere. In Great Britain, the government—a Conservative government, no less—is also asking the people to make huge sacrifices, but at the same time, it is leading by example and reducing the number of seats by 10%. In New Brunswick, the government—also a Conservative government—is also leading by

example in these times of fiscal austerity and reducing the number of electoral districts.

[English]

What does the Minister of State for Democratic Reform have to say to explain his government’s lack of consistency? Nothing. The only flimsy argument he could find was that we cannot reallocate seats in the House because we would pick winners and losers. Is the minister serious? Who is he trying to kid with this empty rhetoric? Listen to Canadians who are telling him that, with the government’s plan and this inflated House of Commons, Canadians all lose.

What Canadians are telling us loud and clear is that with the Liberal plan, all Canadians would be winners. They would enjoy a more equitable, more representative House of Commons with the same number of MPs as today.

Currently, the Government of Canada is the only federal government that deems it necessary to increase its number of MPs when there is a need to rebalance regional representation in Parliament. The only federal government on this planet. This is unnecessary and unsustainable practice. What is important is not the absolute number of seats; it is the number of seats relative to the whole.

As Professor Sancton told the committee:

The key issue is the fairness of the formula itself and how it affects the relative representation of each of the provinces in relation to the others. Except for incumbent and aspiring MPs, I believe the absolute number of seats in a particular province is quite irrelevant.

This is the reasoning adopted by other democracies, one which also applied to Canada not so long ago. Why not return to this common sense position?

• (1115)

[Translation]

After all, the number of seats in the House of Commons did not change for a quarter century. In 1953, there were 265 seats in the House. Twenty-five years later, in 1978, there were 264. And Canada was no worse off.

[English]

According to Professor Sancton, since Confederation there have been 22 instances of individual provinces losing members of Parliament as a result of redistribution of seats following a census.

Professor Nelson Wiseman from the University of Toronto pointed out to the committee that every single province in Canada, except Newfoundland, Alberta and British Columbia, has lost seats in some redistributions.

[Translation]

I have already pointed out that in our provinces during the 1990s, Ontario reduced its number of MPPs from 130 to 103. Likewise, during that same decade, the numbers in New Brunswick went from 58 to 55, in Prince Edward Island they went from 32 to 27, in Newfoundland and Labrador they went from 52 to 48, in Saskatchewan from 66 to 58, while Manitoba has consistently had 57 seats since the 1950s.

*Government Orders*

Keeping a reasonable number of seats would be possible throughout the democratic world, in our provinces and in this House, as it was not so long ago. Why is this possible everywhere else and at all times, but not in the House of Commons of Canada today? This Conservative government is about to impose on Canadians the largest inflation in the number of federal seats in the history of the federation at a time when it is making cuts everywhere else. It makes no sense.

[*English*]

We need to think about the future. We already have a higher MP-to-population ratio than is the norm in democracies, especially if we take into account that in our decentralized federation there are many pressing issues, such as schools and hospitals, that members of Parliament do not have to address.

Professor Ken Carty said to the committee:

Our national House of Commons is now more than twice the size of that of our Australian cousins, and I find it difficult to think how we can justify this continual growth.

However, the government's empty rhetoric about winners and losers would condemn Canada to such perpetual growth.

The Minister of Democratic Reform himself admits that under his formula, according to current population projections, the House will increase from 338 seats in 2011 to 349 seats in 2021 and 354 seats in 2031. However, it may grow even faster than that. If we take the Statistics Canada high-growth scenario, the formula in Bill C-20 would impose on Canadians a 357-seat House in 2021 and a mammoth House of 392 seats in 2031, yet according to a 1996 study quoted by the minister, the current House of Commons can only accommodate 374 members of Parliament.

It is time to put an end to this obligation to always add MPs decade after decade. It is time to halt the perpetual expansion of the House of Commons.

I began my remarks by saying that it would be great if we were all voting together on this issue as democrats who were able to agree about the basic rules of democracy. In closing, I would like to quote one of my Conservative colleagues, for whom I have a lot of respect. The member for Wellington—Halton Hills said in the House:

I think the proposal by the member for Saint-Laurent—Cartier is a principled one but I think, politically, it is untenable.

Well, the Liberal plan is principled indeed, but it is also perfectly tenable, because it is what Canadians want: a fair, equitable and representative House of Commons, a House that is fair with respect to provincial representation, fair to taxpayers, fair to those who will suffer the impact of fiscal restraint, fair and true to our democratic principles.

Since we can achieve fairness with 308 seats, we should not bring the number up to 338. That is the bottom line. Let us show political leadership and the courage to do the right thing. The government should embrace the Liberal plan; Canadians would be thankful.

• (1120)

[*Translation*]

We must say no to Bill C-20 in its current form, no to this bill to bloat Parliament.

[*English*]

We must say no to this “more politicians” bill.

[*Translation*]

We must say yes to the Liberal plan for a fair and reasonable House of Commons, a House that maintains its current size. Let us stand together to show Canadians that we, their members of Parliament, are not here to serve ourselves, but are here to serve Canadians and Canada.

[*English*]

**Mr. Brad Butt (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, only the Liberal Party of Canada can argue against more democratic representation rather than less democratic representation. It is unbelievable. I represent a constituency of close to 140,000 residents. It is more than the entire island of Prince Edward Island, yet I am willing to respect the fact that Prince Edward Island has a history of a certain minimum number of seats being guaranteed.

I would like to know from the member which provinces are losers under the Liberals' proposal? Which provinces would they steal seats from to give to Ontario or to other provinces, such as Alberta and British Columbia, where the populations are increasing?

When 308 was established as the number of seats, our population was under 30 million people. We are almost over 33 million now. I think my constituents deserve to have access to me as often as possible. However, if we remain at 308 seats, it is going to mean members of Parliament are still going to represent 120,000, 130,000 or 140,000 people in some parts of Canada, while in other parts of Canada they will represent a much smaller number. Who will the losers be under the Liberal plan?

**Hon. Stéphane Dion:** Mr. Speaker, all Canadians would win with the Liberal plan. If we would have been able to work together, we would have shifted nine seats out of five provinces to give to three provinces. It is not the end of the world; Canada has done that many times in the past, and provinces are doing it all the time. Other countries are doing it all the time, and nobody speaks about winners and losers.

However, if he wants to know who would lose, in his province of Ontario, under the Conservative plan, Ontarians would have to pay for 30 more politicians, 15 here and 15 in the province. The province of Ontario would mirror the federal jurisdictions. There would be 30 more politicians; ask Ontarians, not politicians, if they want 30 more politicians.

The Liberal plan would give them eight more politicians. That is much more reasonable. That is why Ontarians embrace the Liberal plan and reject the Conservative plan.

**Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I recognize the expertise of my colleague from the Liberal Party in this matter and the contribution he has made in this subject matter in his many years in this House of Commons.

However, I would ask two questions.

*Government Orders*

First, I did not hear him speak to the point that reasonable people are reasonably disagreeing on this matter and that the bill has perhaps not matured. The bill has perhaps not reached its gestation, and imposing closure on it, truncating debate on such important subject matter, does not serve the democratic process well.

Also, I did not hear him comment on what I believe is the Trojan Horse effect of the bill, which is that while we are debating the allocation of seats and the distribution of seats, we are missing the point that the Conservatives are stripping away the funding for democracy, the per-vote federal contribution to the democratic process, in an attempt to annihilate the Liberal Party specifically. Their real goal here is to stamp out his party, not to reallocate seats throughout the country.

• (1125)

**Hon. Stéphane Dion:** Mr. Speaker, I raised this very issue with the minister when he delivered his speech. I asked why the Conservatives were rushing this bill rather than trying to amend it in order to improve it. We tabled ideas and numbers and so on. The minister just engaged me in a debate today, a couple of hours before the vote. It is very important to realize that he had orders, I think, that this bill should not be amended and that it would be voted on as it was a month ago, as if nobody had spoken and as if no experts had told the Conservatives that they were wrong in increasing the size of the House.

I must add, though, that it would have been helpful if the NDP had been constructive in this debate. It could have tabled its own numbers and its members could have said what it means to have all these rules that they want to apply in order to please everyone in this federation, but at the cost of a mammoth House that would be even bigger and fatter than the Conservative one.

I find it very unfortunate that the NDP never addressed the issue of the constitutionality of its proposal, because all experts have said that Parliament alone cannot freeze forever the representation of a province.

**Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I commend the member for Saint-Laurent—Cartierville on his leadership on constitutional changes.

My question is about Nova Scotia. I am an MP from Nova Scotia, and it is my understanding that under his plan we would be losing one seat. However, it is also my understanding that we might gain representation.

Would the member explain for the people of Nova Scotia how losing one seat would also gain them representation in this House?

**Hon. Stéphane Dion:** Mr. Speaker, my colleague is right. Nova Scotia, under the Liberal plan, would be at its Senate floor and would have 10 seats instead of 11. However, since the Conservative plan would give 30 seats to other provinces and none to Nova Scotia, at the end of the day Nova Scotian representation would be roughly the same as it would be with the Conservative plan.

I have spoken with enough Nova Scotians to know that they do not want more politicians. They think it is a bad idea to have the most inflated House in the history of this federation at a time when the government is slashing and cutting, especially in services key for Nova Scotians, such as fisheries, search and rescue, and all these

front-line services. The finance minister would cut these services by 10%; the same finance minister would increase the number of seats by 10%, with none of them going to Nova Scotia.

**Mr. Terence Young (Oakville, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the member for Saint-Laurent—Cartierville mentioned provinces that reduced the number of seats. I was a member of a government that reduced the number of seats. I was one of the ones whose seat was lost, so I had a personal stake in it.

I supported the bill, which was called the Fewer Politicians Act. It was largely symbolic, because between 1995 and 1999, when we had a massive deficit, we wanted to show the people of Ontario that we were willing to sacrifice ourselves and save money across the board. I will tell the member what happened.

First of all, I lost my riding and I lost my job. That was my choice. I agreed with it in principle. However, when I started to talk to my constituents, most of them had never even noticed. They asked if I was on the job, and I told them that my riding had disappeared in the election. They were very upset, because MPs and MPPs provide service to their community. One of the most important and fundamental parts of our democracy is that people can meet with their member of Parliament or MPP, but there are only so many days to do that. We might have Fridays or Saturday mornings in our ridings, and we have weeks off.

When there are fewer politicians, people do not get the same service. It is all about service, so people were profoundly upset that I was not on the job for them. I heard that from other parts of Ontario too. However, adding seats in the provinces that are under-represented now would mean that those people would get better service from their members of Parliament.

Would the member be willing to give up his seat? Would he be willing to give up seats in Montreal or Quebec? Does he want to be the one to explain that to the people of Quebec who might have fewer seats?

May I suggest that the member do a telephone town hall? He can get up to 10,000—

• (1130)

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** Order, please. The hon. member for Saint-Laurent—Cartierville.

**Hon. Stéphane Dion:** Mr. Speaker, maybe I will start at the end.

I would tell the member that I am sure Quebeckers do not want 30 more seats. They do not see why the government wants to give three more seats to Quebec but 27 seats to other provinces. It gives nothing to us.

*Government Orders*

If I had to debate this in Quebec, I am sure I would win the debate. According to a poll yesterday, 10% of Quebecers support the bill, but 57% support the Liberal plan to have a fairer House without any more seats.

The member said that people were disappointed. Yes, many Canadians will always be disappointed, for valid reasons. There are many reasons to be disappointed about MPs. However, a study by Paul Thomas and others from U of T shows that when we compare Canada and the U.K., where there are more MPs than in Canada, the quality of the representation does not improve.

Now that we have the technological and social tools to reach people much better than before, we are able to do the job with 308 seats. That is what Canadians are telling us.

At a time when the member's government is slashing everything, why does it want to boost the number of seats in the House by 10%?

**Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak in favour of this legislation. It is an excellent bill that goes a long way toward returning Canada to one of the foundational principles of our federation.

Before speaking to the merits of Bill C-20, I want to spend a bit of time with respect to my hon. colleague from Saint-Laurent—Cartierville's proposed legislation and point out some of the flaws with what he has proposed. I do not think he gave all the facts in the most objective manner possible, so I will attempt to set that right.

I will first speak to what the Liberal plan would involve. It would keep our current number, which is 308, not because that is good in some metaphysical sense, but simply because it is the status quo. The argument that 308 is good is the same argument one could have made in 1867, where 165 was good and ought to have been kept regardless of circumstances. That is an argument which is implausible when we pick any number, other than the arbitrary current number, and fixate upon it.

There are other jurisdictions that actually do set fixed caps. I will talk a bit about the most obvious of these, that being the United States, which sets its total representation at 435, regardless of population change.

Let us start with the plan of the Liberals. They propose four new seats for Ontario, two seats for B.C., three seats for Alberta and reductions of three seats for Quebec, two each for Manitoba and Saskatchewan, one each for Nova Scotia and Newfoundland, with the result that there would be greater equality than at present, although not greater equality, indeed somewhat lesser equality, than is the case under the government bill. I will demonstrate how that is true.

The member spoke about how popular the Liberal plan was and how unpopular the government's plan was based on a recent poll that came out just yesterday. I read the raw numbers in the poll and I got a very different picture than he did. Let me quote it in greater detail to make the point that he did not give an accurate reflection of what the respondents to the poll actually said.

People were first asked the question, "Do you support or oppose the legislation to increase the number of seats in the House of Commons by 30 to move every province toward representation by population?" When asked that question, 44% were in favour, only

28% were opposed and 27% were undecided. That is a very strong margin in favour.

When I look at the individual regions of the country, and I will not go through all of them, as one might expect in Ontario, B.C. and Alberta, the three dramatically under-represented populations in the current system, we see the widest margins in favour: 52% in Ontario; 60% in Alberta; and 56% in British Columbia. There is widespread popular support, which by the way is true across the country, although it is less in the Atlantic and in Quebec than in these regions. Nevertheless, far more people support than oppose the government's proposal.

People were also asked about the Liberal Party's proposal. They were asked the following question, "Which of the following three proposals for what to do with seats in the House of Commons do you prefer the most?" The choices were to, "Increase seats by 30. Keep the same number of seats but redistribute. Keep things the way they are now". Asked that way, we get quite strong majorities. These are the numbers that my hon. colleague cited for that second option, which is to keep the same number of seats but redistribute. However, that is not the full story and that is why we see those high numbers.

I would like to see the support levels if people were asked how they would feel if they lost seats in their province. How high would the support be if we asked Nova Scotians, for example, if they would like to keep the same number of seats but redistribute by taking away 10% of their seats? How would it be in Quebec if we asked people to keep the same number but take away three of Quebec's seats and redistribute them? Would we see those numbers? I suspect we would not.

This poll asks a question that leaves out the key negative fact about the Liberal proposal. Therefore, these numbers, I would suggest, are highly unreliable in determining what the actual support levels would be for the Liberal plan. The hon. member and his proposal are getting a free ride because of the fact that the Liberals are not having to show the pain associated with what they are proposing.

• (1135)

My hon. colleague also talked about parallels with other countries. He says that we have far too many people in the House of Commons, as if there is some kind of abstract level at which we would achieve perfect representation. He cited two countries to make his point: the British and the Australians.

Britain has 600 members of Parliament, far more than we have here. Although the population of Britain is a good deal larger than the population of Canada, the average population per constituency is lower than in Canada under our new proposal, let alone under the status quo. I am mystified as why he even brought up the British example.

*Government Orders*

As far as Australia goes, he says that there are only about 60% as many MPs in the Australian house as there are in our House. I would point out that Australia has about two-thirds of Canada's population. Therefore, riding populations are more or less equivalent. These are very unconvincing examples.

Let me turn to the United States. The United States uses the system that my hon. colleague has recommended. In the United States there is a firm, unchangeable cap on the number of seats in the House of Representatives of 435 for a population that is currently 309 million. Every 10 years it goes through what it calls a re-apportionment process, equivalent to our redistribution. In the United States there is a floor on how many seats one can have in the House of Representatives, and that is one seat.

What happens under this system, and remember there is a hard cap? Some states, with small populations, are under-represented versus states with large populations. California has 37 million people and it has 53 representatives, which adds up to 698,000 people per congressional district. The smallest state, Wyoming, has 568,000 people and one congressman, which the result is 568,000 people per district. That conforms to the sort of typical phenomenon of smaller states and provinces being a little overrepresented.

What about the state of Montana that gets one representative for 994,000 people? The almost million people in Montana are dramatically under-represented because of the fact that they have equality with Wyoming, right next door but with a dramatically different population. That is dramatically unfair. There are 994,000 per representative in Montana and 568,000 per representative in Wyoming. There is nothing democratic or fair about that.

This is the hidden aspect of the Liberal proposal. Nova Scotia has a senatorial floor of 10 seats, so does New Brunswick, which is already added. Under the member's proposal, New Brunswick keeps the number of members it has and Nova Scotia drops to that number, but they do not have the same population. Specifically, Nova Scotia has 945,000 people and New Brunswick has 755,000 people. The member is asking us to permanently lock in a 20% difference in the level of representative. That is not representation by population; that, quite frankly, is a flagrant departure from representation by population.

The member also talks about cutting seats. It has to deal with the fact that our Senate floors, due to accidents of history, are quite arbitrary. The Senate floor for New Brunswick and Nova Scotia is 10 seats. The Senate floor for Saskatchewan and Manitoba is six seats each. Therefore, those provinces with populations, respectively of 1.2 million and 1 million, would potentially be able to go below the level in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick.

The member does not actually recommend that this occur, but the fact is what he does recommend, by cutting two seats each from those provinces, would have the effect of leaving 24 seats for those two Prairie provinces with a combined population of 2.3 million people, and for the smaller Atlantic region, the number of 30 seats for a smaller population. That is not representation by population either.

The hidden cost of what the member is proposing is a dramatically increased divergence from the principle of representa-

tion by population when we deal with those small provinces, because their Senate floors are established based on nothing that has anything to do with representation by population. It has everything to do with accidents as to when they entered Confederation and what the state was at the province at that time.

• (1140)

Therefore, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba entered confederation when they were largely unsettled wilderness. New Brunswick and Nova Scotia entered confederation when they were highly settled, thus the differences. On that basis, he would lock in egregiously unfair differences among these provinces. Now he does get his overall cap and when we look at, say, Ontario versus Nova Scotia, it does not look so bad. However, the fact is there is a dramatic, grotesque unfairness hidden in this.

We do not want to follow that trend. We want to go in a different direction.

Let me turn back to the Americans for a second. The Americans have, as I have mentioned, a significant flaw in their representation formula. In my view, they should not have a cap on the size of the House of Representatives. James Madison, the author of this part of the constitution, would be rolling over in his grave if he were aware of what they have done to the principle of equality of representation. The American founders specified that, "the People of the several States" shall have the representation "apportioned among the several States according to their respective numbers".

The Supreme Court of the United States, in the case of *Wesberry v. Sanders* in 1964, when dealing with this principle, concluded that when dealing with congressional districts within a state they must be as close to being equal to one another as possible. They had no power to override the arbitrary cap that had been placed on the entire United States House of Representatives, but within states they could not have a distortion. The Supreme Court ruled that, "as nearly as is practicable one man's vote in a congressional election is to be worth as much as another's". That is a parallel case to the more famous *Reynolds v. Sims*, which dealt with representation within individual states and in state legislatures.

The principle applies in other countries too. It is very strongly adhered to in Australia. The British are moving more closely to this principle. Canada especially has this principle, representation by population, the equality of votes among individual citizens, as a foundational principle of the federation.

Arguably the key reason for the failure of our previous Constitution, the Act of Union, was that it created a province of Canada which had two subsidiary units, those being Canada East, now Quebec and Canada West, now Ontario, which had equality of representation, despite the fact that their population numbers were shifting. In other words, they had a situation very similar to the situation that exists under the Liberal proposal vis-à-vis New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, the same floor, shifting populations.

*Government Orders*

What happened over time was Canada West's population increased and people there felt they were being under-represented so demanded change. This movement for change was led by George Brown and the result was that this was incorporated when the federation was created when Confederation occurred in 1867. The principle of equal representation was kept in the upper house, as it is in the upper houses of many countries, including the United States and Australia, and that is why there are 24 senators each for Ontario and Quebec. However, we did not have that principle kept in the lower house. Representation by population was to reign, pure and simple.

Since that time, we have departed from that principle. We have departed in a number of different moves over time. The tendency has been for the problem to get worse and worse over time.

There is a very interesting paper by Andrew Sancton, referred to so frequently by my colleague from Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, who points out that the high-water mark for representation by population in Canada took place in 1911. In that redistribution, there was pretty much full equality among the provinces. Since that time, one rule changed after another, usually to accommodate the frustrations that individual provinces felt at losing seats and the backlash that occurred when a proposal to take away seats from a province was brought forward. When it is just hypothetical, it is easy for everybody to agree with it or to shrug their shoulders and say that it is just hypothetical. When it is actually happens, it is a different story.

• (1145)

The result of that has been that as we seek to adjust for all of those potential seat losses, wherever they may occur, we have moved further and further from the principle of representation by population.

I submit that we have two choices. Choice number one is we worry about arbitrary and unimportant considerations, like the overall number of people who are in this place. Choice number two is we accept that the size of this place is growing and that it will continue to grow in the future, just as it has doubled since the time of Confederation.

We say that is not a bad thing. It is simply a reflection of the fact that Canada is a growing country, a country full of immigrants, a country that is growing in ways that cause one province to expand vis-à-vis another in ways that had not been anticipated and cannot be anticipated.

Therefore, we ought to worry about representation by population, equality of votes, and ensuring that every single Canadian has the same right to elect his or her representatives as every other Canadian and considerations of geography have nothing to do with this.

As a final note, there are consequences arbitrary and unintended but pernicious to the fact that as things stand today in Canada, some provinces are overrepresented and others under-represented. I am holding in my hand a paper put out by the Institute for Research on Public Policy called "Is Every Ballot Equal? Visible-Minority Vote Dilution in Canada". It is by Michael Powell and Sujit Choudhry, and was published four years ago.

One of the things these authors point out is that Canada's population increase today is taking place almost exclusively as a result of immigration of visible minorities at this point. Most immigrants come from countries that do not have white populations. Where do they go? They go all over the country, but primarily, according to the numbers, they go specifically to the cities of Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia. This is reflected increasingly in a variety of ways, including the fact that so many visible minority members are currently in the House and, indeed, in cabinet, but it is not reflected in due proportion because Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta are all under-represented.

The authors go further and point out that in the case of Ontario, the boundaries commission back in 2004 made the arbitrary and unfortunate decision to oversize the ridings of northern Ontario, which is to say to make them geographically smaller populations, thereby systematically under-represent everybody living south of Lake Nipissing, especially the folks in the fastest growing ridings in Toronto. Therefore, they are doubly under-represented.

I defy anybody to stand here and say that it is a good thing that Canada's visible minorities are under-represented in the House of Commons, that they are doubly under-represented both because of what happens when we distribute seats among the provinces and when we distribute within at least one of the provinces.

I defy anybody to say that it is a good thing to keep that process going in the long-run.

I defy anybody to defend the NDP bill which says that we ought to over-privilege one province and guarantee its seat count permanently, and guarantee a yet further diminution of the vote power of those visible minorities in Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta and, coincidentally, the people who are not visible minorities, like the folks in my rural riding in eastern Ontario, would also see their votes diminished.

There is a problem with this. The solution that is being proposed by the government in Bill C-20 is a thoughtful, diplomatic, practical solution that has widespread public support. It is something that is mandated, if one believes in the mandate of government, in that the government went into the election saying it would do three things in its boundary distribution bill: first, it would ensure that Ontario, B.C. and Alberta get more seats; second, it would ensure Quebec gets its equitable share, neither over nor under-represented; and third, it would ensure that none of the smaller provinces lose seats.

This is the kind of compromise on which this country was built 150 years ago. It is an excellent proposal and I encourage every member of the House to vote for it.

• (1150)

**Mr. Kennedy Stewart (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House we think this bill is essentially a battle between two old parties. It is an outdated idea and we think the House needs to move to proportional representation.

We have never really had a proper debate in this country. In fact, the royal commission that looked at electoral reform in the 1990s was specifically instructed not to look at reforming our electoral system. Yet, we still have this back and forth debate about the number of seats and a system that does not work.

*Government Orders*

Why has the government not looked at the issue of proportional representation and when it will give Canadians a chance to discuss real electoral reform?

**Mr. Scott Reid:** Mr. Speaker, the member is partly right. This has been a discussion between the Conservatives and the Liberals, but that is mostly because NDP members have been running as fast as they can from their party's own proposal and refuse to defend it.

Members should read the minutes of committee. NDP members, at least the non-Quebec members, are absolutely panic stricken at the thought that their voters will become aware of what their party is proposing and how it promises to treat Canadians systematically and permanently as two separate categories of people, one guaranteed a frozen level of representation and the other a perpetually diminishing percentage of the House.

That is unfair. It is undemocratic. I agree with my colleague from Saint-Laurent—Cartierville that it is probably also unconstitutional.

With regard to proportional representation, some study has been done. I served on the procedure and House affairs committee when we travelled to Australia and New Zealand to look at their systems. Other members of committee travelled to Scotland and Germany to look at the systems that are in place there. I will point out that there may be merit to looking at those systems. That really is separate from this debate.

There is more than one system of preferential or proportional representation. I invite my colleague to look, as his party wilfully refuses to do, at preferential voting as opposed to proportional. Proportional is all about strengthening the party and weakening an individual member. Preferential is all about respecting the views of constituents. I would suggest that to my colleague.

**Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it is always interesting to listen to my colleague. I am sorry that I was not able to listen to his full speech because I was giving interviews in reaction to the mess made yesterday by his Minister of the Environment.

The member mentioned two points. The first was that we cannot decrease the number of seats of any province because it would create too much flack in this country, the only country where it would be the case. I would argue that with the 15% rule we are proposing, the decrease in seats in any province would be manageable and it would help the country. Most Canadians would react this way.

The member said that there would be no cost to always increasing the number of seats. I would like to quote one of the experts who came to committee, Professor Louis Massicotte from the Université Laval.

• (1155)

[*Translation*]

He told the committee that the unnecessary increase in the number of MPs could lower the prestige of the role, that “international comparisons indicate that, the more members there are, the more the value of Parliament's role is somewhat reduced”. The professor said that this will make fewer resources available for parliamentarians to do their work.

In fact, is that not what might happen here? Did the Conservative government not suggest that it might reduce the MPs' resources in order to cover the cost of increasing the number of seats?

[*English*]

**Mr. Scott Reid:** Mr. Speaker, I am not aware of any proposal to decrease the resources available to members, nor am I aware of any proposal that would involve adjusting our costs in other ways. I would think there are a variety of ways that we could reduce our costs. As the member who has the lowest travel costs in the House of Commons out of 308 members, I am number 308, we could look at our travel budgets.

**Mr. Jack Harris:** How close are you?

**Mr. Scott Reid:** Mr. Speaker, I hear a member over there pointing out that I have a riding close to Ottawa and that is true. But I would also point out that I have spent zero dollars on advertising and I do not have a riding uniquely devoid of newspapers. We could engage in reducing costs there.

We could reduce our salaries. Right before I was elected, MPs gave themselves a 20% pay increase on the argument that if they do not have a higher pay level then they will not get better people. That always left me wondering about all of us who just ran. Cost savings could be achieved there.

Finally, with regard to the overall level of resources available to members, I would just point out that this is a situation involving just good personal budgeting techniques. I have a budget meeting with my staff every month. We look at ways to trim our costs and keeping them under control. We could all do a bit of that.

I do not want to preach because I think others do good things in different ways than I do. Like every person on the planet, there are ways to be practical about how we manage our own budgets.

**Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his amazing speech. In particular, I would like the member to expand on and reiterate some of the comments he made this morning about the importance of representation from our new immigrants who have become citizens of Canada and the importance to ensure that people are represented well. Members of Parliament are the front line people who can hear the voices of our constituents and I wish the member would expand on that if he could.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** Mr. Speaker, there are two things a member of Parliament does. Obviously, we come here and vote. That is where it is important to have equivalent populations in different ridings. The second thing we do is provide constituency work and this is something where those of our colleagues who represent urban ridings can speak with considerable authority. There is an astounding amount of work associated with a constituency with large numbers of recent immigrants simply because of the people involved in the whole immigration process. That does make it very unfair to have those urban, high immigration ridings which are larger in population terms than other ridings.

*Government Orders*

As I said, there were two ways in which there is discrimination in the case of Ontario for these ridings, but there is actually a third level which I did not mention. As our populations expand between censuses, they expand in highly differential ways. There are certain 905 belt ridings that now have populations dramatically in excess of the national average. It is a situation I can relate to because 10 years ago my constituents in the old riding of Lanark—Carleton had, as measured by the number of votes cast, the largest number of votes in Canada. It was very difficult to adequately represent that number of people. Anything that reduces that kind of dramatic overage in population and ensures that MPs do not get that much of a swell, even if it is only incremental, will ensure better constituency services for those MPs.

In addition, outside the representation formula, it may make sense for us to revisit and adjust the degree to which we provide extra resources for MPs who have very large geographic ridings like Nunavut or Kenora, and also those who have ridings that have very large populations. We do have some supplements. It may be appropriate to re-examine those to some degree.

● (1200)

**Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, one of the ironies of this debate is that it is under time allocation. We are here talking about democracy and the representation roles in the House of the members of Parliament, and how many people they should represent when to the government side, it would appear it does not matter who is here because every important bill is going to have the amount of debate and dialogue that is permitted limited.

Given the debates we have had, is the member aware of any bills, including this one, that the government has accepted any modifications from any member of the opposition?

**Mr. Scott Reid:** Mr. Speaker, I have been around here for five Parliaments now and three of those were minority Parliaments. Two of them were Conservative minority Parliaments. My experience was that it was very difficult to get any legislation through at all.

I think I am correct in saying that aside from legislation initiated by the opposition, no legislation went through unless it was being presented on the condition that should it be defeated on a bill, the government would fall and have an election. When we are in that kind of situation, it is very difficult to deal with all the legislation. There is a backlog of five years worth of legislation that is actively opposed by the opposition. That is legislation we are trying to push through. The firearms registry and the Wheat Board legislation are examples. There is no other way of doing it when the opposition is willing to hold things up more or less forever.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would first like to say that I wish to share my time with the hon. member for Gatineau.

First of all, I must address the statements made by the hon. member for Saint-Laurent—Cartier, who announced in a somewhat populist manner that people do not want more politicians. I would like to point out to him that people do not want more Liberal politicians. We have known this to be true since May 2.

I do not want to bore my fellow parliamentarians with something that may seem frivolous; however, this is something that has been nagging at me. We are debating the third reading of a bill to amend the Constitution Act of 1867. Once again, the Conservatives are silencing parliamentarians, demonstrating contempt for democracy and forcing members of the House to discuss such a fundamental issue as our country's democratic representation and fair distribution among regions, nations, and provinces in a single day of debate.

Really, they cannot be serious. They are laughing at us. They are acting as though the work of parliamentarians is worthless. They want to bulldoze through all the bills, as they have been doing since the beginning of this session. There have been 10, 11 or 12 gag orders. It is difficult to keep track because there have been so many. The Conservatives do not like debate and discussion, and they are not listening. This government is out of touch with reality. The purpose of the Conservative bill is basically to correct certain inequities by adding seats in the House. Yet, the Conservatives systematically gag members. So, what is the point of having more members if they are not allowed to speak in the House? What is the point of having more members if the ones who are already here are unable to do their job because the Conservatives will not give them time to do it? This is an important question to which we have unfortunately not yet received an answer.

The Conservatives' Bill C-20 does not solve any of the problems it is intended to solve. The objectives set will not be achieved, the rules of fairness will not be followed and the western provinces, British Columbia, Alberta and Ontario will not be given proportional weight in the future House. Quebec's position and political weight will also be disregarded, but I will come back to this.

The NDP has nothing against the fundamental rule of one person, one vote. It is a fundamental rule and that is the norm. I will also address the comment by my colleague opposite, because we can sometimes agree on certain things. It really is a problem if one member, one parliamentarian, represents 100,000 or 200,000 people. The workload is not the same and it is unfair. We are here to serve the public, and there must be a fair distribution of work among parliamentarians. There is a real issue with demographic growth in some provinces, and this requires changes so that the workload of parliamentarians is better balanced in order for the people to have real representation. Their MPs must be able to do their job. But this is a matter that I have already discussed.

It is vital, imperative and fundamental that we respect the rule of one person, one vote, but it is not the only rule. This has already been established by the Supreme Court. The NDP position is based on the fact that there are many realities in the Canadian federation and that, consequently, we must take them all into account and abandon the vision that focuses on pure and simple mathematical representation. Why? Because the Supreme Court acknowledged that we can recognize that special interest groups can receive special treatment. It is not a privilege, just an acknowledgement of the sociological, historical and geographic reality in our country.

*Government Orders*

For example, the Quebec nation or a province such as Prince Edward Island, which has a very small number of representatives, could be special interest groups. There are rules to ensure that a province cannot have fewer members than senators. We could have rules that recognize the reality of aboriginal or northern communities, which is very different than that of urban centres. We have to have an open, broad and inclusive perspective to be in a position to reflect the realities of the various parts of our country.

• (1205)

On November 17, 2006, the House adopted a motion recognizing that Quebec formed a nation. To that NDP, that means something. It has to mean something; it has to be reflected in concrete ways by concrete actions. Unfortunately, what we have seen since 2006 looks a lot like hot air and wishful thinking.

The NDP has initiatives to ensure that this recognition is applied in reality and is not merely theoretical, somewhere in the clouds. For example, we have private members' bills to ensure that French is respected in enterprises under federal jurisdiction in Quebec. That is essential to all Quebecers and to the French fact in North America.

We also have Bill C-312, introduced by our colleague from Compton—Stanstead, to preserve Quebec's political weight in the House at 24.35%, because that was Quebec's political weight on November 27, 2006, when that motion was adopted in the House. In our view, that political weight must be defended and preserved, to reflect that genuine recognition.

How can members from Quebec be asked to vote for a reduction in Quebec's strength and weight in the House, when we make up one of the two founding peoples and we have been recognized as a nation? I wonder how my Liberal colleagues from Quebec can vote in favour of a setback for Quebec. I am surprised at them. We have to move away from this narrow view of representation as something purely and simply proportional, because otherwise we are on a slippery slope and we risk marginalizing Quebec, the only majority francophone state in North America, and one with unique responsibilities. That has to be recognized.

That is why NDP members from Quebec and elsewhere are standing up for preserving Quebec's political weight and for increasing the number of seats of the provinces that have had significant population growth, out of a concern for fairness in their workload and in the services provided for constituents.

If we recognize that francophones are one of the founding peoples of this federation, we must return to the view adopted by the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, the Laurendeau-Dunton Commission, which took place between 1963 and 1971, in an era when people took the time to do things properly and to do a thorough study of issues that were considered to be essential and important and did not limit debate and constantly muzzle members, as the Conservative government is doing. Over the course of all those years, they studied bilingualism and biculturalism, recognition of the aboriginal peoples, perhaps forgotten in that era, but not today, and the fact that there are two weights, two languages, two cultures in this country. As well, there is now a nation that was recognized in 2006. It is therefore the recognition of the fundamental cultural duality of this federation that is being flouted today by Bill C-20. It

is completely ignored by Bill C-20, while it is wholly recognized by the bill introduced by my colleague from Compton—Stanstead.

If Quebec does have a unique responsibility to protect the French fact, this responsibility to protect language and culture must not cause Quebec to lose its standing in the House and it should allow Quebec to maintain its political weight at 24.35%. That is widely recognized in Quebec. One of my colleagues quoted a unanimous motion from the Quebec National Assembly on this topic. Quebec's minister of intergovernmental affairs, Yvon Vallières, also said that the three seats proposed in Bill C-20 for Quebec are nowhere near enough. I will take some of the credit as a member of the official opposition. If we had not insisted on this so much, I am not sure that these three seats would have even been proposed in the first place.

The guiding principle behind the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism was an equal partnership. That is not at all what we are seeing in the Conservatives' proposal. There is no recognition of Quebec's obligation to protect the French fact in North America or any of the specific historic responsibilities of the Government of Quebec.

As the official opposition, as New Democrats and as people who care about including all parts of this great federation, we cannot support a bill like Bill C-20. We are calling for a real democratic reform that would reform the voting system so that we have a proportional voting method and all political voices in this country are properly heard. That is a debate for another day.

• (1210)

**Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, this is the first time I have had a chance to have a discussion with my colleague in this House and I am delighted. I thank him for his speech.

However, I still have the same problem. The NDP is not the Bloc. The NDP wants to address the problems facing all the provinces of this country and wants to come up with solutions for everyone. That is quite admirable. So, it must show us how this will work. The member said it is important to fix the under-representation of Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia, which are the most under-represented federated entities in the democratic world. If this were taken to court, it could probably be considered unconstitutional.

If we adopt its plan and add the 30 seats the Conservatives want, plus more seats for Quebec to maintain its 24.35%, there is still the problem that Ontario drops from 36%—under the Conservative and Liberal plans—to 35%. Furthermore, Alberta maintains the same percentage as it has now, without the extra 30 seats. We are left with 36 seats, which is not enough. Seats need to be added to those provinces, but if seats are added, Quebec would fall below 24.35%. We are therefore faced with an adjustment problem that means that even if the House had 350 seats, it would not satisfy all the rules the member mentioned.

Thus, I would like to know how the NDP plan will work? How many seats would have to be added to this House?

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice:** Mr. Speaker, I have strange visions. I want to thank the hon. member for Saint-Laurent—Cartierville for that very pertinent question.

*Government Orders*

However, it is as though he were completely ignoring an essential principle, namely the recognition of the Quebec nation and maintaining Quebec's political weight, for purely mathematical reasons. We do not have a vision that is frozen in time. Our vision is inclusive, respectful of the demographic evolution of this country and respectful of the recognition of the Quebec nation, and that cannot be frozen in time.

I find it deplorable that the Liberal plan seeks to rob Peter to pay Paul, which is not a viable solution either.

• (1215)

[*English*]

**Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I listened to the member for Saint-Laurent—Cartierville and his concerns about the legislation and our plan. I do not think 350 seats is what is required, but what the member for Saint-Laurent—Cartierville talked about in his speech and in the Liberals' plan was to reduce the number of seats and the concern about cost.

I wonder if the member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie would comment on the difference between the cost of the additional seats that might be included in the bill versus the cost of the Senate, which is undemocratic, unelected and does not seem to play any role whatsoever in the notion of democratic reform that either the Conservatives or the Liberals have to offer.

When we have concern about costs, is there not an easier way to solve that problem?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice:** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for his very pertinent question

With this bill, the Liberals are taking a somewhat populist approach, suggesting that MPs and democracy cost too much and that we should not be spending money on that. In our opinion, as democrats, that sort of argument can be used in an extremely dangerous manner.

The issue of cost is important because we want to manage public money properly. We do not want to waste money. However, let us look at democratic representation. We are the representatives of the people. We have a mandate. We can be dismissed if our constituents are unhappy with us. That happens quite regularly. We have been surprised at times. Nonetheless, we have a legitimacy that the senators do not have because they are appointed.

Speaking of cost, I wonder why the Liberal Party wants to maintain a Senate that cost \$107 million last year. Why not abolish the Senate, as the NDP is proposing, and take that money and invest some of it in having more legitimate, democratically elected representatives of the people here in this House?

**Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure and honour to rise to discuss Bill C-20, an extremely important bill about our right to representation at the federal level in this magnificent country of ours, Canada. This is not an easy thing to achieve. This is not the first Parliament called upon to consider the matter, and it most surely will not be the last.

I do not know of any perfect formula, a formula that everyone agrees with, unless every Canadian were to have their own member,

but even if that were possible, I am not sure that everyone would be satisfied. In any event, there are basic principles that must be applied. I have consistently listened with interest to the remarks made on this matter. Although I commend the government to some degree for its efforts with Bill C-20, once again, they have missed the boat. There are general principles, principles that must be adhered to in such situations, and in that sense, there is something lacking.

I am sorry to say that I am far less welcoming of the stance taken by my Liberal friends. My colleague from Saint-Laurent—Cartierville gave an extremely interesting speech that attempted to make the Liberal proposal seem logical and give it some oomph. In spite of this, the Liberals' position appears to be an attempt to win votes.

Allow me to elaborate. In 2004, when I previously held a seat in Parliament, I sat on the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. I remember my colleague, who was a political adversary at that time, but with whom I shared a vision of democratic reform. Indeed, reforming the manner in which people are represented in Parliament is fundamental to the very concept of reform and of democracy. When I sat on the committee with the honourable Ed Broadbent, he proposed—as part of the review of our democratic life in Canada—that we consider the concept of proportional representation: our electoral process as a part of our democratic life, the type of representation we have, whether we should have one or two chambers, and how many representatives there should be. That is all part and parcel of our democratic process.

I remember that, at the time, it was a glorious thing to behold. In fact, the Liberal party was in government and some parties with numerous representatives in the House had no intention of even considering the possibility of reforming our electoral process, or even of reviewing the electoral process and proportional representation. Over the weekend, I was quite surprised to read that the honourable acting leader of the Liberal Party started to make a number of proposals regarding proportional representation.

What that tells me is that when a party is strong and has a stable and solid majority government, that is the time to think about such reforms if the party really cares about them. But that is clearly not the case, because it is when a party is not well represented in the House that, all of a sudden, it remembers that proportional representation is perhaps a really good idea.

I take with a grain of salt the criticism levelled at us by our friends on my far left. They often rise in the House to propose one thing or another, but having had numerous discussions with all of these members, I know full well that they do not believe in these proposals. If they were sitting on the other side of the House, if they were in the majority, I am not sure that they would be similarly concerned about this issue.

Although it may be a human instinct, quite often we examine what impact an issue will have on us, as members, and that is not necessarily democratic.

The beauty of the proposal we made at the time in Bill C-312 was the fact that it re-established or put some teeth and substance into the concept of the Quebec nation, which, in my opinion, should be part of Bill C-20.

*Government Orders*

• (1220)

As I said when I gave my speech on Bill C-312, we cannot redistribute seats without going the extra mile and asking what was meant by the unanimous motion in the House that Quebeckers are a nation within Canada.

The most important way to reflect a concept in a country like Canada is through its representation.

Over the years, whether my colleagues believe it or not, if the political weight of Quebec is steadily and slowly diminished as a result of demographic or other factors, there will be no need for a referendum to leave because, at some point, Quebec will no longer exist within the federation. I do not believe that we want this to happen.

I repeat that it is not easy to find the best formula. Bill C-20 gives a number of provinces the right to better representation, and in no way am I denying the western provinces' right to better representation. However, I am not necessarily saying that having more members of Parliament will result in better representation. Basically, we should stop focusing just on the numbers and instead get together and recognize that there are things fundamentally wrong with our Canadian democracy when members of Parliament, even on the government side, no longer have any importance at all.

In my opinion, it is a waste of time and money to add 3, 10, 15 or 150 members if we do not change the way we are currently doing things. We will not satisfy the people in western Canada who do not feel as though they are well represented here in Parliament, the people in Quebec who do not feel as though they are being given the political weight they deserve, or the people in the Atlantic provinces who often have to fight to be heard. We will not make anyone happy. Basically, what it comes down to is how we represent Canadians. The work of members has been irrevocably eroding little by little over the years. There are party lines, a Prime Minister who makes all the decisions, a cabinet that often is not even aware of what is happening, members who have to follow the party line and the members opposite who must oppose.

That is what the public is telling us when we visit communities. Canadians no longer feel as though they are being represented. And yet, here we are, adding more seats so we can tell the public that they will be better represented thanks to a mathematical calculation and a complicated formula that gives results x, y and z.

Will that comfort people? Some ridings have 140,000 people while others have 30,000. But we must remember that some members have vast territories to cover, that some cover rural areas and others urban areas. Some are close to the Hill and some are far from the Hill. All of these factors must be taken into consideration.

I think we are going at it wrong if we limit ourselves and simply use mathematics to resolve something as fundamental as representation, which should be something to which all citizens are entitled.

In conclusion, first, I have a number of problems with Bill C-20 because it does not address the issue of Quebec's political weight at all. Second, this bill does not resolve the problem of representation in the west if what we want is to have a semblance of fairness in terms of the size of ridings. Third—and I will leave all my

colleagues in this House to think about this one—I have no problem representing 200,000 people, as long as I have time to meet with them in their communities. That is our job. All 200,000 people do not communicate with us. We must be realistic. But we would have to re-examine the job of member of Parliament to truly find the notion of representing the people, which I sometimes have a hard time seeing in this House with all of the gag orders we have had.

• (1225)

**Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her speech.

This brings me, first, to two questions. We are entirely in agreement in the Liberal Party that there are better ways to spend our money in the parliamentary system than on new members of Parliament who will not necessarily have the weight or the capacity to serve their constituents well.

So I like the idea that instead of spending millions of dollars more for the 30 new members, we would allocate some additional resources to parliamentarians precisely so that they are able to serve the public in their ridings well. What is being proposed amounts to millions of dollars being spent in the wrong direction.

This brings me to the following comments. Unfortunately, the NDP's proposal offers us no numbers, but as we know, it will require that quite a few members be added to this House to achieve their mathematical threshold. The NDP criticizes the use of mathematics, but it considers the 24% figure to be a magic mathematical number. I think it is unfortunate that it does not directly address the fact that its plan will indeed significantly increase the number of members in this House of Commons, to an even greater extent than the plan in Bill C-10.

**Ms. Françoise Boivin:** Mr. Speaker, I do not know whether my colleague was here at the beginning of my speech. I say that in jest, with respect for him and his group. I think it is a little hypocritical to claim to be calling for a reduction in the number of members or for keeping the status quo, in order to save money, when that is not actually the question.

Representation of the population should never be a matter of money. It is a matter of democracy. It is a matter of fair play. It is a matter of making sure that people everywhere in Canada are well represented. Is that the case here, and which formula is the best? As I said, it is not an easy question.

Some members are simply taking a position to stand out from the others, to try to get a little visibility, when we know that people's requests and needs are growing. They say they want to keep it at 308 members, but redistribute the seats, when they have 34 members and we know very well that the only reason why that is their answer is that they will not really be affected by the exercise. I find that somewhat shallow.

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my hon. colleague from Gatineau on her speech, which explained things very clearly and was quite balanced and reasonable.

*Government Orders*

I would like to ask her the following question. Members on the other side of the House talk about proportional representation based simply on demographic indicators. I would like to take this a little further and talk about proportional representation in the context of proportional representation within this House, and how we represent the voices of Canadians, their various affiliations and political ideas.

How is it that in this system, a government can have a strong, majority mandate with only 39% of votes, when nearly two-thirds of Canadians did not vote for it?

• (1230)

**Ms. Françoise Boivin:** Mr. Speaker, that is an excellent question. Since I know the Speaker will be interrupting me soon, I certainly cannot address all the complexities involved in this issue. However, that was what my speech was all about. We will not solve the representation problem simply by adding seats.

There is also the whole question of the electoral process. These decisions are not expected of small parties, like the Green Party or the Bloc Québécois, that are unrecognized or barely recognized, but when a party forms the government it must make decisions. However, it is much too hard for them.

I am proud of the fact that I won with 62% of the vote. I therefore feel I have a very strong, majority mandate from the people of my riding and I am very comfortable rising in this House. When I speak, I do so on behalf of the people of Gatineau. However, if I had received 39% of the vote, I am not sure I could make the same claim.

[*English*]

**Mr. Terence Young (Oakville, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am happy to share the allocated time with my colleague, the member for Edmonton—St. Albert, on this important issue.

I am very pleased to rise today to speak to Bill C-20. It is a privilege, in fact. I am very proud to be part of a government that has introduced this important historical democratic measure. The most important thing about Bill C-20 is that it would help preserve and improve our country's cherished democratic and constitutional traditions by ensuring fairer representation in the House.

It has been just under a year since the democratic uprisings in the Arab world began, the Arab Spring. If these uprisings have shown us anything, it is that freedom and self-government are so essential to human nature that people are willing to suffer and even die for them.

Back in the French Revolution, the rallying cry was “liberty, equality and fraternity”. These principles were so important they were eventually adopted in the French constitution of 1958.

This bill addresses one of those three primary pillars of democracy, which is representation by population, equality. It means that the vote of every person, regardless of position, power, wealth, or the part of the country they live in has the same value. It is the primary tool that helps ensure that those with position, power, influence, or wealth cannot dominate elections to gain more of the same.

I quote Voltaire at the time of the French Revolution. He said, “Deep in their hearts, all men have the right to think themselves entirely equal to other men”.

The power of the ballot, where every person is equal, is the best way ever designed to make all people equal in choosing their own government. This importance cannot be overstated. Unfortunately, that principle has been undermined in Canada, not by nefarious means, but by simple demographics, birth rates, internal and external migration.

There has been under-representation in some regions for decades. This bill would address that under-representation in a realistic and reasonable way. This means a great deal to my riding of Oakville and my province of Ontario, as well as communities in British Columbia, Alberta and Quebec.

In addition to focusing on the economy and keeping our communities safe, Canadians voted on May 2 for a strong, stable, national majority Conservative government because they knew we would deliver on the three promises we made regarding representation. Delivering on election commitments is another key pillar of democracy.

First, we promised to increase the number of seats now and in the future for Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta, the fastest growing provinces in the Confederation. Second, we promised to protect the number of seats for the smallest provinces. Third, we promised to maintain Quebec's proportional representation according to its population. The fair representation act would deliver on these promises. As a result, every province would move closer to true representation by population.

Population increases in the most under-represented provinces are occurring primarily in urban areas. People from around the world immigrate to these areas for their economic opportunities as well as for their vibrant and diverse communities.

The region of Halton, where Oakville is located, is expanding quickly. As a result, visible minorities in these ridings where this growth exists are under-represented in our Parliament. Bill C-20 would improve the representation of people living within the Halton region where I expect an additional seat would be added. Other seats would be added across the GTA so that Parliament would have more members who represent ridings with a higher percentage of visible minorities for their more equal voice in Parliament.

Bill C-20 proposes to use the Statistics Canada population estimates as of July 1 of the year of the decennial census to determine how many seats each province would receive. The reason for this is that the population estimates provide a more accurate picture of Canada's total population moving forward.

The use of the population estimates was endorsed by Chief Statistician Wayne Smith of Statistics Canada at the procedure and House affairs committee on November 17. When asked whether using the population estimates is a more accurate measure of the population compared to using the census, he answered, “That is absolutely our view”.

• (1235)

It is disappointing but not surprising to see the opposition parties stonewalling Bill C-20 by proposing alternatives that clearly have not been carefully considered.

*Government Orders*

The Liberal Party's plan has not undergone careful consideration and appears to have been hastily composed. Its plan to cap the House of Commons at 308 seats and simply reassign the seats based on population growth would pit one region of the country against another. Its proposal amounts to nothing more than a shuffling of the deck. The representation of Canadians may be a card game for the Liberals, but it is certainly not for this government.

The Liberals' plan would have to include a legislative repeal of the grandfather clause. In addition, it would require unanimous consent of the provinces and Parliament to remove the Senate floor. Not only would this have far-reaching practical implications, but it would also result in significant losses for Saskatchewan, Nova Scotia, Quebec and Manitoba, as well as Newfoundland and Labrador. Over the winter break from Parliament, the Liberal leader should do a tour of these provinces to meet with the local people and ask them how they feel about that proposal.

As for the NDP's proposal, this is a continuation of its agenda to impede progress in this Parliament for Canadians. Its members have voted against important measures to support the economic recovery and measures to keep our communities safe. Now they are inhibiting our plan to improve Canadian democracy for the sake of scoring political points with their political base and their union masters. The NDP proposal would go against expert opinion and use census population data as a means of awarding seats. More significantly, the NDP's plan guarantees a fixed percentage of seats for one province at 24.35% now and in the future, regardless of that province's population. It is neither fair nor constitutional to extend special treatment to one province over the others moving forward. This plan violates the constitutional principle that a province's population should determine its seat count to the greatest extent possible.

To implement the NDP's plan, we would have to alter the Constitution with a 7/50 amendment. This has the potential to open the floodgates on many other constitutional issues and distract this Parliament and the provincial parliaments from our critical focus on growing our economy and creating jobs.

To summarize, the NDP's plan would violate the principle of proportional representation in the Constitution and would penalize already under-represented provinces for years to come. This is in direct contrast to Bill C-20's balanced, reasonable and principled approach to improving representation for all Canadians.

Canada's Chief Electoral Officer spoke to the urgency of passing this bill before the new year at a recent procedure and House affairs committee meeting.

Bill C-20 is the only rational and fair plan for all Canadians. It is the most reasonable solution to under-representation.

As parliamentarians, we must move swiftly to pass Bill C-20 to ensure Canadians are better represented in the House of Commons for years to come.

• (1240)

**Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I ask the member opposite specifically about one of the core elements of what the Conservatives' proposal is reposing on, that is, that Quebec not be under-represented in the House with respect to its actual percentage of the population. The reality is Bill C-20 in its current

form fails that test. They are proposing 78 seats for Quebec, which is adding three. Members may want to get out their calculators right now because 78 divided into 338 equals 23.08, when the population of Quebec as a proportion of Canada is 23.14. There is actually a core flaw in the basic principles of what the Conservatives have put forward because the math simply does not work.

The hon. member may talk about the fact that territorial seats are outside of that calculation, but nobody calculates territorial seats as being outside the 308 or 338 seats. On the very principles the Conservatives put forward in their plan, they are failing.

Adding more seats does not make sense either, but that is for another question.

**Mr. Terence Young:** Mr. Speaker, the territorial seats are outside that calculation. The territories are unique. They are unique for a number of reasons. One is that there is such a vast territory within each one that one member is deemed to be a minimum and a maximum at the same time.

The member is complaining about a difference between 23.08% and 23.14%. This is not a perfect mathematical proposal. The only perfect mathematical proposal I have seen would require Parliament to expand to 900 seats, triple the size it is now, which is completely unrealistic.

**Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member said that the problem with the Liberal proposal is that it pits one part of the country against another. One would expect that when one region is pitted against the other, one region would hold a very different view than another. Recent public survey data show that the Liberal plan is actually quite popular in all regions of the country. It is not dividing the country the way the government's policies on criminal justice and the gun registry do. I am a little perplexed as to why the member thinks the Liberal proposal creates division in the country when everyone seems to agree with it.

**Mr. Terence Young:** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that question because it was discussed earlier in the debate with the member for Saint-Laurent—Cartierville. I was in the middle of asking which members want to give up their seats in Quebec. Which members opposite in the Montreal area would like to go back—the member for Papineau is holding up his hand—to their constituencies and say, “We are going to give up some seats in Montreal and other parts of Quebec because we think it is more fair that these seats should go to Alberta, Saskatchewan, British Columbia or Ontario”. I would like to know what response they would get from their constituents.

*Government Orders*

I was about to suggest that they could do a telephone town hall, where people could call in. Members could put an ad in the newspaper, and get 10,000 or 20,000 of their constituents on the telephone, tell them what the proposal is, say they want to transfer seats to other provinces because they think that is a good way to save money. What response do those members think they would get? I have been in this business a long time. I first ran in 1974 when I was 21 years old. I can tell them what response they would get and it would not be pleasant.

**Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I like the suggestion of the member for Oakville about the leader of the Liberal Party asking, for example, which Liberal would like to give up his or her seat in Newfoundland and Labrador.

The member for Saint-Laurent—Cartier probably knows better than most that the answer one gets depends on the question one asks. If people were asked if they wanted to spend less money on politicians, they probably would say yes. However, if people were asked if they wanted to lose seats or representation in their province, they probably would say no.

What about the Senate? There are 100 seats available there. If we want to make this place more democratic, surely there is room to do that without it costing more money as a whole.

• (1245)

**Mr. Terence Young:** Mr. Speaker, I assume the member is referring to the NDP's suggestion that we abolish the Senate. That is a totally unviable solution for a number of reasons. The reasons are that the Senate is representative of the provinces in Ottawa. It is seen as a counter to the number of seats that the larger provinces have in this House. The premiers would never agree to it. I believe that plan would lead to constitutional wrangling and negotiation. It would be like the Meech Lake and Charlottetown accords times 10. It would be divisive. It would get this House and the provincial houses away from the most important work we are doing now, which is to provide more jobs for Canadians.

**Mr. Brent Rathgeber (Edmonton—St. Albert, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is indeed an honour for me to rise and add a few additional comments on this important piece of legislation, Bill C-20, dealing with fair representation.

It is an interesting debate. Setting the number of seats and dividing those seats among Canada's 10 provinces and 3 territories is one of the most complicated and controversial things that the House is called upon to do. It is a big task, and I am glad that the members generally, and certainly the Minister of State for Democratic Reform, are up to the task.

The purpose of the bill is to provide greater representation for faster growing provinces. I, being a member of Parliament from Alberta, represent one of those provinces. Of course I support the concept of this bill. Although it does not prescribe a number of seats, it would allow for more seats for the faster growing provinces, Alberta, Ontario and British Columbia. That is appropriate.

The bill attempts to balance that principle with two additional principles. One is to maintain the number of seats for slower growing provinces and the other is to maintain the proportional representation of Quebec according to the population, or at least within a very small margin of error. Assuming the bill is passed, when the formula is

applied to the most recent census, the net result will be that Ontario will receive 15 additional seats, British Columbia will receive six additional seats, and my province of Alberta will receive six additional seats.

I think it is important that those provinces receive greater representation in the House. As we have heard, there are members in the House who currently represent in excess of 200,000 people. I understand the member for Brampton West falls into that category, and the member for Mississauga—Erindale is close to that number.

Worse than just the number of citizens that it is an honour to represent, the ethnic diversity of some of those densely populated ridings in the GTA, where in some situations 50% of the population are ethnic Canadians, puts further demands on members and their staff. As all members know from the individual casework that we do in our riding offices, immigration casework takes up the bulk of what we do. If a member represents 200,000 constituents and over 50% of those are not natural-born Canadians or ethnic Canadians, that will place exceptional demands on a member's time and on the resources of a member's staff and caseworkers.

Canada has become a densely populated country in certain regions, although we are very sparsely populated in the north and in some places in the west. The result of those democratic factors is that 61% of Canadians are currently mathematically under-represented in the House and Canada's visible minorities are particularly under-represented. Worse, the trend is continuing. It is to alleviate some of these discrepancies that Bill C-20 sets out a formula to allow faster growing provinces, such as Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta, additional seats.

I just want to mention briefly the issue with respect to my province, Alberta. Alberta has in excess of three million people, approximately 11% of the population, but it has only a little over 9% of the seats in the House of Commons. Therefore, the proportion of relative voting weight of one of my constituents is .92 of the mean. If that .92 is weighted against provinces that are overrepresented, of course the mathematical significance increases. It is a problem that needs to be addressed.

Although we need to grant more seats to the densely populated regions of our country and the fastest growing provinces, there has to be some accommodation for slower growing provinces and provinces where the population may even be declining. Canada is a diverse country. We have densely populated regions close to the 49th parallel and we have very sparsely populated regions the further we get from our southern border.

*Government Orders*

•(1250)

There has to be some accommodation. It is difficult to represent a large region such as the Peace River electoral district just northwest of my riding of Edmonton—St. Albert. Members of Parliament from Yukon and the Northwest Territories represent vast tracts of land with very few people. Representing that much area presents a challenge in and of itself. We will never achieve perfect representation by population no matter how a laudable goal that would be. There has to be some compromise, but that compromise has to be weighed against international standards and international norms for democratic developed countries.

It is significant to note that when compared to western European countries and our neighbours to the south, Canada is failing with respect to its deviations. Canada has the greatest deviations from average counts of citizens in its ridings compared to Switzerland, Germany, Australia and the United States. What is worse, these deviations are getting larger.

Some members will suggest that in democracies such as the United States, members of both the house of representatives and the senate represent more individuals than we do here in the House. However, the reality is that the deviation between the small electoral districts and the larger electoral districts is much larger in Canada than it is in the United States.

It is those deviations that this legislation is attempting to remedy. It would bring us closer to parity, although, as I said, true parity will never be realized in a country as unique as Canada. Canada is so large but has a relatively sparse population, and relatively dense populations in certain areas.

The situation seriously undermines the principle that all citizens should have an equal say in choosing their government. This country was based on the principle of representation by population within limits. If we checked debates concerning the fathers of Confederation and the conferences that led up to Confederation, we would find that it was not only desirable but it was deemed a prerequisite for the formation of Canada that representation by population be given priority in this House. To balance that, the upper chamber, the Senate, the appointed chamber and hopefully not forever appointed chamber, was premised more upon regional representation as opposed to pure representation by population.

Canada is an advanced democracy. We saw in the spring, in the Arab world primarily, in countries like Egypt, Syria and Libya, citizens advocating for, fighting for, and sadly sometimes dying for, the right to participate in democratic elections and choose who should represent them in the affairs of government and the affairs of state.

We are fortunate to live in a country where we do have a functioning Parliament. We have responsible government. The government is responsible to the House. The House of Commons needs to pay attention to the principles of equality, the concept that every Canadian ought to have more or less equal say as to the composition of the House. Every Canadian ought to have the assurance that his or her vote counts equally and that his or her member will have a constituency that is not so expansive and not so large that the member lacks the ability to represent each constituent.

I would ask all hon. members to support Bill C-20 at third reading. It is not a perfect bill. It is a difficult compromise. The bill would achieve three principles that we must adhere to: representation by population, protecting slower growing provinces, and maintaining the relative proportion of seats in the House for the province of Quebec.

•(1255)

**Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I was not going to interject, but one thing that my colleague from Edmonton said in his speech struck me and motivated me to get up. He said that Canada is lucky to have a functioning Parliament. I would remind him that Parliament is just barely functioning. The bill is perhaps a graphic illustration of how poorly our Parliament is functioning under the guidance of the Conservatives.

This legislation clearly needs more consultation. We have not arrived at a national consensus on which direction we should take. There was little consultation, and now we have no time to debate it in the House of Commons.

I remind my colleague, and I wonder if he shares my view, that consultation means more than just listening to someone's point of view. It means the reasonable accommodation of reasonable points of view brought to the table during that consultation. His government has not allowed one amendment to one single bill since the 41st Parliament began. How can the member call this a functioning Parliament?

**Mr. Brent Rathgeber:** Mr. Speaker, it is a functioning Parliament because we are debating right now. I hear what the hon. member says and I disagree with what he says. That is a debate.

There has been consultation. I know for a fact that the premier of Alberta supports the bill for many reasons, not the least of which is that it will give her province six additional seats.

I have consulted members of my constituency. They support the bill because there has been a long-standing feeling in Alberta that Alberta lacked representation in this House. With a formula that will provide six additional seats, they do support it.

I cannot speak for the member's constituents in Winnipeg, I can only speak for my constituents in Alberta. There have been consultations. This is a good bill. The member should support it.

**Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to the member's remarks. I must say I prefer his arguments to those of his Conservative colleague who spoke prior, who seemed to base his argument on, "I once lost my job in a redistribution. I did not like that. My constituents did not like that, so therefore we need 30 more seats in Parliament to get equity". I thought that was a very self-serving argument, frankly.

However, the member's argument was that in a large riding with a very diverse population, it is difficult to serve the constituents. It occurs to me it would be far more economical to adopt the Liberal plan to redistribute seats, rather than add seats. Then if the member is having problems, an additional staff person would be a much cheaper solution, from a financial perspective, than the solution of adding 30 new members of Parliament.

*Government Orders*

What is the research that shows that adding 30 members of Parliament will lead to better service for the constituents, compared with the existing number?

**Mr. Brent Rathgeber:** Mr. Speaker, just for clarification, it is not my electoral district that has 200,000 members. I represent a riding that is admittedly larger than the average. I was referring to the member for Brampton West. Certainly my riding is not as ethnically diverse as a riding that has 51% new Canadians, as my friend from Brampton West represents.

With respect to the member's question, the issue is not only one of cost. I have a difficult time accepting the cost defence of maintaining the House at its current size. We see all over the Middle East and all over the world that citizens are clamouring for democracy. People are clamouring for the right to vote in free elections.

In Canada we have free elections, but the weight of each constituent is disproportionate, depending on whether the constituent lives for example in the GTA or in northern Ontario. To give some sense of parity or some sense of relative equality to the weight of the individual citizens to maintain democratic equality, the bill increases the number of seats for faster growing provinces without getting into the very acrimonious and divisive debate of taking seats away from certain provinces and giving them to under-represented provinces such as mine.

• (1300)

**Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to join the debate on this bill. Perhaps I could keep my remarks very brief, as all that really needs to be said here today is that this bill is not ready for a third and final vote.

We have not come to a national consensus on what direction we need to go on this thorny subject. We have not had the consultation that is necessary. In fact, the actions of the members on the government side serve as a graphic illustration that this is an idea that has not reached gestation. This is an idea that has not matured fully. It has not had the requisite exchange and the requisite participation and consultation. The illustration is that the government itself has introduced three different bills on this subject. In fact, this is the fourth effort, and each one has changed in its formula and its makeup.

Through the 39th Parliament and the 40th Parliament and the 41st Parliament, the government could not and cannot make up its mind what the picture should look like. Do we need any more evidence that we are not ready to move forward with this bill?

As with every other bill that the government has introduced in the 41st Parliament, it has shut down debate, consultation and any opportunity to add value to a worthy notion so that we could craft something that deserves the pride of the Canadian people. Instead of a nation-building exercise, we are being divisive and dismissive of the many legitimate points of view that are not going to be heard on this debate.

My colleague from Edmonton just said that there has been consultation and that the Premier of Alberta herself likes it. However, there has not been a national consultation and consensus. The minister for intergovernmental affairs for the Province of

Quebec has stated openly that it is not meeting their expectations. They reject it; other provinces do as well.

We should consider a very important point. We banter around the word "consultation"; the Supreme Court of Canada has ruled numerous times in recent years on what the definition of consultation is. It means far more than simply asking somebody their views on the matter.

True consultation, to meet the legally recognized definition of consultation, means that you have to accommodate some of the legitimate concerns brought forward by other parties in the process of that consultation. To simply listen and ignore all the points brought forward does not meet the test of consultation, and that has not happened here, nor has it happened with previous bills in this 41st Parliament.

I have been here for six different Parliaments, and I have never seen anything like it in my life, nor has any veteran member of Parliament in this chamber. We have never seen such a disregard for the legitimate opposing views that make up Parliament, which consists of government and opposition.

The father of the member for Papineau once said that MPs are nobodies once they are 50 feet off of Parliament Hill. I hate to say it, but he might want to revisit that popular expression. Members of Parliament are nobody even when they are sitting in this chamber if they are sitting on the opposition benches, because there is such a distinct lack of respect for every one of us that it offends the sensibilities of any person who calls himself or herself a democrat, never mind a New Democrat. It is an insult to the intelligence of everybody here.

Sometimes, in their missionary-like zeal to ram their agenda down the throats of Canadians, the Conservatives are being dangerously ignorant of what a fragile construct and what a precious thing we hold here in our hands as a Parliament in a western democracy.

I wonder if the government is aware of the irreversible damage it is causing. I say "irreversible" because once it lets that genie out of the bottle, it will never get the toothpaste back in the tube, if members do not mind my mixing a number of metaphors.

• (1305)

Once we go there, we cannot get back. Once they have let the pendulum swing so wildly to their ultra-right-wing neo-conservative agenda, it is going to cause a backlash. Normal progressive-thinking Canadians, the majority of progressive-thinking Canadians, are going to have no alternative but to respond; the pendulum will swing wildly the other way, and they will have started to create instability throughout the land. That is the direction we are going.

The Conservatives no sooner won their majority than they started to abuse their majority. That is the danger here. In the spirit of Christmas, that is what I am here to caution. In all good will, I am here to caution my colleagues on the other side not to go there. Mr. Speaker, through you, I tell them not to open that Pandora's box, because they will regret it. It takes a while for these things to resonate throughout the land, but people are starting to take note.

*Government Orders*

The farmers in western Canada are starting to take note. They thought the vote that was guaranteed to them by legislation would occur and that the government of the day would uphold the rule of law. That is another graphic illustration of the blatant disregard the Conservatives have for everything that is good and decent about our parliamentary democracy. They cut a swath through everything that is good and decent about everything we stand for. The very foundations, the very fundamentals upon which we built this great nation, are being struck down one after another by a bunch of ultra-right-wing neo-conservatives who are tantamount to despots when it comes to living up to any semblance of parliamentary democracy.

I accuse them of being not only ignorant, but dangerously ignorant, of what a fragile construct democracy is. They themselves should read a book. They themselves should look at the history of Canada. They themselves should look at the founding nations that built this fragile construct that we call our parliamentary democracy, and they should know that it needs vigilance to nourish democracy.

We cannot treat it with a cavalier disregard. If we do away with any one element, it is like pulling a thread on a sweater. Pulling that string of wool makes it all begin to fall apart. The very fabric of the consensus that built this great nation needs to be cultivated and nourished and watered and developed. It cannot withstand a full majority term of the Conservative government and its blatant disregard for everything that our parents went to war to fight for and to build up. This great nation that our fathers and forefathers built is now vulnerable.

Let me give an example. This is something I learned from a great statesman named Gordon Robertson, who was active in the Liberal era under Trudeau.

In a speech he gave in the time of the Charlottetown Accord, he reminded Canadians that there are fewer than 20 federations in the world. Of all the hundreds of countries in the world, fewer than 20 are federations, because by definition that is the most difficult form of government to put together. It cobbles together diverse interests from diverse regions that accommodate one another's concerns to create something greater than the sum of its parts. That is what a federation is, and it is tough. The largest and most successful is the United States, and it blew itself apart in a bloody civil war after only 75 years.

Of those 20 federations in the world at the time of Mr. Robertson's speech, three were in the process of blowing themselves apart. The Soviet Union is now gone. Yugoslavia is now gone. The third one he cited was Canada. Believe me, there is nothing to guarantee that we will be here in 20 years if we do not nurture and cultivate and nourish the fundamental principles upon which this nation was founded. To be ignorant of them is, again, playing with our children's future.

• (1310)

That is the very core, the nucleus, of what we are dealing with here today.

If members think I am overstating things, I challenge any one of them to rise and contradict me, because it is not just this bill, it is the whole experience since May 2. Every single thing the Conservatives have done has been an affront to the spirit of democracy, an affront

to the institution of Parliament. Conservatives have shown a blatant disrespect for all of our parliamentary institutions and the spirit of goodwill that made them and brought them about.

That is what offends me most in the spirit of democracy. We are being denied our fundamental right to do the oversight, the scrutiny and the due diligence that is our role and our job as the other half of Parliament.

Parliament may have two chambers, but each of those chambers has two constituent parts, the government and the opposition, and nobody has a monopoly on good ideas. It takes an ignorant man to think he knows it all. In fact, that is the best proof that somebody is stupid: he thinks he knows it all. There are good ideas and ideas of great merit on this side of the chamber as well, and the way we test the strength of our positions is to subject them to vigorous debate. If they can stand up to the challenges of legitimate debate, the devil's advocate, then we have tested the mettle of our principles, but along the way we may learn that we did not know it all and that maybe there were points of merit that the other side could contribute.

I was here in previous majority governments. This is my sixth term. I did not just fall off the turnip truck. I cannot believe I am calling it the good old days, but in the good old days of the Liberal majority government, we used to have amendments succeed at committee and in the chamber and at third reading. We had many amendments. A bill might be at committee for six weeks, and in that process tour the country and get input from people from all walks of life. Someone at some point might say, "By golly, that guy had a really good idea; we should fold it into this bill as an amendment."

Do I have to spell it for these guys? They have not allowed a single amendment on a single bill in the 41st Parliament, except the two the Conservatives themselves put forward to amend their own bills. They have been in a fast-track mode, trying to ram stuff down the throats of Canadians with such missionary zeal that they themselves forgot some of the things they meant to put into bills.

I have seen the Minister of Public Safety stand and try to introduce six amendments to his own bill at third reading, the very things that he himself denied at committee. That is an example of the mistakes that can be made through haste. These things are too important to screw up. We have to get it right, because we are stuck with the consequences for a long time.

This is the appalling thing, and it really does worry me. We will not recognize this country with these guys in charge for four years. God help us if we leave them there for eight. If we have to wait until 2019 to relegate these neo-conservative, obsolete, outdated, ideological zealots to the trash heap of history, we will not recognize what is left of this country.

The rest of the world is waking up. These guys are still with Maggie Thatcher and Ronald Reagan and Brian Mulroney. They are neo-conservative zealots. We are the only country in the developed world that is still suffering under this outdated Conservative ideology, and progressive Canadians are having it rammed down their throats without even the opportunity that is guaranteed by the Constitution to participate in the governance of this country.

*Government Orders*

This particular bill is perhaps one of the most glaring examples and graphic illustrations of everything that is wrong with everything the Conservatives do.

It is almost the end of the year. It is almost the Christmas recess. It has been five long weeks, and it has been truly an exhausting and demoralizing experience to watch the Conservatives revelling in glee as they destroy our parliamentary institutions. They are doing enormous damage to our democratic process and everything we hold dear about this country that we love.

● (1315)

I have heard some thoughtful, refreshing, energetic, enthusiastic participation from the opposition benches and it is all for naught. It is falling on deaf ears. It is falling on the ears of people who have only thing in mind, and that is to re-create Canada in the image of George Bush's America. Piece by piece and incrementally, the Conservatives are well on their way, in everything they do, to create their little neo-conservative nirvana with our country. It is really appalling.

What should have been and could have been an opportunity for nation building, as I get to the substance of Bill C-20, has been a missed opportunity.

In fact, I enter this debate with full disclosure that the formula would leave my home province with the exact same number of seats that it had. I am not here to ride any particular regional hobby horse. I am here to emphasize that the very magic of a country that cannot possibly work on paper, but actually works very well in practice, the very magic to this fragile construct that I referred to earlier is the accommodation of the legitimate concerns of the constituent regions that make up our country. Simple math, and I emphasize "simple", is not going to cut it without the consideration of the legitimate role that the founding nations played without some reasonable debate.

Because the Conservatives have moved closure yet again and shut debate, we will not even be able to raise something that I am very excited about. I was recently in New Zealand and I spoke with the Maori Party there. The first nations in New Zealand are guaranteed seats in the New Zealand parliament. That country does not have a constitution. The treaty it signed with the Maori people constitutes its constitution.

These are exciting progressive ideas that deserve to be at least entertained and considered when we deal with representation and the seats of the House of Commons. We will not get a chance to do that. We will not hear a single witness at committee speaking to that as an option. I am not pushing it, but it is an option that is worthy of our consideration as members of Parliament. If we are at all thoughtful and considerate about the representation, perhaps we would acknowledge that there were more than two founding nations that created Canada, that, in fact, first nations, Inuit and Métis people are not as well represented as they could be.

It is only one of these things. We could go on and on. In fact, we should go on and on, at least in the consultation process. As I say, the true consultation, which includes the accommodation of some of the things that we hear in the process of consultation, is what would make it a meaningful exercise. That is what Canadians are being denied by the ramrod tactics of the current government as it rams

through its agenda, without the consideration of the majority of Canadians.

The Conservatives do not have all the answers. I argue that they are not doing it right. None of the bills that we have had rammed down our throats are fully matured to the point that they should be given royal assent. They are not finished. They are immature, like the people who drafted them. It is an immature process. They have not reached their gestation. In fact, they are not ready.

● (1320)

**Mr. Gordon Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I listened to the rather colourful performance from the member opposite. He did not really get into what the bill is all about. The fact is the bill would move Canadians closer to representation by population.

My province has ridings that have 150,000-plus constituents. I represent about 99,000 constituents. I come from a rural riding. Rural ridings would be larger. I, in fact, operate three satellite constituency offices outside of the main centre of Brockville, which serve my constituents very well. If the riding were larger, it might be even more difficult to serve those constituents.

However, getting back to what the hon. member was saying, I did not hear from him how we would do this bill differently. How long does the member think we need to talk about this? How many days, how many months do we need to talk about it before he would be prepared to vote on something that Canadians really want to see passed by Parliament?

**Mr. Pat Martin:** Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Leeds—Grenville has not even had the decency to identify the real incentive on his party's part. There is a Trojan Horse element to the bill. By ramming the seat numbers down our throats, what the Conservatives are really trying to achieve is stripping out the per vote party financing so they can smash their Liberal enemies. That is really their priority. When they talk about electoral reform, it is always about doing away with the opposition entirely.

No one denies that there needs to be a regular reorganization of seats based on the census. We all know what Conservatives think of the long form census, but the mathematics associated with the census are imperfect. One of the previous speakers to this bill talked about what an imperfect mechanism it was because it was only one of the elements we had to consider when we talked about fair representation.

I would like us to consider in that same context some of the other elements. There already is a special budget subsidy for members who have unusually large geographic areas. I would like consideration to be made on socio-economic lines as well. Over 50% of the families in my riding—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** Order, please. I am sure there are other hon. members who wish to ask questions. We will try to keep some time for those remaining.

The hon. member for Papineau.

*Government Orders*

**Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from Winnipeg Centre for his, as always, impassioned and enthusiastic presentation to the House. I tend to believe that Canada is a little stronger than he worries it is. I think we will do just fine after 2015 when there is a reorganization of the seats of the House, which will be quite radical after the next election. However, we shall see about that.

My question for him is more specific. He does not like this bill because it has not had enough consultation. We have pressed him and his party before for a specific number of seats in which the NDP proposal would result. If he feels there has not been enough consultation, how does he feel about the fact that the Conservative Party has fixed an arbitrary number of 24% for the representation of Quebec, a number that will exist into perpetuity and that his worries about the pendulum not swinging back come from locking something in that will bind us for generations to come in a way that is probably unfair to the rest of Canada?

**Mr. Pat Martin:** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate some of the thoughtful, considerate and even refreshing speeches put forward by some of my colleagues in the opposition. I believe it serves as an illustration of how seriously we on this side of the House take this opportunity to show not only respect for the various constituent regions that make up the fragile construct of the nation state of Canada. I am also proud, in the context of this debate, that many of the members on the NDP side have put forward the first bill they believe is a reasonable consideration of the thorny question of representation in the House, which is private member's Bill C-312.

It is the first party to introduce a bill that would give addition seats to the fastest-growing provinces and would recognize the legitimate concerns of the province of Quebec. That is why we have been proudly stating that we view this as a nation-building exercise, not divisive or dismissive of the legitimate concerns brought to the table but accommodating both of those legitimate issues under the auspices of one private member's bill, which I hope will have full debate and even be approved and passed by the House of Commons.

• (1325)

**Mr. Kennedy Stewart (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the NDP vision is of a two or perhaps three-nation concept, but what I fail to hear in this debate is any vision from either the government or the third party in the House. Would my colleague elaborate a little more on the NDP vision and where they have missed the boat in terms of this debate?

**Mr. Pat Martin:** Mr. Speaker, I look forward to the time when we can consult with the provinces and with Canadians to ask whether our bill or the Conservative's bill does the better job in achieving representation by population, while at the same time accommodating the realities of our country. To deny the unique role that Quebec plays in the configuration of Canada is to be wearing blinders and, in fact, I believe adopting a dangerous stance if we are talking about the well-being and the future of what I consider a fragile federation.

I am surprised my colleague for Papineau is so confident that all is well under the rule of the Conservative majority government. Frankly, if we do not get our act together on this side of the House of Commons, the Conservatives will not just be here until 2015. My colleague for Papineau is deluded if he thinks his party is going to somehow rise from the ashes and defeat the Conservatives in 2015. I

do not know what is in the water in Papineau, but the man is clearly deluded. If we do not do something united and unite the progressive vote in our country—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** Order, please. Questions and comments, the hon. member for Prince Edward—Hastings

**Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I certainly think that in getting a little closer to Christmas, a little levity does not hurt. Let me congratulate the hon. member across the floor. In my mind, he gets an A-plus for bombast and puffery. That is really about the extent of it though.

We are talking about a very serious issue. When I talk to my constituents, they say that it is important that we do not just talk, but that we make a decision and move on it.

However, I have heard the hon. member many times in the House and I have heard him filibuster at committee. Quite frankly, a positive contribution with ideas and thoughts on privileges would be welcome. There have been many opportunities.

We have been discussing this issue for over three and a half years now in various forms, but I have yet to hear one solid word of recommendation from the member opposite. Perhaps today he could give us his description of what he believes should take place in the House. I have not heard it in the past three and half years.

**Mr. Pat Martin:** Mr. Speaker, in fact, my colleague made my arguments for me by saying that we have been trying to arrive at the right formula for three and a half years with four separate bills. The Conservatives, as the ruling party, keep introducing these bills and keep changing the formula. It is different every time. They cannot get it right. They do not really know what the right formula is. Therefore, they have decided that they are fed up with trying so they are just going to ram this one through, even though we all know it is imperfect, we all know it is flawed and that is what I caution about.

We should not go into this kind of thing lightly because we will be stuck with it for a long time. There is nothing funny, bombastic or puffery about it. The Conservatives are making a serious mistake in ramming through this stuff because it is not ready to be given royal assent. We are going to have to put it back together when we finally get rid of the government. It will fall on us to try to fix everything it has done. That is what we are cautioning Canadians about now.

• (1330)

**Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to stand in the House and speak to this important bill. It is important to my constituents.

My colleague from Winnipeg Centre had some important points to make. He had a number of minutes to bring forward some facts or suggestions in terms of changes to the bill. Unfortunately, he did not take the opportunity to do that. Instead, he simply criticized Canadians for the government they chose to elect, the Conservative government.

*Government Orders*

It is the government that is leading the strongest economy in the G8. It is the government that is leading this country during very difficult times to a place that Canadians have long desired it to be as a leader. It is a country where Canadians, regardless of where they are in the country, are represented in the House of Commons more fairly.

That brings me to my comments. In the House I have the privilege of representing the highest number of constituents in the province of Alberta. The last census pegged the riding of Peace River at just under 140,000 constituents. We have had significant growth since 2006. As a matter of fact, members will find that in the constituency of Peace River today the population has significantly grown. The cities, the largest of which is Grand Prairie, have grown substantially over the last number of years as a result of the economy that has developed and continues to develop in that region. The outlying areas as well have grown.

In many parts of the country we see small towns reducing in size or diminishing. As a matter of fact, I am proud to report to the House that across my constituency, which is one of the largest in geography in the province of Alberta, the second largest being my colleague's for Fort McMurray—Athabasca, which is in fact the largest, and who also represents a riding with significant populations, no matter where one goes people are continuing to move and develop the local economy, and continue to make their home there. These are people from across the country.

As a matter of fact, we have significant numbers of people who are locating in the Peace Country from Newfoundland. We have people who are coming from Ontario, from throughout the Maritimes, as well as British Columbia and Saskatchewan. However, many of the people from Saskatchewan are now returning to that province because of the economic growth that province is seeing.

I am very proud to represent the large population in my constituency. Some members in the House have talked about the difficulty of representing large populations. It is in fact a difficult issue when we have a large population in a large geographical area. It sometimes makes it more difficult to serve my constituents. Because of the diversity of my constituency, in terms of its economic makeup and the driving economic industries located there, I have a whole host of folks living and working in the oil and gas sector who have their sets of concerns.

Right now, one of the biggest issues is actually trying to find enough people to fill the jobs. Therefore, if there are Canadians out there who are looking for an interesting opportunity, I will put in the plug right now that we are looking for people and would be happy if they would locate to the Peace Country. Those folks right now have major issues with respect to that. They are actually utilizing the temporary foreign worker program significantly to try to fill some of those labour shortages.

In my office we actually deal a fair bit with immigration. That is actually one of the major issues that we deal with within our constituency office. We deal with folks that are trying to come here on a temporary basis. We are working with employers to make that happen. We also work with families who are coming from other parts of the country who were able to locate in Canada permanently. We work with those individuals and their employers to try to bring, in

many cases, families together with those who have located in the Peace Country to work.

We also have a large agricultural sector. In the area of agriculture, certainly manpower or the resources in terms of the labour force are major concerns for those folks as well because of the constraints that we are seeing across the labour pool in my constituency. These folks are also very concerned about a number of things in terms of trade opportunities. They are constantly coming to my office to talk about some of the government programming, as well as some of the trade opportunities for exporting their commodities. We deal with those folks and it is quite a divergent group of programs that we often work with on those files.

● (1335)

In addition to those, we also work with the lumber and pulp industry. We have a significant pulp and paper industry, as well as a lumber industry in my constituency. There are a number of challenges on that front with regard to our trading partners. We sometimes have challenges exporting wood to different countries, including our largest trading partner, the United States. We also have issues with innovation in that field, so we work with the industry on some of the regulatory issues. My constituency office is also very involved on that file.

We also have an emerging mining industry that is locating in my constituency. We are very proud of the exploration that is happening, and we are looking forward to the great opportunities and the potential that that may lead to. My office is, of course, involved with those folks.

One of the largest population centres in my riding is the city of Grand Prairie. I am very proud to inform the House that this year Grand Prairie has been the leader and has been recognized as the most entrepreneurial city in the country. That is a significant milestone. It really speaks to the innovative nature of the people in the Peace Country, and Albertans in general, in driving the economy forward and always looking for innovative and creative ways to really develop our community and foster opportunities for jobs and economic development.

With entrepreneurs though, as we can well imagine, there are a whole host of situations that we often intervene on, on behalf of our constituents. For those people who are starting up small businesses, there may be issues with the Canada Revenue Agency, or in making patent submissions, or a whole host of other things. My office is involved in those. I referenced all those points because they are part of the responsibilities of members of Parliament. If MPs are doing their jobs effectively, they are addressing those challenges.

However, that is not the argument for bringing a fair system of representation to the House. I am happy to do additional work because I have a larger population, if that is the fact. However, what is important is not that I have an easier life, it is the principle of my constituents having equal say, or as equal as possible, to their counterparts in other parts of the country. That is the primary root of the necessity for the change that is being proposed in the legislation.

*Government Orders*

For the first time, we are seeing some of the largest efficiencies in terms of representation by population beginning to be addressed in this bill. We are seeing a movement. We have heard a whole host of different suggestions from my counterparts from other parties in terms of different mechanisms or different tweaks that could be undertaken, but I am not sure that any of them really speak to the necessity and the challenge that needs to be taken on; that is, bringing fair representation to those people who are currently under-represented.

My colleague from Winnipeg Centre referenced aboriginal people in another country. I believe it was New Zealand. I am a proud representative of 32 first nations, folks in my constituency. Those people currently are under-represented to the extent that they have less say in the House of Commons than other people do in other parts of the country, so I am speaking for those people who are located in ridings that are currently under-represented in the House.

It is a real challenge anytime we take on a piece of legislation like this. It has been referenced. My colleague who spoke before me, who was a much more eloquent speaker than I am, spoke about the necessity of ensuring that it is right. There have been a number of different attempts to rectify the obvious problems with the larger populations moving to other parts that do not have the representation.

● (1340)

Over the last three and a half years these have been debated in the House, and every single time there have been opportunities for members of all parties to make their contributions, to make their opinions known.

The minister has brought forward a piece of legislation that we can all endorse. First of all, it addresses the major issues with regard to the population and where it has grown over the last number of years. It does not get into the trenches and the unwinnable arguments with regard to going after what are constitutionally protected provisions with regard to seats specifically in P.E.I. and a number of other provisions.

We do not need to bring forward divisive discussions, as some people have suggested, with regard to taking members of Parliament away from certain provinces because their population has not grown as fast as other parts of the country. That has not been a practice in Canada. I am not certain Canadians could endorse that.

I hear my colleagues from the Liberal Party saying that it could be done. P.E.I. has not actually indicated that it is going to give up seats in the House of Commons, and I am not asking it to do that. That is not reasonable.

I clearly think that while the Liberals continue to make their voices heard, let us just recognize that in their 13 years of government they did not tackle this field at all. As a matter of fact, one of the reasons why I am sitting in the House today is because I saw that the former government was unwilling to address the challenges that many Albertans really were sensing, and this was one of the irritants.

**Mr. Scott Andrews:** They are not represented enough.

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** Mr. Speaker, I hear the Liberal chorus rising louder and louder when I start to speak about Alberta. There is something they find offensive about the province of Alberta, but that is no surprise. When Albertans hear about the Liberal Party, they are also offended. It is a mutual relationship that probably will be long-standing if the Liberal Party continues to oppose Alberta's right to be represented in the House of Commons based on a more fairer system. I do appreciate that people are passionate.

It is necessary for us to have this legislation passed expeditiously because if we do not we will not see any changes reflected in the next general election. I have heard a number of people calling on the government to shelve this legislation, quit with this legislation, and shut down this effort to bring equality to Canadians from coast to coast. I do not subscribe to that.

I actually believe that now is the time to move forward with this to ensure that Canadians, no matter where they live in this country, know that they have a fairer system when it comes to representation in the House of Commons before the next election. It is a principle that I hear from my constituents.

I travel around my constituency regularly even though it is larger. This is an issue that Canadians in my constituency—

**Mr. Scott Andrews:** They are demanding more politicians. I can hear them say we need more politicians.

**Hon. Denis Coderre:** Spend more millions.

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** Mr. Speaker, Liberal members keep chastising me for bringing up the issue that Albertans have in the House. I would ask you, Mr. Speaker, to allow the voices of Albertans to be heard in this chamber and not only me as a member of Parliament but through this change with regard to seat allocation to ensure that Albertans have fair representation in the House of Commons.

I do appreciate that there are passions. I would ask members of Parliament to work with this government to bring fairness to the electoral system, to bring additional seats to those people who are currently under-represented in the House of Commons, to ensure that aboriginal people are more equally represented, to ensure that new Canadians are more equally represented, and to ensure that minority communities within my constituency, my French speaking communities and communities of Ukrainian descent, are more equally represented in the House of Commons.

This is something that we as a government have been working on for a number of years. A commitment has been brought forward by our government in successive elections.

● (1345)

The time has come for this House to recognize that something has to be done, that the work needs to be brought forward in this bill to ensure that the non-partisan commissions can begin the process of readjusting the seat boundaries as we look to the next election. If we do not pass this legislation now, it will not be passed in enough time for the commissions to undertake their work to redistribute seats in preparation for the next election.

*Government Orders*

It is an issue of fairness to my constituents that this legislation be passed as quickly as possible. I call on my colleagues in the NDP and my noisy colleagues in the Liberal Party to join me in bringing fairer representation to my constituents.

**Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, we hear over and over again from the other side how important this piece of legislation is. Yet time and time again, when it comes to important legislation, the Conservatives bring in time allocation which prevents us from discussing and looking at the bills to ensure that, as it is something we are going to be living with for a long time, it will be the right thing to do.

The member thinks this is such a great piece of legislation. I have one of the largest ridings in Canada, the third largest. I am very concerned that this bill will not even address the fact that my riding is such a huge riding. If anything, I am concerned that northern Ontario may end up losing a seat. I do not believe that he would be able to guarantee that will not happen.

Given that the Conservatives' legislation in the previous Parliament had 18 seats for Ontario and now it only has 15, what has changed? My understanding is that the population certainly has not decreased that much to warrant a difference of three seats.

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague asked a question with regard to why we need to move this forward now. This has been an ongoing process. The member can appreciate that over the last three and a half years, there has been a number of efforts to bring forward this legislation to bring fairness for constituents across this country.

The member talked about her home province of Ontario. For the same reasons that I want to bring fairer representation to the province of Alberta, she should support bringing fairer representation to the province of Ontario. I am looking at this list of the census populations of the nine most-populated ridings in the country. Other than mine, the rest are Ontario ridings. If the member believes in bringing fairer representation for her province, she will work with our government to pass this bill expeditiously so that we can actually see these seat changes by the next election.

**Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I have been following the debate quite intently with interest.

As a proud Ontario MP, I canvassed my constituents and other people in the city of Toronto, and they do not see the need for us to add more seats to this House at this particular time.

Redistribution has happened on an automatic basis every 10 years. I would suggest that the Liberal plan makes more sense and would not have the cost impact that the proposed legislation would have.

I find it really interesting that we have lots of quotes from the current Prime Minister saying some years ago that we should be reducing the number of people sitting in the House, that there is no need for more seats. What could possibly have happened that would suddenly change the current government's position, other than the fact that it is looking for more seats in Ontario? In case it loses a few, it figures it can pick up a few more.

What is the rationale of the Prime Minister and his party completely changing their minds?

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** Mr. Speaker, we as a government continue to listen to Canadians.

I find it interesting that my colleague actually has not heard this concern about the issue of being under-represented in her own constituency. That may be the case. I do not doubt her.

I am sure our colleagues from Brampton West, Oak Ridges—Markham, Vaughan, Halton, Mississauga, Whitby—Oshawa, and Nepean—Carleton have heard these concerns. People in those ridings are in fact under-represented in this House of Commons.

When the member speaks about why the Conservative government has not taken on the Liberal position, it is because we do not believe that provinces should be penalized. We do not believe that everyone should lose. We believe there is a balanced position that could be brought forward in this bill where everybody would get fairer representation without massive losses for some provinces.

● (1350)

**Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Peace River gave an excellent speech. He talked about what effects the bill would have on his own riding and the province of Alberta.

Prior to his speech, there was a speech by the member for Winnipeg Centre. Based on the 2006 census, the riding of Winnipeg Centre has a total of 70,000 people, 55,000 of whom are Canadians over 18 years of age. Could the member explain to me how it is fair that an individual sitting in this House representing 55,000 people compared to the over 100,000 people that he represents? Why is this bill important, that the voices of the member's constituents are heard an equal amount to those of the member for Winnipeg Centre?

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** Mr. Speaker, as a matter of fact, the member for Winnipeg Centre conceded that this bill does not affect him or his constituents. I am not sure why he would penalize my constituents. Because it is not his priority, he suggests it should not be my priority. However, I am defending the constituents who are currently under-represented in this House. I believe it is a principle of our democracy that there be fairer representation, moving closer to representation by population as much as we possibly can in a system that is fair and does not divide Canadians but brings Canadians closer together. I believe that the bill we have before us is the best mechanism to make that happen.

**Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I wonder if my colleague from Peace River would entertain the notion that there are geographic subsidies for members of Parliament who have to represent large geographic regions and there is a further subsidy for population if a member has to represent 130,000 constituents rather than 87,000 as is the case in my riding. Would he consider that there should be accommodation based on socio-economic factors?

For instance, 47% of all the families and 52% of all the children in my riding live below the poverty line. Poor people are in a constant state of crisis. They need the representation of their member of Parliament and the offices that we provide. Their children get scooped up by child and family services. They get thrown out of their apartments. Things happen to low-income people.

*Government Orders*

What is the average family income of the riding that the member represents? Would he consider that we could have raised in the fullness of time, if the Conservatives did not move closure, some of the representation issues associated with socio-economics and poverty?

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's enthusiasm for the debate. Obviously he has taken every opportunity to speak over the last three and a half years on this issue. That is why it is important that we move forward on this and actually get something done.

In terms of the subsidies that members of Parliament get based on the geographical size as well as on the population size of their ridings, it is important that Canadians know that goes to the budget of the member of Parliament. It is actually directed to the member of Parliament to ensure that mail can be sent out to the larger population or, if it is a larger geographical area, that there can be accommodations made for travel expenses in large constituencies. I am not sure why he would like additional money for different arguments. It is actually to help offset the costs of those provisions. Certainly, if he has concerns with regard to his budget he could take it up with the Board of Internal Economy.

• (1355)

**Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, what makes this democratic process so rich is that we have a chance to hear the flights of fancy and fury from the member for Winnipeg Centre and then the logistical minutiae of the operation of an Alberta MP's office. It is all very interesting.

When the member for Peace River began to talk about the actual content of the bill, he talked about fairness, necessity and the challenge. I would put it to the member that fairness is actually built into the proposal by the member for Saint-Laurent—Cartierville on behalf of the Liberal Party. There would be redistribution to bring that fairness and democracy but without adding the 30 new seats which I am sure the member's constituents in Alberta do not see as a priority for fiscal spending. The challenge is to have the courage to do redistribution and not try to have a popularity contest by adding seats to have that fairness.

How does this commitment to fairness dovetail with the member's party's bill on Senate changes, which would be very prejudicial to the interests and the representation of his province of Alberta and my province of British Columbia?

**Mr. Chris Warkentin:** Mr. Speaker, I am very thankful that the member from the Liberal Party is actually getting onside with regard to our reforms in the Senate. I am proud to be an Albertan. We are the only province that is represented in the Senate with an elected senator. If the unelected, unaccountable Liberal senators believe in the necessity for change I call on them to resign their seats and run in the next senatorial election.

In terms of her speaking about the minutiae of my constituency, this is the type of language that Albertans find offensive from the Liberal Party. Again and again, if we are talking about things that are important to Alberta, the Liberal Party has something to say about Albertans that offends them. I only make that comment as a point of interest. I hope the hon. member will refrain from doing that in the future.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** Before I recognize the hon. member for Hamilton Centre, I will let him know that I will have to interrupt him at the hour for statements by members.

The hon. member for Hamilton Centre.

**Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity even if it is for only three minutes.

**Some hon. members:** Time.

**Mr. David Christopherson:** Mr. Speaker, I hear my good friends across the way wishing it were less time than that already. I have not even said a full sentence, and members are already shouting me down.

I have enough time to make one point, and it is this. While we are supportive of the seats going to the provinces that need them, we believe that a golden opportunity has been missed to continue to build Canada, to nation build. Remember that we are still a work in progress. We still have a province that has not signed on. We still have a strong sovereigntist movement within our country. We need to address these things. We have been very successful over the last couple of decades in turning the tide. The new official opposition is proof of that.

We believe that this was a great opportunity to lock in the historic vote that happened on November 27, 2006, when an overwhelming majority—almost unanimous, but an overwhelming majority of the House—endorsed a resolution to recognize the Québécois as a nation within a united Canada. That was a significant historical moment in this place. It sent a very strong message to Quebec that its future is safe from assimilation here in Canada and by virtue of that, it is safe within all of North America.

We believe that principle, which we endorsed here in 2006, should find its way into this bill and further reduce the effect of the sovereigntist appeal in Quebec, and also build the kind of regime in this place and across Canada that sends the message that all Canadians are important. We do that through a number of seats where there are guarantees in place. We all point to P.E.I. in terms of what it was offered to bring it into the family of Canada and the respect we have for that. We believe that extending that same kind of respect now to the province of Quebec and most importantly to the Québécois people is the right way to build the nation of Canada for today and for our grandchildren. We stand by that.

• (1400)

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** The hon. member for Hamilton Centre will have seventeen and a half minutes remaining for his speech and another ten minutes for questions and comments when the House returns to debate on this motion.

Statements by members, the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands.

*Statements by Members***STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS***[English]***KYOTO PROTOCOL**

**Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP):** Mr. Speaker, it is with enormous sadness I rise today to mark what was done yesterday by the government in signalling legal withdrawal from the Kyoto protocol.

I urge that members here recognize that this is not a partisan issue. We should at this moment, and at every moment when we examine whether we can protect the world for our children, set aside partisanship and recognize that there was environmental leadership from the government of Brian Mulroney, and that in the world today there is environmental leadership from the conservative governments of David Cameron and Nicolas Sarkozy.

This is not an issue of the left, right, or centre. This is a survival of our children issue, and it should cut across all partisanship.

I hope I am wrong. I hope that Canada's reputation in the world will not be tarnished forever by a decision to renege on a treaty that was legally ratified here, but I fear that our reputation will be damaged and I fear that the future of our children will be damaged.

I ask all hon. members to reconsider. We have one year to recommit. Let us not lose that opportunity.

\* \* \*

**CHILLIWACK SALVATION ARMY FOOD BANK**

**Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Fraser Canyon, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, last Monday Chilliwack's firefighters and other emergency service personnel had an unusually busy night. They went up and down the streets of town in their gear with their lights flashing, going door to door.

Fortunately, they were not responding to a fire. Instead they were responding, as they do every year, to the Salvation Army food bank's request for help in soliciting donations. In one night, they collected over 20,000 food items.

Our local firefighters and emergency service personnel put their lives on the line to protect the health and safety of our citizens and their property whenever they are called into duty. They not only volunteer to fight fires, but they volunteer to make our community a better place to live, work and raise a family.

On behalf of the people of Chilliwack, I want to thank all of the firefighters and other emergency service personnel who participated in the event, and everyone who made a donation, for making this Christmas season a little brighter for those less fortunate in our community.

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**CRIMINAL CODE**

**Mr. Kennedy Stewart (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, on February 28, 2005, Helen Sonja Francis, a nurse and resident of Burnaby—Douglas, was tragically struck and killed while cycling in northern British Columbia. Evidence suggests the driver of the car was impaired.

Section 256 of the Criminal Code states that a warrant must be issued within four hours to obtain blood samples from people involved in an accident who are suspected of being impaired. However, in this case the warrant was signed 13 minutes too late because of the remote location and a local power outage. This delay meant the driver who killed Helen was not charged with driving under the influence.

For six long years Helen's brother, George Sojka, and her daughter Sarah have asked the government to extend the time limit for these types of warrants. Such a change would better ensure that impaired drivers who cause injury and death would be brought to justice and would give at least some peace to affected families.

I ask the government to immediately review this section of the Criminal Code and extend the time limit for warrants.

\* \* \*

**CANADIAN BANKERS ASSOCIATION**

**Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton—Leduc, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the Canadian Bankers Association as it celebrates its 120th anniversary this week. Formed in 1891, the CBA is one of Canada's oldest business associations.

Today the CBA represents 52 member banks, both domestic and foreign, that operate in Canada. With its expertise in banking operations, the CBA plays an effective role in helping government and parliamentarians develop public policies that contribute to Canada's sound and successful banking system.

Indeed, earlier this fall, for the fourth year in a row Canada was again ranked as having the soundest banks and soundest system in the world by the World Economic Forum.

The Canadian Bankers Association also promotes financial literacy to help Canadians make informed financial decisions, and it works with banks and law enforcement to help protect customers against financial crime and promote fraud awareness.

On behalf of the Government of Canada, I wish the CBA the very best as it marks this milestone in its long history.

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**HUMAN TRAFFICKING**

**Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, a short time ago I attended an event hosted by the Young Nak Presbyterian Church in Toronto. The event, themed "Give me Hope", was working to raise awareness and resources to assist with the growing problem of stolen Vietnamese children.

The sex trade has flourished in places like Cambodia and consequently has caused countless innocent children to be abducted, exploited and even murdered as fuel for this horrific industry.

*Statements by Members*

These children are abducted from their parents, taken from the streets or simply attracted by promises of money, food, shelter and drugs in return for turning their young bodies into a commodity for sale to the highest bidder.

These children, some as young as three years of age, have their childhood, their basic human rights and their dignity stolen, and we must do more to help.

All Canadians are outraged by this atrocity, and I would call upon the government and all parliamentarians to work aggressively with our international partners to protect these young victims of the sex trade.

\* \* \*

● (1405)

**HUMAN TRAFFICKING**

**Mr. Rob Anders (Calgary West, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the holidays are approaching. Most of us will be spending time with family and friends. Unfortunately, there are some who will not have this opportunity. There are those out there who will be forced to spend this holiday far away from those they truly love.

Miss Hunter, whose mother, Lisa, lives in my riding, has paid a heavy price. At 16, she was drugged, and people paid to sexually abuse her. This year she turned 18; in May was found with a man three times her age, overdosed with Valium. Paramedics were called more than four hours after she stopped breathing. They determined she had been lying dead next to her john for five hours by the time they arrived.

Human trafficking takes a tremendous toll both inside and outside our borders. The Salvation Army states that 700,000 to 4,000,000 people are trafficked annually worldwide. That is why I encourage all parliamentarians to support Bill C-310, put forward by the member for Parliament for Kildonan—St. Paul to punish human trafficking.

\* \* \*

**THE ENVIRONMENT**

**Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, last week I was in South Africa representing Canada's north at two international climate change conferences. At the first conference, organized by GLOBE International, I learned first-hand just how appalled the rest of the world is with Canada's position on climate change. At that conference, one after another, representatives from other countries rose to attack Canada. The worst came from the former deputy prime minister of the United Kingdom, who likened Canada's attempt to sabotage international co-operation on climate change as a conspiracy against the poor.

When I got to Durban for the UN conference, I learned why Canada was held in such low esteem. Other than to disrupt any agreement, this country was missing in action. Anyone other than the minister and his spin doctors was unwelcome in the Canadian delegation. No scientists or opposition MPs were allowed.

It is unfortunate that the government's blind pro-big-business ideology and lack of willingness to face the facts about the

environment and climate change have so damaged our international reputation.

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**BATTLE OF HONG KONG**

**Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, hundreds of thousands of Canadians came to Canada from Hong Kong, and 70 years ago this month many of them lived through the Battle of Hong Kong, my father being one of them. It was in that battle that the Royal Rifles of Canada and the Winnipeg Grenadiers defended the Crown Colony from an attack by the Japanese in the first combat engagement of Canadian troops in the Second World War.

Seventeen days of battle ended on Christmas Day, 1941. There were 290 Canadians killed, and 493 were wounded. There were 1,600 Canadians captured; in the three and a half years that followed, they lived in appalling conditions in prisoner of war camps. Hundreds died in that captivity.

Years later my father moved to Winnipeg, Manitoba, home of the Winnipeg Grenadiers. Years later I met one of those Hong Kong veterans, Mr. George MacDonnell, who was taken prisoner of war in that battle. He survived and worked as vice-president at General Electric after the war and later as a deputy minister in the Government of Ontario. He currently lives in Toronto.

That truly was the greatest generation. Mr. MacDonnell and his comrades sacrificed so that my family and I could live. My family and I will never ever forget.

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**DEMOCRATIC PROTEST IN RUSSIA**

**Mr. Ted Opitz (Etobicoke Centre, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, last Saturday we witnessed great public discontent throughout Russia. In Moscow, approximately 40,000 people protested amid reports of widespread voter fraud during Russia's parliamentary elections.

The heart of this democratic movement is Alexey Navalny, an impressive young man whose activism against fraud, corruption and the creative use of social media have inspired a flourish of democratic activity that Russia has not seen since the fall of Communism. For organizing this and other peaceful protests, Alexey was arrested on December 5 and sentenced to 15 days for obstructing traffic. This laughable charge did not discourage him from pressing on to ensure that Russia does not slide back into the dark authoritarianism that punished her people and terrorized her neighbours for most of the 20th century.

The resolve of the protestors had an impact. On Sunday, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev announced that he will order an official inquiry into the handling of the elections. While many Russians are skeptical, I am relieved that Mr. Navalny will be there to monitor the process when he is released from prison. This cannot happen soon enough.

*Statements by Members*

● (1410)

*[Translation]***SISTER GISÈLE FOUCREAULT**

**Mrs. Djaouida Sellah (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, today I wish to acknowledge the work of Sister Gisèle Foucreault, a nun with roots in Saint-Bruno.

Sister Gisèle entered the order in 1957 and has been a missionary in Lesotho since 1963. She has been involved in dozens of projects that have helped improve everyday life for hundreds of people. From improving access to drinking water and housing, to working on building local infrastructure such as schools, libraries, bakeries and farmers' co-operatives, Sister Gisèle has made life better for hundreds of families.

Sister Gisèle's work has also made the youth in Saint-Bruno more aware of the needs and reality of young people elsewhere in the world through their involvement in the Minta Saint-Bruno organization.

Congratulations to Sister Gisèle on her involvement and her work and thank you to Minta Saint-Bruno and the youth of Saint-Bruno for their contributions.

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*[English]***BIRTHDAY OF HIS HIGHNESS THE AGA KHAN**

**Mr. Royal Galipeau (Ottawa—Orléans, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, December 13 is an important day for the Ismaili community around the world. His Highness the Aga Khan, a descendant of the prophet Muhammad, was born in Geneva on this day in 1936.

*[Translation]*

In May 2010, this wise imam was given honorary Canadian citizenship by the Prime Minister of Canada.

*[English]*

In 1957, Her Majesty the Queen had granted him the title "His Highness". The spiritual leader of 15 million Ismailis across 25 countries, His Highness the Aga Khan has emphasized the view of his faith, a faith that teaches compassion and tolerance, true Canadian values.

*[Translation]*

The well-being of his fellow Muslims has always been important to His Highness.

*[English]*

On behalf of all Canadians, I wish His Highness the Aga Khan a happy 75th birthday. May he enjoy peace, health, joy and my favourite, serenity.

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**HEAD INJURIES**

**Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, not a day goes by without the media reporting on the impact of concussions in professional sport.

Yesterday Sidney Crosby announced he will again find himself sidelined by concussion-like symptoms. NHL points leader Claude Giroux also is sitting out with a concussion. Last week, news broke that the brain of deceased NHL player Derek Boogaard showed signs of CTE as a result of numerous concussions and head shots, yet the government is ignoring the fact that this concussion epidemic is affecting our young athletes.

We have great initiatives in Canada, such as Dr. Paul Echlin's online library and Impakt helmet sensors, but the government is missing in action on this file.

My bill, Bill C-319, would address this epidemic by creating a sports injury data collection system, concussion guidelines, and training and educational standards for coaches, and it would provide incentivized funding to assist amateur sport organizations implementing these protocols.

Concussions are a public health issue. It is time for the government to take action by fast-tracking Bill C-319 to give parents and coaches the tools they need to reduce concussions among our young athletes.

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**SPECIAL OLYMPICS DEVELOPMENT GAMES**

**Mr. Ryan Leef (Yukon, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, this past weekend I was proud to be invited to the Yukon's fourth annual Developmental Games for the Special Olympics.

The games were designed to increase interest and participation in various sports and to provide an opportunity for the athletes to showcase their skills in front of a local crowd.

I wish to thank Serge Michaud and congratulate all of the organizers, the coaches, the dedicated volunteers and the athletes for their work in putting these games together.

In the spirit of the Special Olympics, I call upon all members of the House to take any opportunity that they have to attend Special Olympic events or games, as these tremendous athletes teach us how we can compete against one another and at the same time be respectful, encouraging, enthusiastic friends.

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**TRIBUTES**

**Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I rise to pay tribute to two remarkable women in my Mount Royal riding.

Bracha Chetrit-Tritt was born in Jerusalem and came to Canada in 1962. She was a teacher for 35 years. Bracha has been an exemplary community volunteer, was involved in both federal and provincial politics for 30 years and was a founding member of the Group of 35 in the struggle for Soviet Jewry.

To a proud mother and grandmother, a happy 80th birthday.

Grunia Slutzky-Kohn was born in Belarus in 1928, fled the Nazis during the Shoah, and came to Canada in 1972. She became a prolific and gifted poet and writer about the Holocaust, children and peace, and is about to publish her tenth book as a tribute to her beloved Canada, in three languages.

Happy 83rd birthday, Grunia.

*Ad mea ve'esrim.* To 120 to both of them. We wish you all the best.

\* \* \*

• (1415)

### GREEN ENERGY

**Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Nepean—Carleton, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, what do the Liberals and NDP mean by “green energy”? Ontario's Auditor General's report told us this week, saying that the Liberal Green Energy Act will drive up electricity bills by at least \$8 billion a year.

That would be a hike of 46%, or \$360 a year on the average household energy bill. While wealthy insiders would make big bucks trading green contracts, small businesses would have to lay people off to pay the \$6,000-a-year electricity hike, which would be a real job-killer.

Federally, the liberal NDP would do likewise, with green taxes and higher gas prices.

As Margaret Thatcher said and as Europe is now proving, “The problem with socialism is that eventually you run out of other people's money”.

On this side of the House, we know that a dollar in the hands of the person who earned it is always better spent than in the hands of the politician who taxed it.

\* \* \*

### ETHICS

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the lobbying commissioner has found that once again Tory insiders are breaking the rules and flying under the radar of the Lobbying Act. The latest is her report on Tory insider Rahim Jaffer and failed Tory candidate Patrick Glémaud, who tried to use the back door to get their hands on \$178 million in contracts.

With this damning report, we will see that the Conservative government will do nothing. How many prosecutions have there been for illegal lobbying? Zero.

This is how it goes down. If the commissioner finds questionable conduct with lobbying, she has to suspend her investigation and call in the RCMP. What does the RCMP do? Nothing. It gives a “Get Out of Jail Free” card every time. When the lobbying commissioner suggests that the RCMP come to the ethics committee to explain this extreme lassitude, the Conservatives put up roadblocks.

What do the Conservatives have to hide? Under the government, we all know how its does business. It is who one knows in the PMO.

### Oral Questions

#### POLAND

**Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon (Mississauga East—Cooksville, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, 30 years ago today, the Communist government of the People's Republic of Poland imposed martial law on its citizens in an attempt to crush the Solidarity trade union and political opposition. Tanks filled the streets; borders were sealed; hospitals, power stations and coal mines were placed under military control.

I was living in Poland at that time, and as a young mining engineer, I joined my workers to strike at the Silesia coal mine. Confrontations with riot police resulted in over 100 deaths, mainly during protests in Gdansk and at the Wujek coal mines. Polish people were bent but not broken. Their determination and perseverance changed Poland and all Soviet-controlled countries in Europe.

Now Poland is free, democratic and highly recognized in the international community. Today we pay tribute and remember those who sacrificed so much to fight for democracy and freedom.

As Canadians, we should always show support for seekers of liberty, human rights and democracy.

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## ORAL QUESTIONS

[*Translation*]

### FIREARMS REGISTRY

**Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Leader of the Opposition, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives' insistence on destroying the data in the firearms registry is completely illogical. The police are saying it and the bar associations are saying it. Now the Government of Quebec is taking legal action against the Conservative government to save the registry data.

Will the Prime Minister avoid unnecessary legal fees, listen to Quebec and share the data with the provinces that are prepared to take over the registry to protect the public?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our platform commitment is clear. We do not support a long gun registry. Our position has been clear for a long time. The provinces have the right to pursue their own policies, but this government will not help them to maintain the registry through the back door.

\* \* \*

• (1420)

### THE ENVIRONMENT

**Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Leader of the Opposition, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has had every opportunity to help the provinces by simply transferring the data. It would not cost anything.

### Oral Questions

Yesterday was another dark day for Canada when it became the first country to withdraw from the Kyoto protocol. This is a very dark oil stain on Canada's international reputation. Canada is being criticized by France and even China. The rest of the world is moving forward, but Canada is putting on the brakes. Canada is isolating itself and turning its back on the rest of the world.

Why is the Prime Minister capitulating to climate change?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, once again, the government's position is clear with regard to the registry. We do not intend to attack farmers and duck hunters. We are attacking criminals. That is our position.

As for the Kyoto protocol, our position has been clear on this issue for a long time. We support an international protocol that will include all major emitters. The Kyoto protocol clearly does not meet those criteria. That is why it is not effective.

[English]

**Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Leader of the Opposition, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it appears the Conservatives are reneging on Canada's obligations. The Conservatives are turning their backs on the world. The Conservatives are betraying future generations. They have set up bogus homemade targets and are not even a quarter of the way toward meeting this lame attempt at saving face.

When will the Prime Minister take climate change seriously?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, in terms of climate change, we are pursuing policies domestically, nationally and internationally. We are working for the creation of an international protocol that will include all major emitters.

What this government does not favour, what this government has never favoured and has been very clear on is we do not agree with a protocol that only controls a bit of global emissions, not enough to actually make any difference but enough to transfer Canadian jobs overseas. We will never agree to that.

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### HEALTH

**Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, today we learned that the government is keen on slashing increases to health transfers by half. Just as the 2014 negotiations begin, the message to the provinces is clear: do not expect a willing partner in Ottawa.

The Prime Minister promised not to touch health care transfers, but that is just what he is doing.

Why is the government putting health care services on the chopping block? Why is it breaking its promise and turning its back on the provinces?

**Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to a publicly funded and universally accessible health care system. We want to see a strong, sustainable Canadian health care system that works for people when they need it.

Our government has increased funding to the provinces and territories for health care to a record level, from \$19 billion when we formed government to \$27 billion this year. We will continue to increase funding for health care in a way that is balanced and sustainable.

**Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it is Ottawa's job to show leadership and accountability. It has yet to follow through on the 2004 accord. Now the government wants to tie health care funding to the GDP, so in a good year Canadians can get the health care they need, but in future years they are out of luck.

The government is making this stuff up as it goes along. Why will it not commit to adequate, stable health transfers on which provinces and Canadians can rely?

**Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as I stated earlier, we will continue to increase funding for health care in a way that is balanced and sustainable.

As the Minister of Health, one of my goals is to ensure that there is more accountability in the way that money is being spent. I will continue to work with the provinces and territories in the delivery of health care to their residents.

As I stated before, unlike the previous Liberal government, we will not slash funding to the provinces for health care.

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### THE ENVIRONMENT

**Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, when the Prime Minister started his 10-year battle of Kyoto in 2002, he told Canadians scientific evidence on climate change was contested and contradictory, thereby giving credibility to climate change deniers such as the one who just applauded across the way.

Is that still the position the Prime Minister of Canada holds about the issue of climate change?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I do not pretend to be a scientist on these issues and I hope neither does the leader of the Liberal Party.

What made absolutely no sense for this country was a Liberal government that signed the Kyoto protocol, signed what I quite frankly think were stupid targets, and then had no plan after 10 years in office to even implement those. That was irresponsible.

This government is ensuring we have a responsible position for this country.

● (1425)

[Translation]

**Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I asked a very simple and direct question to the Prime Minister of Canada regarding climate change and scientific evidence. I asked a very simple question, and the Prime Minister of our dear country refused to respond.

I will ask the question again: does the Prime Minister accept the scientific evidence regarding climate change? Yes or no? That is the question.

*Oral Questions*

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have said a number of times that climate change is a big international problem. That is why this government is taking action on climate change—unlike the Liberal Party, which did nothing.

\* \* \*

[English]

**DEMOCRATIC REFORM**

**Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I thought it was a socialist conspiracy. That is what the Prime Minister said the last time we talked about it. I knew the Minister of Foreign Affairs would take that sophisticated approach to this serious problem.

My final question for the Prime Minister is with respect to the question of the addition of seats in the House of Commons, a \$100 million additional expenditure starting in 2015.

When the Prime Minister was fighting this issue a while ago, he took a completely contradictory position to that. He said that it was time to cap the size of the House of Commons and time to save money. Why is that not his position today?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, this party's position since the election in 2004 has been to increase the number of seats to give fairer representation to the provinces of British Columbia, Ontario and Alberta, which are under-represented. It is the Liberal Party that has changed its position in about the last two months.

The fact is this. We know the Liberal Party opposes the seats that those provinces deserve, but this party supports it and we are proud of that.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**THE ENVIRONMENT**

**Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, not only has the government mismanaged the climate file on the international stage, but it is also not protecting the environment in Canada.

The Environment Commissioner said that there is such poor management that the government does not even know who is breaking the law and, furthermore, it is not following up on half of the offences.

This government's record is awful.

Will the minister explain why he has abandoned the environment and Canadians?

**Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of the Environment, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for the question, but the premise of the question is absolutely false.

[English]

Environment Canada accepts the environment commissioner's recommendations to address enforceability issues, and we are already taking action in this area. However, we note that the commissioner has failed to recognize that this government has made significant investments and improvements to the enforcement regime.

This government can balance protection of the environment and enforcement of regulations and also protect the economy.

**Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the commissioner did an audit and the audit, showed complete mismanagement by the government. The government is sabotaging climate deals on the international stage and mismanaging the environmental file here at home.

The government promised to beef up environmental enforcement, but four years later enforcement is actually worse. Conservatives cannot even confirm that new staff are enforcing anything.

The commissioner has made it clear that this hurts the environment and hurts the health of Canadians. When is the government going to stop listening to its insider friends and when is it going to start enforcing environmental regulations?

**Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of the Environment, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, let me inform my colleague that this government has increased enforcement capacity by more than 50% through budget 2007. We enhanced it again in 2008. We hired more enforcement officers and they are, in most respects, doing their jobs.

We note some of the suggestions that the commissioner has made and we agree. We also note that the environment commissioner overlooked a number of relevant issues in composing this report.

\* \* \*

● (1430)

**TRANSPORTATION OF DANGEROUS GOODS**

**Ms. Laurin Liu (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the transportation of dangerous goods, like propane and acid, through our communities is a serious issue, but the government does not know if companies are following the rules and little happens when companies get caught breaking them. It feels like we are in the wild west and there simply is no sheriff. In one case, sulphuric acid was put in the wrong kind of truck, which literally dissolved a few kilometres down the road.

The government has known about these problems for years. Why has it not fixed them?

**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, Transport Canada has accepted the recommendations of the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development. There are over 30 million shipments of dangerous goods every year in Canada. The program continues to be very successful in preventing incidents during the transportation of dangerous goods.

[Translation]

**Ms. Laurin Liu (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, in particular, the commissioner deplores the fact that the government does not check the emergency response plans of transport companies. The report cited the case of a company that transported 3,000 litres of flammable propane gas several times a day for 13 years, without careful review of its interim emergency plan.

When will this government stop playing games with the safety of Canadians?

*Oral Questions*

**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, we are not playing games with the safety of Canadians. If something should happen, it is important to have a plan in order to be ready to intervene, and we will continue to support this. However, when there are no accidents, no notification needs to be given. Every year, 30 million shipments of dangerous materials take place in Canada without incident. Naturally, we take the recommendations made this morning very seriously, and our action plan is already being implemented.

\* \* \*

**FISHERIES AND OCEANS**

**Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I hope the Conservative government will listen to the commissioner, because he emphasized the importance of having reliable, up-to-date information in order to ensure a sustainable future for fisheries. With the decline in fish stocks in Canada and its devastating effect on the economy and coastal communities, the advice of scientists and proper monitoring are crucial in order to allow stocks to rebuild.

Why is the government reducing its scientific capacity just when fishers need it the most?

[*English*]

**Hon. Keith Ashfield (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our record on science is solid. Since 2006 we have actively invested in science, setting aside \$30 million to update and refit laboratories and \$36 million to construct three new science vessels. We have also made many other investments.

Our record is solid, unlike the previous government.

**Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, Canada's coastal communities deserve better than that out-of-touch response.

The simple fact is that up to 400 staff of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans are on the chopping block. Many are scientists on the front line of conservation and fisheries management. According to the commissioner, science is more important than ever.

Why are the Conservatives firing hundreds of fishery scientists and gutting monitoring programs just when they are needed most? Why are they turning their backs on coastal communities?

**Hon. Keith Ashfield (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we are doing nothing of the sort.

As I indicated yesterday, the reductions in the staffing at DFO are a result of our strategic review. Specifically, it is 1% per year over the course of the next three years with an attrition rate of 6% annually in the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. The employees who were informed asked to be informed of potential downsizing, and we did that at their request.

**ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS**

**Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, on November 1 National Chief Shawn Atleo called on the aboriginal affairs, justice and status of women committees to expedite joint action to address violence against indigenous women and children. While first nations leaders and premiers all agree that action is a priority, the Conservative government does nothing. Now the UN has to step in to do the government's job.

When will the government finally respond to the myriad of calls for a national inquiry into missing and murdered women and children?

**Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, first, to deal with the issue of the United Nations investigation, there is no United Nations investigation on this issue. I understand from the Department of Foreign Affairs that two civil society groups have made a request to a United Nations committee. The committee is looking into it and will be discussing it in February.

In working with the United Nations in our response to that, we will ensure that it is aware that we have launched the murdered and missing aboriginal women's strategy that has a number of components that deal with all of the issues that we believe are necessary to deal with the systemic issues of not only racism but poverty affecting aboriginal women.

● (1435)

**Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, broken promises and band-aid solutions will not keep aboriginal women and girls safe. The United Nations committee on the elimination of discrimination against women is certainly taking the concern with missing and murdered aboriginal women and children seriously. Today it launched an inquiry, led by 23 independent global experts.

When will the government acknowledge the problem and show some real leadership? Will it support the UN committee fully in its inquiry into the tragedy of missing aboriginal women and children in Canada?

**Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, just to repeat, at this stage we have received a letter from the committee at the United Nations and we are responding to it. It will be discussing this issue in February, but at this point there is no inquiry.

To answer the member's question again, we have launched the missing and murdered aboriginal women's strategy. We have worked very closely and collaborated with women's organizations, particularly aboriginal women's organizations across the country. Through that strategy, we have not only created a new RCMP centre for missing persons but a national website for public tips to help locate missing women. Included in that is, of course, community support.

*Oral Questions*

[Translation]

**Ms. Mylène Freeman (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the government should be ashamed of itself. The UN sounded the alarm about missing and murdered aboriginal women years ago and it has now launched an investigation into this matter. The government is refusing to act and is ignoring this serious situation, adding yet another blemish on Canada's international reputation. The government's contempt for aboriginal people is completely horrifying.

Will this government listen to and co-operate fully with the UN in order to finally protect aboriginal women?

[English]

**Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as I said, civil societies have raised an issue at the UN, which they have every right to do, but there is no inquiry and there is no investigation.

In collaboration with women's organizations across the country, there is a missing and murdered aboriginal women's strategy. In fact, today, this was only launched a short time ago. We are now funding 30 different community aboriginal organizations across the country to educate, sensitize, and raise awareness about the root causes affecting aboriginal women and violence.

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, there are 99 other Attawapiskats. In Fort Albany, Wasagamack and Natuashish there is severe overcrowding, toxic mould, and no water. This is the unacceptable norm. The Auditor General and the government's own departmental audits have repeatedly concluded that the funding for first nations housing is not based on real numbers or based on the real need.

Would the Prime Minister acknowledge and urgently address the systemic failure of the government to fix the on-reserve housing crisis?

**Hon. John Duncan (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we have invested substantially in housing, water, and other infrastructure on reserves. During the Canadian economic action plan, we provided major stimulus to catch up on some of the backlog that was left because of the inaction of 13 years of Liberal government. We are moving forward—

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**Hon. John Duncan:** We are working—

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**The Speaker:** Order. The Minister of Aboriginal Affairs has the floor.

Well, if he is finished, the hon. member for Random—Burin—St. George's.

\* \* \*

**FISHERIES AND OCEANS**

**Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, clearly, the Conservative government is intent on destroying what is left of the fishery by cutting \$85 million from the

Department of Fisheries and Oceans within three years. More than half of the 400 DFO employees who got notices this week are scientists.

The very survival of the fishing industry depends on sound science, yet the government is moving full steam ahead by changing things like annual fish stocks review to multi-year assessments.

What is it about the government that it does not understand the consequences of cutting science from a science-based department?

**Hon. Keith Ashfield (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, what does the member not understand? Her previous government gutted \$154 million out of DFO in 2005, of which about \$50 million was for science.

\* \* \*

**HEALTH**

**Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the Health Council reports that 23% of Canadians with chronic illnesses are not taking their medications because they are too expensive. The 2004 health accord stated that “affordable access to drugs is fundamental to equitable health outcomes for all our citizens”, and agreed to establish a ministerial pharmacare task force co-chaired by B.C. and the federal government.

Conservatives love to talk about accountability, but they broke that agreement. Will the government immediately restore the task force and develop, as promised, a pharmacare strategy?

● (1440)

**Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our government recognizes the importance of affordable access to drugs as part of our quality health care system. We work with the provinces and the territories. They are responsible for deciding which drugs are publicly covered.

That is why we have consistently increased transfers to the provinces and the territories by over 30% since we formed government: so that they can continue to meet the health care needs of their citizens.

\* \* \*

**STEEL INDUSTRY**

**Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, U.S. Steel violated the Investment Canada Act when it failed to meet employment and production commitments. Two years ago, the Minister of Industry took U.S. Steel to court for failing to keep its promises, but now another promise is all it takes for the Conservatives to drop their court case.

When is the government going to stop making backroom deals with their insider friends and start defending Canadian communities, Canadian jobs and Canadian families?

*Oral Questions*

**Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the mayor of Hamilton has called this agreement “a reaffirmation that the industrial sector of Hamilton is alive and well”.

We have a great deal here. Its operations will be guaranteed until 2015 in both Lake Erie and Hamilton plants. It will be \$50 million more beyond the \$200 million already committed for capital expenditures. It will be \$3 million for the community and moreover, U.S. Steel will carry out its original undertaking to guarantee pension funding obligations for more—

**The Speaker:** The hon. member for Hamilton Mountain.

**Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the reality is that for a mere promise the government let the company off the hook and sold out Canadian steelworkers. There is no guarantee this money will be spent on addressing the issues that brought this to court in the first place: maintaining jobs and local production. Without that, where is the net benefit the Investment Canada Act is supposed to guarantee? Capital investments without job guarantees are a win for U.S. Steel, but workers will continue to pay the price.

When will Conservatives stop selling out our manufacturing sector and create a real plan to save industrial jobs?

**Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the opposition always amazes me. U.S. Steel pledged to continue to produce steel in Canada, operate a—

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**The Speaker:** Order. The hon. Minister of Industry has the floor.

**Hon. Christian Paradis:** Mr. Speaker, it is incredible to see. U.S. Steel said that it will increase its capital investment in those facilities to a total of \$250 million. The question is quite simple. What do these guys have against jobs and economic growth?

\* \* \*

### THE ECONOMY

**Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it is incredible to us that they betrayed the workers of Hamilton. That is what is incredible.

[*Translation*]

Like the official opposition, Mr. Carney of the Bank of Canada believes that the best way to create a virtuous circle of employment and economic growth in Canada is to stimulate public and private investments to create good jobs with good salaries, which Canadians so desperately need in order to pay off their record debt.

Where are these public investments? Instead of a big Christmas present for Bay Street, where is the government's job creation plan for Canadian families right now?

[*English*]

**Hon. Ted Menzies (Minister of State (Finance), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member and his colleagues voted against a plan for jobs and the economy, not just once but several times. They, in fact, vote against Canadians whenever they seem to have an opportunity.

We have cut 120 different taxes for Canadians. The NDP voted over 100 times against those. Reducing the GST for Canadians, they voted not once but twice against that. They voted against the tax-free savings account that helps Canadians save for their future.

**Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, we did not vote against a virtuous circle; we voted against this vicious circle that the Conservatives imposed: job losses, lower wages, the highest family debt ever in our history. What are they doing now? They are cutting taxes for banks and big oil companies swamped with profits. They do not care about the 90,000 Canadian families that lost a breadwinner this fall because of their policies.

Instead of acting like Santa to Bay Street again, why do the Conservatives not give a real Christmas present to hard-working Canadian families and put a jobs plan into place for Christmas this year? A jobs plan is what Canadians need for Christmas.

● (1445)

**Hon. Ted Menzies (Minister of State (Finance), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, there is the Christmas spirit: vote against everything that Canadians want by reducing their taxes. The NDP continues to vote against it. Through the actions that this government has taken, every family of four, an average Canadian family, has over \$3,000 left in its pockets. That is a good news story going into this Christmas season.

\* \* \*

### DEMOCRATIC REFORM

**Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, there is no question that Bill C-20 represents the most practical and fair approach to improving representation in the House of Commons. It is the only truly national representation strategy. It is the only formula that can claim to be fair for all Canadians. Bill C-20 addresses the serious and increasing under-representation of our fastest growing provinces: Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta. The problem is significant right now and it is only going to get worse if we continue with the status quo.

Could the Minister of State for Democratic Reform please tell the House why all parties should be supporting this bill?

*Oral Questions*

**Hon. Tim Uppal (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our government is delivering a principled, reasonable and fair bill for all Canadians with the fair representation act. It is truly a national formula. The opposition has brought forward alternatives. I thank those members for contributing to the debate, but I believe that in their attempt to score political points they are ignoring the real consequences of their proposals. It is time to put politics aside and support a truly national strategy on representation that is fair for all Canadians. That is why I am asking the opposition parties to vote for the fair representation act tonight.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**FIREARMS REGISTRY**

**Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it is incredible that we are hearing the same old empty rhetoric.

Quebec is willing to go to court to prevent the destruction of data from the firearms registry. It is the only way the provinces have of being heard because the government is completely out of touch and refuses to listen, in the same way that it refuses to listen to the chiefs of police and victims. And now, to defend its ideology, the government is going to engage in a very costly legal battle.

Why is the government persisting with the wrong approach instead of co-operating with the provinces?

**Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of State (Small Business and Tourism), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, there is absolutely nothing new in what our government is doing. We made an election promise to all Canadians and Quebecers. We said that we would scrap the registry, and that is what we are going to do. The registry consists of inaccurate, outdated and obsolete data. We do not want a provincial government to recreate, through the back door, a registry with inaccurate, outdated, and obsolete data.

**Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the data is outdated and obsolete because of the government itself. No one can invoke his own turpitude. In fact, it is this government that stopped updating the data.

That is not the only thing. The government can claim to represent only 39% of the population. I would remind the honourable member that 39% is a failing grade in any school.

For weeks, we have been repeating tirelessly that the chiefs of police, women's groups, victims' groups and Quebec all want to keep the registry. There is a simple solution to avoid having the matter go to court: give the provinces the data they are asking for, as the NDP proposed in committee.

At the end of the day, what is this government going to defend in court? The safety of Canadians or its arrogance and—

**Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of State (Small Business and Tourism), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind my colleagues that on September 26, 2006, which was 5 years ago, the Auditor General stated, after having reviewed the long gun registry:

We found the information in the database to have significant quality problems: ...Verification frequently determined that information on the weapon's action, make or serial number was wrong.

This dates back to 2006. The database is incorrect, inaccurate and outdated.

\* \* \*

[English]

**NATIONAL DEFENCE**

**Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the government says it expects delivery of the F-35s to begin in 2016, but senior U.S. military officers have testified that the aircraft will not become operational until at least 2018. All reasonable people would agree that with our already refurbished CF-18s unable to fly beyond 2020, the need to implement a plan B becomes obvious.

Will the Associate Minister of National Defence please tell us what is his plan B, and does it include fewer F-35s?

• (1450)

**Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we have a plan to give our pilots the best equipment available, and we will not apologize for that.

The F-35 is a plane for now and for decades to come. Our plan is on track, and we will continue to work with our allies on this plan.

**Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, my concern is that we have an Associate Minister of National Defence who does not know the difference between on track and off the rails.

The government's plan of delivery in 2016 is unrealistic. The world all over has acknowledged this, except for the government.

The minister is now saying that he may buy fewer planes. Is this the plan B that the minister was referring to last month, fewer F-35s?

**Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am absolutely puzzled by the constant refrain and sarcasm, but nonetheless, if I can repeat for the hon. member who is not listening, our plan is on track. We will be delivering to our men and women in the air force the best equipment to enable them to carry out their duties in an effective and safe manner.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**FIREARMS REGISTRY**

**Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I heard the reply from the tourist in chief just now, but I would like to have someone serious. My question is for the Prime Minister.

There has been a unanimous motion by the National Assembly. There is consensus among the stakeholders in Quebec, among health care professionals, among police and among victims. They all say, with a single voice, that they want to get the information in the firearms registry back.

Instead of applying the scorched earth theory, what is stopping this government from transferring the information to Quebec—information that is not the government's property—so we can create our own firearms registry in Quebec?

*Oral Questions*

The government has said no to the registry, but the information belongs to Canadians and Quebecers. It does not belong to the government.

**Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of State (Small Business and Tourism), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the best way to fight crime, whether in Quebec or outside Quebec, is to have tougher laws that will mean that we have safer streets and communities where we can live in peace. We recently passed a bill in the House of Commons, and I am eager to see that bill come into force, as quickly as possible. That is one of the ways to fight crime. We are not going to achieve that goal with a long gun registry.

**Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I will take the word of the Minister of Public Security in Quebec City, who is from Beauce, over that of the tourist in chief from Beauce.

I now have a question for the Minister of Justice.

This is going before the courts, where millions of dollars will be spent. I would like to have the assurance of the Conservative government that if there is an injunction, or if the constitutionality of Bill C-19 is challenged, the Conservatives will preserve the information in the meantime, or are they going to destroy it? Will they respect the court?

**Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of State (Small Business and Tourism), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we have always said, on this side of the House, that we respect the Canadian Constitution. That is what Canadians and Quebecers want.

We have passed a bill that, at the end of the day, represents the responsibility of the federal government in relation to criminal law. That legislation will be in force shortly, when we proceed to third reading. I hope that all provincial governments will respect the Canadian Constitution, as we do.

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[English]

**GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS**

**Mr. Ryan Cleary (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, yet another well-connected Conservative has received a patronage appointment. This time it is Reginald Bowers who is heading to the Canada-Newfoundland and Labrador Offshore Petroleum Board.

The board is responsible for resource management, environmental protection and safety concerns in the industry. Here is the rub: Mr. Bowers has little to no experience in the offshore oil and gas industry. Apparently managing a successful Conservative campaign is experience enough.

When will the Conservatives start taking the development of Newfoundland and Labrador's offshore resources seriously and stop appointing their friends?

**Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our government is appointing capable advisers to the Canada-Newfoundland and Labrador Offshore Petroleum Board. The individual in question has decades of experience in regional economic development. We look forward to working with him as a representative of Labrador on the board.

• (1455)

[Translation]

**ETHICS**

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the Commissioner of Lobbying discovered that not one, but two friends of the Conservatives had engaged in illegal lobbying. What happened next? Nothing. There was no punishment, no charge, no fine, not even a little slap on the wrist. The code does not have any power, but the fact remains that this government is sitting on its hands when it comes to Conservative lobbyists. It refuses to give the commissioner more power and it even refuses to let the RCMP appear before the committee.

Will the government finally address illegal lobbying? When will the Conservatives block the revolving door they installed to let lobbyists into the Prime Minister's Office?

**Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our government has put tough laws in place to ensure that in Canada, lobbying takes place above board and according to the rules. That is why we submitted for review by the Commissioner of Lobbying every meeting that Mr. Jaffer and Mr. Glémaud did not report. The Commissioner of Lobbying was clear in her report that Mr. Glémaud and Mr. Jaffer did not secure any government funding.

\* \* \*

[English]

**RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT**

**Mr. Peter Braid (Kitchener—Waterloo, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to making sure that businesses have the tools they need to innovate, to grow, to prosper and create jobs. Last year we launched the applied research and commercialization initiative through FedDev to foster partnerships between post-secondary institutions and businesses in southern Ontario.

Could the Minister of State for Science and Technology and the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario give the House an update on this important program?

**Hon. Gary Goodyear (Minister of State (Science and Technology) (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, businesses in southern Ontario know full well that our government listens to their needs and then acts. More than 300 small- and medium-size businesses have already partnered with colleges and universities. Therefore, I have announced an extension of the ARC program so that we can continue to fill the gap between industry and the marketplace.

Our government continues to work hard to make sure that businesses have the tools they need to create more jobs, to grow and to keep our economy moving forward.

*Oral Questions***ETHICS**

**Mr. Scott Andrews (Avalon, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, in their accountability election platform, the Conservatives promised to require ministers and senior government officials to record their contacts with lobbyists. The Lobbying Commissioner's report is clear that the government broke this promise because it failed to blow the whistle on two well-connected Conservative operatives who used their privileged access to lobby five ministers for nearly \$200 million in contracts.

Will the Attorney General finally get tough on Conservative crime and lay criminal charges against Jaffer and Glémaud?

**Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as I already indicated, this government put in place some tough laws to ensure lobbying in Canada takes place above board and according to the rules. That is why we referred all meetings that Mr. Jaffer and Mr. Glémaud had not reported to the Lobbying Commissioner for her review. The Lobbying Commissioner was clear in her report that Mr. Glémaud and Mr. Jaffer did not secure any government funding.

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**FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

**Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, in 2009 Stephen Watkins, from Newmarket, Ontario, awoke to his worst nightmare. His two sons, under his full custody, were abducted by their mother and flown to Poland, where they have been held ever since. The fate of these children rests with a Polish judge in a hearing set for this week. We have seen no action from the government for over two years.

Why will the government not support the victims here? What is the government planning to do to bring these children back home for Christmas?

**Hon. Diane Ablonczy (Minister of State of Foreign Affairs (Americas and Consular Affairs), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our government takes cases involving children especially seriously. I thank my colleague for her interest in this case.

Since learning of the situation, our consular officials have been actively supporting Mr. Watkins both in Canada and in Poland. In addition, consular officials have been working with local authorities, the province and the police on this situation. I can assure my colleague that we will continue to be very active to resolve this case.

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**CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION**

**Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon (Mississauga East—Cooksville, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, a few weeks ago I attended a citizenship ceremony and I was shocked to learn that people could have their faces covered when swearing the oath of Canadian citizenship and joining our Canadian family. I believe Canadian citizenship is invaluable and I am very happy that the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism acted so quickly to restore integrity to the citizenship process.

Could the minister inform the House of what he is hearing from Canadians in reaction to this important government announcement?

● (1500)

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, first, I want to thank the hon. member for Mississauga East—Cooksville for bringing this matter to my attention. The oath of citizenship and the citizenship ceremony is a solemn and essentially public time when the individual expresses his or her loyalty to Canada in front of fellow citizens.

[*English*]

That is why I clarified yesterday that citizenship applicants will now be required to recite the oath in an open and transparent manner and to do so without being obscured by a face covering. This decision underscores the essentially public nature of the oath. It also underscores our belief in social cohesion and such democratic values as the equality of men and women and our equality before the law.

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]

**INFRASTRUCTURE**

**Ms. Éloïse Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, airplanes have already started flying at the airport in Neuville. The mayor has been asking to meet with the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities for months now, but the minister refuses and refers him to the province, even though this is a matter of federal legislation and the Supreme Court has confirmed that it takes precedence over protecting agricultural land in Quebec. All that is missing in Neuville is the asphalt on the runway, and then there is no going back.

The people of Neuville have reason to be concerned. Is this how the minister reassures them—by refusing to meet with elected officials?

**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, the developer has of course already signed an agreement with the City of Neuville. The mayor signed an agreement with the developer. That is something. There are thousands of mayors in Canada. We work very hard, and I make every effort, but we cannot meet with every mayor who wants to speak with us. A certification was issued. At Transport Canada, we feel it is important to respect our role when it comes to safety. In conclusion, I must say that there is no certification or authorization needed from Transport Canada during the construction phase of an airport—none.

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**FIREARMS REGISTRY**

**Mr. Jean-François Fortin (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives say they are abolishing the firearms registry and destroying the data because this measure is ineffective and costly. Nothing is further from the truth.

*Speaker's Ruling*

Quebec's public safety minister, accompanied by victims and police, reminded us today that it "is useful and essential for crime prevention...to keep the data".

Quebec is even prepared to go to court to defend Quebecers' right to obtain the data they have already paid for.

Will the minister finally transfer the data to Quebec, or will he have to defend the indefensible in court, before a judge, at taxpayers' expense?

**Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of State (Small Business and Tourism), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we will simply follow through with our election promise. I would like to remind my colleague that the registry that will be destroyed is the long gun registry. With regard to registrations and permit records, which allow police across Canada, including Quebec police, to determine if an individual has the right to have a firearm and thus to prepare themselves accordingly if they are called upon, that registry will remain intact. It is important to understand that the registry has four sections, and we are only abolishing the long gun section. The rest will be kept to protect the public.

\* \* \*

[English]

**PRESENCE IN GALLERY**

**The Speaker:** I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of the Honourable Jonathan Denis, Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security for Alberta.

**Some hon. members:** Hear, hear!

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**PRIVILEGE**

## TELEPHONE CALLS TO MOUNT ROYAL CONSTITUENTS—SPEAKER'S RULING

**The Speaker:** I am now prepared to rule on the question of privilege raised on November 16, 2011, by the hon. member for Mount Royal regarding the negative impact an organized telephone campaign survey conducted in his constituency has had on his work and reputation.

[Translation]

I would like to thank the hon. member for Mount Royal for having raised this important matter, having responded to the comments of other members and having provided the Chair with additional material in support of his allegations. The Chair would also like to thank the Government House Leader, the House Leader of the Official Opposition and the members for Richmond—Arthabaska, Saanich—Gulf Islands and Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte for their comments as well as the member for New Brunswick Southwest for his interventions.

● (1505)

[English]

In presenting his case, the hon. member for Mount Royal states that several constituents had contacted him about survey calls they had received from a telephone number identified as Campaign

Research Inc., asking if they would support the Conservative Party in the "impending, if not imminent, by-election".

He has also informed the House that similar calls were placed to citizens in the Westmount—Ville-Marie constituency. The hon. member for Mount Royal stated that this telephone campaign led his constituents and other voters to think that he had deserted his post, and overshadowed his parliamentary work. Noting that the House has the right to the services of its members free from intimidation, obstruction and interference, he claimed that the confusion created among his electors was damaging his reputation and his credibility.

[Translation]

In the case before us, no one disputes the fact that there is no pending by-election. Yet the hon. member for Mount Royal explains that he has been put in an ambiguous situation through this telephone campaign. He says:

[English]

Simply put, how am I, or any member, to effectively represent a constituency if the constituents are led to believe that the member is no longer their elected representative? How can one correct the confusion and prejudicial damage that has been done in the minds of those who may think I am no longer their representative in Parliament or no longer discharging my duties?

[Translation]

To support his argument, the member cited a ruling of Speaker Bosley, as found on page 4439 of the *Debates* of May 6, 1985, which states:

It should go without saying that a Member of Parliament needs to perform his functions effectively and that anything tending to cause confusion as to a Member's identity creates the possibility of an impediment to the fulfilment of that Member's functions. Any action which impedes or tends to impede a Member in the discharge of his duties is a breach of privilege.

[English]

The Chair finds striking the repeated emphasis that the member has placed on the importance of this issue not only for himself but for all members. This point has also been stressed by other members who intervened. Because of the Chair's primordial concern for the preservation of the privileges of all members, this is a matter worthy of serious consideration. As your Speaker, one of my principal responsibilities is to ensure that the rights and privileges of members are safeguarded, and this is a responsibility I take very seriously.

The member for New Brunswick Southwest argues, on the contrary, that the House should not even be seized of this question because "...it lies outside its authority". He claims that:

—the...conduct of political parties should not be judged by the House or by its members....The best place for this to be judged is among Canadians, not in the House...

[Translation]

The Chair has no doubt that Canadians are indeed judging this matter, just as they are constantly judging this House by what happens here and what is said here and by the attitude that members display toward one another.

*Speaker's Ruling*

[English]

It does not matter that the resources of the House of Commons itself were not used to carry on this particular campaign. On this point, let me point out that the rights and immunities of individual members can be breached by a wide range of actions and that such actions are not limited, as has been suggested, to actions taken in the House or actions involving the use of House resources.

At the same time, in listening to the arguments on this question, I have seen that a certain confusion seems to exist with regard to the extent of the powers of the Speaker in dealing with questions of privilege. Several members have ascribed to the Chair seemingly vast powers that neither I nor my predecessors have ever possessed. The role of the Chair is actually very limited, as the hon. member for Mount Royal has himself pointed out, citing O'Brien and Bosc, at page 145:

—the issue put before the Speaker is not a finding of fact, it is simply whether on first impression the issue that is before the House warrants priority consideration over all other matters, all other orders of the day that are before the House.

[Translation]

In cases where a member alleges that he has experienced interference in the performance of his parliamentary duties, the Speaker's task is particularly difficult. As O'Brien and Bosc states at page 111:

It is impossible to codify all incidents which might be interpreted as matters of obstruction, interference, molestation or intimidation and as such constitute prima facie cases of privilege.

[English]

Furthermore, in ruling on questions of privilege of this kind, the Chair is obliged to assess whether or not the member's ability to fulfill his parliamentary functions has been undermined. *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition, at page 109, notes that my predecessors have stressed the importance of establishing a direct link to parliamentary duties in such cases, stating that:

—rulings have focused on whether or not the parliamentary functions of the Member were directly involved. While frequently noting that Members raising such matters have legitimate grievances, Speakers have consistently concluded that Members have not been prevented from carrying out their parliamentary duties.

[Translation]

In the Bosley decision cited by the member for Mount Royal, the Speaker was confronted with a situation where the former member of Parliament was identified in a print advertisement as the sitting member: the very identity of the sitting member was at issue.

● (1510)

[English]

In the case at hand, the Chair is entirely sympathetic to the situation faced by the member for Mount Royal. There is no doubt that he has been bombarded by telephone calls, emails and faxes from concerned and confused constituents. However, the Chair has great difficulty in concluding that the member has been unable to carry out his parliamentary duties as a result of these tactics. The member for Mount Royal has been extremely active in the House and in committee. By raising the matter in the House as he has done, the hon. member has brought attention to a questionable form of voter identification practice and described in detail the negative

impact it has had. Indeed, his interventions here in the House on this very question have garnered, as he himself points out, extensive sympathetic coverage in media across the country.

In a ruling delivered on August 12, 1988, *Debates*, page 18,272, Speaker Fraser stated that:

Past precedents are highly restrictive...and generally require that clear evidence of obstruction or interference with a Member in the exercise of his or her duty be demonstrated in order to form the basis for a claim of a breach of privilege.

Speaker Milliken, in a ruling from February 12, 2009, also stressed this point:

—adjudicating questions of privilege of this kind, the Speaker is bound to assess whether or not the member's ability to fulfill his parliamentary functions effectively has been undermined.

As I considered the member for Mount Royal's case, a second ruling by Speaker John Fraser has resonated particularly for me. On May 5, 1987, Speaker Fraser concluded:

Given all the circumstances in this case, I am sure that the Minister's capacity to function as a Minister and Member of this House is in no way impaired. I point out to honourable Members that this is the real issue of privilege, although there are obviously other matters that surround the particular fact in this case....the Chair has to look very carefully at the exact point of privilege.

In today's case, too, the so-called surrounding matters have given me pause. I am sure that all reasonable people would agree that attempting to sow confusion in the minds of voters as to whether or not their member is about to resign is a reprehensible tactic and that the hon. member for Mount Royal has a legitimate grievance.

[Translation]

I would hope that his airing of this grievance and the discussions this case has provoked—here in the House and in the media—will lead to two results. On the one hand, managers of legitimate exercises in voter identification should be more careful in the information they disseminate to the people they contact. On the other hand, Canadians contacted this way should be more wary and judge more critically any information presented to them by unsolicited callers.

[English]

I can understand how the member for Mount Royal and others are seeking relief from the climate of cynicism, not to say contempt, about parliamentary institutions and practice that seem to prevail. But I fear that such relief is not within my gift: the Speaker's powers in these matters are limited, as my predecessors have repeatedly stated.

The words of Speaker Fraser in a ruling of December 11, 1991, seem particularly apt in these circumstances:

The Chair can devise no strategy, however aggressive or interventionist, and can imagine no codification, however comprehensive or strict, that will as successfully protect the Canadian parliamentary traditions that we cherish as will each member's sense of justice and fair play. Especially at this time of crisis of confidence in our parliamentary institutions, our constituents deserve and will tolerate no less.

Accordingly, after studying the precedents in these matters, I am not able on technical grounds to find that a prima facie case of privilege exists in this case.

*Government Orders*

[Translation]

I would like once again to thank the hon. member for Mount Royal for bringing this serious and important matter to the attention of the House and of Canadians.

[English]

**Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, your ruling, interestingly enough, was as you said a technical ruling. I believe that on technical matters, since I was the only one to cite principles and precedents, there was not one intervention by any government member that referenced any principle and precedent, which should have been referenced in your ruling as they were. The ones that were referenced in your ruling, Mr. Speaker, would seem in my view to have accorded with the claim that I made in my question of privilege, not only on technical matters but on substantive matters.

While I have no other recourse and will always respect the rulings of the House, as all hon. members do, I think if you, Mr. Speaker, would revisit the principles and precedents that were cited in my submissions to you, and again I say none from the other side, you might at some point in the future reconsider this ruling.

**The Speaker:** I can assure the hon. member I reflected a great deal on this matter. I hope that was reflected in the ruling I gave.

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## GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1515)

[English]

### 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 third time and passed.

**The Speaker:** The hon. member for Hamilton Centre has seventeen and a half minutes to conclude his remarks.

**Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I will begin by suggesting that, when it comes to reforming this place, our long-held position is that the first thing we need to do is to abolish that other place entirely. We do not need it. The so-called reforms that the government is bringing forward do not constitute a democratic institution. Senators would be elected under that bill, but by law they could not be held accountable. If there is no accountability, one cannot consider it to be a mature, modern democracy. We believe the best thing for Canadians is to get rid of that other place.

With regard to this place, we believe that we are in dire need of proportional representation to make sure that when Canadians vote, every vote would carry the same weight and all votes would be heard. We know that in this place, the demographics are not reflected accurately. The political beliefs of Canadians are not reflected accurately, particularly given the fact that we have a government that gets 100% of the power with only 39% of the vote. It does not take long to realize that the present system does not serve the kind of democracy to which Canadians are entitled.

Proportional representation may not be perfect, but it is a far cry better than the system we have right now. The current system leaves hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of Canadians without their vote and their voice being reflected in this place. We would address that.

In the absence of that, the best we could hope for is to ensure that our provinces have as close as possible representation by population. However, we have to recognize that already we do not have that consistently across the country. We are already an asymmetrical country when it comes to this place. Again, the favourite and easiest example, and I hope the province does not feel I am picking on it, is P.E.I. Without getting into the history of why, the reality is that the 150,000 people in P.E.I. were guaranteed four seats here and four seats in that other place. That is not representation by population by a long shot.

I do not think that my good friend who represents the Northwest Territories even represents 40,000 people. However, the geography that the hon. member represents is massive; a huge swath of Europe could fit in his riding. We know that representation by population is not the holy grail of reform of this place.

More important, and I will make this point again because it is central to our position, we believe that it meant something when, on November 27, 2006, by overwhelming majority, this place adopted a motion that recognized the Québécois as a nation within a united Canada. In fact, we think it meant a lot.

To not recognize this motion as having meant a lot would do more harm than good. It would look like it was an attempt to pacify by delivering some nice words in the House, but that did not mean anything. The government of the day would have been given a nice headline, but then nobody would have ever given it another thought. What is worse, nobody would have put any real political capital behind it. We think there should be political capital behind it.

• (1520)

I mentioned this in previous remarks, so I will only comment briefly. This is not a new concept. Some have tried to say that the NDP is playing politics and not worrying about the country, that the NDP is not worrying about holding the country together, that this is dangerous, awful and cannot happen, that this is almost un-Canadian. We know that Conservative prime minister Brian Mulroney signed the Charlottetown accord which, I grant, did not pass the ultimate Canadian referendum. The motion granted that 25% of all the seats in the House of Commons should be dedicated to Quebec in recognition of the uniqueness of the Québécois and of our desire to build and maintain a strong, united Canada.

The Conservative prime minister and all the premiers of the day signed on to the Charlottetown accord. In terms of its role in Canadian history, it would be hard for anyone to argue that this was a dangerous thing. I do not think one can legitimately say that it threatened the cohesiveness of our country. I do not believe that a sitting prime minister, regardless of which party, along with every premier of every province and every territory, would sign anything that could jeopardize the future unity of our beloved Canada.

*Government Orders*

We also recognize that the Charlottetown accord did not survive, so we did not think that was necessarily the best anchor to put our principle to. That is why we went with the November 27, 2006 motion and the relative weight that Quebec had at that time. We believe that weight should be put into the formula once and for all. It is 24.35%. There is not much of a difference between 25% and 24.35%, but we feel it has more currency and that it would stand the test of time better. Quite frankly, it is a better argument here on the floor of the House of Commons.

That is primarily why we are not able to vote for this bill. We recognize that it does provide seats in provinces that deserve them, that are well behind their representation by population numbers. However, it needs to be pointed out that it is not as though the brilliance of the government shone through and gave us this bill. It took three bills to get here. The government will remember that its first bill thoroughly shafted my province of Ontario and offered nothing to Quebec. The second bill recognized it could not do that to Ontario, or any province. It still had not recognized that Quebec had some respect due it. It was not until the third bill that we finally got Ontario, B.C. and Alberta closer to representation by population.

We do not disagree with that. We think that is the right thing to do at this time in this context. However, we think a golden opportunity is being missed by not grabbing this great opportunity to send yet another powerful message to the Québécois that our Canada includes them, that they are safe and secure, and need not fear assimilation in Canada. As we repeat over and over, when the Québécois feel that comfort, safety and respect within Canada, then by extension they feel that same safety and respect in North America.

• (1525)

My last point is this. For those who keep asking what Quebec wants now or what is the next thing we have to give Quebec, the reality is that the job is still not done. Our Constitution has not been signed by every province. Quebec has not signed, although constitutionally, it recognizes that for all intents and purposes it has. It is not an accident that the sovereigntist movement is at one of its lowest ebbs right now. That is the culmination of steps that have been taken over the last couple of decades to give the assurances and respect that the Québécois are seeking.

To us, the inclusion of 24.35% is really an investment in the security of a strong, united Canada. We believe that. We believe this would make a stronger Canada and would lessen the chance that the sovereigntist movement will come roaring back to this place in the kind of numbers it had here before.

We have this unique opportunity. We should set aside the partisanship. I think most Canadians would be very pleased that there is no longer official party status for those who seek to break up Canada. Yet sovereigntists are entitled to come here. They get elected the same way. They were even the official opposition once. However, it is a victory for Canada that they are not here as a recognized party because Quebecers have decided that at this moment their interests could be best represented by a federalist party. They see that it is possible to have a party that is devoted to a united, strong Canada but also recognizes that we need to take opportunities to build into the future. If we do not, the worry is that in another election, they can say that is partisan. Fair enough. I accept that

criticism, but it also means that Canada would be under threat again. The stronger the sovereigntists are, the weaker Canada is. The stronger Canada is, the weaker the sovereigntists are. However, the Québécois are only going to believe that if they actually see, hear, feel and understand that we do respect their differences and that Canada is not Canada without all our provinces and territories.

We are disappointed that this moment is being lost. We continue to maintain our position. If we are ever given the opportunity to be on that side of the House, we will take this step that we believe makes Canada stronger than when we got here. This should be the goal of all of us.

Let us move to two points. First, there are a couple of problems still with this bill. It is not all hearts and flowers. The government wants to shorten the advertised time of the notice period regarding any hearings for the electoral boundaries commissions. As every member here knows, once we have decided on the number of seats and where they are going to go in terms of provinces and territories, it is then up to the individual provinces and territories to set up their own electoral boundaries commissions. This is where the rubber hits the road. This is where it is going to be decided what the common interest is in our various ridings and where those boundaries will help or hinder the ability to unite people within a given riding. That time period would be shortened from 60 days to 30 days. We do not think this is a good decision. We moved an amendment at committee but we lost.

• (1530)

The second one is another timeframe that the government is reducing from 53 days to 23 days, the time that interested groups have to submit a request to make a representation to the Electoral Boundaries Commission. Again, this is a shortening of the time to allow people to indicate that they have some concerns or they have a submission they would like to make.

We do not think that is necessary. We disagree with the government that it is necessary to meet the timelines. It damages that process and that really is the one that people care about the most after the macro issue in terms of what happens in their own communities and in their own neighbourhoods.

To end on a positive note, I do want to thank government members on the committee. We were trying to be respectful of the need for certain timelines to ensure that these seats are in place for the next election. That was one of our goals as the official opposition. It was a commitment I made, that we were going to attempt to do that unless the government gave us some reason to be obstructionists because it was ramming something through or doing something totally unacceptable, but in the absence of that, in a fair game and a fair process, that we would be as co-operative on the macro timeframe as we could be. We have honoured that. We are here today.

I want to thank the committee chair and committee members for the tone, the attitude, and the process, which was, in my view, fair. There was the kind of give and take that one would hope. My amendments did not carry, so it was actually bad, but the way it happened was fair and above board. I wish all committees, in fact, I wish all of the government's business would be approached that way because it was very helpful.

*Government Orders*

We in the NDP support the seats that need to go to the biggest provinces with the fastest growing population. We support that. We do not see any kind of funny business in the new formula. The experts came in and said that everything seems to be okay. The proof is in the pudding. We will see what happens after the fact. We are supportive of those notions, with a couple of problems around the timeframes that the government is cutting back on.

The thing that drives us to voting against the bill is the lack of the 24.35% that we think needs to be in place to show the respect to Quebec and build the kind of Canada that we all want.

**Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague, in his speech, talked about the importance of proportional representation and how that would be the first principle of a possible NDP government in this country. He said that proportional representation is the most important electoral reform that we can put in place.

I do note that my hon. colleague used to be a cabinet minister in the province of Ontario. When he was elected in the province of Ontario, according to these numbers, I see that he was elected with 36% of the vote and 37% of the vote. I know he did not like proportional representation in those elections.

There is an NDP majority government in the province of Manitoba. There is an NDP government in Nova Scotia. There was an NDP government in British Columbia. If the NDP is so committed to proportional representation, then why does it not impose it now in the provinces in which that party governs? Is it possibly because NDP members are all talk and no action when it comes to this issue?

**Mr. David Christopherson:** Mr. Speaker, I cannot speak for governments of which I am not a part.

**An hon. member:** It's your party. You're all wet. Talk.

**Mr. David Christopherson:** Mr. Speaker, do members want to listen or do they want to talk? I want to respond because the member asked some heartfelt questions and I want to give him an answer.

First, I cannot speak for governments of which I am not a part.

Second, 21 years ago, which is the timeframe the member is talking about, this issue was not front and centre as it is now because we see us going in the wrong direction more and more, and we are seeing greater examples of it.

I thought the member was going to use a really good example. I do not believe 37% or 38% was the case in 1990, but I am not sure what year the member is using. It might have been the first year I was elected. The member should have stood up and said I was elected with 38%, 37%, and formed a majority government. That would have been a good point.

My answer to that would have been that that should not have happened. That should not be the way it is, but it is our system so we are all running under that system, but it is not right. It is not right to get 100% of the power when a party only gets 36%, 37%, 38%, 39%, or 40% of the vote. That is just not right.

• (1535)

**Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to come back to the topic of this bill, this Conservative bad bill. However, I would like to say to my colleague that I like working with him a lot, but the fact is I strongly disagree with what he said, and I want to explain why.

First, as a Quebecker, I am very proud to be part of a country that tries to implement proportional representation. This is as important a democratic principle for Quebeckers as it is for all Canadians. I do not like to hear that I should feel insulted or that it is a slap in my face because I do not accept this 24.35% frozen off the Quebec representation forever. He should be careful when he says that Quebeckers will be insulted and so on. Maybe Quebeckers will believe him if he says that all the time. We would then have the kind of separatist surge that we do not like in Quebec.

Second, as a Quebecker, I want my Constitution to be respected. This Parliament does not have the power to decide that we will contradict proportional representation alone. We need to consult the other provinces. It is important for me as a Quebecker.

Third, I want, as a Quebecker, to be fair to all Canadians. That is why we are asking the NDP to table its numbers to show how its plan would be fair for not only Quebec but for Alberta, British Columbia, Ontario, and all the provinces. What kind of mammoth size of House would we have if we put all these rules together?

**Mr. David Christopherson:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his attentiveness and for taking the time to intervene with a question. My responses will not be in any particular order.

The member talks about being a proud Quebecker. That is great. I am a proud Ontarian, and I am sure everybody feels that way about their province or territory. I would not question his belief or try to convince him that he should think differently.

I take sincerely the concern about watching the language, watching what we are saying so that we are not feeding the sovereignty movement. I get that. I try to be very careful in the words I choose. If the member believes that, sincerely, something is over the line that is doing some damage, I would be pleased to hear that, either publicly or privately.

The member gets all caught up in how many numbers, how many seats there will be. The number 24.35 does not take a mathematician. Grab the formula. Figure it out. The reason we are not focusing on that is because it is not about that. It is about the principle. It is no different than the principle that 150,000 people in P.E.I. deserve four seats because they were guaranteed that when they joined this country's Constitution. We feel the same way about the 24.35. If the member does not feel strongly about it, that is his democratic right as a Canadian. We believe it is an important principle that Quebec would like to see in its laws.

*Government Orders*

[Translation]

**Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by congratulating my colleague. We are talking about small percentages, differences that are symbolic and that send an important message. I consider our position to be extremely courageous. I especially take my hat off to my colleague for having fought this battle to the bitter end. However, I object to the positions voiced earlier because, quite clearly, Prince Edward Island's current level of representation was, at the time, one of the prerequisites to their joining the federation. Today, we are specifically trying to redress the situation in Quebec.

I would like to know my colleague's opinion on the notion of repatriation, in other words, telling Quebec that it is welcome in Canada.

[English]

**Mr. David Christopherson:** Mr. Speaker, I believe that more and more Quebecers, by virtue of seeing the election results, are recognizing that there is a safe place for their culture in Canada.

A win for anyone in this country is to be proud of the province they come from, whether it is P.E.I., Alberta or B.C. We have such beautiful geography. We are so blessed that I think we should all feel very proud of our home province and our home territory.

However, the beauty of Canada and of our Confederation is that we can hold that provincial pride, that territorial pride, big or small population-wise, geography-wise, but at the same time we get the world benefit of being a Canadian, one of the greatest, safest, best places in the world to be.

There are people around the world who are willing to die to try to get a Canadian passport for themselves and their families because they know what it can mean.

We try to hold up Canada as a mature democracy, in some ways as a model, even with all our imperfections, and we have many. Attawapiskat screams the loudest today.

However, Quebecers more and more are realizing that by going with a federalist party, they have an opportunity to maintain, secure, and strengthen their unique culture in Canada, and be proud, and pass that pride on to their children and their grandchildren, but they can also still hold that Canadian passport. That, to me, is the best of both worlds.

We can be proud Quebecers, proud Ontarians, and proud Prince Edward Islanders, but we are still proud Canadians and we have that passport. That is the best of both worlds.

• (1540)

**Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Fraser Canyon, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, certainly, my voice today cannot compete with the hon. member for Hamilton Centre.

We have heard the Liberal plan, and while we do not agree with it, at least the Liberals have a formula and some numbers that we could talk about. The NDP represents a moving target. Any time NDP members are asked about the numbers, they divert into some other discussion about passports and what not.

Could the member just stand in his place and say what the NDP plan is? How many seats would be in the House of Commons if the NDP were in government and could implement the plan?

**Mr. David Christopherson:** First, Mr. Speaker, this gives me an opportunity to mention one thing about the Liberal plan that needs to be mentioned. I understand the appeal of capping and saying there is no need to have any more members here. The problem is that it does not save the money that one thinks, for the simple reason that while the example is given of America, where I believe it has, give or take, 500 Congress members. It is capped at that and it is moved around, depending on the population. Those congresspeople represent between 600,000 and 700,000 people, many of them. They have 20 to 30 staff. They have umpteen offices and they are far more distant from their constituents than we are here, so we do not think that is the way to go.

**Mr. Ted Opitz (Etobicoke Centre, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to have this opportunity to stand again today to speak in favour of Bill C-20, the fair representation act. This bill is representative of a series of important points for Canadians in general and for both Ontarians and my constituents in Etobicoke Centre.

First and foremost, this bill would address serious and increasing under-representation of our fastest-growing provinces, Ontario being chief among them on a short list that also includes British Columbia and Alberta. The under-representation is a serious problem that has a direct impact on the way all Canadians experience their representative democracy.

The source of this under-representation is a current seat allocation formula instituted in 1985. The effect of the current formula has been to significantly increase the disparity between provinces protected by seat guarantees and the faster-growing provinces that do not benefit from those guarantees. Specifically, the faster-growing provinces of Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta have become significantly under-represented in the House relative to their populations, and this under-representation is only going to get worse.

In his presentation to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, Professor Michael Powell of the University of Toronto spoke about the value of Bill C-20 in addressing the distortions caused by the 1985 formula. He stated:

[Bill C-20] removes the artificial cap on the size of the House of Commons.... The practical effect of the 279 formula means that not enough seats are added to the fast-growing provinces, those being Ontario, Alberta, and British Columbia. By removing that cap, Bill C-20 raises the possibility that representation by population will be adhered to much more closely than it currently is.

He went on to say:

The second positive move forward by Bill C-20 is that it adds seats to exactly those provinces that have fast-growing populations.... By adding the seats to the fast-growing populations, Bill C-20 is a positive move because it raises equality for those voters.

*Government Orders*

Bill C-20 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 of smaller provinces; and protecting the proportional representation of Quebec according to population.

Now that we have had the benefit of the second reading debate and committee review, the value of this bill has become even more clear, in particular when compared and contrasted with the proposals that have been put forward by the New Democratic Party, which refuses to provide numbers, and the Liberal Party, which is a little more understandable. When we review all of these proposals objectively, in my mind there is no question that Bill C-20 represents the most practical and fairest approach to improving representation in the House of Commons.

During the debate on Bill C-20, the other parties made alternative proposals to reform the formula for seat readjustments in the House of Commons. The NDP put forward a proposal that would see Quebec guaranteed a certain minimum number of seats in the House; our friends the Liberals have proposed that the number of seats be capped at 308 and then redistributed proportionally among the provinces. Of the three proposals, Bill C-20 is the only option that is not only practical but that also achieves the objective of improving representation in the House of Commons. In fact, I would go so far as to say that the options proposed by the other parties are at the extreme end of the spectrum and that their possible solutions would not be practical.

In the evolution of the seat readjustment formula, there have always been certain common objectives when changes have been considered, including the primacy of representation by population, seat protections for slower-growing provinces, and the desire to maintain a reasonable size in the House of Commons. The idea of guaranteeing a fixed percentage of seats to a province, as proposed by the NDP, has never been an element of the seat readjustment formula, and nowhere in the Constitution has there ever been a guarantee that Quebec—or any other province, for that matter—should receive a certain percentage of seats in the House of Commons.

Fixing a certain percentage of seats for one province would be contrary to the proportional representation of that province, since it would diminish significantly the principle of representation by population in the seat readjustment formula. Bill C-20, on the other hand, respects the principle of representation by population while ensuring that Quebec receives a number of seats in proportion to its population.

• (1545)

As Professor Pal stated in his remarks before the procedure committee,

This bill would add three seats to Quebec. I think that's a good development, because it means that the proportion of seats Quebec has in the House will not fall below its proportion in the general population.

In this regard Mr. Kingsley, the former chief electoral officer, said to the committee,

Insofar as Quebec is concerned, Quebec will remain right on, not overrepresented, not underrepresented, based on the total number of seats. This has been one of the objectives for a very long time.

The Liberal proposal is equally flawed and does not represent a feasible option for adjusting the seat readjustment formula. The Liberal proposal would freeze the number of seats in the House of Commons at 308 for the coming readjustment, remove the grandfather clause that protects the seats of the slower-growing provinces and then redistribute seats on a proportionate basis.

The key problem with the Liberal proposal is that it picks winners and losers among the provinces. It would create losers because it would result in seats being taken away from the slower-growing provinces and given to the faster-growing provinces. In effect, the Liberal proposal would take seats away from Quebec, Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. Seats from these provinces would be redistributed to Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta.

Our government believes this would be an extremely unfair approach to representation in the House of Commons. We made a strong commitment to the slower-growing provinces that their seat totals would be maintained and we intend to meet that commitment.

As former CEO Jean-Pierre Kingsley noted in his testimony before the procedure committee,

...if you tell a province that it is going to lose some members, but that it shouldn't worry about it because it will keep the same proportion... I don't know how such a thing could be done in this country.

He went on to say:

I don't see how it could be achieved politically. The force of resistance would be too great.

Having received these competing proposals, it seems clear to me that Bill C-20 represents the best possible option. Neither of these opposition proposals is close to being a practical and fair solution to the issue of representation in this House; Bill C-20, on the other hand, does present a practical solution that goes a long way to achieving fair representation. The practical result of Bill C-20 is that every single Canadian moves closer to representation by population.

I would like to underline this point in more detail and discuss the importance of introducing a seat allocation formula that is more responsive to population size and trends. This legislation would move the House closer to fair representation for Canadians living in Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta while maintaining the number of seats for slower-growing provinces and ensuring that Quebec's representation is equal to its population. By introducing a seat allocation formula that is more responsive to population size and trends, the fair representation act would move the House closer to representation by population both now in the in the future.

The practical effect is that Ontario, Quebec, British Columbia and Alberta would be entitled to new seats under the fair representation act. Ontario would receive 15 new seats rather than only the three new seats it would receive under the 1985 status quo formula. Alberta would receive six new seats rather than only three, and British Columbia would receive six new seats rather than only one. Quebec's representation would equal its population, which means it would receive three new seats.

This is the best formula to move all provinces toward representation by population in a principled and fair manner. This fair representation would have a direct effect on my riding in Etobicoke Centre and on the Greater Toronto Area as a whole. It would generally have a direct positive effect on other large urban areas and cities in the three fastest-growing provinces. Canadians, especially new Canadians and visible minorities, would be much more fairly represented than they are now, and the populations of our ridings would be much more manageable.

A benefit of our bill over the opposition's proposals is related to rural ridings not being forced to become even larger than they already are from a geographic perspective. Many of my colleagues who represent rural areas have made this point and have raised concerns that the Liberal proposal in particular would greatly enlarge their ridings. My colleague from Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington was especially noteworthy on this point. Regardless of the advance of modern technology, rural MPs still find it challenging to stay in touch with and represent the people who live in such wide expanses of country, some of them thousands of kilometres square.

We have to face some realities. Our country is the second-largest country by land area in the entire world. This has particular implications, one being that even given the allowable population variances, many of our rural ridings cannot be anything but incredibly large.

● (1550)

These sorts of ridings are challenging to represent, even given the efforts at better communication through the use of technology and through increased resources. My colleague for Nunavut, the Minister of Health, has to fly to practically every single community within her riding. My colleague for Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River represents the entire northern half of Saskatchewan. It is massive. Our colleague for the NDP, the member for Churchill, represents more than the entire northern half of Manitoba. The ridings of northern Ontario, northern Quebec, northern British Columbia and northern Alberta are similarly very large. Ridings that large pose not only a distance and communications problem to MPs but also an enormous time problem. It can take hours to drive or fly to communities within one riding in these rural and northern areas.

The House does provide some extra financial resources to MPs for these areas, but ultimately MPs all have the same amount of time in which to visit their communities. I have the same amount of time to visit the people in my riding as my colleague for Kenora has to visit his. However, I can walk to many community centres in my riding and I can drive from end to end of it in a matter of minutes. That is a luxury of time that our northern and rural colleagues do not have. They have to drive or even fly for hours to reach different community centres.

### *Government Orders*

Kenora, for instance, is fully half the size of the province of Alberta. Kenora is bigger than the country of Poland and much larger than many countries around the world. To impose a formula that would make those time and distance problems even more severe would be highly unfair to those MPs across this House, so that is something we have decided to avoid. That decision is part of the balance that we have struck in this bill, and that balance is important.

We have not claimed that our bill is perfect; it is a balance between competing principles. We do, however, maintain that it is a fair balance, a good balance and a balance that we should all be able to support at the end of the day. We balance fair representation for our faster-growing provinces with protection of seat counts for our slower-growing provinces. We balance the need for faster-growing densely populated areas to have a fair number of MPs with ensuring that our large rural and northern ridings will not get much larger, if at all.

We provide much more equal voting weight for Canadians who live in those urban areas, who are new to Canada, who are visible minorities, or who live in under-represented provinces.

We also provide a formula that does not punish the smaller provinces and that does not cause overrepresented provinces to become under-represented. We think this is a fair balance and one that is based on widely shared and easily recognized principles.

I note that as part of that balance, our government is addressing under-representation in a way that respects the representation of the smaller provinces. This is a long-standing commitment of our government and of our party. Canadians have given us a strong mandate to deliver in this regard, and that is what we will do.

The fair representation act is fair for all Canadians, not just for some provinces. It is a measured investment that brings every single Canadian closer to representation by population. Maintaining fair representation by population allows all members of Parliament to provide adequate services for their constituents. In the GTA and in Etobicoke Centre, it is integral for me and for my staff to ensure that people receive the help they deserve from our constituency offices.

Finally, the fair representation act also provides that the seat allocation formula would apply a representation rule. If a province became under-represented as a result of the application of the updated formula, additional seats would be allocated to that province so that its representation will equal its share of the population. Based on population estimates, Quebec will be the first province to receive new seats in order not to become under-represented by the application of the updated formula. Quebec has 23% of the provincial population and will have 23% of the provincial seats in the House of Commons.

*Government Orders*

Though the representation rule is nationally applicable and applies to all provinces that enter this scenario, the representation rule is a principled measure to ensure that smaller and lower-growth provinces do not become under-represented in the future and that they will maintain representation in line with their share of the population. This is fair and just.

• (1555)

In addition to the updated formula for allocating seats, Bill C-20 also proposes amendments to the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act, the EBRA. The Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act sets out the process for readjusting electoral boundaries within provinces once the allocation of seats by provinces is known.

Under the current timelines, it would take approximately 30 to 38 months to complete the readjustment process following the release of census results. This would mean the process would not be complete until November 2014. The changes proposed in the bill aim to shorten the timelines in the current boundary readjustment process with a view to streamlining that process. With these changes, it would be possible to bring forward the completion of the boundary readjustment process to early 2014. I think that benefits all parties in the House.

During the hearings at the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, both the current Chief Electoral Officer, Marc Mayrand, and former chief electoral officer, Jean-Pierre Kingsley, noted that the amendments were consistent with previous recommendations and there would be no problems associated with the new timelines. As Mr. Mayrand stated:

We are confident that we and the commissions will be able to proceed and implement the new formula and the remainder of provisions of the legislation without too much difficulty, provided it's enacted in time.

The fair representation act fulfills 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 between the different provinces and our federation. In short, it is the best formula to move toward fair representation in a principled manner. It is reasonable. It is principled. It is nationally applicable. Most of all, it is fair for all Canadians. It will achieve better representation for Canadians living in fast-growing provinces, while maintaining representation for smaller and slower-growing provinces. It brings every Canadian closer to representation by population.

I hope all hon. members in the House will also agree and will come to support the bill in order to restore fair representation to the House.

• (1600)

**Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it is a bit disingenuous for the member to say that we should give them the numbers when we have said our plan is based on census figures. We know the Conservatives do not seem to like the long form census. They did away with it. They do not seem to like the census, but we have said that is a much more effective way

of looking at this issue. We have other concerns as well, but the reality is the census figures will give us the formula as far as we are concerned.

I am flabbergasted when I look at the plan of the Liberals. They have a rump here in Parliament, but the reality is half of their members of Parliament come from provinces from which they want to take seats away. It just makes no sense at all. They did not say in the last Parliament to elect them and they would get rid of seats in the provinces they represent. It is a very bizarre, unbelievable—

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Peter Julian:** They are yelling now, but the reality is it just makes no sense. They did not come forward to the public last spring and say “elect us and we'll go for lower representation for your province”.

What does the member he think of the Liberal plan to make five provinces effectively losers, certainly not showing leadership, and these provinces are the only places that elected Liberals in the last campaign?

**Mr. Ted Opitz:** Mr. Speaker, I am somewhat surprised at the member's response. The hon. member cannot give numbers or some indication of where the NDP would go. The Liberals have at least done that, so we have some understanding of what their rationale is. If the two parties opposite would like to bicker, I am more than happy to sit here and referee.

That is why I believe our plan is the fairest for fair representation across the board. We believe the Liberal plan would cause divisions within the country because it would unfairly reallocate seats without any protections for those smaller provinces.

**Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, on the question of provinces losing seats, it is important to underline the fact that since confederation in redistribution, there have been 22 occasions through the course of Canadian history in which individual provinces have lost members and seats in the House. It is not something new. It is not something that has never been done before. It is something that has happened.

Canadians are not worried about how many people are in the House of Commons. They are worried about the proportions of the House that they and their province represent.

My question is specifically on Quebec, where the threshold of being overrepresented or under-represented is so important. How come the member is falsely claiming that the Conservative plan has actually reduced the number of seats for Quebec underneath the actual threshold of population? The proportion of the population is 23.14%, and 23.08% is 78 divided by 338.

There is a real problem that Quebec goes underneath even the basic threshold that the Conservatives have set out as being the minimum requirement for smaller, under-represented provinces. There is a real concern about this because Quebec cannot be under-represented as opposed to its weight by what the hon. member himself had to say.

*Government Orders*

•(1605)

**Mr. Ted Opitz:** Mr. Speaker, I reject most of the hon. member's question. I believe we are being very fair to Quebec. I believe Quebecers are not asking, as the hon. member who made his speech prior to mine said, for anything to which they are not entitled. They are asking for fairness and they are asking for fair proportional representation. I think that is all Quebecers are asking for and that is what we are proposing in our plan.

As for the hon. member's comments about historical reallocations, we believe that today, this is the fairest, most even-handed plan that we can come up with for Canadians to have fair representation in the House going forward and with a formula that is able to be easily amended as time marches on.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask a question of my colleague regarding the rural ridings.

If one were to take, for example, three Quebec members, the member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, the member for Manicouagan and myself, we represent 75% of Quebec's territory, but only 4% of Quebec members. So, if you consider land mass alone, the levels of representation are disproportionate.

The seats that the government wants to add, regardless of the province, are primarily in urban regions where there is demographic growth. My concern is how to ensure that the rural ridings maintain their political weight in the House of Commons. There are not a lot of members representing the big ridings. So how do we maintain our political weight and our role as spokespersons?

[*English*]

**Mr. Ted Opitz:** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is a colleague of mine in the defence committee and somebody who has shared service in the Canadian Forces with me. I would like to thank her for her service.

This plan, as I addressed in my speech, will address rural ridings. As I pointed out, many rural ridings are so vast and so huge, it is very difficult for members of Parliament to communicate effectively with their constituents. When we cannot communicate effectively, we therefore have no fair representation for those people because their voices are muted.

That is something this will address in the fair rebalancing by representation in the House. I think that will address the issue the hon. member brought up.

**Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP):** Mr. Speaker, I have a question for my hon. colleague from Etobicoke Centre.

The issue of how to approach this is not easy. I recognize the government has made an attempt through this legislation, but I cannot believe that most Canadians think it is a good idea to add 30 more members of Parliament to the size of the House.

I have been quite impressed with the Liberal proposal. I did not expect to be, and I will be candid about that. I really thought I was happy with the government's approach, but the Liberal approach made us rethink and then the Green Party came up with our own

approach, which the president of the Green Party brought before committee and was able to testify about it.

Even if we go with the government's approach, I still think we have to find a way to limit the cost. Has the government given any consideration to a point I made earlier in this debate, and that is could we reduce proportionally a bit from each of our salaries to cover the cost of these 30 new MPs and all the costs that will involve?

**Mr. Ted Opitz:** Mr. Speaker, I see the member is gravitating toward the Liberals, so perhaps the team colour might change to a reddish-green sort of hue. She is already in that corner. It is Christmas after all.

I do not accept the premise of the member's question. There are costs associated, and this is the cost of democracy. This must be applied to ensure that every Canadian gets fair and proportional representation by all of the members of Parliament.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the leader of the Conservative Party, today's Prime Minister, at one time recognized that the Liberal Party's position was in fact the best position on the table, and that is we maintain the number of seats at 308. At one time, he said that we should have fewer members of Parliament.

What does he believe caused the Prime Minister to flip-flop to the degree where he now believes we should have more members of Parliament, something which the vast majority of Canadians do not want?

•(1610)

**Mr. Ted Opitz:** Mr. Speaker, I would not presume to get into the right hon. Prime Minister's mind. That question is better addressed to him.

We believe that time marches on. Today, this is the situation and the circumstances we are faced with in delivering fair and proportional representation to all Canadians and this is the direction and the path we will be following. Canadians elected us to do that. We have a strong mandate to do that. We will follow through on the promises that we made to Canadians.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I have the honour of sharing my time with my colleague from Papineau.

It is a real pleasure to be able to speak to Bill C-20, whose primary purpose is to ensure that the vote of every citizen of this country has the same value. We know that the population is changing. It is declining in some places and growing in others, but overall, the population of the country is growing. Accordingly, every time we have a census, which is every 10 years, we have to do a redistribution and make sure that there is a fair proportion of members for each province.

This majority government had a choice between demonstrating leadership in this matter and taking the route it has taken. Unfortunately, that is going to cost us dearly and it is going to postpone a job that should be undertaken right now.

*Government Orders**[English]*

The government took the lazy and expensive approach and is increasing the number of seats in the House by 30 at a time when Canadians are saying that they do not need more politicians, at a time when Canadians are being asked to accept cuts in government services. The Conservative majority government failed to show the leadership required to provide Canadians with the most sensible option.

I am sure that members know this, but the proportion of seats by province and territory in the Conservative plan and the Liberal plan are virtually identical. Under the Conservative plan with 338 seats, 10.06% of the seats in the House of Commons would be allotted to Alberta. Under the Liberal plan with 308 seats, 10.06% of the seats in the House of Commons would be allotted to the province of Alberta. There are a few small decimal differences in some of the figures, but the plans are virtually identical.

In fact, the Liberal plan ends up with almost exactly the same proportion by province and territory, which is after all what is most important here, the weight accorded to each province. We come out with almost identical figures, yet the Liberal plan would save the taxpayer a considerable amount of money, about \$100 million between 2015 and 2020. That is something Canadians would very much want us to do.

A poll was done last week of 1,000 Canadians across Canada that indicated three different choices: to preserve the status quo, in other words not to have Bill C-20; to go with the Conservative plan, which would increase the number of seats by 30; or to go with the Liberal Plan, which would keep the number of seats at 308 but with some redistribution. The results are in. The status quo was endorsed by 22% of Canadians. The Conservative plan was endorsed by 21%. The Liberal plan was endorsed by 57%. That is a fairly clear indication that Canadians want a solution that would not increase the cost and that would not add more MPs to the House of Commons.

● (1615)

*[Translation]*

Let us talk about some specific points now. First, I would like to talk about the risk of devaluing members by increasing their numbers. I think this is an important point. We all consider ourselves to be representatives of our ridings, but do we have a value? Professor Louis Massicotte of Laval University told the committee that having unduly large numbers of members could reduce the prestige of the office: "...international comparisons indicate that, the more members there are, the more the value of Parliament's role is somewhat reduced".

Ultimately, this reduces the resources made available to parliamentarians to do their work. In fact, that is what might well happen here. The Conservative government has suggested that it might reduce members' resources in order to fund the increase in the number of members.

*[English]*

Similarly, a recent study done by Professor Paul Thomas and others compared constituency population and the quality of representation in Canada and the United Kingdom, and concluded

that people are not more satisfied when they have more elected representatives.

*[Translation]*

Then there is the question of why the government would increase the number of members when it has contempt for Parliament, something there has been much talk about recently.

*[English]*

Professor Nelson Wiseman from the University of Toronto said to the committee that it is contradictory for the government to increase the number of seats when it is showing so little respect for Parliament anyway. He said:

One of the paradoxes right now is that we're increasing the size of the House of Commons, but we're using time allocation more and more and we're actually giving fewer MPs the opportunity to speak in the House of Commons. To me, that seems to be a contradiction.

It is a contradiction indeed. Why does the government want more MPs when it is using time allocation, cutting off debates, deflecting questions, bullying the House to force through its bills as never before?

*[Translation]*

Why would there be more members, when the government thinks so little of Parliament? Our Liberal proposal is constitutional.

*[English]*

At the outset of the debate on November 2, the Minister of State for Democratic Reform said that the Liberal plan was unconstitutional. He knows now that it is constitutional. All the experts confirmed this. They confirmed that the Liberal plan is fully constitutional. As Professor Andrew Sancton from the University of Western Ontario said to the committee:

The so-called grandfather clause, which prevents provinces from losing seats from one redistribution to another...was enacted by Parliament alone in 1985. It can just as easily be removed by Parliament acting alone in 2011. In fact, this is exactly what I urge you to do.

*[Translation]*

Let us now consider the large riding argument.

*[English]*

The Minister of State for Democratic Reform stated that we need more seats because we are a very large country, with very large rural and northern ridings, but we will always have these large ridings. He said that the extra seats will go to the rapidly growing city regions of Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton and Toronto.

*[Translation]*

To touch briefly on the NDP proposal, it consists of piling up rules with the aim of pleasing everyone and their dog. The fact that the combination of these rules gives Canadians a House that is even more bloated than what is proposed in Bill C-20, a House that might consist of more than 350 seats, is so embarrassing that the NDP has not had the nerve to make its figures public, even though they have been asked for over and over. That party has no credibility on this point.

*Government Orders*

By failing to disclose how many seats each province would have under its plan, or what the increase in the total number of members of the House would be, the NDP is mired in vagueness and has ruled itself out of the debate. It has made itself irrelevant.

I will conclude by saying that 20 years ago, the Prime Minister of this country adopted the philosophy reflected in the Liberal approach. It was a wise approach and he should have held to it, but he has unfortunately abandoned it in Bill C-20.

• (1620)

**Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to the member for Westmount—Ville-Marie's comments. I really like him. We have been working together here for a number of years now. He knows very well that we cannot announce any numbers from our census since that census has not been done yet.

However, I am very concerned about the Liberal Party's approach. We had a general election on May 2 and at that time, Liberal candidates in Quebec, the Maritimes and Atlantic Canada never said that if people voted for them, the Liberals would take seats away from their province and from the Quebec nation. They never said that. They were not honest with the public. They did not say that voting for them would mean having less democratic representation in the House of Commons.

And now, a few months after the election, the Liberals are telling us they have decided to take seats away from Quebec, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and other provinces.

My question is a very simple one: on May 2, why did the Liberal Party not tell the public straight-out that it wanted to take away some seats in the next Parliament?

**Mr. Marc Garneau:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question.

Before answering, may I ask if he intends to disclose the figures he claims to have in mind for the nine other provinces and the three territories in this country? I would like to be able to compare our plan with his. Unfortunately, that is not the case.

Quebec represents 23.14% of Canada's population. The census figures have not been released, but we can predict them with a great deal of accuracy. The Liberal plan proposes 23.38% as Quebec's representation in the House of Commons.

In our plan, unlike the Conservatives' plan, we ensured that Quebec would be overrepresented.

[*English*]

**Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I wonder whether the hon. member would be prepared to comment on the irony of the government presenting this particular bill.

The senior members of the government, namely, the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and the President of the Treasury Board were members of the Mike Harris government in Ontario. The Mike Harris government in Ontario had the fewer politicians act. The fewer politicians act actually reduced the number of politicians at Queen's Park from 130 to 103 to parallel the federal ridings.

The irony is that if this legislation passes, not only would Ontario gain 15 politicians here, it would gain 15 more politicians at Queen's Park, if in fact Dalton McGuinty chose to follow this legislation.

I would be interested in hearing the hon. member's observations with respect to the irony on the irony on the irony.

**Mr. Marc Garneau:** Mr. Speaker, I am not sure I could provide an irony to the fourth power on this issue.

The reality is that in these financially difficult times, certain provinces are providing the example. One in particular, New Brunswick, has recently decided that for reasons of fiscal rectitude it is going to cut back on the number of members of the legislative assembly. The Government of Ontario, as my colleague said, did it some time ago. The reasons were precisely all the reasons that the Prime Minister cited and that we have cited, that we want to provide a good example to the rest of the country. That is exactly what should be done.

If we look at Australia, for example, each MP represents about 145,000 people. That is way more people than we represent, and would represent under the Conservative plan. We do not need to add 30 more seats to this House. Let us show the example to Canadians that we are able to tighten our belts and do our job properly as well.

• (1625)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to be coming back to this issue because it warrants a great deal of consideration and serious thought. Most Canadians are cynical about politics at this juncture, and I believe that we must study the very important issue of whether or not Canadians across the country are well represented.

[*English*]

Because of that, I would like to look at the three different plans that have been put forward, one by the Liberal Party, one by the Conservative Party which is Bill C-20 which looks like it is going to be enacted, and one by the NDP.

The Conservatives and the Liberals are very much in agreement that the faster growing provinces must move toward a closer representation of their actual percentage of the population, while ensuring that the smaller provinces and the slower growing provinces remain overrepresented in terms of their share of the seats and their population. Those are principles on which we are in perfect agreement, and might I add, on which the two plans are remarkably in sync. Before I dwell too much on that, I would like to take a moment to address the NDP's plan.

**An hon. member:** Which plan?

**Mr. Justin Trudeau:** Which NDP plan is the question.

The NDP has come forward with a few different principles that we have been able to pick up from the various speeches made. However, the NDP has been unwilling to put forward an actual number associated with how big the House would be. It has been saying that we should not base things on that, that the NDP needs to consult to see where things are going, but it knows that Quebec needs to be represented at 24% because that is where it was when Quebec became a nation.

*Government Orders*

I am a Quebecker. I have been part of the nation of Quebec all my life. I am sorry, but it is not because the right hon. Prime Minister recognized us as a nation that I suddenly became a member of a nation.

[*Translation*]

I find it a bit odd to pick an arbitrary number, but let us say 24% for Quebec.

Other NDP members from different parts of Canada rose to say that Ontario should have 38% of the seats in the House because it has 38% of the population, British Columbia should have 13% of the seats because it has 13% of the population and Alberta should have 11% of the seats in the House of Commons because it has 11% of the population. It is true that the numbers in both the Conservative and the Liberal plan do not come close to these last three figures.

[*English*]

The reason we do not quite reach the perfect representation for Ontario, B.C. and Alberta is because Canada is not a country to which we can simply apply straight math. We have to understand that the math would say that the territories should not have three different seats, they should only have one seat if we are just going to look at the math. But the idea of having one MP to represent the vastly different and geographically huge regions of Nunavut, Northwest Territories and Yukon is inconceivable.

We have to understand that we are moving toward a proportional balance for the country while recognizing the regional strengths. The problem, however, is when we total up all the numbers that the NDP wants in terms of percentages, we cannot get there with only 308 seats in the House. We cannot even get there with 338 seats in the House. We can only begin to approach it when the House gets to 350 seats, easier if we get to 360 or 370 seats. We were asked to do the math; we did the math and members can see what it is.

The fact is that the NDP chose not to do the math. Members like the hon. member for Sackville—Eastern Shore get up and rail about nobody wanting more politicians in this House and then say, in their next breath, that this plan is good and we should eliminate the Senate.

Honestly, there is a level of disingenuousness there and, unfortunately, a demonstration that for all its numbers in the House, the NDP is not quite ready yet to put credible and concrete plans forward for governance, to make the tough decisions that are required to govern this country. Unfortunately, we have to dismiss, almost directly out of hand, the proposals by the NDP as being completely unrealistic.

Between the Conservative plan and the Liberal plan, there are very few differences. It would be interesting to take a moment to actually have the numbers heard and registered in the House. Ontario with 38.7% of the population would reach 35.8% with the Conservative plan and 35.7% with the Liberal plan. It is pretty much the same proportion. British Columbia would reach 12.4% with the Conservative plan and 12.3% with the Liberal plan. Alberta would reach 10.06% with the Conservative plan and 10.06% with the Liberal plan.

Interestingly enough, Quebec would reach 23.08% with the Conservative plan and 23.38% with the Liberal plan. Now we may be quibbling about decimals, and I am sure I have lost the people who were actually watching the House proceedings at this particular moment, but the numbers aside, there is a threshold that is important. The only real question is, is a province overrepresented or underrepresented?

The reality is that in this situation, in the Conservative bill the province of Quebec becomes under-represented in the 338 seat House. This is very important because the Conservative members have explained that they have three priorities and one of them is that Quebec remain at its proportion of the population. It does not.

It does not because the Conservatives do not calculate 78 seats into the 338 seats of the House. They arbitrarily remove the three territorial seats. The members from the territories are members of Parliament, just like anyone else. The citizens of the territories elect members of Parliament, just like anyone else does. There is no difference between a member of Parliament from the territories versus a member of Parliament from the provinces in their functions or in their legalities. They have a large riding, and there are challenges associated with the north, but there is no structural difference between an MP from the territories and an MP from any other province.

● (1630)

The fact is, for the Conservatives' calculation, they are pulling out the territorial seats as a historical artifact, which means that they can actually say that Quebec is just as well represented. However, anyone who would calculate what Quebec's percentage is of the House would take the number of seats that are in the House and how many seats Quebec has. Therefore, there is a fundamental flaw in the Conservatives' proposal going forward and it is one that is important to highlight.

Why are these territorial seats pulled out to the side? What is the legitimate basis for this?

In the past, there was a need to recognize that the territories should have seats, but it was outside of the regular formulas and calculations. However, as of the 1970s, the territories each got a senator. There were two originally and now with Nunavut there are three senators for the territories. The territories are actually covered by the Senate floor clause of 1915. There is no need or legitimate justification for pulling the territorial seats out of the calculations. Therefore, as it stands right now, the bill would be unacceptable to Quebeckers and unacceptable to the Liberal Party.

The fact that we have demonstrated that we can provide exactly the same proportions in the House as the Conservatives would with their plan of adding 30 seats, to me, is a huge demonstration that our plan is one that Canadians would overwhelmingly support.

If only the government had the courage to follow-up on what its leader said when he was leader of the opposition. He said that "Canada is already extraordinarily well represented as a country. We need to reduce or keep the same seats in the House".

*Government Orders*

•(1635)

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Papineau for his remarks.

I have two comments I would like to make. To begin with, earlier members spoke about democratic reform and irony. I have recently noticed that the Liberal Party is starting to talk about introducing a form of proportionality to our voting system. I would like to point out the irony in this.

The Liberal Party was in power for a very long time and never attempted to make any changes in this area. All of a sudden, when the Liberals are no longer in power, this issue becomes relevant. The Liberals are saying that something needs to be done regarding proportionality. There is something extremely ironic about that. I would like the member to comment on this.

I have a second comment. The Liberals love to cry wolf and say that under the Conservative proposal, the House is going to become quite enormous and unmanageable. I would like the member to comment on the Liberals' long-term plan. What are they going to do when they reach the Senate floor for each province concerned, such as the maritime provinces, which currently have a lot more senators? Are they simply going to take members away from the western provinces, leaving them to bear the brunt of the other provinces' under-representation in the upcoming years? I would like the member to explain how they intend to handle that in the future.

**Mr. Justin Trudeau:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her question.

I find it somewhat amusing when I get questions like that because it shows that the NDP has not properly done its homework when it comes to this bill. Essentially, we are not talking about proportional representation; we are talking about what is done every 10 years: a review of the populations of each province and the number of members representing each province in the House to determine whether the two correspond. Clearly, there are three provinces that are very much under-represented and their level of representation must be improved. That is what is being done right now. This is not about proportional representation. I am not talking about that at all.

The other question was about senators. The current proposal is to maintain 308 members in the House under the current redistribution. That does not mean that in 10 years, there will be no need to rethink this and consider a slight increase in the number of members. We are reportedly in a recession. The costs are enormous at this point in time. Let us take a moment to consider the fact that there is no need to automatically increase the number of members in the House of Commons.

[*English*]

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I wonder if my colleague could provide some comment regarding Europe and England where they have actually reduced the number of members of parliament. Could he reflect on the current Prime Minister, who, at one point in time, advocated that the size of the House of Commons should have been capped, if not reduced? I wonder if he could provide his insight on those two points.

**Mr. Justin Trudeau:** Mr. Speaker, around the world people are asking not about the quantity of the representation that citizens have but the quality of representation. When we look at the \$100 million or so that it would cost between 2015 and 2019 to add 30 seats to the House of Commons, one realizes that money would perhaps be better spent giving a few extra resources to members of Parliament for their constituencies, particularly in large rural constituencies and inner city constituencies where the needs are so great, and to look at the needs of Canadians in terms of getting better quality representation.

If we are going to talk about quality of representation, we also have to address the fact that party lines and party discipline are doing a very good job of muzzling a lot of independent thought and voices particularly on the government side from participating in debate. As we look at quality of debate, it does not actually mean that increasing the number of seats in the House would improve the quality of representation for Canadians. That is what other countries around the world are seeing.

[*Translation*]

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** Before I recognize the member for Wellington—Halton Hills, 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 Malpeque, Canadian Wheat Board; the hon. member for Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, Fisheries and Oceans.

The hon. member for Wellington—Halton Hills.

•(1640)

**Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to speak to this bill, which I think is very important because I believe that citizenship is the foundation of Canadian society.

My riding in the greater Toronto area has more than 200,000 constituents, while other ridings have fewer than 100,000. That is not fair and it is a sort of insult to Canadian citizens in some areas of the country.

[*English*]

This is one of the most important bills the House has considered in the last 10 years or so. The reason for this is I believe the most fundamental foundation for Canadian society is Canadian citizenship. I believe strongly that all Canadian citizens, regardless of their ancestry, religion, creed or race, should be treated equally in our country. However, when we have a situation where in one part of the country there are over 200,000 citizens in a riding and in another part of the country there are fewer than 100,000 citizens in a riding, that flies against the very basic Canadian and constitutional principle that all Canadians are equal and they should all have an equal say in who governs the country.

*Government Orders*

In fact, I would argue that it is the basis of Confederation. It was the long-held conviction of the first leader of the Liberal Party of Canada, George Brown. His statue stands behind the Parliament Buildings overlooking the Ottawa River. He was leader from 1857 and post-Confederation until 1873. He fought for that principle, both in the united Province of Canada before Confederation and subsequently in Confederation itself. It was in part because of that leader's efforts that Confederation was forged.

However, today we have come a long way from that constitutional and founding principle of the country. The gap between how many voters an MP represents in rapidly growing provinces like British Columbia, Alberta and Ontario and that of an MP who represents a riding in one of the seven other provinces has never been as large as it is today. Never has the gap been so large, since 1867.

Under the current formula, the seats that have been distributed in this chamber, according to the provincial divisions, have reached the point where the average MP in Ontario, B.C. and Alberta represents almost 30,000 more Canadians than MPs in the seven other provinces. This has undermined the very principle on which this chamber is based, representation by population. It flies in the face of the very basic constitutional principle that Canadian citizenship is the basis of our society, that all Canadian citizens should be treated equally and that all Canadian citizens should have a fair and equal say in who represents them in this chamber.

In the 1991 Supreme Court ruling on the proposed changes to the electoral boundaries for the provincial division in the House of Saskatchewan, the court stated:

A system which dilutes one citizen's vote unduly as compared with another citizen's vote runs the risk of providing inadequate representation to the citizen whose vote is diluted....The result will be uneven and unfair representation.

Clearly, we have a problem that needs to be dealt with before the next election and a problem with which Bill C-20, now at third reading, will deal.

We, as the government, have been debating this issue for over four years. The first iteration of a bill to re-apportion the seats in the House was introduced on November 14, 2007. It was Bill C-22, An Act to amend the Constitution Act, 1867 (Democratic representation). Some two years ago, a second iteration of the bill was introduced as Bill C-12, An Act to amend the Constitution Act, 1867 (Democratic representation). It was introduced on April 1, 2010.

Therefore, this is the third iteration of the bill with which we have now been presented. We have gone through extensive consultations with stakeholders, with various provinces, with members of Parliament in the debates that we have held in this chamber. It is now time that we deal with this issue, especially considering that the electoral boundaries commissions for the various provinces will be setting up shortly and will be undertaking a review of the proposed boundaries that would be used in the 2015 election.

As I said, this has been a long-standing commitment of the government. The bill also meets the government's commitment with three principles that we outlined in our last election platform, three principles that we had long held to. They are as follows.

● (1645)

First, we need to ensure that the rapidly growing regions of the country, particularly in areas like Calgary and Edmonton, greater Vancouver, the Lower Mainland, and the greater Toronto area, are properly, fairly and equitably represented in the House. That is why the bill would give 15 new seats to Ontario, 6 new seats to Alberta and 6 new seats to British Columbia.

We also committed to a second principle that would ensure that no slower-growing region of the country would lose seats. We have ensured that the provinces whose populations are not growing do not lose their number of seats in each provincial division in the House.

The third principle we committed to was to ensure that the provincial division of Quebec in the House would not under-represented. That is why in Bill C-20 would add three new seats for the provincial division of Quebec to ensure that its representation levels in the House would not fall below average.

The bill upholds those three principles and meets the fundamental requirement that the House be representative of the population of the country.

There have been some criticisms of the bill. I would like to talk about some of the criticisms that the official opposition has levelled at the bill. It is proposing that we fix the number of seats in the House for the provincial division of Quebec at the percentage it had in November of 2006. I cannot strongly disagree enough with that principle.

The first point I want to make to rebut the argument that the provincial division of Quebec should have a certain number of seats is that these seats do not belong to any province. The seats are federal seats. We consult with the provinces because we want their input, but at the end of the day, the seats are accorded to provincial division for administrative purposes. There is no reason why these seats belong to a particular province. They are simply provincial divisions for administrative purposes. The idea that any one provincial administrative division in the House should have a certain fixed percentage of the seats for time eternal flies against the very basic fact of Confederation, which is that this chamber needs to be representative of its population.

We used to have a guaranteed number of seats for a provincial division, or for an administrative division on Parliament Hill. That was for the United Province of Canada. After the rebellions in Lower and Upper Canada in the 1830s, came Lord Durham's report. Out of Lord Durham's report was the fundamental recommendation, acted upon by the authorities, that the Act of Union of 1840 would be implemented.

Out of the act of 1840, we merged the colony of Lower Canada, now Quebec, and the colony of Upper Canada, now Ontario, into the United Province of Canada. That act took effect in 1841. We had a single legislature and the capital bounced around from Kingston to Montreal, where it was burned, and later on to Ottawa. This site was selected as the provincial capital for the provincial legislature.

*Government Orders*

In that provincial legislature in the unitary state of Canada, as we did not have a federal state at the time, was the guarantee of 42 seats for Canada West, which is now part of the province of Ontario, and 42 seats for Canada East, which is part of the province of Quebec. It was a unitary state and because of the divisions between the francophones and anglophones, it was felt best to guarantee in the unitary state half of the seats for one administrative region and half for the other administrative region.

That operated for the better part of 25 years. Initially, what it meant, because Ontario's population at the time, Canada West, had some 450,000 and Canada East, Quebec, had some 650,000, was that Canada West was overrepresented in this chamber at the beginning of the 1840s and Canada East was under-represented. However, by the time the 1860s had rolled around, the inverse was true. In the 1861 census there were 1.1 million people in Canada East, Quebec, and 1.4 million people in Canada West, Ontario. As a result, there were increasing cries that reform was needed because Canada West felt its voice was under-represented in this unitary state of Canada, in this legislature for which these buildings on Parliament Hill were originally built.

• (1650)

A solution was found after much wrangling and years of debate through the various conferences that took place, and that was Confederation. The deal struck at Confederation was that we would go to a federal system of government with two sovereign orders of government, where the provinces would be responsible for areas within their jurisdiction and the federal government would be responsible for federal matters of jurisdiction as outlined in the Constitution, 1867.

One of the critical elements of this was that the chamber of the people, the House of Commons, in the federal order of government, would be representative of the population. George Brown, the first leader of the Liberal Party, fought for that. Many other members on all sides of the aisle fought for that. It has been the defining characteristic of the House for the better part of 150 years.

Clearly, the bill in front of us would meet that fundamental constitutional principle, but what has been proposed by the official opposition does not.

I want to speak briefly to the proposal made by the New Democratic Party in another regard. I have constantly heard that areas of the country are vast in geography with very little population and that we need to protect those regions because they are huge geographically. That misses the point. The point is this. In the House we represent people, not geography. We have domain over geography and we have domain over citizens, but we represent people not geography. That is the defining characteristic of how we divide divisions in the House.

When we established the non-partisan, arm's-length electoral boundaries commissions for each province, geography was taken into account in terms of whether we would slice down the middle of a municipality or whether we would go along our municipal boundaries. It is taken into account in terms of allowing some flexibility in terms of the geographic vastness in under-populated areas within a province. However, when we accord the number of seats for each provincial division, we do not take the geographic size

of that provincial division into account. What we represent in the House is not geography but people.

I also want to speak briefly to the proposal that the Liberal Party has put forward. As I said before, it is a principled, logical proposal. However, it has one fundamental flaw. It would take seats away from five regions of the country: the provinces of Quebec, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia.

With respect, because the Liberal Party is a third party, it has not garnered a lot of attention. However, I can say convincingly that any government that would introduce a proposal that would bring this into effect at this time in our nation's history would create a crisis among our federation and would create a lot of problems with the different regions of the country, pitting one region of the country against another. For that reason, I cannot support what the Liberal Party has put forward.

Our bill respects the fundamental principle of representation by population. It does so in a way that would not take seats away from slower-growing regions of the country, like the Liberal bill would do. It would ensure that the provincial division of Quebec in the House would not fall below the average of all the provincial divisions.

I want to finish on this thought. This is an incredibly important bill. The House does not currently represent or reflect the galloping heterogeneity of the new Canada. It does not reflect the makeup of our bustling regions like the Vancouver Lower Mainland or the greater Toronto area. It does not reflect the increasing diversity of cities like Calgary and Edmonton. The reason for that is simple. Out of the 30 most populated ridings in the country, these ridings are disproportionately made up of members of visible minority groups.

• (1655)

That is why the bill is so very important. This bill would add new seats to the rapidly growing regions of Toronto, Calgary, Edmonton and Vancouver, ensuring that the rapidly growing heterogeneity of this new Canada is properly represented in this House, so that after the next election we could move closer to the dream where everybody in this chamber, en masse, ensemble, reflects the makeup of Canada.

It is also important for another reason, and that is, in a democracy, people need to be properly represented. This bill would ensure that we respect the fundamental basis of Confederation, the fundamental basis of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the fundamental basis of the repatriation that has taken place. It would ensure that we respect the fundamental contract that we have with the Canadian people, which is that Canadian citizenship is the basis of our society and that Canadian citizenship means that we treat all citizens equally, regardless of their race, religion, creed, ancestry or how long they have been here. It also means that Canadian citizens all need to have an equal vote and an equal say in who gets to represent them in this chamber.

That is why this bill is so very important. It strengthens that principle and ensures that Canada is a democracy where citizenship is the basis of our society.

*Government Orders*

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Hoang Mai (Brossard—La Prairie, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I listened very carefully to what the member on the other side said.

The member spoke about proportionality and the fact that Quebec does not deserve a specific proportion. He really talked about Canadian history. I remind the member that Quebec is one of the founding peoples of Canada. I remind him that in 2006, the Conservative Party recognized Quebec as a nation. There was obviously a need there.

After recognizing Quebec as a nation, when it is time to take action and have a proportion, why is the government not taking the first opportunity to respect Quebec's right?

**Hon. Michael Chong:** Mr. Speaker, I do not agree with the NDP member.

Canada is a nation, and our society is not based on two or three peoples. The basis of our Canadian society is Canadian citizenship.

[*English*]

I do not agree that Quebec is a nation. I do not agree with the recognition of that in this House, and I indicated so five or six years ago.

Most important, I think that the basis of our society is no longer two or three founding peoples. It is not a nation of nations, but rather Canadian citizenship. Canadian citizenship is the basis of our society, whereby every citizen, regardless of where they live in this country, should have an equal say, an equal vote over who governs them and who gets to represent them in this chamber.

That is why our government's bill is so very important. I encourage members to support it.

• (1700)

**Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it is always a pleasure to debate with my colleague. I have a lot of respect for him. I think he is a very principled man, so when he says that the Liberal plan is principled, it means a lot to me, but I am sorry that I cannot say that the Conservative plan is principled. There is no principle in increasing the number of federal politicians by 10% when the Minister of Finance is cutting everybody else in the federal civil service by 10%. That is not principled. It is not only the amount of money, it is that we cannot expect the front line to make sacrifices when the top is not making any sacrifices.

Why is he so sure that to do the principled thing in Canada would create chaos in Canada between citizens of different provinces? He said very clearly that these things do not belong to provinces. He said other federations are able to do that, and they are united countries. He knows that this House remained at the same number of seats for a quarter of a century, and at that time, Canada was doing well, so why not now?

I would be ready to go with him to Quebec to argue that it is better to stay with 308 seats and to have a fair representation in Quebec, and to make the same argument that he made with the NDP, but with 308 seats.

My colleague from Winnipeg North is ready to go with him to Manitoba to make this argument, so why not? Why is he afraid to be principled on this issue?

**Hon. Michael Chong:** Mr. Speaker, the government's bill is principled, as is the Liberal plan, but it is principled in a way that it does not take seats away from slower growing regions of the country and does not reduce the provincial division of Quebec's proportionate representation in the House.

To answer the member's question, the reason I do not think it would be a good idea to reduce the seats for certain regions, even though the seats, as he has mentioned, do not belong to the provinces, is that we have seen in the past many federal issues of jurisdiction *intra vires* where provinces have managed to sway public opinion to such an extent that it ended up creating regional friction. Whether it is foreign direct investment policy in relation to the potash decision or other decisions concerning the apportionment of seats in the House, we have to be very careful to govern in the interests of national unity and all Canadians.

This bill squares that circle by restoring representation by population and upholding that fundamental concept while at the same time not taking seats away from other regions of the country and ensuring that the Quebec division's proportionate representation in the House remains in place.

**Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Wellington—Halton Hills has done a great job in talking about the principle of representation by population and also iterating the three promises we made to Canadians about how we developed Bill C-20. In previous debate today we heard about the positive comments of the Chief Electoral Officer regarding this bill and its workability in framing the new divisions and being ready for the upcoming election in 2015.

My colleague mentioned taking seats away from slower growing regions. I would like to ask him about taking seats away from Saskatchewan which is growing very rapidly right now. It is a province that is experiencing great economic growth, not only population. How would it be received by the people of Saskatchewan if we went with the Liberal plan?

**Hon. Michael Chong:** Mr. Speaker, my colleague has raised a very good point, that it would create a lot of regional friction. There is a second friction that the proposal from the Liberal Party would create. Not only would we be taking seats away from slower growing regions of the country and giving them to more rapidly growing regions, we would also be taking seats away from rural Canada and giving them to urban Canada. Not only would Saskatchewan lose two seats, but rural Saskatchewan, now down to 12 seats, would lose seats in order to ensure that there are more seats in Saskatoon and Regina. That is the second problem with the Liberal Party's plan. It is principled, but it would create too much rancour and division in this country.

*Government Orders*

•(1705)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Marc-André Morin (Laurentides—Labelle, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, my colleague across the floor seems to really know his history. He seems to know a lot and appears to have done his homework, but I nevertheless have the impression that he is skipping over a few details.

Quebec has some concerns about this bill because we will lose some representation. If we look at history, at the time of Confederation, Manitoba's population was predominantly franco-phone. At that time, there were Lessards, Lemieux and Lamoureux, whose names were pronounced with a French accent. The same names exist today, except they are pronounced with an English accent.

From our perspective, when we look at a proposition like the one before us, we see a net loss for us. Incidentally, I would remind the member that the burning of the Parliament of Canada in Montreal was the result of a riot started by the Tories at the time.

**Hon. Michael Chong:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the NDP member for his comments.

It is true that it was the Conservatives who destroyed the Parliament of Canada in Montreal, in the Old Port, downtown.

[*English*]

I need to point out that when it comes to the bill that is in front of us, we have agreed to add three new seats for Quebec. We are moving up the number of seats in the provincial division of Quebec in this House from 75 to 78 to ensure that its proportionate representation in this House does not fall below the average.

We are taking the concerns of Canadians in Quebec into account to ensure that their fair voice, their fair vote counts in this House. It is a good plan we are putting in place. It is a principled one. It reconciles a lot of difficult decisions that the government had to make. This is the third iteration of this bill. It has been over four years since we introduced the first bill in November 2007. I support the government's bill. It is time that we implemented it, in advance of the next election.

[*Translation*]

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** I must inform the hon. member for Vaudreuil-Soulanges that I will have to interrupt him at 5:15 p.m., since that will be the end of the time provided for government orders today. I will signal him when he has one minute left.

The hon. member for Vaudreuil-Soulanges.

[*English*]

**Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it is a bit upsetting that I will not be able to talk as long as I would have liked to about this bill, because I think this is an important time in our history.

I would like to begin by thanking the member for Wellington—Halton Hills. I have a great respect for this member because he believes strongly in representing his citizens. In this sense he is an idealist, and I respect that.

However, I also find it is a bit disingenuous, because he also represents his party, and there is a balance to be made there. As well, I do not necessarily agree with all of his historical analysis. I was confused when he referred to equality while guaranteeing seats for certain provinces; he seemed to say representation by population guarantees equality, but certain provinces would have guaranteed seats. I was a bit confused by his train of thought and argumentation.

I am new to this House. As members of the official opposition, every Wednesday we occupy a place called the Railway Room. This is where the NDP caucus meets. In that room there is a painting by Robert Harris depicting the Fathers of Confederation. The subject of the painting is the 1884 Quebec Conference, a conference held in the lead-up to Confederation.

There are two figures side by side, one standing and one sitting. They are John A. Macdonald and George-Étienne Cartier. These two figures, in the lead-up to Confederation, formed various coalitions to govern the United Province of Canada.

The member for Wellington—Halton Hills mentioned George Brown. George Brown formed a very short ministry during this union history. It was about nine months, I believe. George-Étienne Cartier spent his whole political life rallying against the concept of rep by pop in the worry that his people, the Québécois, would see a diminishing of their presence in the Canadian fabric.

Both figures, John A. Macdonald and George-Étienne Cartier, had a common fear of republicanism. John A. Macdonald and George-Étienne Cartier were afraid that eventually the American nation would take over Canada; as a result, they felt it was urgent to unite and form a new nation called Canada, a federal nation.

The traditions of this nation were based on peace, order and good government. Cartier was willing to go into building this new nation with John A. Macdonald because he believed that what is now Quebec would turn into Louisiana if the Americans were to take power here. Macdonald had similar concerns. He did not want Canada to become merely another American state.

The agreement they came to in Confederation, with all the other Fathers of Confederation, was not simplistically rep by pop. We see that in other provinces such as Prince Edward Island and other areas in the country. Those provinces were guaranteed a certain amount of representation that was not based upon population. George-Étienne Cartier had a similar belief that it was not just simply representation by population in this country; it was more complex.

That is what we are talking about when we refer to having 24.35% of the seats in this House for Quebec. It is in recognition of this historical reality and the compromise that was made.

There is a problem if we increase the seats in this House. I made reference to the fact that we balance representing our citizens with representing our parties.

*Government Orders*

• (1710)

A troubling development in our system of governance has been recognized, and it is this increasing power in the Prime Minister's Office. We could multiply lots of members in this House, but if the Prime Minister's Office remains as powerful as it is, it does not matter if we add 30, 40, 50 or 60 seats; the Prime Minister's Office has the power to determine the way members vote, what they are going to say in the House, what questions they are going to ask.

The member for Brossard asked the member for Wellington—Halton Hills, “Why don't you recognize what we did here in 2006?” Well, in fact that member did not recognize the idea that Quebec was a nation. He voted against his party. He was in cabinet, and now he is no longer in cabinet.

I ask Canadians why that happened. Why was he thrown out of cabinet for going against the wishes of the Prime Minister's Office?

I would like to end with a quote. It says:

In today's democratic societies, organizations share power. Corporations, churches, universities, hospitals, even public sector bureaucracies make decisions through consultation, committees and consensus-building techniques. Only in politics do we still entrust power to a single faction expected to prevail every time over the opposition by sheer force of numbers. Even more anachronistically, we persist in structuring the governing team like a military regiment under a single commander with almost total power to appoint, discipline and expel subordinates.

Who said that? It was the Prime Minister of Canada.

• (1715)

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** It being 5:15 p.m., pursuant to an order made on Wednesday, December 7, 2011, it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the third reading stage of the bill now before the House.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Some hon. members:** No.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

**Some hon. members:** Yea.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** All those opposed will please say nay.

**Some hon. members:** Nay.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** In my opinion the yeas have it.

*And five or more members having risen:*

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** Call in the members.

• (1755)

[*Translation*]

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

(*Division No. 103*)

## YEAS

## Members

Ablonczy	Adams
Adler	Aglukkaq
Albas	Albrecht
Alexander	Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Allison	Ambrose
Anders	Anderson
Armstrong	Ashfield
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	Clement
Daniel	Davidson
Dechert	Del Mastro
Devolin	Dreeshen
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	Dykstra
Fantino	Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)
Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)	Fletcher
Galipeau	Gallant
Gill	Glover
Goguen	Gosal
Gourde	Grewal
Harper	Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hawn	Hayes
Hiebert	Hillyer
Hoback	Holder
James	Jean
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Kent
Kerr	Komamicki
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Lake
Lauzon	Lebel
Leef	Leitch
Lemieux	Leung
Lizon	Lukiwski
Lunney	MacKay (Central Nova)
MacKenzie	Mayes
McColeman	McLeod
Menegakis	Menzies
Merrifield	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Nicholson
Norlock	O'Connor
O'Neill Gordon	Obhrai
Oda	Oliver
Opitz	Paradis
Payne	Penashue
Poilievre	Preston
Raitt	Rajotte
Rathgeber	Reid
Rempel	Richards
Richardson	Rickford
Ritz	Saxton
Schellenberger	Seeback
Shea	Shipley
Smith	Sopuck
Sorenson	Stanton
Strahl	Sweet
Tilson	Toet
Toews	Trost
Trottier	Truppe
Tweed	Uppal
Valcourt	Van Kesteren
Van Loan	Vellacott
Wallace	Warawa
Warkentin	Watson
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)	Williamson
Weston (Saint John)	Woodworth
Wilks	Young (Oakville)
Wong	Young (Vancouver South)
Yelich	Zimmer — 154
Young (Vancouver South)	

*Private Members' Business*

## NAYS

## Members

Allen (Welland)	Andrews
Angus	Atamanenko
Aubin	Ayala
Bélangier	Bellavance
Bennett	Benskin
Bevington	Blanchette
Blanchette-Lamothe	Boivin
Borg	Boulerice
Boutin-Sweet	Brahmi
Brisson	Brosseau
Byrne	Caron
Cash	Charlton
Chicoine	Chisholm
Choquette	Chow
Christopherson	Cleary
Coderre	Comartin
Côté	Cotler
Crowder	Cuzner
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)	Davies (Vancouver East)
Day	Dewar
Dion	Dionne Labelle
Donnelly	Doré Lefebvre
Dubé	Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	Dusseau
Easter	Eyking
Foote	Fortin
Freeman	Fry
Garneau	Garrison
Genest	Genest-Jourdain
Giguère	Godin
Goodale	Gravelle
Grogulé	Harris (Scarborough Southwest)
Harris (St. John's East)	Hsu
Hughes	Hyer
Jacob	Julian
Karygiannis	Kellway
Lamoureux	Lapointe
Larose	Latendresse
Laverdière	LeBlanc (Beauséjour)
LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)	Leslie
Liu	MacAulay
Mai	Marston
Martin	Masse
Mathysen	May
McCallum	McGuinty
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)	Michaud
Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)	Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)
Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)	Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)
Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)	Mulcair
Murray	Nantel
Nicholls	Nunez-Melo
Pacetti	Papillon
Patry	Pécelet
Perreault	Pilon
Plamondon	Quach
Rafferty	Ravignat
Raynault	Regan
Rousseau	Sandhu
Savoie	Scarpaleggia
Sellah	Sgro
Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor)	
Sims (Newton—North Delta)	
St-Denis	Stewart
Sullivan	Thibeault
Toone	Tremblay
Trudeau	Turmel
Valeriotte — 131	

## PAIRED

Nil

**The Speaker:** I declare the motion carried.  
(Bill read the third time and passed)

## PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[Translation]

## CANADA LABOUR CODE

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP)** moved that Bill C-307, An Act to amend the Canada Labour Code (pregnant or nursing employees), be read the second time and referred to committee.

—Mr. Speaker, I am extremely proud to rise today in this House to speak to a bill that is so important to many women throughout Canada. It is important to women's groups and also to the union movement, the people who represent working women and are concerned with health and safety issues.

The purpose of this bill is to allow pregnant or nursing women who work in businesses that are under federal jurisdiction to avail themselves of existing provincial occupational health and safety legislation governing preventive withdrawal. This is a very reasonable and necessary bill.

In the last election campaign, the NDP had the slogan “Travaillons ensemble”, meaning working together. We had a positive campaign, a campaign about ideas and people's real problems. In this regard, we said, and we still say, that parliamentarians have to work in the interests of the public, and so they have to work together. We also said that we had to help families. We said that in the NDP, but other parties were saying the same kind of thing. We said we had to listen to the needs of families. That is why I am proud today to speak to this bill again.

In Quebec, we often boast about how we are more progressive, but that is not always true and has not always been the case. Women won the right to vote only in 1940. And I would just note in passing that aboriginal people won the right to vote federally in 1960, and that is truly unbelievable. Since then, women have fought to have all their rights fully recognized. After many battles, they have achieved concrete recognition of their equality. In Quebec, it was not until 1979 that a maternity leave program for working women was implemented. In 2000, there was the Women's March, to send a loud and clear signal that the struggle for fairness and equality for women continued. That struggle still has to continue.

Perhaps members are unaware, but at present, when some working women in this country are pregnant and have to leave their workplace for their own safety or the safety of their fetus, their baby to be, they receive no compensation. They have to do it on their own dime, as they say. That is inconceivable. One might even say it is somewhat shocking.

We call ourselves an egalitarian society, we say that we recognize that women play an important role in the labour market, but at the same time, we penalize them when they are pregnant. We tell them that it is all very well for them to protect their health and the health of their fetus, but they will have to pick up the bill. Forgive me, but in our view, that seems a bit cheap.

*Private Members' Business*

In Canada, we have collectively provided ourselves with a social safety net of which we are rightly proud. It is in fragile shape today, but for many long years it has served our society, Canadian men and women, men and women in Quebec, well. It is a social safety net we must work to preserve today. In fact, it is this social safety net that protected us against the recent global economic crisis, because, as the IMF reminded us, a better distribution of wealth and lower levels of inequality allow for longer and more stable periods of economic growth.

So, we created a safety net for workers, because we recognized that, in certain situations, employees and wage earners in our country need to be protected. We recognize that, and occupational health and safety laws exist because dangerous situations are sometimes a reality. We also have an employment insurance program because sometimes—and these days it is more frequent than that, with 91,000 in two months—people lose their job.

However, when it comes to pregnant women, the government seems to be a little more stingy. Pregnant or nursing women have to do tasks or put up with working conditions that can be dangerous. The NDP does not accept that situation, and I am convinced that the majority of members in this House do not accept it either.

I am going to summarize the relevant Canada Labour Code provisions for those who are not familiar with them.

First, there are two levels of labour codes in Canada. We have the provincial codes and then the Canada Labour Code. The latter covers workers in several sectors, including the financial, air transportation, aerospace, telecommunications and transportation sectors.

In Quebec, 4.45% of women are covered by the Canada Labour Code, which means close to 75,000 women.

•(1800)

Under the bill that I am humbly submitting today, these 75,000 women would be potentially better protected if they experienced the joy of expecting a child.

In Quebec, we are very proud of the program that was put in place in 1981. It allows pregnant women who provide a medical certificate confirming that their work poses risks and dangers for their unborn child or for themselves to be reassigned to tasks that do not present these dangers.

Under this program, women receive 90% of their salary. The program recognizes that it is not right and that it is unfair to put on the victims the burden of occupational health and safety problems.

Unfortunately, the Canada Labour Code currently does not do that. With regard to preventive withdrawal, section 132 of the Canada Labour Code, which deals with pregnant or nursing employees, provides that when dangerous conditions exist, the employer may try to find an alternative. I insist on the term “may”. The employer is under no obligation to do so. If no alternative is found, these women must take a leave without pay. That is where the big difference lies. In these situations, the financial and economic burden rests on the shoulders of pregnant and nursing employees whose working conditions endanger their health, or that of their unborn child.

The question is, is this just? I wonder if it is an egalitarian policy and social vision. I wonder if it is consistent with our values, with the Quebec and Canadian values of equality between men and women, equality between workers, and of protection for people with health or safety problems.

Is forcing pregnant employees to work in dangerous conditions for both themselves and their fetuses the right way to treat them? The members of the NDP and I, the member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, do not believe so. I do not think that these women should be penalized. We in the NDP believe that the health of pregnant workers is important. I would go so far as to say that it is a priority.

If we want to encourage people to have children, and if we are serious about this, women must be provided with the best living and working conditions possible. They must have appropriate and safe conditions in which to work at all times.

I imagine that my colleagues from the Liberal and Conservative parties, and the other members who sit in this House share this opinion. At least, I hope so.

I am the father of a blended family with four beautiful children. I am lucky. I enjoyed good working conditions before having the honour of being elected to represent the constituents of Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie in this House. My wife also enjoyed good working conditions. We both had a collective agreement that enabled us to take extended parental leave.

Today's topic is not parental leave. It is even more elementary than that. The subject is the health of thousands of workers and their right to be protected without paying for it. It is about pregnant women working in a standing position for over seven hours. It is about pregnant women lifting loads of over seven kilograms. It is about working environments that are too noisy. It is about ergonomics that put these women's pregnancy or the health of their fetus at risk. It is about being exposed to hazardous products. I could continue, as the list is long.

A study conducted in 2004 by Health Canada as part of the National Health Research and Development Program demonstrated the effectiveness of the provincial program in Quebec. The study showed that if exposure to ergonomic problems is eliminated early enough in pregnancy, the rate of premature delivery is the same as for women with no exposure. These and other such hazards have been eliminated. This is evidence that prevention works. For prevention to be successful, there should be no financial penalty. That is the current problem with the Canada Labour Code. It is the problem that this private members' bill seeks to address.

In the NDP, we believe that these women should not be penalized when their working conditions put their health or that of their babies at risk.

If we really want to help Canadian families, we must put our money where our mouth is. We must take concrete action. My bill does that and it is a good thing for Canadian and Quebec families. Its objective is to stop penalizing pregnant employees. It is a simple measure that will improve living conditions for these families and, therefore, for thousands of people.

*Private Members' Business*

The bill humbly does that. All we are saying is that pregnant women who work in a job that comes under the Canada Labour Code can avail themselves of the existing provincial occupational health and safety legislation if, of course, the latter is better.

• (1805)

That is not much to ask under the circumstances. My bill does that in six small subsections.

Subsection (1) provides that an employee may avail herself of “the legislation of the province where she works that relates to the applicable measures, including preventive withdrawal, transfer to another position and financial compensation to which she would be entitled under that legislation”. Subsection (2) defines the terms of the application, while subsection (3) refers to its processing. It provides that: “The agency referred to in subsection (2) shall process the application according to the legislation of the province applicable to pregnant or nursing employees in that province.”

Subsection (4) points out that employees may avail themselves of the remedies provided for in the provincial legislation. Subsection (5) gives to the federal government a mandate to enter into an administrative agreement with the provinces concerned. Incidentally, similar agreements already exist regarding health and safety. Employees who come under the Canada Labour Code are protected by the CSST in Quebec for workplace accidents, but not always for preventive withdrawal.

Finally, subsection (6) of my bill provides that the exercise by an employee of this right is without prejudice. The fact that an employee exercises a right must not result in retribution or penalties of any kind. This is a reasonable, modern, appropriate and necessary legislation. I hope there is unanimity for once in this House regarding the private members' bill that I am introducing today for second reading.

This is why I am asking all hon. members to support it, regardless of their political colours. I am asking that we recognize the contribution of women in the workplace, and that we recognize that they should never be penalized because they are pregnant or because they are nursing their child. I am asking for the support of my fellow parliamentarians to pass this bill, which will correct a major deficiency in the existing legislation.

• (1810)

**Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his speech. Some of the members of the House know that I trained as a nurse and that I have begun occupational health and safety certification. I am therefore beginning to clearly understand these issues. I would like to say that the bill introduced by my colleague is excellent.

Are there any workers under federal jurisdiction who have been denied leave without pay or who have experienced major inconveniences because they do not benefit from the same legislative provisions as employees under provincial jurisdiction?

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice:** Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for her very relevant question. The measures contained in this private member's bill respond to the desires of women's movements and unions representing female workers under federal jurisdiction. This is something that flight attendants who

work for airlines have been requesting for years. It has become a priority for them because they have been penalized in their workplace as compared to female workers under provincial jurisdiction. They see the difference.

When they want to take care of their health and the health of their children, they have to do so by taking leave without pay. They can take the time, but the problem is that they are not being paid. They have to pay for this time off out of their own pocket or they have to take weeks of maternity leave in advance, which reduces the duration of their maternity leave by the same number of weeks since those weeks are subtracted from the period of leave to which they are entitled. In both cases, they lose out. This bill closes a gap and fills a real need. Representatives of women's organizations and labour organizations have been calling for such action.

**Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I really appreciated the member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie' comments and I thank him for his bill.

Obviously, it is now time to help Canadian families. We are not talking about huge amounts, since benefits are already being paid. I believe this bill should get the unanimous support of the House, as it takes concrete actions.

Could our colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie tell us whether women's groups have taken position and recognized that this bill could change how women experience motherhood? Are there any organizations that support the bill? Has he received any emails about it?

• (1815)

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice:** Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for the relevant question.

Indeed, we are in contact with organizations with a strong interest in that issue. I want to reassure him straight away: centres focused on promoting women's involvement in the workforce support us on this. They have given us their support. The Fédération des femmes du Québec is in favour of the bill and has said so publicly. The Canadian Union of Public Employees, which represents workers under federal jurisdiction, supports this bill, as do the FTQ and the Public Service Alliance.

All that to say, I think we should all agree, since it is a very important issue. Once the administrative agreement is in place, and for a minimal cost, this will be a concrete way to improve the lives of Canadian and Quebec families.

[English]

**Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I am happy to have the opportunity today to comment on Bill C-307 presented by my colleague, the hon. member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie.

[Translation]

This bill proposes adding another section to part II of the Canada Labour Code. This would bring the federal code in line with provincial legislation regarding the health and safety of pregnant or nursing employees.

*Private Members' Business*

[English]

In Quebec there is a program called “Pour une maternité sans danger”, the safe maternity program, which many pregnant workers use. A pregnant nurse, for example, whose job poses a risk to her health or that of her baby can be reassigned to another task or be allowed to take preventative withdrawal leave on the advice of her physician. If she must take leave, this pregnant nurse will receive an income or replacement benefit equivalent to 90% of her net insurable income.

It is clear that even if this is not spelled out explicitly, the intent of Bill C-307 is to give employees working in Quebec, but under federal jurisdiction, the possibility of getting the same access to the safe maternity program as employees under provincial jurisdiction.

I must admit that the issue raised by the bill is important to me, both as a woman and as a pediatric surgeon who spends most of the time taking care of children. I would be the first to say that pregnant and nursing women have the right to work in a safe environment. This is something that every Canadian would agree with.

Wherever we sit in the House, I am sure that we all want to protect those who give life, the infants they carry, and those who have been brought into the world. In fact, the Canada Labour Code formally recognizes this right. It includes several provisions, including maternity related reassignment or leave. These provisions give considerable protection to pregnant and nursing employees. I am not going to go into the details of these provisions, but generally speaking this is what they allow.

If there is a risk to the health of the employee, her fetus or her child, the employee can get a modification of her duties to be reassigned to another job without any loss of salary or benefits. If these measures are impractical, she can go on leave for as long as the danger persists.

Other provisions allow an employee to take leave during the period from the beginning of the pregnancy up to 24 weeks after childbirth if she is unable to work because of her pregnancy or nursing. This is in addition to regular maternity, parental or sick leave provisions under the code.

[Translation]

It is not my place to give an opinion on Quebec's safe maternity program, which, in principle, is very commendable. But one thing is sure: the program is very expensive.

[English]

To note, in a Canadian Press article that appeared at the beginning of November, it was reported that the cost of financing the program is 19 times higher than it was when it was first created. It now costs over \$200 million per year, all of it financed by employees through a payroll tax. In Quebec, the same contribution rate, which is 19¢ on every \$100 of employees' insurable earnings, is applied to all employees targeted by Quebec's preventative withdrawal program. This is regardless of the amount of benefits their employees receive.

If we assume that the same contribution rate would be applied to their current total salary envelope, employees under federal jurisdiction operating in Quebec, including the federal government, would be obliged to pay almost \$20 million a year in contributions.

However, given the relatively lower health and safety risks presented by most jobs under federal jurisdiction, it can be estimated the amount of benefits provided to employees would be approximately \$5.4 million. In such a scenario, federally regulated employers would on average pay almost four times more into the program than their employees would take out. If only from a financial perspective, this would make no sense.

The financial aspect is one we cannot ignore, especially in these difficult economic times. That is perhaps why a report earlier this year, commissioned by Quebec's workers compensation board, recommended that the admissibility criteria for its program be tightened and that more effort was needed to encourage employers to accommodate pregnant and nursing employees. That is what our priority should be, to focus on allowing women to maintain their attachment to the labour force by ensuring that they work in a safe environment.

We have to consider the potential unintended consequences of the bill on workers that it is meant to help. Increasing business payroll taxes would hinder job growth and could lead some employers to reduce or eliminate benefits altogether for their employees. If Bill C-307 brought significant new benefits and protections for employees, this might also be a price worth considering, but it does not.

From a legislative point of view, Bill C-307 would also be difficult to implement. If Bill C-307 were adopted, many employers under federal jurisdiction would then be subject to most provincial and federal provisions on preventative withdrawal. This could create confusion in regard to the respective rights and obligations of employers and employees. Employees could try to take advantage of either their federal or provincial rights or remedies, choosing whichever system seemed to be the most advantageous under the circumstances. This would lead to problems in application of labour laws.

In addition, Bill C-307 would create disparities in the treatment of employees working in different provinces for the same employer. Given certain rights and benefits only in federal jurisdictions, employees located in one province and having such inequity enshrined in law would be unfair for employees working in other regions of the country. This sort of situation could lead to a complicated patchwork of disparities and legal obligations for employers under federal jurisdiction. Those operating in several provinces, including small companies which cannot afford professional legal or HR assistance, would face significant administrative difficulties.

Bill C-307 would also have the effect of blurring the lines of demarcation between jurisdictions of labour matters. The provinces could adopt laws that would apply to workplaces under federal jurisdiction. Such a development could have broad legal and policy ramifications.

It is clear that pregnant and nursing women have the right to work in an environment that is safe and healthy. If there is a risk to their health, that right is protected under the Canada Labour Code.

I would also point out that the vast majority of employees under federal jurisdiction are entitled to benefits under a disability insurance or sick leave program provided by their employer. Employees are also entitled to employment insurance benefits if they meet the eligibility criteria.

When we propose to make changes or additions to the Canada Labour Code, as is proposed in Bill C-307, we must ensure that we are carefully considering their implications, and weigh the pros and cons. That is what we have done as a responsible government.

● (1820)

[*Translation*]

After spending a great deal of time examining this bill and for all the reasons I just mentioned, we have decided to oppose Bill C-307 and we ask all members to do the same.

[*English*]

**Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, a number of different points have been raised in debate and I think all members in the House share the opinion, the will and the want to ensure that pregnant and nursing women are well cared for and supported, as they should be.

From a Liberal perspective, our track record shows we have not just talked about this, but we have taken steps such as maternity leave through the employment insurance program and various undertakings over a number of years.

Bill C-307 is similar to a private member's bill put forward in the past by a member of the Bloc. I remember being in the House when it was debated. I do not see any changes from this legislation to the points that were raised the past legislation.

The concern then and the concern now is the impact this will have on provinces and how they have to respond to the legislation. It is really a case of dictating programs to the various provincial jurisdictions. I do not know if that is what our role and responsibility is here, and it was mentioned in the comments of my colleague, the parliamentary secretary.

I went through a process fairly closely with a former colleague, Ken Dryden, when he was a member of this chamber. We did cross-Canada contacts and stakeholders meetings when he worked toward the formation of a national child care program. What we took from those meetings and from that whole experience was that each province did things completely different.

The province of Quebec has a child care model that stands apart from other provinces. It is very well refined, whereas the province of Newfoundland is still trying to come to terms with and develop more of a broad-based system.

However, one thing Ken understood from his experience was that none of the provinces were willing to accept a national program. They could only do what they could do. They could improve what they were doing. They could support some of the initiatives they had undertaken. They believed in early education and child care, but they had to live within their means, as all governments do.

What had to be done was a series of one-offs, where the federal government embarked on a particular deal with each of the

*Private Members' Business*

provinces. Investments were made. Those deals were certainly supported financially and dollars were transferred. However, it was not up to the federal government to dictate what a child care and early learning program should look like. That was clearly provincial jurisdiction. Ken and I took away from the experience that this was clearly within the purview of the provincial governments, but there was a role for the federal government to play.

● (1825)

As has been stated by the parliamentary secretary, and it is a belief that I share, there are provisions within the Canada Labour Code right now that protect the safety and security of pregnant and nursing women. Although well-intended and as noble as it might be, the legislation has the potential to further add to an inequality, where those women who work in a federal sector would have access to a higher level and a greater amount of support than other women who did not work in that sector.

The potential to add to inequality is real and I have not seen any changes in the legislation. That concern was raised when the Bloc introduced the legislation. I have not seen that change through this. If we were to go forward and support the legislation, I think we would constitutionally impinge on the jurisdiction of the provincial governments. It is tough enough to move legislation forward and be progressive in areas of federal jurisdiction, but when we try to impart that on the provinces, they are not all that willing.

The additional risk is it would further complicate an already complicated area, where we see provincial labour laws and provincial codes apply as well as an overlap of federal labour laws and labour codes.

We dealt with legislation four years ago. Cape Breton had a subsea mine and federal labour codes applied to that specific operation, the Cape Breton Development Corporation. When the federal government got out of the mining business, the province wanted to assume and further develop the coalfields in Sydney. To try to streamline that, we had to pass legislation in the House that would enable the province to assume responsibility to have that mine operate under provincial labour codes and to be monitored by provincial labour standards. It was a rigorous process, but nonetheless we were able to get through it.

However, when we look at all 10 provinces and the varying degrees of support that are awarded by each of those provinces and when we look at where the Canada Labour Code currently extends into this issue, then it calls into question whether it is wise or prudent or if it is our responsibility to move forward with this type of legislation.

Again, our caucus has seen the legislation before. We did not think it was the cleanest of legislation. Although we support pregnant and nursing women, we do not think the legislation is one that makes a great deal of sense to support. It further draws a greater inequality between those who are in federal sectors and those who are not.

● (1830)

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Isabelle Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I am really very proud to rise in this House today to stand up for the rights of working women in Canada.

*Private Members' Business*

I want to lend my support to Bill C-307 because I think it is a good thing, it is something that is logical and necessary for the provinces of Canada. This is not just a law that will strengthen our federation; it is also a law that affects the rights of women in our country. I think there are many reasons why all parties in this House, as a government, are going to be able to work together in a non-partisan debate. I am convinced that as the government of Canada, we want to be sure that our federation stays strong and the injustices that women suffer are eliminated.

I believe in a policy of bringing people together, a policy that will be equal in all provinces. I hear my colleagues in the other parties talking to me about inequality. This bill is one that my colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie has introduced precisely so that we will be more equal everywhere in Canada. I wonder whether the others have really understood the essence of this bill.

The reason why I believe in this bill is that the history of Canada shows that the federal government takes the social legislation of the provinces into consideration.

What we are saying in Bill C-307 is that there is legislation in Quebec, good progressive legislation to protect working women's rights, and that all of Canada should be able to benefit from it. We believe that preventive withdrawal legislation should apply to all working women in all provinces. While everyone works together to improve the lives of people in their own province, it is up to us, in the federal government, to do that for our country. It is important that the federation not take away the social progress achieved by the provinces. That is an injustice, and it is our job as parliamentarians to put a stop to injustices.

The debate today relates to an injustice that is truly important to me. Women's rights are of crucial importance in this world, and particularly in Canada. It is inconceivable that in this country we should have legislation that discriminates against nearly 50% of our population. The purpose of Bill C-307 is to enable pregnant or nursing women who are subject to the Canada Labour Code to be able to avail themselves of provincial legislation governing preventive withdrawal when that legislation is more beneficial.

At present, only Quebec has a preventive withdrawal program. Since 1981, pregnant women have been able to receive 90% of their wages before their delivery if their job is considered to be too dangerous for them or their child. This means lifting loads of more than 7 kg, interacting with people who may potentially be dangerous to the woman or the child, being exposed to noise levels that are dangerous to the woman or working in a standing position for over seven hours.

Women who live in the province but work for federal institutions—that is, who are subject to the Canada Labour Code—do not have access to this kind of program at present. They are subject to the Canada Labour Code, which ignores the rights of pregnant or nursing women. Women may take unpaid leave, but that is all, even though their colleagues who work next door are able to benefit under the Quebec legislation.

Here is a concrete example. I worked as a teacher in a provincial detention centre. I was replacing a person who was on preventive withdrawal, because working in a detention centre is dangerous.

That person was really pleased to be able to avail herself of that right and I replaced her. I would feel kind of silly if I told a teacher working in a penitentiary that it is dangerous for her to work in that environment. If she worked in a detention centre, she could leave, but because she is teaching in a penitentiary and cannot get an alternative job, she must take a leave without pay if she wants to be on preventive withdrawal.

This is supposed to be a country where people are encouraged to have children. Our demographic situation is all upside down. In some regions, there are more people over the age of 50 than under it. However, we are telling a woman who wants to have a child that she must give up her salary. That is unfair and unjust.

The hon. member opposite raised an economic argument.

• (1835)

I was really appalled and upset to hear that because, according to the Library of Parliament, the costs could reach \$11 million annually. I agree that this may look like a lot of money. However, another study was carried out by Dr. Robert Plante, and published in *Le Médecin du Québec* magazine in November 2004. Based on an average of 50,000 pregnant women, there were, among those who did not have access to preventive withdrawal, 375 cases of low gestational weight, 460 premature delivery and, what is worse, 340 fetal deaths. This means that out of 50,000 pregnant workers, we would spend \$11 million to save 340 children a year.

Members opposite are saying that it is too expensive. Personally, I earn money and I pay taxes at the federal and provincial levels. It seems to me that we could try to invest that money in social programs. But I am told it is too costly. So, we will let 340 children die, even though they would eventually have paid taxes and help correct our demographic situation, all this because the government says it costs too much money. That is a very weak argument and I hope our friends in the other parties will realize that. The government talks about stimulating the economy. It seems to me that people who are born and who work help do just that.

I spoke of my experience replacing someone. This legislation would help the 75,000 women in Quebec who work under the Canada Labour Code.

Some hon. members say this is unfair to the provinces. We have to look at the basics. We currently have a good program in Quebec. We are trying to extend it so that those who work under federal jurisdiction can benefit from it. If some believe this creates inequalities and that it is not fair, then let us extend it Canada-wide. This is just the first step in telling women everywhere who work full time that their job is a little bit dangerous, that they need to take time to have children, because we need children in our society, and that we are going to give them the means and tools to do so.

The bill has been applauded by several women's groups including the Conseil d'intervention pour l'accès des femmes au travail and the Fédération des femmes du Québec. The Canadian Union of Public Employees did not tell us this was illegal with regard to the provinces, but that this progressive bill would help 75,000 women in Canada, that we needed to start there and then we would see what could be extended to the rest of Canada.

*Private Members' Business*

I am truly in favour of the bill by the hon. member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie. This bill will help Canadian and Quebec women and will restore some justice in this country where we ask women to have children, go to work and take care of the home. I think this bill is a very good thing. I encourage every member in the House to think about it and put partisan debates aside in order to pass this bill. I invite everyone to vote in favour of this bill.

● (1840)

**Mrs. Djaouida Sellah (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I have no qualms whatsoever about supporting the bill introduced by my colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie. Moreover, I would like to thank him for rising in this House to speak about the rights of pregnant and nursing women. This bill is particularly important to me. Women and their cause have always been at the heart of my social, community and political outreach work.

Women are increasingly present in the workforce. Since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the presence of women has been consistently on the rise. In 1901, women accounted for 13% of the labour force and by 1951 this rate had jumped to 23%. Women in the workforce were predominantly single in the past. This is evidenced by the fact that in 1951 the Canadian labour force comprised only 11% of married women whereas by 1994 the rate had jumped to 57%.

This is no longer the case however. The labour market has changed. The role of women has also changed. There were very few women in this House 20 years ago. The first woman elected was Agnes Macphail in 1921. There were four women in the House of Commons in the 21<sup>st</sup> Parliament. The threshold of 20% female representation was only reached in 1997.

Today, there are 76 women in this House, including 40 in the official opposition. This is an unprecedented number in the history of Canada. Many of us are doctors, teachers, lawyers, and the list goes on. We have completed graduate studies. One only has to look at the composition of this House to see how the role of women has evolved. It would be very hypocritical and most unrealistic to infer that women in the labour force face the same challenges as their male counterparts.

The number one challenge is, obviously, wages. The fight for pay equity in this country is not over. Only a few weeks ago, the Supreme Court handed down its opinion on a dispute that had lasted for over 28 years between Canada Post and the Public Service Alliance of Canada.

Another challenge women face in the labour market has to do with maternity. We now finally have a maternity leave program. It is not perfect, but it is a lot better than it used to be. But that is not the only challenge. Women who go on maternity leave can still end up getting transferred or missing out on promotions due to their absences. That is far from ideal. Women still have to qualify, under the federal program, for employment insurance, which is not the case for everybody, like for self-employed women for instance. There are also part-time employees, a group where women are overrepresented. I find that the Quebec parental insurance plan, a more generous plan than its federal equivalent, is better geared towards women, but that is not the crux of my speech today.

Among the other issues tied to maternity is preventative withdrawal. Given the nature of the work some women do, and because of complications, some women who fall pregnant are unable to work. These women cannot, for health issues and the safety of their child, continue to work.

In Quebec, provincially regulated women employees have access to the CSST if their employer cannot find tasks that will not endanger them or their child. For women working in companies that are federally regulated, it is a nightmare. They are permitted to take leave until they see their doctor. However, once the doctor has certified that they can no longer carry out their duties, their employer is under the obligation to transfer them to other duties. This, however, is not always possible.

● (1845)

Then they have two options. The first one is to continue to work despite all the risks and dangers involved. That choice may put both mother and child at risk and create complications during pregnancy. However, it ensures financial security. The second option is to take a leave without pay, which deprives the mother and her child of a much needed income. Women are more at risk of living in poverty. They are more likely to hold precarious and part-time jobs. There are also more single moms. Let us also not forget that there are more poor women than poor men. These women are already in a difficult financial situation, and sudden changes in their income can get them caught in the vicious cycle of poverty and indebtedness.

It is inconceivable that a woman should have to choose between financial survival or her health and safety. It is an abomination and a disgrace. We know that pregnant women are under a huge financial stress. They must find furniture and diapers for their baby. Sometimes, they must find a larger place to live. Pregnancy is also the time when women must be most careful with their diet. It is very difficult to make healthy choices and to eat fresh fruits and vegetables, milk and dairy products, when one can only afford Kraft Dinner. The mother's diet can have long term effects on a child's health. Pregnancy is not the time to be stingy and to deprive women of financial resources.

This bill will help close to 75,000 women in Quebec benefit from CSST's protection. We are talking about 75,000 women who will not have to choose between their health and safety or their financial security. These women will be able to focus on eating well and on preparing for the arrival of their child. Should other provinces decide to follow Quebec's example and provide protection through their provincial occupational health and safety agency, this bill will protect an even larger number of women.

The government should accept this legislation, which only restores equality between women and men across Canada. I urge all hon. members to support this bill. It is a matter of justice, of equality and of public health.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

• (1850)

[English]

**Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I rise to speak to Bill C-307, an act to amend the Canada Labour Code (pregnant or nursing employees), which has been proposed by my colleague, the member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie. I want to commend him for bringing forward this important legislation.

In terms of the context, currently in Quebec women who are pregnant and nursing have some protection in the workplace if they are covered under Quebec labour laws. However, women who are not under Quebec labour laws but are under Labour Canada do not have the same protection. What the member has proposed would apply to women across Canada if their provincial governments had similar legislation.

I want to quote from the International Labour Organization, which states:

Maternity protection has been a core issue for the International Labour Organization...and informs the work of the Canadian Labour Congress. ILO member States have adopted the Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183) which states that "the need to provide protection for pregnancy...are the shared responsibility of the government and society" and extends coverage to all employed women, regardless of occupation or type of undertaking (including women employed in atypical forms of work).

That is an important context because the key words to the statement are a shared responsibility of the government and society. I would argue that this shared responsibility is something we in the House should talk about when we talk about pregnant and nursing women in the workplace. It is always interesting to hear people talk about family values and yet when legislation is brought forward, which is designed to protect that very family, members in the House talk in opposition. That is a shame.

A number of organizations across Canada are in support of the legislation. I want to quote CUPE, which applauds the member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie. It states that this:

—would extend provincial measures governing the paid protective reassignment of pregnant employees to workers under federal jurisdiction. This would include areas such as air and rail transportation, banking, communications, ports and armoured car services.

At present, protective reassignment means that pregnant workers in occupations subject to the Canada Labour Code receive Employment Insurance benefits equivalent to 55 per cent of their pay. For every week of benefits, their maternity leave is reduced by a week. In essence, this amounts to leave without pay.

In effect, if some workers are forced to take an unpaid leave of absence from their work, it actually impacts on their ability to provide care for their children and to provide financial support to their families.

One might ask why this is important and what it is about workplaces that could be unsafe. A number of organizations have talked about the workplace pregnancy risk assessment. I want to point to one that is available, which states:

Why A Workplace Pregnancy Risk Assessment Matters

This comes to the heart of this. We are talking about health and safety in the workplace. This document states:

Workplace risk assessments during pregnancy are especially important because there can be a lot of hazards even in what may seem like the safest of offices.

That is the important point. We are talking about a workplace where normally the woman is very capable of performing the duties in the workplace, but in some situations, when a woman is pregnant or nursing, there are things about it that now make it unsafe for her. She fully intends to return to that workplace, and in most cases we have laws in place where a woman's right to return to work after pregnancy is guaranteed.

However, in this case, this workplace pregnancy risk assessment goes through a number of factors, but I will touch on three. It talks about lifting risks, chemical risks and standing risks. There are a long list of activities that fall under those lists, which would say that it is not a safe place for the woman to work while she is pregnant or nursing.

With respect to chemical risks, I think anyone who has been a mother and has nursed can imagine working in an environment where the breast milk could become contaminated because the woman ingests something in the workplace. Surely we would not women working in those kinds of circumstances. In some cases, the employer is simply not able to reassign the woman to other duties. The workplace may not have those other opportunities. In those cases, the woman requires some financial support until she is able to return to the workplace. This is exactly what Bill C-307 attempts to address.

Many other organizations have been in support of this and I want to specifically quote the Alberta Federation of Labour. It passed a resolution stating that it would work with affiliates, labour councils and the Canadian Labour Congress for the adoption of protective reassignment legislation.

• (1855)

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. member will have five minutes remaining for her intervention when this bill returns to the House.

[Translation]

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.

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## ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

[English]

CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

**Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, in my question on November 4, I asked the minister to explain his act of misleading the committee and why he deliberately refused to meet the board of directors of the Canadian Wheat Board.

Knowing this minister's tactics, I should not have been surprised by the minister's deceptive and misleading response when he claimed that the board refused to meet with him. That, as the board has since confirmed, was not true.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

In fact, every action the government has taken in its fevered efforts to destroy the Canadian Wheat Board was summed up in the Federal Court decision of December 7 as being “an affront to the rule of law”.

The minister claims he represents farmers, and cites the Western Canadian Wheat Growers Association and Western Barley Growers Association on every occasion. These organizations, by their own admission, have gone from 3,130 members to about 730 members, not all of whom reside in western Canada.

Clearly this is a government that believes freedom can be given by destroying democracy. This is a government that has brought forward legislation based upon deception and lies. It is a government that has used threats, intimidation, firing and gag orders on the board. This is a Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food who has the gall to stand in front of western farmers and tell them that he would do nothing until farmers decided to make a change to the Canadian Wheat Board.

Farmers, the minister said, “are absolutely right to believe in democracy. I do, too.” He again broke his word, because he never held the vote under section 47.1 of the Canadian Wheat Board Act that would have allowed farmers to have that voice. In fact, the Federal Court has said, as I indicated a moment ago, that it was “an affront to the rule of law”.

This is a government whose parliamentary secretary claimed in this House that the Canadian Wheat Board of 1943 was the same as the CWB today. This deliberately ignored the fact that legislation was brought forward in 1997 which allowed an elected board of farm directors to control and manage the board.

This is a Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food who will now deliberately expropriate the property of farmers and will appoint five of his cronies, his hacks or those he wants to pay off, to direct the Wheat Board. This will change the Canadian Wheat Board from being run by an elected board of farm directors to being run by a few hacks controlled by the Government of Canada.

To whom do these political appointees answer? Where do they get their direction and marching orders? From the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food's office itself.

This is a minister who just increased the contingency fund to \$200 million, a fund that he and his hard cronies can manipulate as they wish, a point confirmed by the deputy minister of agriculture himself.

I will conclude by saying that when faced with a government that is guided by the same moral compass as a bully, as a thug, it should come as no surprise that extraordinary measures are required.

The Prime Minister is fond of declaring that he would like Canada to reflect certain provisions of the BNA Act, in terms of the federal relationship to other levels of government. Section 55 of that act, long in disuse but still contained in the Constitution document, provides the Governor General with the option of withholding or reserving assent to legislation.

Bill C-18 is premised on a violation of law. Its very genesis is based on an affront to the rule of law. Perhaps the Governor General should give consideration to using section 55 to deny this—

● (1900)

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board.

**Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I do not know how close to the line the member's language is getting in terms of being unparliamentary, but it must be getting very close as he has done nothing but make a series of personal attacks on the minister, farmers and farm organizations.

I would like to point out that he knows what he is talking about when he talks about thuggery, because it was he and his government that locked farmers in jail on this very issue. It was also his government that changed the legislation without ever consulting farmers, and he has the gall and hypocrisy to come here today and tell us that we should be doing something other than what he has done himself.

The question the member asked was about meeting with the board of directors. I was very disappointed. The minister was invited to meet with the board, but he was going to Russia and the board knew that. The minister asked if I could possibly attend the meeting, but the board of directors refused to meet with me.

I know there are directors like Henry Vos and Jeff Nielsen who work very hard for western Canadian farmers. I wanted to meet with them to see what kind of solutions and interests they had for the future. However, the board insisted on making some excuses and would not meet with me. The board had refused to meet with the minister in the past as well.

I guess I am not surprised when the member, in his comments at one point, said that he had been invited a number of times to Winnipeg. That is not surprising. There is a certain connection between the Liberal Party and a number of members of the board. I could point to two or three examples where that seems to be the case.

About a year ago, I had a chance to ride back from a reception with one of the Liberal members. He said maybe more than he should have, but he said that the Liberals had a chance to meet with the Wheat Board in Winnipeg at their summer caucus. He said that the board said that it really loved them, but that it would not tell western Canadian farmers that.

There is a reason the board should love them. I do not know if it was Reg Alcock's campaign manager or EA, but the board hired her to be the government relations member for the Wheat Board. Paul Martin's failed campaign manager was hired to do polling. The board hired law firms in the last couple of months that have required Liberal senators to recuse themselves from the debate because for them to be involved would have been a conflict of interest. We see that connection between the Liberals and the Wheat Board's board of directors.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

I think we are going to see that again tomorrow. I think a circus stunt will be pulled off. We will see a couple of Liberal members trying to get attention, trying to make this into a political situation because for whatever reason, they do not seem to want western Canadian farmers to have certainty. I think that is what is really offending and annoying western Canadian farmers.

I just had somebody on the phone about 10 minutes ago who said, "Would you tell the member for Malpeque that the Wheat Board has been responsible for so much growth in western Canada. It has been the growth of the specialty crops and the growth of canola". He wanted me to carry that message directly to the member for Malpeque when he heard that I was going to be talking to him.

The member for Malpeque has been dragging an anchor all the way from Malpeque to Winnipeg. Apparently he is going to be there tomorrow. I do not know why he does not realize that farmers in western Canada have moved on. Farmers want to have certainty and they want the freedom to market their own grain. The member, a few members of his party and a few lonely people in western Canada still stand between farmers and certainty.

We look forward to passing the bill. We think it is important. It is going to bring certainty to western Canadian farmers. Certainly they are looking forward to that day. We ask the member to join with us to make sure that certainty takes place on January 1. We ask him to not continually interfere with the situation in order to cause uncertainty.

I guess he, his party and the NDP as well have taken seriously the request of the eight board directors from the Wheat Board when they said, "Would you mind disrupting the legislation as much as you possibly can and then we'll work together to try to disrupt the market so that when the government implements the bill, it will cause uncertainty for farmers?"

On this side of the House we want to do exactly the opposite. We want to bring the bill forward and we want to provide certainty.

• (1905)

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** Madam Speaker, the parliamentary secretary certainly misses the point. If there is one thing that will be certain as a result of the government's action in destroying the Canadian Wheat Board, it will be uncertainty in the grain markets. That will be the bottom line.

The key point is that we are asking the government to abide by the rule of law, as the Federal Court has asked it to do. We are asking the government to respect farmers' opinion and allow farmers the right to have their say on their marketing institution. The Conservatives have denied them that right.

However, the Conservatives went very far and even managed to intimidate their own bureaucrats to the point that the deputy minister of agriculture confirmed at the Senate committee on Bill C-18 that rather than provide the minister with objective advice he stated, "I was asked to indicate the studies that support that", meaning the open market option, "and I have done so". There were other objective studies. He failed to release them. The government has even intimidated the bureaucracy.

Why does the government not abide by the rule of law?

**Mr. David Anderson:** Madam Speaker, to wrap this up, the truly shameful thing is that the member for Malpeque and his interim leader are flying to Winnipeg tomorrow to hold a publicity stunt with Allen Oberg and other members of the tinfoil hat crowd with the express purpose of disrupting the markets in western Canada.

We live in a free country. We are giving farmers freedom. It is the right thing to do. Removing the CWB's single desk is the best thing for the economy. It will result in increased innovation, investment, value-added opportunities, and employment in western Canada. We want to extend to all wheat and barley farmers the property rights upon which our nation was built.

As one farmer wrote today in the *Winnipeg Free Press*, "The right to sell my property (i.e., my own wheat) to whomever I like should not be a collective decision".

That is what I have believed for many years. That is the difference between the member for Malpeque and myself.

[*Translation*]

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

**Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP):** Madam Speaker, the government is making cutbacks to fisheries research and management and is claiming that it will not affect us. At the same time, the ocean ecosystem and the fishery industry are facing a very uncertain and worrisome future.

In the past, fishers depended on Fisheries and Oceans Canada for scientific information in order to make well-informed decisions regarding the TAC, the total allowable catch.

Over recent years, the department has made deep cuts to the funding of this essential scientific work. These cutbacks have an adverse affect on the quality and effectiveness of the department's decision-making when it comes to fish stocks that are endangered or vulnerable.

One of the most serious examples is the recent closure of the Fisheries Resource Conservation Council. The FRCC was a science-based organization respected by the industry's fishers. For 10 years, the FRCC conducted an annual review of the TACs for the groundfishery. The FRCC was at the origin of numerous moratoriums imposed since the 1990s.

Only very rarely were its recommendations not accepted or followed. The need for scientific assessment of the fisheries has never been greater or more evident. The closure of the FRCC and the reduction in the number of science programs are quite worrisome.

In my riding, we are still experiencing the collapse of groundfish stocks, such as cod and redfish. Due to this ecological and economic crisis, which has persisted since the 1990s, my region has lost some 30 to 50% of fisheries-related jobs.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

The fishing industry in the Gulf is in transition because of a trend towards shellfish, such as snow crabs and lobster. The result is paradoxical: the value of the fishery has increased despite the disappearance of a lot of fish stocks, since shellfish sell at a higher price than groundfish. Unfortunately, scientists are unable to fully explain why the shellfish are so plentiful. They do not understand the long-term effects of this fundamental change to the ecosystem.

The shellfish industry is also poorly managed: the snow crab fishery is tanking and scientists are unable to say whether the same fate awaits the lobster fishery. Companies in the Gaspé, such as E. Gagnon & Fils in Sainte-Thérèse-de-Gaspé, employ over 500 people in their fish plants, which includes shellfish.

How do we reassure these people that they will keep their jobs and still be able to earn a living in the future? Scientists are essential to a fishery that is based on the precautionary principle. However, Fisheries and Oceans Canada does not seem to focus on science. Conducting stock inventories every three or five years is not enough. Clearly, there is a need for a lot more scientific research, not less.

With the cutbacks at Fisheries and Oceans Canada, what guarantee do we have that scientists will be able to continue their work as advisors to fishers and the industry?

• (1910)

[*English*]

**Mr. Randy Kamp (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I am happy to have the opportunity to respond to the member opposite and to set the record straight about how Fisheries and Oceans Canada is delivering on its mandate through programs and services that a modern fishing industry requires.

The member has mentioned our government's spending on research and management. I can tell him and the House that since 2006 our government has demonstrated a strong commitment to science at Fisheries and Oceans, including investing \$30 million to upgrade 13 laboratories at sites across the country. We have also set aside \$388 million to construct three Coast Guard offshore fisheries science vessels, with berths for 13 scientists each, to undertake environmental and fishery research, and one offshore oceanographic science vessel, with berths for 23 scientists, to conduct oceanographic, geological and hydrographic survey missions.

This government has also approved \$720 million for the construction of CCGS *John G. Diefenbaker*, Canada's largest and most powerful icebreaker. When it is delivered in 2017, it will be available to support Arctic science over three seasons each year instead of the current two seasons, with a greater geographical reach into the high Arctic.

We have invested \$14 million to complete mapping and data collection in the Atlantic and Arctic Oceans for Canada's submission to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, and we have invested \$9.7 million in science to support emerging commercial fishing.

However, we are not through with our progress yet. As we face the challenges of the future, we will continue to accelerate our progress toward supporting a more modern and economically and ecologically sustainable Canadian fishing industry.

How are we going to do that? For starters, fisheries management programs will be modernized to create an environment in which stability, predictability and transparency will allow fish harvesters to make informed business choices and decisions for the long term.

We will continue to improve ecosystem science and habitat management by focusing resources on areas of greatest impact and improving transparency and effectiveness.

We will continue to streamline programs and make greater use of modern technologies to improve the overall efficiency and effectiveness of our programs, and where appropriate, we will wind down non-core programs that are no longer part of our mandate.

All departments have been asked to review their program spending as part of the Government of Canada deficit reduction initiative. Fisheries and Oceans Canada and Canadian Coast Guard programs and services will contribute to that effort by focusing on core mandate responsibilities, taking advantage of modern technologies and continuing to seek cost efficiencies.

The department is committed to meeting its deficit reduction targets and achieving value for money for taxpayers. At the same time, we are effectively delivering on our mandate through well-designed programs and services that are regularly refreshed to take account of the priorities of Canadians.

Over the summer and fall, the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans travelled from coast to coast to coast and met with key players from the fishing industry to discuss how the department can best support their economic growth. He has spoken to stakeholders whose interests lie in aquaculture and wild fisheries and heard their views on licensing, sustainability, conservation, export markets and all the other issues that are important to them.

These consultations helped shape the planned changes in how the department will operate, changes that will come into effect over the next three years to ensure we continue to protect our ecosystems and build a stronger fishing industry.

• (1915)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Philip Toone:** Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member. I do not think the answer is sufficient, but at least it is a start.

The minister told us that the government will replace the FRCC with direct links between the industry and scientists, but what assurances do we have that decisions will be made objectively? In addition, how will this government plan long-term conservation, which was one of the main tasks of the FRCC, which no longer exists?

*Adjournment Proceedings*

How can Canadians be certain that the department will not make decisions blindly? We need scientists who have the respect and support of the government, fishers and all other industry stakeholders.

How can we ensure that scientists will be there and that they will give us good advice?

[*English*]

**Mr. Randy Kamp:** Madam Speaker, I think the key message that we are trying to deliver is that we cannot afford to continue with old ways of doing business, so we have chosen to focus on the future. That is really the only sensible option.

Our government is committed to ensuring that programs are efficient and effective and that they achieve expected results for Canadians. To get there, we are focusing more fully on our core mandate.

Yes, we are modernizing our program and policy approaches. We are transforming how we do business on behalf of Canadians. In the

future, our business and regulatory practices will be characterized by clear rules that are consistently applied, thus bringing predictability and stability to stakeholders.

The department will embrace the use of modern navigational services, and the Canadian Coast Guard will rebalance its resources to where they can have the greatest impact.

By streamlining core programs and shedding non-core programs, accelerating the take-up of new technologies and aligning departmental resources where needs are the greatest, the department will be in a stronger position to meet its strategic outcomes and to serve its stakeholders and all Canadians.

[*Translation*]

**The Deputy Speaker:** The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:18 p.m.)

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