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(HANSARD)

Wednesday, February 29, 2012

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, February 29, 2012

The House met at 2 p.m.

•(1405)

Prayers

•(1400)

[*English*]

The Speaker: Today being Wednesday, we will now have the singing of the national anthem led by the hon. member for Sackville—Eastern Shore.

[*Members sang the national anthem*]

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

SOUTHEAST ASIA

Mr. Andrew Saxton (North Vancouver, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I recently had the privilege and honour to be a member of the Canadian delegation accompanying His Excellency the Right Hon. David Johnston, Governor General of Canada, on his state visits to Malaysia, Vietnam and Singapore.

Our three nation tour of Southeast Asia was a valuable opportunity for Canada to enhance our relationships in an increasingly important region of the world. Engaging in what the Governor General referred to as the "diplomacy of knowledge", our trip promoted Canada as a premier destination for international students, many of whom will return to their home countries as unofficial ambassadors to promote Canada.

Southeast Asia represents a valuable opportunity for us. It is imperative that we continue to cultivate a closer relationship with countries in the region. Canada could benefit greatly by increasing trade and commerce throughout Southeast Asia. In this time of global economic uncertainty, it is our government's main priority to grow the economy and create jobs.

We will continue to build bridges and promote Canada with our international partners in order to promote mutual understanding and prosperity.

DEAN HEYWOOD

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is with sadness that I rise today to mention to the House of Commons the passing of a great Canadian, Mr. Dean Heywood, a long-time CBC parliamentary TV cameraman. From Meech Lake to Afghanistan and points in-between, Dean covered the most important stories of the day. He was always the one to get the shot and the picture that others wish they had landed.

As long-time friend and colleague, Ms. Julie Van Dusen, used to say, he always got the shot and knew the story inside and out. He loved his job and he liked living on the edge. His friends also said that he was a bit of a crusty fellow but that at the mention of his family he turned into a big marshmallow.

On behalf of the House of Commons, for his wife, Cheryl, his children, Chris, Jasmin and Duncan, and his entire CBC family, we say God bless the memory of Mr. Dean Heywood, a truly great Canadian.

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QUEEN'S DIAMOND JUBILEE MEDAL

Mr. Blake Richards (Wild Rose, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians who have distinguished themselves in service to others are being awarded Diamond Jubilee Medals in this, the 60th year of Queen Elizabeth II's reign.

I have invited residents of my Wild Rose constituency to nominate candidates for this honour. Today I am proud to recognize two constituents who have already received these medals.

Dr. David Chalack received his medal this month from the Governor General. A veterinarian who lives in Cochrane, he is the past president of the Calgary Stampede and well-known for his dedication to animal care. He was inducted into the Canadian Agriculture Hall of Fame in November.

Harvey Shevalier was honoured by Alberta Lieutenant-Governor Donald Ethell for his service to veterans. He served in our military and has more than 40 years of service with the Royal Canadian Legion as Alberta/ NWT Command president and president of the Sunde Legion.

I look forward to recognizing many more deserving residents of Wild Rose through the Diamond Jubilee Medal program.

*Statements by Members***MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS**

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, 55,000 to 75,000 Canadians live with devastating MS. Tonight, all members will have the opportunity to vote their conscience, to do the right thing and to vote to develop a national strategy for CCSVI.

Sixty countries have undertaken 30,000 procedures, while Canada has failed to even begin clinical trials and failed to even begin collecting data, while 800 Canadians succumbed to MS.

North America's top doctors who diagnose and treat CCSVI, Drs. Hubbard, McDonald, Sclafani, Siskin, et cetera, support Bill C-280, as does Dr. Shannon, former deputy surgeon general, who lived through the restructuring of the Canadian blood system. He considers "the lack of definitive action on the part of governments, government agencies such as the CIHR and NGOs...extremely disappointing".

Colleagues, as those living with MS say, "you know what the right thing is to do, do the right thing".

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ENTREPRENEURS

Mr. Chungsen Leung (Willowdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to share my appreciation for having had the honour to attend the annual gala of the Canada-Armenia Business Council that took place last Saturday, February 25. The gala truly showcased the spirit of entrepreneurship in Canada.

It is clear that entrepreneurs have the exceptional ability to turn ideas into solid companies and business ventures. They are able to grow by taking risks and by being innovative. There is no limit to what Canadian entrepreneurs can accomplish in today's global marketplace, and now is the time to work together to create a business environment where entrepreneurs can thrive.

Entrepreneurs create jobs and are an integral part of Canada's economy. Our government understands that the economic recovery is encouraged by the private sector and we have and will continue to work with entrepreneurs to make it easier for them to invest and create jobs.

We understand how important it is that the ambition and desire of Canada's entrepreneurs be fostered so that success can be achieved on a global scale. Our future generations will benefit from the consistent and exceptional growth in jobs and revenue that are the direct result of small businesses.

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[*Translation*]

LA FRANCOPHONIE

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, 2012 has one extra day. In a non-leap year, today would be the first day of March, which is the month during which we celebrate la Francophonie. That being said, Mr. Speaker, it is never too soon to celebrate with the 200 million French speakers and the 870 million citizens of the 70 states and governments that are members of the International Organization of La Francophonie. I want to celebrate all francophones and francophiles and everyone who is learning French and discovering a rich, universal culture. I would also like to

salute the Auditor General and the Supreme Court justice who, like millions of young students around the world, are spending time learning the language of Molière.

French is not a dead language. French is alive because we live in French in our communities, schools and workplaces. That is why NDP members from across Canada support the bill that recognizes the use of French in Quebec companies governed by federal regulations. Not only will this bill guarantee the rights of Quebec's francophone majority, but it will also enhance the vitality of Canada's Francophonie.

Enjoy the celebration, and long live la Francophonie.

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● (1410)

[*English*]

LEAP DAY

Mr. Peter Braid (Kitchener—Waterloo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again a person in my riding of Kitchener—Waterloo is using innovation, in this case to heighten social awareness. Today is leap day, and Madi MacIntyre, a student at Sir John A. Macdonald Secondary School in Waterloo, is asking people to put this extra day to good use. She is the inspiration behind 29Leaps, a social media campaign to motivate us to reach out to others with 29 acts of kindness or charity.

Waterloo region has leapt on this idea and momentum is spreading around the world. Over 200,000 individual acts of generosity have been registered on the 29leaps.com website from people all over the world.

I congratulate Madi for showing that everyone has the power to make a positive difference in the world, one step or one leap at a time. With creative young leaders like Madi, the future of Canada looks very bright.

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FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Russ Hiebert (South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it was 20 years ago this week that a most brutal incident in a tragic war took place.

Canada remembers the Khojaly massacre where hundreds of civilians were gunned down by Armenian forces as they fled their hometown in Azerbaijan. According to the Government of Azerbaijan, the death toll was 613 civilians, including 106 women and 83 children. The massacre was one of many atrocities each side was alleged to have committed during the Nagorno-Karabakh war. The war killed over 30,000 soldiers and civilians and displaced more than one million people.

While the displaced have been resettled, 20 years later the Nagorno-Karabakh region is still occupied by Armenia. The border region remains a place of scattered but deadly clashes.

However, there is hope for a peaceful settlement in this long-running conflict. Armenia and Azerbaijan are talking to each other and we encourage them to resolve this dispute at the negotiating table.

* * *

[Translation]

DANIEL ST-PIERRE

Mr. François Lapointe (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Daniel St-Pierre passed away on February 2, 2012, at the age of 63, after a devastating battle with cancer. He will be sadly missed by his wife, his brothers and sisters, everyone in his extended family, his friends and colleagues, and the thousands of people who rubbed shoulders with him in the course of his many social commitments.

I would be remiss if I did not rise here in the House to commend Mr. St-Pierre's years of work with co-operatives like the Horisol workers' co-operative, the thousands of hours he put in as chair of organizations like the Fondation-Jeunesse de la Côte-Sud, as well as his invaluable contribution as a Saint-Jean-Port-Joli municipal councillor and as mayor of Saint-Aubert.

The legislative efforts of major democracies would basically be meaningless without people like Mr. St-Pierre who give themselves fully to civil society. So, in defiance of this loathsome killer, which seems intent on taking our best and brightest before their time, Mr. St-Pierre will forever be remembered fondly by the thousands of people who knew him simply as Dan.

I would like to offer my sincere condolences to Michelle Séguin and take this opportunity to say here in the House: Dan, thanks a million.

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2012 SCOTTIES TOURNAMENT OF HEARTS

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first, I want to wish a happy birthday to all the leapers.

[English]

I rise today to congratulate Team Alberta on its victory this past week in the 2012 Scotties Tournament of Hearts, the Canadian Women's Curling Championships in Red Deer, Alberta.

Skip, Heather Nedohin, whose home rink is located in Edmonton; teammates, Beth Iskiw, Jessica Mair, Laine Peters, Amy Nixon; and coach Darryl Horne deserve all the accolades for a truly historic win.

Team Alberta's win marks the end of a 14 year drought of Alberta victories at the Tournament of Hearts. After a difficult start, members of Team Alberta proved themselves game after game. Their resolve, poise and focus in the final match ensured they held onto a victory.

This makes me truly proud to be an Albertan and the win is reflective of our western spirit. We aim to win and we keep going until we do.

We wish them the best of luck at the upcoming Ford World Women's Curling Championship in Lethbridge. There, not only will Edmonton and Alberta be able to cheer them on, but the whole country will be able to root for them as Team Canada. Hurry hard!

Statements by Members

[Translation]

FIRST NATIONS

Ms. Mylène Freeman (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last week, the hon. member for Edmonton—Strathcona and I attended the Assembly of First Nations National Justice Forum and witnessed the first nations' commitment to reconciling with the past and moving forward.

Last week, in Geneva, Canada was assessed by the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, where the first nations testified about the systemic discrimination they experience. Soon, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women will assess Canada and launch an independent investigation into the hundreds of cases of missing or murdered aboriginal women in Canada.

I am calling on the government to co-operate fully in the investigation. The entire world will be watching Canada's actions. Aboriginal women are asking for our help, and all the hon. members of the House have a duty to act in support of the first nations in order to restore justice. As Shawn Atleo, chief of the Assembly of First Nations, said:

The time for study is over. The time for action is upon us.

* * *

●(1415)

[English]

OIL AND GAS INDUSTRY

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Peterborough, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the second largest industry in Ontario is oil and gas and it is growing. Indeed, Ontario's manufacturing sector has, in part, Canada's oil sands to thank for many of its jobs.

Just last month, the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters said that energy and resource development across Canada offers billions of dollars in new opportunities for Canadian manufacturers, technology, logistics and other service suppliers. As the province has the most manufacturing jobs, this is tremendous news for the province of Ontario. The oil sands create hundreds of thousands of direct and indirect jobs, jobs induced across Canada, many of them right here in the great province of Ontario.

Canada's emergence as a clean energy superpower is great for Ontario. It is great for Ontario's manufacturing jobs. As a country, we will continue to diversify our trading relationships and build jobs right here in Ontario.

* * *

PINK SHIRT DAY

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal caucus is wearing pink in solidarity with all who celebrate Pink Shirt Day in British Columbia today, and were it not prohibited by you, Mr. Speaker, we would be flash mob dancing in the aisle on YouTube with hundreds of kids of all ages from greater Vancouver schools to Lady Gaga's *Born This Way*.

Oral Questions

While April 11 is International Day of Pink, Premier Christy Clark, when she was a CKNW radio host, chose the last day of February to launch a successful B.C. pink shirt campaign to combat bullying, homophobia and transphobia. Pink Shirt Day began in Nova Scotia after a young man was bullied for wearing a pink shirt. His fellow students, in solidarity, bought 50 pink shirts to wear to school. It was a potent act of peaceful defiance and activism.

This morning, hundreds of volunteers hit the streets in Vancouver to raise awareness, sell buttons and promote Pink Shirt Day. At the event was Premier Clark, radio CKNW, the Boys and Girls Club. Gay and transbullying occurs in schools—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Mississauga—Brampton South.

* * *

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Ms. Eve Adams (Mississauga—Brampton South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our Conservative government is working hard to ensure that our veterans have access to the benefits and services they deserve more quickly and with fewer roadblocks. That is why just last week the Minister of Veterans Affairs announced the reducing red tape initiative for our veterans. The changes made as part of this initiative will create a more hassle-free system. They will reduced bureaucratic roadblocks while improving service delivery.

We have started modernizing our systems so that veterans can contact us electronically, have implemented direct deposit options to ensure that money flows more quickly and more easily into veterans' accounts, and have revamped decision letters to ensure that information is communicated in a clear and consistent manner. This is just the beginning. Cutting red tape is one more way in which our Conservative government is standing up and delivering for Canada's veterans.

* * *

[Translation]

CONSERVATIVE PARTY OF CANADA

Ms. Francine Raynault (Joliette, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I searched high and low but was unable to find Pierre Poutine of Separatist Street in Joliette. What I did find were angry Quebeckers who now know two things: that the Conservatives will stop at nothing to mislead voters and that, given the opportunity, they will use humiliating and offensive stereotypes about Quebeckers.

Why are the Conservative members from Quebec not outraged? Where is the apology to the people of Joliette?

It seems that the Conservatives woke up one morning and were unable to decide whether to break the law or insult Quebeckers, and so they said to themselves, "You know what? Let's do both."

The people of Joliette deserve better. That is why they said "no" to scandals and the divisive politics of the past. That is why they said "yes" to the NDP team, because the NDP does things differently and represents Quebeckers with respect. We are firmly committed to defeating these Conservatives, who are mired in scandal, and that is exactly what we are going to do in 2015.

• (1420)

[English]

NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Robert Goguen (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the NDP has started talking about harsher penalties for people who attack transit workers. Unfortunately, far too often the NDP's position on victims is usually to blame and attack them, as do the members for Winnipeg Centre and Gatineau.

It is unfortunate that the soft on crime NDP do not stand up for victims and have voted against victims several times. For example, the soft on crime NDP voted against the elimination of the faint hope clause for murderers and opposes the safe streets and communities act, which would give a greater voice to victims in our justice system. In fact, the NDP wants to silence victims. Amazingly, the NDP recently urged a well-known victims' advocate to stop speaking about Canada's justice system.

Our government will keep bringing forward legislation that gives victims a voice and keeps our streets and communities safe.

Instead of pretending to support victims, the NDP should step up and start supporting victims.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

41ST GENERAL ELECTION

Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday on CBC the Prime Minister's parliamentary secretary said that the Conservative party was investigating the allegations of election fraud. An hour later, on Sun TV, he said that the Conservatives were not conducting an investigation. Could the Prime Minister tell us which it is? Are the Conservatives investigating, yes or no?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative Party has made available, from the beginning, all information to Elections Canada. The Conservative party can say absolutely, definitively, that it has no role in any of this.

The hon. leader of the NDP should provide her party's information to Elections Canada. Otherwise, I think we just conclude this is simply a smear campaign without any basis at all.

Oral Questions

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives will actually say anything. They do not know whether or not they are investigating. The Conservatives have admitted to making calls. They say that it was to inform people of changes in polling stations. However, in the ridings in question, there were no changes.

Can the Prime Minister confirm that calls were made in ridings where there were no changes in polling stations?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative Party has made available all its information to Elections Canada. The Conservative Party did not make inappropriate calls. I conclude that this is just a smear campaign by a party that lost the election.

Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the NDP gave all the information it had to Elections Canada; we made it public. We will continue to protect the electoral system against trickery and fraud.

What information did the Prime Minister give to Elections Canada? Did Elections Canada receive the RackNine and RMG contracts? Are the Conservatives investigating this matter, or are they ignoring it? What is the Prime Minister hiding?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, the Conservative Party has handed over all available information to Elections Canada. It is interesting that the NDP says that it gave information to Elections Canada, because Elections Canada said that there were almost no complaints during the election. These are just stories made up recently by a party that lost the election.

[*English*]

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians want their government to fix health care, not elections. If the Conservatives won their razor thin majority by cheating, using American style dirty tricks, then they have no mandate. Neither do they have the moral authority to govern.

The kid they threw under the bus now says he did not do it, even though the Minister of Defence said they found the culprit and dealt with it. My question for the Minister of Defence is this: he said the culprit had been caught, but who are they going to blame now? Who is the new fall guy and how far up the food chain does this treachery go?

● (1425)

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have heard the member for Timmins—James Bay indicate that the NDP has no evidence. We just heard the leader of the opposition indicate that they have made all their evidence public. I guess we would have to conclude then, based on what they have made public, that this is nothing but an unsubstantiated smear campaign on behalf of the NDP, and they should withdraw all their comments in this regard.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let us get this straight. We have the gun sitting here and we have this plume of smoke hanging over the gun, but the Conservatives say there is no proof that the smoke is in any way related to the gun.

The proof is coming in by the hour, every day, to our offices from constituents reporting that their right to cast their ballot was interfered with on election day.

We have asked the government to table all documents related to their relationship with RackNine, RMG, and that other outfit, Campaign Research. Where are all the invoices, all the documents, and all the contracts that the government has with those contractors?

The Speaker: The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, that is very interesting coming from the opposition. Those members are saying they have no evidence and could we provide them with some. This is an unsubstantiated smear campaign led by the opposition parties. They have absolutely nothing to back up what they have said.

The Conservative Party of Canada ran a clean and ethical campaign. We won the support of Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is what the Conservatives said for three years about the in and out campaign until they had to pay a \$50,000 fine. We will see what happens.

We have reported to Elections Canada on four ridings, Eglinton—Lawrence, St. Paul's, Winnipeg South Centre and Mount Royal. Jewish voters there received phone calls on Friday night or Saturday from people claiming to be members of the Liberal Party in support of the Liberal Party. These can only be described as harassing calls.

If it happened in one riding, it might just be one riding. If it happened in two, that might be just a coincidence. When it happens in four, there has to be an explanation. What is the explanation?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have become aware, apparently Elections Canada received virtually none of these complaints during the campaign outside of Guelph. Now it is receiving all of these complaints nine months after the election.

We have detailed information. All of the information about calls placed by our campaign is available to Elections Canada. That member should provide similar detailed information. If he cannot do that, we will simply conclude this is yet again another smear by a Liberal Party that lost the election.

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in addition to the calls made to Jewish voters, we have another pattern of calls that were made not to just four but to over thirty ridings. People received calls, again from people claiming to be canvassing on behalf of the Liberal Party, at midnight, at 11:30 p.m., at two o'clock in the morning claiming to be saying let us vote for the Liberals.

Oral Questions

If this happened in one riding, we would say it was just a prank. If it happened in two, it might be a coincidence. When it happens in over 30 ridings, the explanation has to come from the Conservative Party with respect to what was going on. That is what is required.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what the Liberal Party will not accept is that the overwhelming majority of Jewish voters voted for the Conservative Party of Canada.

If the member has any proof of any such campaign he should provide that detailed information to Elections Canada, as we certainly have done and are prepared to do. Otherwise, in the absence of information, I will just conclude that nine months after an election these are smears that have appeared out of nowhere. This is a typical Liberal tactic. Where is the beef? Where is the proof?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have given clear examples today. First, Jewish voters received harassing phone calls. In over 30 ridings, voters received calls that can only be qualified as harassing. Then I gave another very clear example: people were told to go to vote at a location where there was no polling station.

I want to make one thing crystal clear to the Prime Minister: he and his government have that information; the opposition does not. We can give examples, but it is up to the government to answer for this.

• (1430)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, Elections Canada has received our information. As for the Liberal Party, it is clear that these complaints, coming nine months after the election, are nothing but another smear campaign. This is a very old Liberal tactic and the reason why that party keeps losing elections. That party simply cannot accept that it lost the election.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the fabulous story concocted by the Conservatives is beginning to fall apart. Now a Conservative has come forward and is asking that the true identity of the guilty party who orchestrated all these fraudulent phone calls be revealed.

On one television station, the parliamentary secretary said that his party was not conducting an investigation. Five minutes later, on another station, he said that the party was conducting an investigation. He is so caught up in his tangled web that he no longer knows whether or not an investigation is being conducted. He does not even know whether Edmonton East exists.

Have the Conservatives discovered the identity of Pierre Poutine or have they used so many other imaginary names that they are unable to keep them all straight?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, I am going to drown out the noise the opposition is making with the government's facts. I have in my hands the Chief Electoral Officer's report on the 41st general election. He said that no conduct was reported that would call into

question the integrity of the election results as a whole or in a given riding.

The opposition is not providing any evidence to back up these allegations. We must therefore conclude that the opposition members are trying to explain why Canadians did not vote for them.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is a bold statement from a party that did not receive 40% of the popular vote.

If I wanted to solve the mystery, I would say that I suspect it was Pierre Poutine of Separatist Street in Joliette with a RackNine cellphone.

Unfortunately, we are not playing Clue. This is not a game. It is not just a young person in Guelph who was making phone calls. It is a fundamental attack on democracy. It is an attack on the right to vote. It is a hijacking of an election and election fraud. Calls were made between the Conservative Party offices and RackNine.

What did the Conservatives have to say to each other? Why are they hiding things? What did they have to say to RackNine?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are aware of just one investigation in one riding. The Conservative Party is co-operating with Elections Canada in this regard. Other than that, we have only allegations made by partisan Liberals and New Democrats without any evidence. And without evidence, we must conclude that this is simply a case of sore losers trying to explain why Canadians overwhelmingly rejected their parties.

[*English*]

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives have to do better than hide behind the excuses of Pierre Poutine. Canadians want to know who is behind him and who is behind the electoral fraud.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. I would like to ask the member for Timmins—James Bay to assure the House that he was not referring to any member of this House by that term.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, certainly the New Democrats did not make up the name "Pierre Poutine", the Conservative Party did. I just want to be clear—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please.

I have asked the member to assure the House that he was not referring to any member of the House by that term. He has one more opportunity to do so.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, absolutely.

I think this gets to the bottom of what we are concerned about. Yesterday I asked a specific question about bogus phone calls into Edmonton East. The Conservatives said that they were just letting voters know about polling changes. Well last night Elections Canada confirmed to the NDP that not a single polling station was moved in that riding.

Oral Questions

I would like to ask the government why it provided inaccurate information to Parliament. Will the Conservatives come clean about the monkey-wrenching in Edmonton East and who is behind it?

• (1435)

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is very interesting that on Monday, this very member, the member for Timmins—James Bay, said that NDP members had no evidence, none whatsoever, to support the claims that they were making. In fact, I would argue that this member has no evidence whatsoever with respect to Edmonton East.

What I would say is that this member and the members of his party have conducted a completely unsubstantiated smear campaign against our party. If they have evidence, produce it. Otherwise, Canadians are left to conclude that this is nothing but a party conducting a full-blown, unsubstantiated smear campaign.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is pretty rich from a guy who yesterday claimed that Edmonton East did not even exist.

There is only one party that has been convicted of electoral hijinks in this country: the Conservative Party. There is only one party where all the top operatives have been charged and convicted of breaking the electoral laws of this country, and that is the Conservative Party. There is only one party that is behind 30-some investigations right now, and that is the Conservative Party, but it is telling Canada that it is the victim.

Conservative members need to start coming clean with Canadians and stop misrepresenting the facts.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite has just made a number of claims, a number of statements, that he would not make outside this House because they are entirely false.

The member has conducted an unsubstantiated smear campaign. I can say that unequivocally because the member has provided no evidence, none whatsoever, to back up his claims.

The member said earlier this week that they have no evidence. Those are not my words, those are the words of the member. He said that his party has no evidence. If those members have no evidence and they are making these statements, we can only conclude that this is an unsubstantiated smear campaign by the NDP.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the allegations have to do with the Conservative Party. It is up to the Conservatives to provide the information.

The Chief Electoral Officer asked to have the power to demand documents from political parties in order to ensure compliance with the electoral law. However, at the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, the Conservatives told him, “no way”. The Conservatives ask other parties to provide their documents, but they refuse to give the Chief Electoral Officer the tools to be able to detect fraud.

What are the Conservatives trying to hide? Their ties to RackNine and RMG?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the NDP and the Liberals continue to make allegations without any evidence. If they have any evidence, they need to share that information. Otherwise, clearly, the NDP and the Liberals are simply trying to explain why Canadians rejected them so decisively in the election. They are behaving like sore losers, levelling false accusations and conducting a smear campaign for their own purposes.

[*English*]

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the issue is very simple. The Chief Electoral Officer has the legal responsibility and mandate to ensure that all parties are in compliance with the law. The Chief Electoral Officer does not have the legal powers to demand documents that would prove said compliance. The Chief Electoral Officer came to procedure and House affairs committee seeking that power.

We in the NDP agreed. The Conservatives would not give them that power. Why?

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative Party of Canada always provides all documents requested by Elections Canada. In fact, we provide Elections Canada with full reports on all our campaigns. The Conservative Party of Canada ran a clean and ethical campaign. That is what the evidence demonstrates.

Canadians from coast to coast came out in huge numbers to support this party, to support its economic action plan, to support the leadership of this Prime Minister and to guide us over the next four years.

* * *

[*Translation*]

GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a government should not begin a four year term by breaking the law. Breaking the law is a bad move.

It is not the only bad move by this government: cuts to food safety, \$33 million; cuts to transportation safety for Canadian families, \$29 million; cuts to veterans' services, \$48 million.

A budget is about making choices. They are making very bad choices. Why throw tens of billions of dollars into prisons and inadequate planes instead of investing in essential services for Canadian families?

• (1440)

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our priority is jobs and the economy.

Oral Questions

[English]

Our priority is jobs and growth in a low tax jurisdiction. We are working hard to reduce wasteful and inefficient spending across the government. We want to pay down debt. We want to make sure that our efforts are focused on excellent government services for Canadians across the country, as well as a plan that will be continued in the next budget to make sure we have more jobs and more growth for our economy.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, 60,000 full-time jobs were lost in the last few months. The government's bad choices are hurting Canadian families. Even the government must know that cutting back on food safety, transportation safety and the environment hurts Canadians. There was a 43% cut to the Environmental Assessment Agency.

Will the government continue to further weaken the economy and further hurt Canadian families, or will it finally listen to this side of the House, to the OECD, to Moody's, to Fitch, to the IMF and to many others, and refrain from cuts that could drive Canada back into a recession and hurt Canadian families?

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are not doing those things, of course. We have a low tax plan for jobs and growth in this economy. We have pursued it over the last few years. This economy has created over 600,000 net new jobs. We have led the way in the G7. We have led the way in the industrialized countries.

On the other side, of course, they believe in higher taxes. They believe in strangling the economy with red tape. We believe in the economy. We believe in Canadians being unleashed to create more jobs and opportunity. That is our goal. Unfortunately it is not the goal of the opposition.

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PENSIONS

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government just does not care who it hurts with its reckless cuts.

It has lost all credibility by claiming there is not enough money to help seniors retire. Yesterday, we learned the government over-estimated the cost of OAS in three of the past four years. It wants seniors to work two years longer because it cannot get the numbers right.

How can we trust the government's long-term bogus OAS claims when it does not even understand how much it costs this year?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in actual fact, OAS and GIS payments were up 5% last year. Those are payments to seniors who have worked for those benefits and are entitled to them. That was just slightly off forecast by about 1%.

We do know that those costs continue to rise every year. That is why we must take action now to protect and preserve the old age security system for today's seniors and also for future generations. The NDP should support us in that if it really does care about helping seniors.

41ST GENERAL ELECTION

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know this. An individual or individuals in Guelph bought a burner cellphone as "Pierre Poutine". Elections Canada requested documents, having concluded that the Guelph Conservative campaign had a relationship with RackNine and did not disclose it on its return.

We know some 40 calls were made from Rebecca Rogers and Chris Rugé, Conservative election staff in Ottawa, to RackNine.

Will the Prime Minister confirm Ms. Rogers' employment with the trade minister and tell Elections Canada and the House where Chris Rugé works now?

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative Party is aware of a single investigation being conducted by Elections Canada in the riding of Guelph and we will fully support and co-operate with that investigation.

What we also know is that in the last election Liberal campaigners were found to be stealing election signs. They were charged with that. We know that Liberals were found taking campaign literature directly out of people's mailboxes in the last campaign. We know just this week the Liberals had to cut loose a staffer in their own research bureau for sleazy, dirty politics. It is very unbecoming.

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Conservatives spent over \$2 million during the last election on call centres. Over a million of that went to RMG, whose employees blew the whistle on questionable scripts. Hundreds of thousands went to Campaign Research, whose activities are under investigation in Montreal. When we look at what is going on here and we look at RackNine, court records show they were repeatedly contacted by the offices of Conservative MPs.

Will the Prime Minister take this election fraud seriously, launch an investigation and get to the bottom of it?

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative Party and our campaigns used legitimate funds to hire legitimate companies for legitimate purposes during an election. We do not deny that. However, we can say that we ran a clean and ethical campaign.

Oral Questions

The Liberal Party has conducted and has led an unsubstantiated smear campaign for which it has no evidence other than defeated Liberal candidates who are coming forward and suggesting that they lost for any reason other than what they stood for and what they ran on.

Canadians came out and voted for this party because we work for them.

• (1445)

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, former chief electoral officer Jean-Pierre Kingsley says that this current investigation of election fraud is absolutely unprecedented.

The Conservative sacrificial lamb, Michael Sona, has confirmed that there was indeed illegal behaviour.

Conservatives spent over \$2 million on at least five robocall companies, and the Prime Minister surely knows what they were doing.

Will he stop starving Elections Canada and table the logs that show what Conservative calls were made and what Conservative scripts were used in those calls? He has that information. Will he produce it?

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is what we know. We know that the Liberal Party has provided no evidence to substantiate its claims. What it has conducted is an entirely unsubstantiated smear campaign.

We also know that Liberal campaign operatives were charged with stealing election campaign signs. We know that Liberal campaign operatives were actually found to be taking campaign literature out of people's mailboxes. We know that the Liberal Party, through its Liberal research bureau, conducted a dirty, sleazy operation targeted at the Minister of Public Safety. It was unbecoming.

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TRANSPORTATION SAFETY

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, after Sunday's tragic train crash, Canadians are worried about their travel safety. The Transportation Safety Board has previously called on the minister to increase training and improve the safety management system on rail services. What are the Conservatives doing? They are cutting \$29 million on transport safety programs, drastic cuts on programs that keep Canadians safe when travelling.

Instead of protecting Canadians, why are the Conservatives cutting transport safety programs?

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 speaking about a tragic accident that happened last weekend, and now our thoughts and prayers are with the families and the men who lost their lives on Sunday.

Since 2007, passenger train accidents have decreased by 19%, train accidents have decreased by 23% and train derailments by 26%. We are delivering the job.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the reality is that the Conservatives are making cuts in the area of transport safety. More than \$29 million will be cut from air and marine safety. That is one-quarter of the price tag for a single F-35 fighter jet and half the bill that the Conservatives want to pass on to Quebec for their law and order agenda. In the meantime, big corporations continue to receive gifts.

Why are the Conservatives endangering the lives of Canadians by cutting tens of millions of dollars from transport safety programs?

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 truth is that the NDP believes that money grows on trees. The truth is that the NDP voted against a \$1 billion budget over five years to continue enhancing CATSA, our air security authority.

We will continue to work hard to keep Canada's entire transportation system safe.

* * *

[*English*]

CANADIAN FOOD INSPECTION AGENCY

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we now know that the Conservatives have food safety on the chopping block. The latest federal estimates include tens of millions of cuts to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. That means cuts to food inspectors who helped and will help prevent a listeriosis crisis from happening in the country again.

Families need to know that the lunch meat they feed their children will be safe for them to eat and to take to school. If the Conservatives agree with that statement, why are they cutting inspectors who ensure the safety of children's lunches?

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. The government has put 733 net new front-line inspectors on the job. We voted through hundreds of millions of dollars for food safety in our great country. At the same time, the NDP voted against every one of those initiatives. If anyone should explain why they are cutting food safety, it should be the members of that party.

• (1450)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean Rousseau (Compton—Stanstead, NDP): Mr. Speaker, once again, that answer is not reassuring in the least. If the Conservatives go ahead with these cuts, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency will have fewer inspectors than it did in 2008, at the height of the listeriosis crisis, which resulted in 23 deaths. That is very serious.

Do the Conservatives understand the importance of the CFIA's work and its inspectors? Why risk reducing the quality of food inspection by reducing the number of inspectors? Why put Canadians' health at risk? After transport safety and freedom of expression, is the health of Canadians going to take a hit?

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the only new item in that question was the member using the word “if”. The reality is we put 733 net new inspectors on the front lines on food inspection and food safety in the country and we have added hundreds of millions of dollars to CFIA's budget to ensure it has the ability to move forward and ensure our food is safe in Canada. We have that assurance.

Food in Canada is some of the safest in the world, in spite of the NDP constantly voting against those initiatives.

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ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Ms. Joyce Bateman (Winnipeg South Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government has demonstrated its commitment to supporting strong and healthy first nations communities through significant investments that are producing tangible and lasting results.

While provinces and territories each have their own safe drinking water standards, there are currently no legally enforceable protections for first nations communities.

Could the parliamentary secretary tell the House how our government is taking action to address this gap and to ensure first nations have access to safe and reliable drinking water?

Mr. Greg Rickford (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, for the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government believes that first nations communities should have access to safe drinking water, as all Canadians do. That is why we reintroduced the safe drinking water for first nations act today in the Senate. This legislation builds on our significant investments in water and waste water infrastructure, including improving capacity for first nations in managing their systems on reserve.

I urge all members of the opposition to join with us, the Alberta chiefs and the Atlantic Policy Congress in supporting the bill and help ensuring that first nations have access to safe drinking water on reserves.

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*[Translation]***OFFICIAL LANGUAGES**

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in a few hours the House will vote on Bill C-315, which would give Quebec workers employed by businesses under federal jurisdiction the same language rights as other Quebec workers.

Instead of beating around the bush and announcing a new committee that has still not come to be, will the Conservatives take action and vote with the NDP to recognize the rights of all francophone workers in Quebec?

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, for Official

Languages and for the Economic Development Agency for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with respect to language of work, the NDP has not done its homework and seems determined to impose pointless and burdensome paperwork on businesses. Our government is determined to promote and protect the French language in Canada.

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as renowned Quebec singer Éric Lapointe would say, if he were speaking English, “Whatever”.

Bill C-315 is balanced and solves a real problem. NDP members from across Canada support it unanimously because they believe that the recognition of Quebec as a nation within Canada should be backed up by real action.

Will the Conservatives acknowledge that it is high time Quebecers felt respected? Will they vote in favour of Bill C-315?

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, for Official Languages and for the Economic Development Agency for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, French is an integral part of our history, our identity and our daily lives. French is Canada's founding language, and our Conservative government is proud of that. Our government will create an advisory committee to determine whether there is a problem with respect to the French language in private enterprises operating under federal jurisdiction.

* * *

JUSTICE

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives' senseless crime bill will come with equally senseless costs. The Parliamentary Budget Officer estimates that the average cost per offender will be 16 times higher. Even worse, correctional supervision will be available for fewer offenders. The upshot: the Conservatives want Canadians to pay more to be less safe. It makes no sense.

Is this really what the Conservatives want, for Canadians to pay more to be less safe?

● (1455)

[English]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I completely disagree with that. I noted that the PBO, Kevin Page, said yesterday that there was no way judges would give conditional sentences for the nature of some of these crimes. He talked about kidnapping and sexual assault. Do not tell that to Sheldon Kennedy who has been lobbying for many years to get rid of conditional sentences for sexual assault. I am going with Sheldon Kennedy on that and that is exactly what this government will do. We are going to crack down on this kind of activity.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives, as usual, are cherry-picking the facts. The minister knows that this rule also includes non-violent offences and such things as theft.

Oral Questions

The independent Parliamentary Budget Officer was only dealing with one small part of Bill C-10 and concluded that the changes would be extremely costly and would punish fewer criminals for less time. It would cost 16 times more money to keep fewer criminals under correctional supervision. That is just nonsense.

This bill is expensive, it will not make our streets safer and nobody wants to pay for it. Why are the Conservatives forging ahead with something that is doomed to fail?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are looking at all victims in the country. When we have individuals, organized crime and gangs bringing drugs into our country, we need to send a message out to them that we are not prepared to stand by and let these people go ahead and try to destroy young people in our country without serious consequences.

That is exactly what this government is doing. We will continue to stand up for victims and law-abiding Canadians. That is the mandate Canadians gave us.

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41ST GENERAL ELECTION

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday a senior in Vancouver Quadra wrote to me that she received an election call giving wrong poll station information so she reported it because, “it is my duty to report it in defence of Canada’s treasured democracy and moral integrity”.

Campaign Research, the robocall company caught making Conservative—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The member for Vancouver Quadra has the floor.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Mr. Speaker, Campaign Research, the robocall company caught making Conservative-funded false calls in Mount Royal, also provided services to the Conservative campaign in Vancouver Quadra.

When will the Prime Minister accept his responsibility and investigate these nationwide complaints—

The Speaker: Order. The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative Party conducted a clean and ethical campaign in ridings right across this country. We hired legitimate companies to undertake legitimate exercises throughout that campaign to ensure that voters got out to vote. In fact, some 900,000 more Canadians voted in the last election.

What the Liberal Party has done, and shame on it for doing so, is it has brought forward all of these allegations with no evidence, none whatsoever. It is an unsubstantiated Liberal smear campaign and the Liberals should be ashamed of themselves.

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister asked earlier, “Where is the beef?” We want to know, where is the poutine?

[*Translation*]

When someone buys a disposable phone and registers it with a false name and address, that usually means they want to abuse the system. This is not complicated. The only people who know who Pierre Poutine is are the Conservatives and their leader. We want to know who this Pierre Poutine is. Will the Conservatives come clean on this?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us look at the Liberal Party’s record this week. The leader of the Liberal Party had to admit to an anonymous smear campaign against the Minister of Public Safety launched by his office. The same day, he had to withdraw his false allegations against a private company in Canada.

That is why we are asking the Liberals to provide some evidence when their members level new allegations without any proof. Otherwise, it is clear that the Liberals are simply trying to explain their huge losses in the election.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is really just the Conservatives who do not understand that buying the F-35s will cost more than expected. All our allies are aware of the problems with this program. Today, Japan is thinking about cancelling its order if the price goes up again. The NDP has been warning the Conservatives for months that the price is going to go up.

We know that we have to replace the CF-18s. There is no doubt about it. But how much will it cost taxpayers? How many planes are we going to replace them with? When will we have the new planes? It is simple, is it not?

● (1500)

[*English*]

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was beginning to feel left out.

The Royal Canadian Air Force plays an important role in protecting our sovereignty and defending our interests at home and abroad. Canada’s CF-18s are nearing the end of their usable lives. A contract has not been signed as yet for the replacement aircraft. We have set a budget for replacement. We have been clear that we will operate within that budget. We will make sure that the air force has the aircraft necessary to do the job we ask of it.

* * *

MINING INDUSTRY

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a shocking new report today revealed that nickel mining giant Vale failed to take reasonable precautions to prevent the deaths of two miners. The company had been told by one of the now deceased workers that there was a serious water problem, water in the muck, which every miner knows is deadly. The union wants charges pressed under the Westray bill, a law that holds companies to account for worker safety.

Oral Questions

Will the government work with the province to hold this company accountable?

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government is very committed to occupational health and safety for Canadians within the federal jurisdiction and in the case of the provincial jurisdiction, we work with the province and the ministers with respect to it. I have not been approached by the minister in Ontario with respect to the matter, but I will take it under advisement.

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HEALTH

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, patients with a rare disease face significant challenges ranging from a correct diagnosis to the availability of treatment and care. Earlier today our government announced an investment in research that will transform biological research into medical practice and treatments in the area of rare diseases.

Would the hon. Minister of Health please inform the House how this will help patients with rare diseases across our country?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very proud our government announced funding to support new research on rare diseases. This investment will go a long way to improving the lives of people who suffer from these diseases. Rare diseases are often chronic and life threatening. There are about 7,000 rare diseases and the number is growing.

Our goal is to save lives and ensure that people with these diseases receive treatments that are timely and effective.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on Monday, the Associate Minister of National Defence declined to be as candid as his British counterpart in response to a question about the soaring F-35 costs, who said, “the honest answer is I don’t know”. Since then the Japanese too have had to scale back their plans because of soaring costs.

When the minister returns from his F-35 problems conference, will he be as candid as Minister Luff? Will he table a full report telling Canadians how much, how many planes and when the delivery will be?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, all I can say repeatedly is that we are engaged with all of our partners on this particular issue. No contracts have been signed. We will do the best we can for our men and women in the military, as well as Canadian taxpayers.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, against the will of British Columbians, the Conservatives continue to push their Enbridge pipeline project. Their latest move was to accept a report paid for by Enbridge which says—surprise, surprise—there are no tanker traffic safety issues.

We are talking about some of Canada's most sensitive and perilous waters. Not only that, if there is a spill, the Conservatives say Enbridge would not be responsible.

Can the Conservatives rely on such a biased report when so much of B.C.'s coast is at risk?

Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have said repeatedly, no project will go ahead unless it is safe for the environment and safe for Canadians. The independent regulatory process will proceed.

In the meantime, our government is committed to the diversification of our markets and the hundreds of thousands of jobs that that will create.

* * *

● (1505)

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Scott Armstrong (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our fisheries remain one of the greatest economic engines of many of our coastal communities. However, the industry suffers from low wages and low capacity.

We need to make sure that the fishermen in my region continue to look for change and they look for solutions. Unlike the rhetoric we hear from many labour unions, we need to ensure that they have the opportunity for this change.

What we have heard recently from the FFAW in its negotiations with the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador is such rhetoric we need to ignore. Could the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans please inform the House on his activities to support—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Fisheries and Oceans.

Hon. Keith Ashfield (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, indeed the member is right. Canada is a strong economic player on the world stage, yet when it comes to our fisheries, we are often outperformed by much smaller jurisdictions. That should not be the case.

For some time now, my officials have been consulting in person and online with stakeholders seeking their views on how we can change the way we do business. We received many excellent ideas. We will be extending the deadline for submissions until March 14, to ensure that everyone with an interest in strong jobs and economic growth has a chance to respond.

* * *

[Translation]

INFRASTRUCTURE

Ms. Éloise Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Minister Lebel is unable to provide a clear answer on the future of the Portneuf wharf.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. I would like to remind the hon. member that we must not mention the names of hon. members, but instead use the name of their riding or their title.

Ms. Éleine Michaud: Mr. Speaker, I apologize. I will ask my question again. The Minister of Transport is unable to provide a clear answer on the future of the Portneuf wharf. At first, he referred the municipality to the port divestiture program. Now the minister is telling us all the funding in the program has been allocated. Clearly, he has no idea any more what strategy to use to get rid of the wharf, which is essential to tourism and business in the region.

Will he finally be straight with people? What does the minister think the future has in store for the Portneuf wharf?

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 problem is not that I am not providing an answer. The problem is that she is not hearing the answer she would like to hear. There is a difference.

The port divestiture program ends on March 31. There have been negotiations between the municipality of Portneuf and people from our department. Unfortunately, they were unable to reach an agreement. The program is ending and we will see what happens in the future.

Despite these negotiations, for now, no decision has been made. If that is what the town wanted, then it had more than enough time. Unfortunately, the problem was not resolved that way for them.

* * *

41ST GENERAL ELECTION

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in the robo-call scandal, the Conservatives' denials are losing traction as the facts emerge. Their only line of defence is to ask the opposition to provide the proof. Voters want to know who is behind this attack on democracy and how it happened. Only an independent public inquiry can reveal to voters the details of what the former chief electoral officer, Jean-Pierre Kingsley, has called an attack on the very essence of the electoral process.

What is the Prime Minister waiting for to launch a true, independent public inquiry, and why not put Jean-Pierre Kingsley in charge, but definitely not Pierre Poitine?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians voted in great numbers in the latest election. In fact, national voter turnout was up by 900,000. Canadians obviously knew where to vote. Unfortunately for the Bloc Québécois, it was overwhelmingly rejected by Quebec voters. The Bloc can now try to explain its monumental defeat by making false allegations, but no one will believe it.

Privilege

[English]

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of Mr. Fred Wah, Canada's fifth Parliamentary Poet Laureate.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: All members are invited to a reception in honour of Mr. Wah in Room 274-F, Centre Block at 4 p.m. today.

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PRIVILEGE

ALLEGED INTERFERENCE OF MINISTER'S ABILITY TO DISCHARGE RESPONSIBILITIES

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today in response to the question of privilege raised on Monday, February 27, by the Minister of Public Safety and also to the consequent intervention by the parliamentary secretary to the government House leader.

In reviewing their remarks, I have concluded that their argument is really composed of three distinct complaints and my remarks will deal with them as such.

I would like to say at the outset that I understand the minister's embarrassment at having the details of his personal life brought into the realm of public discussion.

The introduction of Bill C-30 caused quite a ripple across the country. Millions of Canadians voiced their discontent and expressed their opposition to this legislation. The fact we are here today debating this issue is a testament to that.

The first part of the minister's complaint deals with the issue of the Twitter account Vikileaks. Mr. Speaker, as you will no doubt recall, my leader addressed the involvement of a Liberal staff member earlier this week and offered an unreserved apology on this point. That being said, we would have hoped that the minister would accept this apology regarding Vikileaks and consider the matter closed. However, if he insists on dragging out the matter, I would like to mention a few things.

First, he purports that House of Commons resources were used to create the account. I should remind the minister that this is not a matter of privilege, but a matter reserved for the Board of Internal Economy. An excerpt from the Parliament of Canada Act dealing with exclusive authority, in subsection 52.6(1), explains the following:

The Board has the exclusive authority to determine whether any previous, current or proposed use by a member of the House of Commons of any funds, goods, services or premises made available to that member for the carrying out of parliamentary functions is or was proper, given the discharge of the parliamentary functions of members of the House of Commons, including whether any such use is or was proper having regard to the intent and purpose of the by-laws made under subsection 52.5(1).

Privilege

The effect of this section in the act is clear. The matter of the use of House resources is the sole and exclusive domain of the Board of Internal Economy. If the minister still thinks there was a cost incurred by the creation of the Twitter site, I recommend that he take it up with the board. I have no doubt, Mr. Speaker, that you and the entire board will deal with this issue in the appropriate manner.

If the minister still thinks his reputation was affected as a result of the release of this publicly available document and that this in itself represents a breach of privilege, I would refer him, and indeed all members, to page 111 of O'Brien and Bosc where Speaker Fraser's 1987 ruling states:

The privileges of a Member are violated by any action which might impede him or her in the fulfilment of his or her duties and functions. It is obvious that the unjust damaging of a reputation could constitute such an impediment. The normal course of a Member who felt himself or herself to be defamed would be the same as that available to any other citizen, recourse to the courts under the laws of defamation with the possibility of damages to substitute for the harm that might be done. However, should the alleged defamation take place on the floor of the House, this recourse is not available.

In this ruling, Speaker Fraser wisely reminds members that where there is a normal avenue of recourse, the courts in the case of defamation, this normal avenue should be pursued. Given the resignation of the person involved and the clear apology by the member for Toronto Centre, we consider this matter closed.

The second complaint dealt with the threats from the international group that calls itself "Anonymous". This was the main argument put forth by the minister and expanded on at length in the parliamentary secretary's speech. I think it is appropriate to note right off the start that, yes, indeed, there clearly are threats being made. However, before your finding a prima facie breach of privilege I think it bears careful consideration here that we fully understand what we are dealing with.

• (1510)

First, who is this group called Anonymous? Put simply, it is an international cabal of criminal hackers dating back to 2003, who have shut down the websites of the U.S. Department of Justice and the F.B.I. They have hacked into the phone lines of Scotland Yard. They are responsible for attacks against MasterCard, Visa, Sony and the Governments of the U.S., U.K., Turkey, Australia, Egypt, Algeria, Libya, Iran, Chile, Colombia and New Zealand.

This is not at all in the same league as Wikileaks. We are not dealing with the actions of a sole staff member from another party. This is an international criminal organization.

I am forced to ask what would be accomplished by sending this matter to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. Beauchesne's fifth edition notes the problem of dealing with these matters on page 23, where it states:

Direct threats which attempt to influence Members' actions in the House are undoubtedly breaches of privilege. They do, however, provide serious problems for the House. They are often made anonymously and it is rarely possible for the House to examine them satisfactorily. The common practice today is to turn the responsibility for investigating them over to the ordinary forces of the law.

By that Beauchesne's clearly means that these threats would be dealt with by the police and the courts.

This brings us to another point. Sadly, in this day and age, threats against ministers and indeed the Prime Minister occur all too often.

One only has to step outside and see the Prime Minister's security motorcade to understand that the RCMP believes there are credible threats made regularly against the Prime Minister. I do not believe that the Prime Minister simply enjoys being escorted by multiple vehicles while sitting behind four inches of bullet-proof glass.

Presumably these threats are made by people who feel wronged by the government in some way. These are not threats by neighbours or angry people who were cut off in traffic by the Prime Minister. In other words, this is not some personal grudge but one related to his role as the Prime Minister of Canada.

Yet these threats have not been brought to this House to be handled as breaches of privilege. These threats are dealt with, as they should be, by the police, the RCMP and presumably by CSIS where needed.

As pointed out earlier in Beauchesne's, it would not be appropriate to bring these issues here to the House since little could be accomplished by studying these threats in committee. In fact the mere suggestion sounds rather silly. These are threats made by criminals and should be handled by the police, plain and simple.

The second reason these are not dealt with in the House is that they are, in essence, threats made against the Government of Canada, not the member for Calgary Southwest. His role as the local MP is of little relevance to those who make those threats. It is his role as Prime Minister that sadly makes him a target.

Similarly in the case of the threats by Anonymous to the Minister of Public Safety, these threats are directed at the minister in his role as Minister of Public Safety, not as the member for Parliament for Provencher.

In essence, these are threats against the Government of Canada made by criminals. Joseph P. Maingot's *Parliamentary Privilege in Canada*, is instructive on this point. On page 191 he states:

—parliamentary privilege is concerned with the special rights of members, not in their capacity as ministers or as party leaders, whips, or parliamentary secretaries, but strictly in their capacity as Members in their parliamentary work.

Anonymous has threatened to release information about the minister if he does not withdraw Bill C-30 and step down as minister. This is clearly a threat, but they are not asking the member for Provencher to vote against a bill, speak against it or take some other action as a member of the House, or even for the member for Provencher to step down as an MP. They are asking the minister to withdraw a bill from Parliament, the House and the Senate, and to step down as a minister of the crown.

Again, these are clearly threats made by criminals, yet they are threats against the Government of Canada, and as such should not be dealt with as matters of privilege but instead be investigated by the RCMP to ensure that these criminals are brought to justice. It is not an appropriate role for the House to supplant the normal criminal justice system, and I would caution that a finding of prima facie breach of privilege may do just that.

*Routine Proceedings***ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS**

● (1515)

Finally, to the third and final complaint, which dealt with the issue of being inundated by phone calls and such, thus preventing him from performing his duties, I would like to quote from Speaker Sauv e's ruling given on July 15, 1980, cited on page 117 of O'Brien and Bosc. It states:

While I am only too aware of the multiple responsibilities, duties, and also the work the member has to do relating to his constituency, as Speaker I am required to consider only those matters which affect the member's parliamentary work. That is to say, whatever duty a member has to his constituents, before a valid question of privilege arises in respect of any alleged interference, such interference must relate to the member's parliamentary duties. In other words, just as a member is protected from anything he does while taking part in a proceeding in Parliament, so too must interference relate to the member's role in the context of parliamentary work.

Indeed, it was for this very reason that we have not raised a question of privilege regarding the efforts of the New Democratic Party to systematically attempt to clog the phone lines of the member for Saint-Maurice—Champlain. I say "systematically" because they are using a system of robocalls to call constituents in the member's riding and telling them to simply press a number on the phone to be connected immediately to the constituency office, thereby flooding it. These types of underhanded, dirty tricks by the NDP are unfortunate and certainly no way to do politics and are motivated by either a sense of revenge against the member or perhaps a dire warning against their own caucus members. In any event, while they may clog the phone lines of the constituency office for a time, they do not constitute a breach of privilege, which is why we did not raise it.

Mr. Speaker, in your ruling pertaining to the question of privilege raised by the member for Mount Royal on November 16, 2011, you stated:

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.

In his May 5, 1987 ruling Speaker Fraser stated:

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.

In conclusion, the only one of the three complaints that even approaches a breach of privilege is the matter dealing with the group Anonymous. While that instance clearly does involve threats and intimidation, these are made against the minister in his role as a minister, not as a member. As such, they do not constitute a breach of privilege. While they are a matter of concern for all members of the House, they remain threats made by criminals to a minister of the Crown, and as such are better handled by the RCMP and other appropriate authorities.

● (1520)

The Speaker: I appreciate the hon. member's further contribution to this matter, and I can assure the House that I will be getting back with a decision in due course.

[English]

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 38(6), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to six petitions.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 32(2), I have the honour to table in both official languages, the treaties entitled: Convention on Mutual Administrative Assistance in Tax Matters, done at Strasbourg on January 25, 1988, as amended by the Protocol amending the Convention on Mutual Administrative Assistance in Tax Matters, done at Paris on May 27, 2010; and an Agreement on Social Security between Canada and the Federative Republic of Brazil, done at Brasilia on August 8, 2011.

* * *

EXPORT DEVELOPMENT CANADA

Hon. Ed Fast (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the Canada Account Annual Report for 2010-11, prepared by Export Development Canada.

* * *

[Translation]

VETERANS OMBUDSMAN

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the report of the Veterans Ombudsman entitled "Veterans' Right to Know Reasons for Decisions: A Matter of Procedural Fairness".

* * *

● (1525)

[English]

INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Hon. Mauril B elanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1) I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian delegation of the Canada-Africa Parliamentary Association in its bilateral visits to the Republic of Kenya and the Republic of South Sudan from January 17-20, 2012. This is the first Canadian parliamentary delegation for this new country since its creation in July of last year.

I would like to thank our analyst Michael Dewing for this report, which will be his last report, which is being tabled within the regulated 20 sitting days of the House.

*Routine Proceedings***PETITIONS**

ABORTION

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to represent some of the constituents in my riding of Wellington—Halton Hills who have asked me to present three petitions.

The first two petitions call upon the House of Commons to enact legislation to restrict abortion. They were signed by 250 people.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the third petition calls upon Parliament to take action on climate change.

The petitioners call upon Parliament to work toward a new international agreement to replace the Kyoto protocol, to commit to national reductions in greenhouse gases and to commit international funds for the mitigation of climate change outside of Canada.

I am tabling this petition on behalf of 30 constituents in my riding of Wellington—Halton Hills.

CANADIAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this petition comes to me from Calgary, Alberta.

The petitioners want fundamental assurance from the House and from the government for the future of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation/Radio-Canada. It is a public broadcaster as it does have a mandate to provide information across the country from coast to coast.

The petitioners want the government to help provide the funding to help fulfill the mandate of CBC/Radio-Canada. It is a great institution and, essentially, the cultural crossroads of this country as to who we are, our identity and where we are going to be in the future.

ABORTION

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions to present to the House today.

The first is signed by a number of petitioners from my riding of Dufferin—Caledon. They call upon the House of Commons to speedily enact legislation that would restrict abortion to the greatest extent possible.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is from people all over Ontario who are concerned with the proposed megaquarry in Melancthon township in Dufferin county, which would be the largest open pit quarry in Canada at over 2,300 acres.

The petitioners are concerned that the proposed megaquarry threatens the Grand River and Nottawasaga watersheds, including various freshwater fish species, plus a number of other items.

The petitioners call upon the Government of Canada to conduct an environmental assessment under the authority of the Canadian

Environmental Assessment Act on the proposed Highland Companies' megaquarry development.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I rise here today to present two petitions. The first petition concerns Enbridge's supertanker scheme to bring a twin pipeline from Alberta to Kitimat that would ship bitumen crude in waters that have been protected from oil tanker traffic for 40 years. There is a moratorium on supertankers along British Columbia's coastline.

[*English*]

These petitioners from the Toronto area urge the government to allow the hearings to take place and cease promoting this project.

● (1530)

HEALTH OF ANIMALS ACT

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is signed by residents of Saanich—Gulf Islands, particularly those in Sidney, Saanich, Victoria and Saturna Island.

The petitioners call upon the government to cease allowing the treatment of horses as potential food products. The Health of Animals Act and the Meat Inspection Act prohibit the use of horses for human consumption.

FRIENDSHIP CENTRES

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present two petitions from my constituents in Western Arctic, Northwest Territories.

In the first petition, the petitioners want to draw the attention of the House that members of the 41st Parliament of Canada recognize the vital role friendship centres and provincial territorial associations play in first nations, Inuit and Métis communities across Canada. Therefore, they call upon the Government of Canada to continue to support provincial-territorial associations and friendship centres by ensuring their core funding is increased and remains in place.

These vital functions that the friendship centres supply to Canadians across the country are a treasure to many of our communities. I join with my constituents in putting that petition forward.

HOUSING

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition concerns housing.

The petitioners want to draw the attention of the House to the fact that Canada lacks a national housing strategy and that housing is a human right, and therefore call upon Parliament to address a growing housing crisis by working with provincial, municipal and first nations governments to create a national housing strategy.

Right across this country, housing is of great concern to Canadians. I join with these petitioners in presenting this petition to the House.

SEARCH AND RESCUE

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition by a number of petitioners, mostly from my riding but also the adjoining ridings on both sides of me.

The petitioners oppose the decision to close the marine rescue coordination centre in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador. They want the government to understand and acknowledge that the closure of the centre will mean service cuts that will put lives at risk. Some of the reasons the petitioners give have to do with the fact that the St. John's rescue coordination staff have a unique knowledge of the area's ocean and coastline, and also for the people involved.

Language is an issue in St. John's, as well as it is in Quebec City. Many people in Newfoundland and Labrador speak with very distinct accents and dialects and use language that is not common elsewhere, particularly in the bays and coasts around Newfoundland and Labrador. These people are used to dealing with people who work at sea and are from these places. They also know them in many cases. They know the coastline, the currents and the place names. These are very unique in Newfoundland and Labrador. It is very important that this marine rescue centre continue.

The petitioners are calling on the government to reverse the decision to close this centre to help save more lives in Newfoundland and Labrador.

CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. Jay Aspin (Nipissing—Timiskaming, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present a petition on behalf of a number of my constituents in Nipissing—Timiskaming to amend section 163.1 of the Criminal Code to acknowledge the need for more severe sentences for criminals producing sexually exploitive material involving children.

The constituents who have signed this petition are requesting that Parliament enact legislation that changes the legal terminology in section 163.1 from “child pornography” to “child sex abuse materials” and that stronger mandatory minimum sentences be enacted in order to protect children, deter pedophilia and ensure that justice is delivered to those who merit a punishment.

I support this petition.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to present petitions from many constituents in Toronto asking the federal government to not miss the bus and to take a leadership role in public transit.

The petitioners want the federal government to be a full partner with provincial, territorial, municipal and transit authorities so they can come up with a long-term investment plan to support public transit. They want to see the federal government establish a funding mechanism for public transit and to work together to provide sustainable, predictable, long-term and adequate funding for public transit.

The petitioners note that there is a serious \$18 billion gap in transit infrastructure needs and that action is needed now. They are petitioning to ask Canada to enact a Canada public transit strategy.

* * *

• (1535)

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if

Government Orders

a supplementary response to Question No. 385, initially tabled on January 30, 2012, could be made an order for return, this return would be tabled immediately.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Text]

Question No. 385—**Mr. Brian Jean:**

For questions Q-1 through Q-376 on the Order Paper, what is the estimated cost of the government's response to each question?

(Return tabled)

[English]

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

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

MOTIONS FOR PAPERS

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

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

CANADA-PANAMA ECONOMIC GROWTH AND PROSPERITY ACT

The House resumed from February 27, consideration of the motion that Bill C-24, An Act to implement the Free Trade Agreement between Canada and the Republic of Panama, the Agreement on the Environment between Canada and the Republic of Panama and the Agreement on Labour Cooperation between Canada and the Republic of Panama, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the motion that this question be now put.

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise here in the House today to talk about the Canada-Panama economic growth and prosperity act.

Government Orders

Our government recognizes that trade and investment are the cornerstone of our economic success as a nation. In Canada, 60% of our GDP and one in five jobs depend on trade. While our economy has outperformed much of the world in recent years, we cannot take our success for granted. Hard-working Canadians are counting on us to continue to expand markets and open doors for our businesses to succeed around the world. That is what our pro-trade plan is all about. It is the most ambitious plan of its kind in Canada's history.

The Canada-Panama economic growth and prosperity act being debated here today is yet another step this government has taken to help Canadians compete and succeed in the global economy. Canadian businesses have long been asking for closer ties with Panama. This government will deliver.

Panama is an innovative, dynamic and rapidly growing economy that offers huge commercial opportunities for Canadian firms. According to a recent report published by the CAPA Centre for Aviation, Panama is the fastest growing economy in all of Latin America. It is expected to be the fastest growing economy in Latin America for the next five years. In 2010, Panama's real gross domestic product growth was 7.5%. It is expected to expand at an equivalent rate in 2011.

This growth, driven by the expansion of the Panama Canal and other major infrastructure projects, represents tremendous opportunities for Canadian businesses. It is important that Canadian firms establish an early presence in this emerging market and build solid relationships that will provide them with a competitive edge. However, the remarkable economic phenomenon that is taking place in Panama is not the only reason this government seeks to forge closer economic ties with this regional partner. Panama holds a unique and influential position in the global trading system, thanks to the Panama Canal. Panama represents an entry point for the broader region, thereby enabling access to neighbouring markets. Canada and Panama enjoy positive and expanding relations built on shared values. Our policies and objectives in the region are well aligned. Panama is a like-minded partner that has demonstrated its commitment to aligning its laws and regulations to international standards.

For example, Panama has made significant strides with respect to transparency in the area of taxation. In recognition of these improvements, in June 2011, the OECD formally placed Panama on its list of jurisdictions that have substantially implemented the international standards for exchange of tax information. This is an important milestone. It demonstrates Panama's progress in fulfilling its commitments to combat international tax evasion.

The Canada-Panama economic growth and prosperity act would mark a new chapter in the Canada-Panama relationship. We have negotiated a high quality and comprehensive free trade agreement. It covers everything from market access for goods to cross-border trade in services, to investment and government procurement. This agreement would help Canadian businesses and workers compete and win in the Panamanian marketplace. It would help forge an even stronger bond between our nations in the years ahead.

The Canada-Panama economic growth and prosperity act would create new opportunities for Canadian businesses and producers by removing the major tariff barriers that Canadian goods face when

entering the Panamanian market. Currently, Panama maintains an average most favoured nation applied tariff on non-agricultural goods of 6.2%, with tariffs of 10% or more on a number of products of export interest to Canada.

Panama has agreed that it would eliminate the tariff on 89% of non-agricultural imports from Canada. The remaining tariffs would be phased out over the next 5 to 15 years. This would be a significant reduction in trade barriers expected to benefit a wide range of sectors across the Canadian economy, including fish and seafood products, paper products, vehicles and parts, construction materials and equipment, and industrial and electrical machinery.

Canadian agricultural exports would also benefit from this agreement. Currently, Panamanian tariffs of Canada's main agricultural exports to Panama, which are pork, pulses and Christmas trees, range from 0% to 70%. Once this agreement enters into force, 89% of Canada's agricultural exports would receive immediate duty-free access. The Panamanians would be buying their Christmas trees without tariffs. That is great news for the Christmas tree sector, along with the pork sector and the beef sector.

• (1540)

Products such as beef and pork, frozen potatoes and pulses would receive immediate duty-free access. Other Canadian agriculture exports would see tariff reductions and eliminations over 5 to 15 years.

That is not all. The Canadian services sectors would also benefit from the Canada-Panama economic growth and prosperity act. This agreement would provide Canadian service providers with a secure, predictable, transparent and rules-based environment which would facilitate access to Panama's \$20.6 billion services market. Panama is a services-oriented economy offering opportunities for Canadian service providers, in particular for financial, engineering, mining and petroleum extractive services, construction, capital projects and environmental services.

On investment, the free trade agreement would grant investors access to transparent, binding and impartial dispute settlement through international arbitration. The strong obligations in this agreement would ensure the free transfer of capital related to investment, protection against expropriation without adequate and prompt compensation, and non-discriminatory treatment of Canadian investments. Panama is an established destination for Canadian direct investment abroad, particularly in the banking, financial services, construction and mining sectors. This agreement would serve to further promote this bilateral investment flow.

Among the key priorities for deepening our trade relationship with Panama are the remarkable procurement opportunities that exist in the Panamanian market.

Government Orders

In addition to the ongoing \$5.2 billion Panama Canal expansion project, the Government of Panama has numerous infrastructure projects either under consideration or already in progress to build and improve roads, hospitals, social housing, bridges and airports. They are part of the \$13.6 billion strategic investment plan from 2010-14. Among these projects is the Panamanian government's plan to construct a metro system in Panama City at an estimated cost of \$1.5 billion.

The opportunities are out there and more are on the way. Under this agreement, Canadian suppliers would be granted non-discriminatory access to a broad range of government procurement opportunities including those under the responsibility of the Panama Canal Authority. Canadian firms possess the expertise in the areas that Panama is looking to develop. This agreement would enable them to bid competitively in pursuit of such opportunities.

However, it is important to note that many of these projects are already under way. If we delay implementing this agreement, Canadian companies risk losing out on major procurement contracts because they would not be able to take advantage of the government procurement provisions contained in the FTA. It is therefore critical that the Canada-Panama economic growth and prosperity act be implemented without delay.

I know some hon. members have raised concerns about the potential impact of pro-trade agreements on workers. The benefits of this FTA are clear. Canada needs more growth and more jobs. But let me assure the House, this government believes that growth and jobs cannot come at the expense of workers' rights or the environment. That is why the Canada-Panama economic growth and prosperity act would also be accompanied by an important side agreement that demonstrates our joint commitment to corporate social responsibility, the rights of workers and preserving the natural environment.

In parallel to this free trade agreement, the government has signed robust environment and labour agreements with Panama. I know that some members of Parliament here today think that Bill C-24 should be debated at length and ask why this government is in such a rush to pass this bill. The Canada-Panama economic growth and prosperity act was concluded and signed nearly two years ago. We have already lost tremendous opportunities by waiting to implement this agreement.

A bill to implement the Canada-Panama FTA was introduced in the 40th Parliament. The legislation was debated for 15 days and almost 30 hours. The Standing Committee on International Trade thoroughly studied this trade agreement in the previous Parliament and reported the bill back to the House without amendments.

At this point, I sincerely hope the hon. members of the House will work together to complete the debate at second reading on an expedited basis. We cannot continue to lose tremendous opportunities by waiting to implement this agreement. It is time to get the bill through the House.

It is important to note that Canada is not alone in its efforts to forge a closer economic relationship with this economy. Other countries are taking notice of Panama's potential and they are looking to gain first-mover advantage into this strong and growing market.

● (1545)

We in Canada cannot afford to sit on the sidelines while other countries vigorously pursue trade deals to secure market access for their products and services in Panama. Panama has an active and ambitious pro-trade agenda that includes FTA negotiations with a range of partners. Panama's FTA negotiations with the European Union were conducted in May 2010. This free trade agreement is expected to be signed later this spring and could possibly enter into force by the end of 2012.

Even more important to Canada, however, our main competitor in the Panamanian market, the United States, has completed an FTA with Panama. The United States Congress has already approved this agreement. The United States-Panama trade promotion agreement could very well come into force this year. If the House does not act swiftly and decisively, Canadian companies will be at a significant competitive disadvantage. Canadian firms will lose market share in Panama if U.S. firms benefit from preferential access to the Panamanian market while Canadian products continue to face duties.

We must act now to ensure Canadian companies compete on an even playing field and remain competitive in the Panamanian market. Closer economic ties with Panama promise to deliver further gains for Canadian exporters, investors, consumers and the economy as a whole. The benefits of a pro-trade agreement with Panama are clear. An agreement with Panama would support more Canadian jobs by enhancing our ability to export more goods and services into this market.

One of the associations I work with is ParlAmericas. I had the chance to go to Panama to speak with the *diputados* there about this agreement and what it means to them. This past summer I spent some personal time there with one *diputado*, who took me around to some of the high-risk communities that are in very poor suburbs in Panama City. He showed me just how much they rely on trade. They view trade as the ticket for the four-, five- and six-year-olds, who came running up to us looking for baseball bats or toys. Their parents and families want good jobs. They say they would have opportunities if they were allowed to compete in the world. They asked me why Canada will not sign this free trade agreement and what is taking so long.

The people of Panama understand trade. They are not scared of it. They understand that trade would bring benefits to their country just as it would to our country. That is why this is such a fair trade agreement and why the Panamanians have been asking us for so long to get this through. The ambassador for Panama here in Canada has been working around the clock trying to make sure that all members of the House understand how good this agreement is for Canada and Panama. This is a positive step forward. This is important for our companies and businesses.

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When we talk about growth in Canada and our position in the world, we need to keep making trade deals like the one we have created for Panama. We also need to keep making trade deals like the trans-Pacific partnership agreement in areas like India and Korea. We have to be willing to allow our companies to compete with fair and unfettered access. That is what this government is doing.

I want to credit the Minister of International Trade for the action he has taken in this regard. This is a minister who gets it. He understands the importance of trade. He gets it because he talks to Canadian business people. He asks what he can do to help them grow their businesses, to make their businesses stronger and to ensure they continue to employ people. They tell him they want market access to Panama, Colombia and the United States. They want to make sure that when they have market access and have disputes, they can settle them. They say they simply want fair market access. Canadian companies are willing to compete and love to compete.

In my riding there are a lot of pulses grown. I have an agricultural riding and the pulse growers are ecstatic about this. They see a tremendous opportunity to sell pulses into the Panamanian market. They view Panama as a good stepping stone into the entire Latin American region for the pulse sector. They are not scared to compete. In fact, the Panamanians look at the quality of the pulses that Canada produces and the protein that comes from them. They say it is great and they are excited. If we do not have the FTA in place, another country will fill that market.

Do not think that other countries are standing still. Other countries look at the strategic importance of Panama and say they need to be there, that they cannot let the Canadians beat them there. What has Parliament done? It has delayed, delayed and delayed. There have been elections and other things that have delayed it, which are no fault of any parliamentarian, but in the same breath, there is no reason to delay now.

● (1550)

We need to move forward now. We need to see this agreement come to fruition. We need to allow our businesses to go down there and build those relationships in Latin America, especially in Panama. One thing we have to understand when we are dealing with Panama or any of the countries in Central America and South America, is that they deal based on relationships. Canadian companies need time to go down there and build personal one-on-one relationships with partners they can work with down there. They need the time. Canadian companies need this agreement passed so that they can go down there and take advantage of all these economic opportunities that I have talked about. That is just the tip of the iceberg.

We only need look at the growth potential of Panama, its location, the Panama Canal, the airport in Panama City, where Copa flies into, which is to be an international hub for every country in Central America and South America. There is so much potential. I would sure hate to see us delay our businesses from taking advantage of this potential.

That is why I would strongly encourage all members to look forward and talk to their constituents. The reality is that we need to get this agreement done as quickly as possible and get the bill through committee.

I would remind members it has already been vetted at committee. There is no reason for the committee to take a whole lot of time before bringing this back to the House. The committee should be able to look at previous testimony and understand the issues.

I would also remind the House that it did come back to the House from committee with no amendments, not one amendment. I would also remind the House that occurred during a minority government situation. It was a committee that had the involvement of all parties to push it through.

I would encourage my colleagues to use that co-operation as they did before to push this bill through, in order to allow Canadian companies to take advantage of the Panamanian market and allow Panamanians to experience the products Canadian companies have to offer.

Our businesses will benefit. Jobs will be created. Canada's economy will get stronger. Our constituents will thank us for that.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I like the hon. member and I certainly think he put what is a fairly poor argument from the government's standpoint across as well as he could. He is dealing with the PMO's talking points.

The reality is the government has been a massive failure on trade. Canada now has the largest merchandise deficit, the largest current account deficit on balance of payments in our country's history. Why is it happening? We are fundamentally exporting raw materials and jobs out of the country, importing the finished goods that come with the higher-end jobs, which is why Canadians are strapped like never before, have seen a reduction in real wages, have seen lower salaries, and are at the highest level of indebtedness in history. That is the Conservatives' record. They have done the worst in practically everything.

The Conservatives are moving forward with this Panama trade deal. I just want to raise that Panama is one of the world's worst tax havens. We heard that in the trade committee. It has an estimated 400,000 corporations, according to the U.S. state department, and major Colombian and Mexican drug cartels, as well as Colombian illegal armed groups using Panama for drug trafficking and money laundering purposes.

Nothing in this bill prevents that continued money laundering. In fact, there is nothing in the bill that provides for full disclosure.

Why would the member support something when the due diligence was not done, and when the concerns about the laundering of dirty drug money are everywhere on this planet? Only the Conservative Party seems to support the laundering of dirty drug money.

● (1555)

Mr. Randy Hoback: Mr. Speaker, the member would have credibility if the NDP actually agreed with any type of forward movement in trade.

Government Orders

The member has not agreed with any trade deal. He has never said that it has been good for businesses. He has not gone out to talk to prairie farmers who said they have market access for their pulses and pork, which means that farmers are going to have more money in their back pockets. The member has not done that.

He seems to go on with rhetoric and more rhetoric, over and over again, which kind of fits the NDP profile. Those members are just going to oppose. They will never give anything a fair chance. When it comes to a piece of government legislation, they are never going to say that it is probably the right thing to do, and that they will vote with the government because it is the right thing to do.

An example would be the pooled retirement pension plans. It is a very simple piece of legislation that would help workers and business owners provide pensions for people. Instead of supporting something as simple as that, the NDP opposes it.

Could the member provide an example of when the NDP might agree with a piece of legislation that comes from the government? I do not think those days are coming.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Party has recognized the valuable role free trade agreements can play in terms of generating very important jobs. Somewhere around 20% of Canadians are dependent on exports and having those secure markets.

I found it interesting to hear the member talk about how we need to move quickly to pass the bill. I would remind the member that there were other pieces of legislation that the government moved much more quickly on which may have caused the delay on this bill coming before us. There was a bill designed to kill the Canadian Wheat Board which consumed debate time and ultimately hurt prairie farmers. There was the bill on increasing the size of the House of Commons. Those bills seemed to have higher priority, a bill to have more politicians and a bill to kill the Wheat Board, than this bill.

Could the member provide some comment as to why those bills had a higher priority than this bill?

Mr. Randy Hoback: Mr. Speaker, I acknowledge that the Liberal Party at least understands that trade is important to Canada. However, I do not think the member understands how important it was to change the Canadian Wheat Board. In fact, the Canadian Wheat Board is still alive today and will be alive five years from now. It is just the operation of the Canadian Wheat Board that has changed.

The member also needs to understand that if the opposition was not trying to continually delay we would not have to use closure to get legislation through. Things would have flown through in a much more timely fashion and probably this legislation would have come forward a lot quicker.

He could help us do that on this piece of legislation. He could help us ensure that it goes through committee relatively quickly. The ball is in his court. I look forward to his co-operation at committee so that we can get this bill through, get it back to the House, get it off to the Senate and get royal assent. I know that he is a fan of Canadian businesses and cheers them on. Once the bill is passed, we will be

able to get to work in Panama and get some jobs for our employees here in Canada.

Mr. Gerald Keddy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened very closely to the member talk about the Canada-Panama free trade agreement. When the NDP were asking questions, I could not help but think of a number of things. First of all, the NDP has never supported a free trade agreement and we do not expect the NDP to start supporting one in the immediate future.

More importantly, this agreement has side agreements on labour and environmental practices, and an agreement against money laundering. These are all things that would help to move the Panama government and economy forward. An increase in exports of Canada's superior agriculture products would improve nutrition in Panama. Over and above that, with the twinning of the Panama Canal, Panama will handle 5% of the world's trade. The opportunity for Canadian companies is huge. I would like the hon. member to comment on that.

• (1600)

Mr. Randy Hoback: Mr. Speaker, I would appreciate it if the parliamentary secretary could help me educate the member from the NDP on just how important this is to the people of Canada. Let us look at other countries where we have done trade deals in the past.

We made a trade deal with Costa Rica and the quality of governance has gone up in that country. We can look at the quality of lifestyle for the people of Costa Rica. We see those types of things happening in Panama. We also see that happening with some of our other trade agreements, with Colombia for example, and Honduras, which we hope will get through the House fairly quickly too.

Economic growth is good. It is not a bad thing. Profit is not a bad word. It is not a problem. I expect it helps people socially when they have a job and they can go to work. They want to do something.

There are numerous examples of Canadian businesses that have gone into different countries around the world with strategic partnerships which have benefited the other country and Canada. A good example would be Research In Motion. The BlackBerrys that we all use are developed here in Canada, but are made in Mexico. What a great partnership for both Canada and Mexico.

Those are the types of things we need to build as we do these trade agreements. Those are the things that will see both countries thrive in future.

Government Orders

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, it is great to come back to the member for Prince Albert because he is well aware that the NDP put forward a series of amendments to this bill because, as with most of those who are concerned about dirty drug money laundering, we believe that an agreement like this without a tax information exchange agreement is not a prudent or responsible course. However, the government just went ahead. Panama said it wanted to remain as a tax haven and to continue to launder the money that comes from drug gangs in Colombia and Mexico. The Conservatives love to stand in this House and pontificate about how they are tough on crime, and we hear that expression all the time. They are going to allow those drug gangs to continue to launder money in Panama and the Conservatives are not going to put anything in this agreement to reduce or curtail it. Financial institutions dealing between Panama and Canada do not even have to report back.

How does the member for Prince Albert, whom I like and respect, think his constituents would take his going back and saying the Conservatives did not get a tax information exchange agreement, which has to be done with a money-laundering tax haven, but the Conservatives think it is fine that drug money laundering continues in Panama and they want to facilitate that in Canada? How would his constituents respond to that?

Mr. Randy Hoback: Mr. Speaker, again it goes back to the classic NDP position to oppose everything. It does not matter what is on the table, the NDP is just going to oppose it.

When my constituents look at this deal they understand that no country is like Canada. Canada is a great beacon to the world. Canada is a nation which every other country looks at and strives to be like. We could offer a hand up or we could ignore them. We could actually work with them and help them improve the capacity of their government or we could ignore that. I would rather do trade with them. I would rather see their standard of living rise so their public security would get stronger. I would rather work with the Panamanian government or any government in Central or Latin America on public security, the drug trade or human trafficking, rather than discipline it or lecture to it.

The member would prefer to go and lecture to Panama about all the things that are wrong with Panama. I would rather go down there and work with the Panamanians to try to understand the issues and help them achieve results and improve their governance. If I can do that through a trade deal, that is a good first step in ensuring that happens.

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise to speak to the trade agreement between Panama and Canada. However, before I speak to that, I would like to speak about the general trade policy of the government.

It has been said in debate in the House that for the first time in 30 years, under the Conservative government, we have seen trade deficits. This is in part due to our over-dependence on the U.S. economy and the U.S. downturn, but it also has something to do with the failure of the government to effectively defend Canadian interests, the Canadian economy, Canadian companies and Canadian workers, against U.S. protectionism. We know there is a knee-jerk protectionism in the U.S. that crosses party lines. It is in the Democrats, the Republicans, the Tea Partiers and the occupiers in the

U.S. There is a knee-jerk protectionism when times are tough, and we know that times are tough in the U.S.

We have to do a better job on both ends of Pennsylvania Avenue: at one end, the administration, the White House, and at the other end, Congress. We have to do a better job in defending Canadian interests legislator to legislator, senator and member of Parliament to senator and congressperson, government to government, minister to minister, prime minister to president. We have seen stronger relations between presidents and prime ministers than we have between the current President of the United States and the current Prime Minister of Canada.

The reality is there needs to be more attention placed in Canada on defending ourselves from U.S. protectionism. We have seen more than one set of legislative actions in the U.S. in buy American type provisions, which have threatened, hurt and, in fact, eliminated Canadian jobs and cut Canadian companies out of participating in U.S. government contracts. That has had a pernicious effect. We have seen buy American type provisions rear their heads again just recently and there is tremendous concern among Canadian manufacturers.

Looking at the overall Canadian economy, it is important to realize that while the macro numbers look reasonably good in some areas, if we go just below and break them down by region, we are having a very strange sort of recovery in Canada. In fact, what the world is going through now is not an ordinary recession and recovery, but is really a global economic restructuring.

Part of what is happening in Canada reflects that global economic restructuring with the rise of China and India and the demand for natural resources, such as oil, gas, potash and minerals of all sorts. We are lucky in many ways, as a country, to have so much natural resource wealth. The positive side of it is we do have that natural resource wealth and we do have the capacity to meet the demand for those resources. We do well within those sectors and within those provinces that have those resources.

If we look at Alberta, Saskatchewan and parts of Newfoundland, the economy looks much better than it does in the traditional economic heartland of Canada, Ontario, Quebec, the Maritimes, where we see a real falling back and a falling behind. In many ways what we are going through as a country reflects what some people call the Dutch disease, where our dollar is being driven up by demand for our natural resources and there is a crowding out of traditional manufacturing and value-added jobs. That is something we have to look at as a country. We have to consider that as parliamentarians. We have to understand the growing disparity between have and have not provinces.

Government Orders

One of the ways to address that is through a more robust trade policy. The current Conservative government spent its first three years in office chiding China and ignoring India. The government has turned around on both India and China as of late. It is going to take a while to rebuild relations with China. Canada's relationship is at a historic low after 40 years of remarkable relations with China, going back to prime minister Trudeau's opening up of China in 1968. He was the first western leader to establish diplomatic relations with post-revolution China. Before Nixon built a bridge to China, Trudeau had done that.

●(1605)

Much of that goodwill was damaged in the first three years of the current Conservative government. I do see that it is working assiduously to try to rebuild those relations, and that is the right thing to do. However, it is important to recognize that damage was done to those relations early on.

If we ask many global economists where they see the growth coming in the next 10 to 15 years, it is broadly believed that Africa represents tremendous opportunities. We have had a traditional aid relationship with Africa. We have to move from simply aid to an increased discussion and movement forward on trade with Africa. It is a continent with which Canada has had traditionally strong and historic relations and friendships. We need to redouble those relations. We should see the great commercial opportunity in Africa, opportunity that can benefit the people of Africa and the people of Canada. We could be partners in progress as Africa moves forward.

The Conservative government has focused largely on Latin America. Deepening our trade relations with Latin America is generally a good idea. It is not mutually exclusive, however, with having deep trade relations with China, India and Africa.

I see an opportunity for Canada to be a centrepiece in terms of global trade in many ways, to be a more central and leading figure in global trade for a number of reasons.

First, we have the best banking system and financial services system in the world. Not only are our banks successful in Canada, but they are successful globally, in China, India and Latin America. In some of the fastest growing economies in the world, Canadian banks are present and they are growing. A few months ago Bank of Nova Scotia bought 20% of the Bank of Guangzhou in China. A little over a year ago Bank of Nova Scotia bought all of Royal Bank of Scotland's Colombia assets. More recently, Bank of Nova Scotia bought a significant retail operation in Colombia. Bank of Nova Scotia can be found everywhere throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. It is not just Bank of Nova Scotia but Royal Bank, Bank of Montreal and TD Bank, particularly in the U.S.

One of the things that gives us influence in other countries is the presence and the strength in the reach of our financial services sector. We could be doing more to harness the power of the success of our financial services sector to affect positive change and influence in those countries.

Second, as I mentioned earlier, we are blessed in Canada with tremendous natural resource wealth that the China's and the India's of the world need. We have become very good at extraction. Our expertise in the extractive sectors is second to none in the world, not

just in terms of oil and gas but also in mining. Much of the way we have developed our extractive sectors and our oil and gas sectors in Canada has given us the capacity to export wherewithal and technologies to other countries that have the benefit of natural resource wealth and are in the process of developing that wealth.

There is a lot of natural resource wealth in Latin America. Many of the countries in Latin America face some of the same challenges we have faced over decades in Canada. Many of them have a lot of natural resource wealth and need to now face the reality and the opportunity that there is unprecedented demand for that wealth. We can help, work with and partner with these countries.

●(1610)

Colombia is a country like Canada, with a lot of natural resource wealth in mining and in oil and gas. However, we also share a history with the people of Colombia in that neither Canada nor Colombia is a colonizing country. We are countries that were colonized. We also have a history of indigenous and first peoples in both countries.

Thirty years ago in Canada, most first nations and aboriginal peoples and their leadership were opposed to the development of natural resources and extraction in oil and gas. Today they are business and financial partners in the development of those extractive sectors. I would like to see us working co-operatively with the governments of Latin America to help them and us learn and partner in terms of best practices around the responsible development of natural resource wealth in a way that shares that wealth with first nations and indigenous peoples.

In these countries and in Panama there continue to be challenges. There have been issues around tax havens in Panama. There has been progress on that, but there needs to be more. I am of the belief that, in the same way there were and are challenges in Colombia, we have to ask ourselves, as people outside of these countries, how can we best influence and effect change in those countries. I believe that free trade agreements, with robust rules-based frameworks on things like labour, environmental practices and human rights, can strengthen our capacity to effect positive change and to partner with good people in those countries who want to move forward and to help their people move forward. Free trade agreements with strong labour and environmental frameworks give us more influence and the capacity to help in these countries, not just to build wealth for Canadian business people or to create jobs for Canadians but also to help those countries develop their economies and societies.

I share concerns that people in the House have expressed, from all parties sometimes, about some of the challenges faced in these countries in the past and present. The drug trade is an example. If we do not provide legitimate trade opportunities to these countries, the only opportunities that people have growing up in their villages and cities to make a living will be through the drug trade, narcoterrorism. If we are concerned about the drug trade in these countries, one of the best ways to help these governments and people fight narcoterrorism and the drug trade is to extend to them legitimate trade opportunities to buy their legitimate products. If we are not willing to do that, we are leaving many of those people stranded, potentially with their only lifeline being the drug trade, which is destroying their country and their society.

Government Orders

Free trade agreements with strong rules-based approaches to labour, to human rights and to the environment can help wean some of these countries away from the criminal activities that have sadly been part of their history over far too long a period. There has been a lot of progress in Colombia. Throughout Latin America, the economic growth in places like Colombia and Panama has been incredible in recent years.

● (1615)

For decades, Latin American countries were basket cases in terms of their economies. Whenever there was a World Economic Forum panel on Latin America, it was always on the basis of what we would do with Latin America. There was always another financial crisis, another series of government bailouts and country defaults. Last year, I served on a panel on the future of Latin America with President Martinelli from Panama. Last year, at the World Economic Forum, the focus of the panel was on the remarkable growth, opportunity and progress of Latin America.

I can tell the House that people like President Santos of Colombia and President Martinelli of Panama speak quite openly to the challenges they face in their countries. They speak quite openly to the challenges they face with corruption, organized crime, narcoterrorism, issues around FARC and other organizations, but at the same time as they acknowledge those challenges, they have put in place a road map to move forward.

Since the drug trade issue has been raised in the House as part of this discussion, I want to close with some consideration of drug policies in Canada, in the U.S. and in much of the developed world and their pernicious effect on Latin America. There have now been two different panels conducted by two different groups of former Latin American presidents, countries like Panama, Colombia and Mexico, on the impact of North American drug policies on their countries and the remarkable destabilizing impacts of our war on drugs on their countries.

I will provide a couple of facts. Prohibition did not really work that well with liquor. During the time of prohibition, Americans continued to drink but the biggest bourbon factory in the world was in Chihuahua, Mexico. However, after prohibition was lifted, it went back to Kentucky. The reality is interdiction, policing and incarceration did not work in terms of prohibition and it does not work in terms of our war on drugs. It costs a lot of money, it is hugely expensive economically and societally, and it is remarkably destabilizing to the countries of Latin America.

Colombia was largely successful due to the planned Colombia initiative, which was initially launched by President Pastrana and President Clinton and then further implemented by President Uribe and President Santos as a minister. In Colombia, the war on drugs was quite successful. However, Colombia's success in the war on drugs drove the drug cartels, which are very mobile, to Mexico. That is one of the reasons that Mexico and President Calderon have faced such challenges in the last couple of years. Production and distribution can be stamped out in one country but it goes somewhere else.

We need to actually develop rational approaches to drug policy in places like Canada and the U.S. and understand that interdiction, arresting and putting people in jail for this will not be as successful

as treating drug issues as addiction and health issues. If we were to invest a fraction of what we are spending on police and incarceration in our war on drugs into treating drug addiction as a health care issue, treating mental health and helping people with addictions, we would have better results in Canada and we would stop punishing people in countries in Latin America who are penalized by our continued failed war on drugs policy in Canada.

● (1620)

When we are talking about that region of the country, I think it is important that we are open about all aspects of our engagement. One of the areas where are playing a negative role is in our drug policy here in Canada and in countries like the U.S. where we are playing a negative role in terms of our relations with Latin America.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Before moving on to questions and comments, it is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Etobicoke North, the Environment; and the hon. member for Vancouver Kingsway, Citizenship and Immigration.

● (1625)

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the NDP agrees that Canada has a high volume of trade, both as an exporter and an importer. However, I have two concerns about such trade agreements: respect for the human rights of workers and for the environment, especially in countries with less environmental regulation. This can lead to abuses by major corporations that have a great deal of money.

My question is about sustainable development. My hon. colleague for Burnaby—New Westminster has proposed amendments that would result in a better definition of sustainable development in the agreement. The Brundtland Report, prepared by the World Commission on Environment and Development, defines sustainable development as development that “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” I think it is a very good definition.

Does my Liberal colleague agree with this definition and, in particular, does he believe that sustainable development must be an integral part of the free trade agreement with Panama and must be respected?

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Speaker, I absolutely agree that we must find ways to foster the sustainable development of countries with which we enter into agreements. I acknowledge that this agreement contains many provisions that signal progress in terms of sustainable development. I would like to have a better understanding of this particular approach. I agree that we must develop other approaches, but I need to review the information and understand what is being proposed.

[*English*]

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we live in a global society today and international trade is part of what is going on. We need to be involved as Canadians but that trade must be fair, equitable and sustainable over a period of time.

Government Orders

We know that Panama has been used as a money laundering, drug trafficking country by Mexican and Colombian cartels. The member was talking about how, through trade, we can help get people working instead of getting involved in the drug trade.

I have an example that I will present to my colleagues. We have seen what has happened in Mexico in the last number of years. We had a trade agreement with Mexico that was negotiated, NAFTA, and that trade agreement did not slow down the drug trade. In fact, as we have seen in news reports over the years, the drug trade in Mexico has gone up. Would the member care to comment on that?

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Speaker, in fact, the drug trade in Mexico for many years was in significant decline. Certainly legitimate trade between Canada and Mexico within NAFTA has grown significantly and continues to grow. However, the member is quite right. In recent years, the growth of the drug trade and drug activities in Mexico has grown, but it is very difficult to tie that with a free trade agreement.

I would say that most people who study the drug trade on an ongoing basis, most scholars and experts in this field, say that the biggest reason for the growth of the drug trade and crime in Mexico and the violence associated with it in recent years has been the fact that Colombia was successful in clamping down on it and driving much of it out. That goes to my point that the drug cartels are mobile. As long as there is demand here in North America and in Europe and as long as we impose this prohibition, this failed war on drugs, we will continue getting supply somewhere.

That speaks to the final point in my remarks. I think we need to consider our failed war on drugs here in Canada, not just in terms of its incredible cost to the Canadian economy and to society, but also its incredibly negative effect on a lot of the countries with which we purport to be friends.

• (1630)

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I work with my colleague from Kings—Hants on the trade committee and on finance. We do not always agree, in fact, often we disagree, but there were many points in his speech with which I did agree, particularly the point that the mean-spirited government's cut backs on addiction programs and crime prevention programs have helped to fuel what has been an ongoing problem in Canada.

I disagree with the member on the interpretation that a free trade agreement, particularly a right-wing free trade agreement like the Conservatives are bringing forward, would help the situation. We have seen demonstrably that, under NAFTA, a trade agreement that had as one of its attributes the idea that somehow this would stimulate development of the rural economy in Mexico, it has done the exact opposite. It is a meltdown. It is a catastrophe in rural Mexico. Part of that has been because of the removal of the subsidies that have allowed American corn to be dumped into rural Mexican markets that has helped to provoke what is an ongoing tragedy.

I want to come back to the Panama agreement. I know that the member shares concerns around how the government goes about negotiating agreements. We have an agreement with Panama where Canada approached Panama to sign a tax information exchange agreement a number of times but Panama just said that it would not exchange tax information.

I would like the member from Kings—Hants to comment on how the government could have possibly muffed what should have been a key consideration before it brought this agreement to the floor of the House of Commons.

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Speaker, movement to greater transparency in finance and taxation is important. It is something that ought to be a strong priority of the government. I also believe that moving forward on a free trade agreement more deeply integrates our economies and increases the capacity for us to effect influence.

As with the hon. member, I would like to see, from a timing perspective, more movement on that as well. I would like to see the government move post-haste with that. However, I do not believe that signing a free trade agreement reduces the capacity of the government to do that at any time. In fact, it may have the opposite effect.

In terms of the general area of trade, this is where I think there is a fundamental difference between how the hon. member and I view these issues. I believe that the New Democratic Party in Canada ought to embrace some of the progress and evolution that other social democratic parties have around the world in terms of embracing trade. If we look at the labour party in Great Britain, the democrats in the U.S., or around the world generally, national social democratic parties have come to realize that globalization is a little like gravity: we do not have to like it but it is a reality. Instead of ignoring it and pretending that somehow we can shut off globalization, we would be better off if we were to engage with it and seek ways to increase our country's influence in that global economy.

In Canada, where we are such a tiny economy, we depend disproportionately on global markets. It is important to us, but it also increases our capacity to effect positive change in the world. My advice for the hon. member and his party is that they ought to move in that direction.

• (1635)

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to start by talking about the NDP approach to fair trade issues. As members know, we have come forward in the House for years and offered some of the best existing practices on trading issues around the world. We have come into the House and talked about the binding social obligations of Mercosur, for example, by social democratic countries in South America that have come together and put in place binding social obligations to reduce poverty. When we have raised that in the House, the Conservatives, not wanting to have anything to do with any sort of progressive fair trade agreement, have always said no. We have brought forward the progressive and binding human rights components that the European Union signed with countries outside of the European Union, again a product of a strong social democratic practice and principles, to make sure that those trade agreements actually include binding human rights obligations. The Conservatives and the Liberals have said they do not want any part of that.

Government Orders

We have pointed to some of the social democratic innovations. Australia, for example, has said that it would not put in place investor-state provisions because these override democratically elected governments. In an almost Flintstonian approach to trade taking us back centuries, the Conservative government continues to say, "Even though we're the only country in the world with these right wing investor-state provisions, we're going to keep them, Fred Flintstone. We're just going to keep pushing these bad components, primitive components, that every other country has moved away from, including the United States". After the United States signed the NAFTA, it moved away from the investor-state provisions which these Conservatives hold so dear. We have offered that innovation and the Conservatives again have consistently said no.

We have offered all of these progressive fair trade approaches. These are the kind of trade agreements that are actually catching fire around the world, but every single time the Conservatives have said no. They have never seen a progressive fair trade agreement they cannot say no to every single time.

We have offered examples like the auto pact that we strongly supported in the past, a pact that actually helped to sustain and build up our automotive sector. The Conservatives say no to that type of progressive fair trade agreement. The Conservatives have never seen a fair trade agreement they like. They have never wanted to move forward with any type of progressive legislation on trade. They continue with their Fred Flintstone approach to trade with an antiquated, 30-year old infrastructure and template coming out DFAIT.

Conservative members might say that although it is antiquated and is Fred Flintstonian, it creates jobs. Let us look at the facts. Let us look at the impact of this type of Conservative approach to trade over the last few years. I know members are aware that we have the worst, the most horrendous, merchandise deficit in our history in this country. That means we are not exporting manufactured goods any more but importing them. We are creating jobs in other countries of course, but the result in this country has been a hemorrhaging of manufacturing jobs, good family-sustaining jobs, which used to sustain families right across this country. Nearly half a million manufacturing jobs are gone because of the government.

The government might say that it is exporting natural resources and, of course, the jobs go with them hand over fist. However, if we look at the overall balance, the current account balance of Canada's balance of payments, it is at its most horrendous deficit in Canadian history too. Even there we see a massive failure by this government to actually manage trading relationships in such a way that we would actually create jobs in Canada.

We have biggest most horrendous merchandise deficit and the biggest and most horrendous current account deficit in our balance of payments. Those facts speaks for themselves. There is not a single Conservative who is able to stand up and address that. It is a massive failure. The Conservatives just have to wave the white towel and say they have failed. I can see some of them smiling and nodding: they understand they have failed on this issue.

What has been the result? Of course, we have seen that hemorrhaging of manufacturing jobs. What has replaced them? I will come back to the Conservatives' bogus job figures in a moment,

but when we actually look at what they have done to the economy, they have lost jobs, and the jobs they have created have been part time and temporary. Most tragically, the jobs the government has managed to create pay on average \$10,000 a year less than the jobs they have lost.

After six years in power, we have seen the Conservatives attempt to bring forward a very misguided and antiquated template dating back to another century and there has been a lack of follow-up. From that they have managed to create an economy where we are throwing the good jobs away and, at best, getting part-time and temporary jobs paying \$10,000 a year less.

● (1640)

What has the impact been for the average Canadian family?

I know that members and the people listening to this debate are aware that the average Canadian family over the last year has lost about 2% in real wages. Real wages have been tumbling. The decline has been serious and has had an impact not only on families but also on small- and medium-size businesses across communities and, as a result, on whole regions and provinces. It has an impact right across this country. We are looking at a 2% real wage fall for our middle class and hard pressed, poor Canadian families. We are seeing Canadians living through a substantial problem.

Tragically, the result is that Canadian families across this country from coast to coast to coast are now living with a record level of debt like we have never seen before in Canadian history. This level of debt has a stupefyingly significant impact on the average Canadian family. Families are already earning less and less because of some deliberate economic and trade policies of the government, and because of that level of debt, families are being more and more constrained.

These are the economic results we have to look at when we talk about what the government has done after six years in power. The results are the worst merchandise deficit in our history, the worst current account deficit in our balance of payments in our nation's history, and the worst level of indebtedness in our nation's history. That is Conservative economics.

Now the Conservatives will say they have created some jobs. Their jobs poor quality, part-time jobs, but they say they have created those jobs nonetheless. However, the reality according Statistics Canada data is that since May 2008, the government has actually created a quarter of a million jobs short of the level required just to maintain the same percentage of the labour force employed. Some 450,000 Canadians have come onto the labour market since May 2008, and only 200,000 of them have found work. That was even before we entered the catastrophic last six months under the current government.

We have seen job closures, factory closures. We have seen White Birch Paper, Electro Motive Diesel, and a whole litany of closed manufacturing facilities. At the same time, we have seen 60,000 full-time jobs evaporate, that is, 60,000 families losing a breadwinner. That is the record of the Conservative government.

Government Orders

The Conservatives say that their trade policy accentuates job creation, that somehow, magically, by signing these trade agreements, it will lead to job creation. However, in virtually every case where Canada has signed a trade agreement under the Conservatives, the exports to those markets have fallen after the agreements were signed.

There is only one exception and that is Mexico. I will not return to what my colleague from Surrey North mentioned, the catastrophic meltdown in rural Mexico that has led to ongoing drug wars that have killed tens of thousands of people. That in part has been due to the economic policies of the Mexican government, as well as the removal of the tariffs that has destroyed much of rural agriculture in Mexico.

• (1645)

What we see in every case is a fall in exports to those markets, in real terms, which Conservatives do not use when they bring out the figures. Then, when they have put together such a catastrophic list of trade deals, where in virtually every case our exports to those markets goes down, what are the Conservatives doing wrong, aside from the Fred Flintstonian approach to trade templates from 30 years ago, stuff that has been disregarded by most of the progressive world? The other aspect is Conservatives simply do not walk the talk on providing support for export industries.

On research and development, we have the worst level of public investment among industrialized countries, the worst level of patent development among industrialized countries, the second worst level of Ph.D. development among industrialized countries. The reality is, even before we get to the research and manufacturing capacity, when we look at what Conservatives put out there in exports, it is tiny. It is pennies compared to what our major competitors are putting out to support product promotion and product support in those export markets. Australia spends half a billion dollars. Canada spends \$13 million.

I have met trade commissioners, as I have travelled around the world with the trade committee and other committees, who do not even have the budget to buy a cup of coffee for a potential client of Canadian goods and services. The Conservatives have simply not walked the talk. They have starved that needed support for export industries for product promotion.

This brings us to Panama. The Conservatives failed on the trade strategy. They have not walked the talk on actually providing support for our export industries. For the third time they bring forward a bill, Bill C-24, on an agreement with Panama.

What is the problem with an agreement with Panama? We talked about this earlier. The state department in the United States has very clearly declared that Panama is one of the worst countries in the world for the money laundering that comes from illegal drug activity.

The government does not think about the impacts. It never does. There is never an in-depth study of the impact of signing a trade agreement with any country, which is part of the Fred Flintstonian approach of the Conservative government on trade issues. It does not do an evaluation before it enters into a trade agreement and it does not do an evaluation afterward. In fact, those figures I cited, in real terms, about export development did not even come from DFAIT.

We had to get those figures ourselves. Nobody on the Conservative side of the House is even monitoring what happens after a trade agreement is signed.

What we have is an agreement that the government has signed, in complete denial of what is a fundamental problem with Panama, and that is the fact that Panama does drug money laundering on a significant and ongoing massive scale. It has been cited by a number of organizations, the IRS in the United States, the U.S. State Department and the OECD, all of which have said that this is a tax haven for drug money, for illegal drug gangs in Colombia and Mexico.

The government, so panicked by its lack of economic performance, throws this agreement onto the floor of the House and does not even have the decency to do its due diligence before it gives it to members of Parliament to evaluate.

On this side of the House, the NDP caucus does thorough evaluations. We read through the bills. We take the government at its word and read every word to find out what the actual impacts are. Since the government does not do any due diligence and has no evaluation of what the impacts of the agreement are, we have to surmise and look at the impacts of the agreement.

Very clearly, from the outset when the government put forward this idea, we said that there was no way we should sign a trade agreement with Panama unless there was a solid and binding tax information exchange agreement in place. In a very real sense, we should not be importing from Panama the drug money, money laundering that takes place in Panamanian financial institutions. We said that very clearly when the government talked about negotiating an agreement. We said from the very outset that we needed a tax information exchange agreement.

• (1650)

To its credit, the government sent a letter to the Panamanian government. In the letter, the government said that it thought the Panamanians should try to close out the drug money, money laundering. It said that tentatively. The member for Prince Albert said earlier that the Conservatives did not want to lecture to drug gangs. I am sorry but on this side of the House we believe that when there are drug gangs involved, we should be cracking down on them. We should be more than lecturing, but the Conservatives may disagree.

We are talking about pretty fundamental economic policy but, more important, it is a reflection of Canadian values. It is also this idea which, on our side of the House, is something we take very seriously. We believe in walking the talk. When we talk about economic development, we believe in putting in place the mechanisms so Canada can grow and prosper economically. When we talk about fighting drug gangs, we do not say that we will try to fight the drug gangs in Canada, but that it is okay if they are in Panama laundering money and then sign a trade agreement that has no provisions to stop that money laundering in Panama from coming to Canada. We believe in walking the talk and being consistent.

We said that the tax information exchange agreement needed to be signed. We made that very clear from the beginning.

Government Orders

We heard testimony from a wide variety of people who came to the trade committee to talk about the trade agreement. It is important for members of the House, particularly on the Conservative side, to understand what the witnesses said about this agreement and the advisability of signing an agreement without any mechanisms to prevent money laundering.

Mr. Todd Tucker, who is the research director for Public Citizen's Global Trade Watch said:

—Panama is one of the world's worst tax havens. It is home to an estimated 400,000 corporations, including offshore corporations and multinational subsidiaries....According to the OECD, the Panamanian government has little to no legal authority to ascertain key information about these offshore corporations, such as their ownership. Panama's financial secrecy practices also make it a major site for money laundering from places throughout the world. According to the U.S. State Department, major Colombian and Mexican drug cartels, as well as Colombian illegal armed groups, use Panama for drug trafficking and money laundering purposes. The funds generated from illegal activity are susceptible to being laundered through Panamanian banks, real estate developments, and more.

As well, Dr. Teresa Healy, the senior researcher from the social and economic policy department at the Canadian Labour Congress, talked about the context of labour rights currently in Panama. She said:

In response to the international perception that Panamanian labour laws were rigid and a disincentive to foreign investment...[there were] unilateral changes to labour law...from workers, it allowed employers to fire striking workers and replace them with strike-breakers, it criminalized street blockades, and it protected police from prosecution. The severity of this attack on labour rights was met with strikes and demonstrations. The police were exceedingly harsh in their response.

She was talking in 2010. She went on to say, "At least six people were killed, protesters were seriously injured, and many were blinded by tear gas and police violence".

These are the kinds of issues that were brought forward to the trade committee, concerns that were raised about Bill C-24.

On the other side of the House, Conservatives say that there are export markets to be had. However, the reality is when we look at the practices and we look at the record of the government, in every case, save one and that case over the past few years was one that was not signed by the Conservative government, following the signing of those agreements, we have seen a decline in our export markets.

• (1655)

We are facing a serious situation: a decline in manufacturing capacity, a decline in jobs, a reduction in real income and a profound level of indebtedness in our country that we have never seen before. We need a fresh, new approach on trade, not a Fred Flintstonian approach from 30 years ago that has clearly failed. A new NDP approach on trade could really bring jobs to Canada and could bring a new prosperity to our country.

Mr. Gerald Keddy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened as closely as I could to the hon. member's statement. One always has to take most of what the hon. member says with a grain of salt.

He did say that we would be judged by walking the walk, and I believe that. We are judged by our deeds and our acts. The hon. member talked a bit about Panama, a lot about trade and a bit about Colombia. If we are to be judged by our acts, I will offer the hon.

member an opportunity to apologize to the House for what he said about the Colombian government. He brought it up in committee, said it was fact, never retracted it, never apologized for it. He said that two families of indigenous people in Colombia had been murdered by the Colombian government. It turned out they had been murdered by FARC, which is the socialist rebel group in the Colombian jungle.

He never apologized for saying that. We cannot believe him on that. He will not take it back. Why would we believe him on anything else?

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, that was the most pathetic attempt I have heard yet to try to turn the channel.

So we are both on the record, the parliamentary secretary knows full well that the family was killed by military connected to the government. That family was brought forward not by me but by Human Rights Watch, a very reputable human rights organization. The parliamentary secretary is referring to a completely different circumstance about which he is absolutely right. On more than one occasion, families have been killed by FARC. We do not dispute the facts about the family about which he talked.

What I find incredible is that he would try to pretend that all of those exist when every major human rights organization has pointed to the ongoing problems with paramilitaries connected directly to the government and to the ongoing problems with crimes connected to the military in Colombia. I find it incredible he would deny that all of those exist.

The reality is we are talking about two different families. I accept the version of facts that was put forward by Human Rights Watch in the case of the family that was killed by FARC.

What I find inconceivable is that a parliamentary secretary would stand in the House and defend and deny acts of human rights abuses committed by paramilitary organizations and by the Colombian military. That is despicable.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I look to the member to provide some insight in regard to NDP policy with respect to trade agreements. We in the Liberal Party have always believed in the importance of trade and how it generates thousands of jobs. There is a great deal of benefit from trade. Canada needs to reach out to all nations to expand opportunities, not only for nations abroad but to enhance opportunities here for all Canadians.

To the best of my knowledge, I do not believe the NDP has ever supported a free trade agreement of any sort. Could the member explain to us why the NDP feels there is no such thing as a good free trade agreement? Is it just hoping for a day when there will be a good free trade agreement? I do not quite understand why the NDP oppose the concept of free trade agreements, no matter what country it is.

• (1700)

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, the member for Winnipeg North did not bother to show up for the debate. In two-thirds of my speech I talked exactly about that—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please. Just a slight reminder to hon. members that it is not proper to refer to either the absence or presence of members in the chamber.

Government Orders

The hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I was referring not to his physical absence, but obviously a mental absence. If I spent 10 minutes talking about that particular issue, I would have expected he picked it up.

I referred to the examples that we have repeatedly put forward to the government around Mercosur and its binding social obligations, anti-poverty obligations, the binding human rights obligations that are contained in European Union agreements, as well as Australia and its movement gutting the investor-state provisions because that is simply not in the public interest at all. I talked about the Auto Pact that we defended on the floor of the House for years.

We have been putting forward very consistently progressive social democratic alternatives in trade repeatedly and we have never had the Conservatives agree to any of the many amendments that we have put forward at all. Therefore, the question really is—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please. I do not want to interrupt the hon. member, but I am sure there other members who may wish to pose questions.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Brome—Missisquoi.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Jacob (Brome—Missisquoi, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his very interesting speech about Panama. I understand that it is clearly a tax haven. Even Mr. Sarkozy, the French president, recognizes that it is a tax haven. I also understand that workers' rights there are not strictly enforced.

I would like my colleague to comment on two ideas. First, does sustainable development have a place in this agreement? And what is responsible investment?

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

Throughout our discussions on this free trade agreement, we have suggested amendments to include a sustainable development clause in the agreement. The Conservatives have systematically rejected every amendment.

I have been in the House for eight years, and I have noticed that, every time changes or amendments are suggested, the Conservatives systematically reject them. The Conservatives are wedded to their backward ideology, which impels them to sign right-wing free trade agreements. There is always a right-wing slant to the agreements that the Conservatives sign. They cling to their ideology even though people are making a concerted effort to do away with it this century.

Every other country in the world is making progress on free trade agreements, including agreements that involve sustainable development. Unfortunately, Canada has the worst free trade agreement template in the world.

[*English*]

Mr. Jeff Watson: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, Standing Order 18 says that a member should not be using offensive words against any member of the House. In defending himself against the question about whether he was exposing a member for not having

been in the House, the member for Burnaby—New Westminster questioned the mental capacity of a member of the House. He should withdraw the comment and apologize for it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): I thank the hon. member for Essex for his intervention. Indeed, the member for Burnaby—New Westminster, in his response to my intervention, did in fact impute a certain note in respect of the hon. member for Winnipeg North. I did not, indeed, hear anything unparliamentary in that exchange, but I would caution hon. members to take care in their references to other hon. members and not do so in a fashion that would in any way diminish their character.

● (1705)

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, the member for Winnipeg North is very intelligent. I was not impugning at all on his intelligence. He is an intelligent and effective member. I was questioning his alertness during my speech. That is all I was questioning.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): We have time for one short question and response. The hon. member for Winnipeg North.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the member could provide a very simple answer to a very simple question that I asked. Could the member clearly indicate which free trade—

Mr. Peter Julian: Four. My answer was four.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, the member says four. He might be the only New Democrat MP who says that they have voted for four. I cannot recall. Could the member indicate clearly which four free trade agreements? He said he voted for four of them. Could he tell us which four free trade agreements he voted for that came through the House of Commons? I do not believe he is right.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I cited four trade agreements that we supported. There was the auto pact. I talked about the EU binding agreement on human rights.

Mr. Gerald Keddy: The NDP never supported us.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: That's not true.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I would hope the member would show the politeness of actually listening.

There was the Mercosur binding social agreements. I also talked about Australia's move away from investor-state provisions.

Do we vote for bad Conservative trade agreements? No, only Liberals do, because they do not read the agreements. They do not understand the impact of the Conservatives' bad Fred Flintstone agreements that we say no to. The reality is when we look at the actual trade statistics, we have been proven right and they have been proven wrong.

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I wonder why today we are debating a free trade agreement between Panama and Canada. I wish I were standing here debating Bill S-4, the safer railways act, for example. That is a high priority for me.

Government Orders

The bill we are discussing would allow the Conservatives to be soft on crime and on criminals. How would the bill allow the Conservatives to do that? It would allow criminals to hide money obtained through illegal means in the tax haven of Panama. In fact, the Conservatives do not really want to track this money from illegal activities. They have no problem doing a trade deal with Panama even though Panama refused to sign the tax information exchange agreement which would disallow criminals from hiding their money in that country.

Right now there is absolutely no transparency. In a small country like Panama, there are 400,000 corporations, many of which are there just to hide their illegal funds. One might ask what kind of illegal activities those corporations in Panama are involved in. The country is used to launder drug money. It is used to divert aid. It is used to bribe the government. It is used to fund paramilitary groups. It is used to defraud shareholders. It is used to embezzle public funds. It is used for human trafficking. It is used to trade in illegal arms. Those criminal activities are intolerable and the people involved in them should be punished.

However, this trade deal would allow criminals not only to avoid taxes, but to also launder money and hide their funds. In fact, Panama is known as a major financial conduit for Mexican and Colombian traffickers' money laundering activities according to the U.S. Department of Justice and other entities. Let me read a memo from the U.S. Embassy in Panama that was revealed by WikiLeaks:

Along with its sophisticated banking services, Panama remains an environment conducive to laundering the proceeds from criminal activity and creates a vulnerability to terrorist financing.

These are the words of the U.S. Embassy, not of the NDP. The memo indicates:

The money laundering process of: placement (putting money into a legitimate financial institution), layering (distancing the money from its origin) and integration (causing the money to re-enter the economy in legitimate-looking form) is perfectly replicated in Panama.

My gosh. Placement, layering and integration; this is how criminals hide their money in Panama. Not just in that memo from 2006, but in 2009 a U.S. Embassy cable on Panama reported Panama's failure to report Colombian kingpin David Murcia Guzman's laundering of drug money. It is incredible. These criminals are using the drug money they have made from selling drugs and wrecking people's lives. They are able to take the money made from doing drug deals and hide it in Panama.

● (1710)

The Conservatives have said that is okay. They are going to turn a blind eye to it and will not even ask about who is behind the corporations. They do not want to know what kind of people are hiding money. They do not want to know about the illegal activities. They do not think it is up to them. They will see no evil and speak no evil, because it is another country. They are going to wash their hands of it and allow the criminals to continue their activities. That is inexcusable.

How would the trade deal make it even worse? The Canada-Panama trade deal would worsen the tax haven problems. As the OECD has noted, having a trade agreement without first tackling Panama's financial secrecy practices would encourage this secrecy and allow even more offshore tax dodging.

There is reason to believe that the trade deal would not only increase tax haven abuses, but it would also make fighting them that much harder. How would that happen? For example, even if we could persuade the government to put in place legislation giving Panama a deadline to clean up its act or face sanctions, and we tell the Canadian banks that they are restricted from transferring money to their affiliates, article 9.10 of this trade deal says that each party shall permit transfers relating to a covered investment to be made freely and without delay into and out of its territory.

What does that mean? It means speeding up the transfer of illegal funds. It means giving criminals more freedom to cheat. It means making sure that they can hide their funds without any barriers. Moreover, chapter 9 and chapter 12 of the FTA have non-discriminatory clauses that protect Panama's registered investors. That means protecting criminals from Canadians or anyone going after them.

Article 12.06 states that Canada will always allow Canadians to purchase financial services from banks operating in Panama.

This is the kind of deal that we are debating.

What is a tax haven? It means people do not have to pay any tax or very little tax on relevant income. They do not have to provide information about their income. There is a lack of transparency. There is no substantial activity by the taxpayers in that jurisdiction. That is the OECD's definition of a tax haven. Panama fits the criteria of this definition to a *t*. That is what it is known for.

Why are we doing a trade deal with that country? I looked at how much trade Panama is doing with Canada. I noticed that it is less than 1%. It is not a major trading partner for Canada.

● (1715)

Two-way merchandising trade between the two countries reached only \$149 million in 2008 and is less than 1%. Therefore, why this rush for trade with Panama? I would understand if we wanted to discuss trade with China. There is a big market there. It is not as if Panama is a big country. It is well known as a tax haven.

This trade deal is being negotiated in record time without any consultations. Perhaps one of the reasons is that the government does not want people to rise up and say that to shelter criminals and be soft on crime is not the way to go. Perhaps that is why we are debating this bill.

Panama is well known for allowing people who are close to bankruptcy to take their cash and assets to an anonymous offshore company so that they do not have to pay their creditors. They rack up a big bill and owe a lot of people a lot of money, so they take their assets and hide it in a corporation in Panama. No wonder they have tens of thousands of these corporations functioning very well.

Government Orders

Panama is also known for allowing people to transfer profit to these offshore centres. In fact, in 2008, Goldman Sachs paid a federal tax rate of 1%. This was before it collapsed. It would have paid 35% in the U.S., but it only ended up paying 1% because it was able to move a lot of its money to Panama.

Global Financial Integrity estimates that there is \$1.2 trillion in tax havens in secret jurisdictions around the world. One-third of that money, 33%, is money that comes from the proceeds of crime. As well, 3% of that money comes from corruption. That is \$335 billion of criminal funds hiding in tax havens around the world. Because of these tax havens, one might ask how much tax is not being paid to governments such as the Canadian government. In total, governments around the world are losing \$165 billion worth of taxes, which could go to AIDS, helping people in poverty, providing drugs for kids in Africa, providing education for women, creating jobs or building infrastructure around the world, but is not because of many tax havens, such as the ones in Panama.

Panama is also famous for the registration of ships. It is number one for flags of convenience. They could be Canadian ships. Some of us may recall that we have a famous person who has these ships that do not fly Canadian flags. Rather, they fly flags of convenience.

• (1720)

Do members know how many ships are registered in Panama? Eight thousand ships are registered there so they do not have to pay much tax. I would rather see some of these ships, those that are owned by Canadians and registered in Canada, pay Canadian taxes so we could take some of that money and provide health care for seniors, for example. There are lots of ways one could use the funds from tax avoiders.

Some of the 8,000 ships that are registered there, just registered but not really there, just fly the flag of convenience. Some of these ships do have crew members from Panama. What kind of people are they? Forty per cent of them are migrant Chinese workers who earn less than \$3,000 per year. As a result of registration in Panama, illegal fishing vessels can avoid fisheries regulations and controls. Some of these fishing vessels can fish illegally using methods that are prohibited by international laws. Since they hide in Panama and fly flags of convenience, they do not have to be regulated. I focus mostly on these illegal activities.

French president Nicolas Sarkozy, in a speech made at the end of the G20 conference in Switzerland in November of last year, named Panama as one of the countries with serious problems. He said that countries that remain tax havens would be shunned by the international community.

Shunned by the international community, except Canada perhaps, because the Canadian Conservative government wants to be good friends with Panama. It does not want to curb these illegal activities. It does not want to understand or learn about the illegal arms groups that use Panama for drug trafficking. The government does not want to learn about the funds generated from illegal activities that are being laundered through banks, real estate developments and various corporations.

Panama is a country of extremes. It is a country of about 3.4 million people and yet 40% of the people living in Panama are poor

and 27% of those folks, close to three out of ten, are extremely poor. The rate of extreme poverty is particularly acute in the indigenous population. Even though the country has endured extensive structural adjustments, liberalization and privatization in recent years, this has not translated into economic benefits for the population. I have no doubt that when this trade deal passes through the House of Commons it will not help four out of ten people in Panama and lift them out of poverty. It will help criminals, drug dealers, arms traders, people involved in extreme illegal activities and fraudsters.

• (1725)

Mr. Chris Alexander (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we on this side have unfortunately become all too familiar with positions taken by the NDP in comprehensive opposition to trade agreements, whether they be existing ones, future ones, those under negotiation or those under discussion today.

In my experience in the House, this is the first time that I have heard a member comprehensively denigrate an entire country. As a former member of Canada's foreign service, I find it curious, and to some extent embarrassing, that any member of the House would give such a negative characterization of a nation of over three million people in our hemisphere that is our partner in so many fields.

Would the hon. member opposite please correct the record and acknowledge that there are business people in Panama who run legitimate businesses, who want to trade in good faith, who respect the laws of their country and this country, and have a contribution to make by creating wealth to alleviate poverty in Panama and prosperity in this country?

Ms. Olivia Chow: Mr. Speaker, perhaps my friend across the aisle did not want me to quote the U.S. embassy's cables on Panama. Of course, there are very good business people in Panama. There are good people conducting trade activities and doing business. We want to support them. Yet we cannot turn a blind eye to the people who are not friends of Panama but are just using it to hide their money obtained by illegal means.

If the Conservative government is serious about cracking down on crime and being hard on criminals, then at a bare minimum it should demand a tax information exchange agreement. Why would the Conservatives not want to do that? At least all income could be tracked going into Panama, including that obtained by illegal means. Why would the government not want to do that? What does it have to hide?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The hon. member for Trinity—Spadina will have seven and a half minutes remaining for questions and comments when the House next returns to debate on this question.

*Private Members' Business***PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS**

● (1730)

*[Translation]***NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR CHRONIC CEREBROSPINAL VENOUS INSUFFICIENCY (CCSVI) ACT**

The House resumed from February 15 consideration of the motion that Bill C-280, An Act to establish a National Strategy for Chronic Cerebrospinal Venous Insufficiency (CCSVI), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): It being 5:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at second reading stage of Bill C-280 under private members' business.

Call in the members.

And the bells having rung:

● (1810)

[English]

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

*(Division No. 136)***YEAS**

Members

Allen (Weland)	Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Andrews	Angus
Atamanenko	Aubin
Ayala	Bélangier
Bennett	Benskin
Bevington	Bezan
Blanchette	Blanchette-Lamothe
Boivin	Borg
Boulerice	Boutin-Sweet
Brahmi	Brisson
Brosseau	Brown (Barrie)
Caron	Casey
Cash	Charlton
Chicoine	Chisholm
Choquette	Chow
Christopherson	Cleary
Comartin	Côté
Cotler	Crowder
Cuzner	Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Day	Dion
Dionne Labelle	Donnelly
Doré Lefebvre	Dubé
Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Dusseault	Eyking
Foote	Freeman
Fry	Garneau
Garrison	Genest
Genest-Jourdain	Giguère
Godin	Goodale
Gravelle	Grogue
Harris (Scarborough Southwest)	Harris (St. John's East)
Hassainia	Hsu
Hughes	Jacob
Julian	Karygiannis
Kellway	Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lamoureux	Lapointe
Larose	Latendresse
Laverdière	LeBlanc (Beauséjour)
LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)	Leslie
Lizon	MacAulay
Mai	Marston
Martin	Mathysen
May	McCallum
McGuinty	McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)

Michaud	Miller
Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)	Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)
Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)	Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)
Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)	Murray
Nantel	Nicholls
Nunez-Melo	Pacetti
Papillon	Patry
Péclet	Perreault
Pilon	Quach
Rae	Rafferty
Rajotte	Raynault
Regan	Richardson
Rousseau	Sandhu
Savoie	Scarpaleggia
Sgro	Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind-
sor)	
Sims (Newton—North Delta)	Sitsabaiesan
St-Denis	Stewart
Stoffler	Sullivan
Thibeault	Tilson
Toone	Tremblay
Trost	Trudeau
Turnel	Valeriot
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Albas	Albrecht
Alexander	Allison
Ambler	Anders
Anderson	Armstrong
Ashfield	Aspin
Baird	Bateman
Bellavance	Benoit
Bernier	Blaney
Block	Boughen
Braid	Breitkreuz
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)	Brunoogee
Butt	Calandra
Calkins	Cannan
Carrie	Chisu
Chong	Clarke
Clement	Daniel
Davidson	Dechert
Del Mastro	Devolin
Dreeschen	Dykstra
Fast	Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)
Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)	Flaherty
Fortin	Galipeau
Gallant	Gill
Glover	Goguen
Goodyear	Gosal
Gourde	Grewal
Harper	Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hawn	Hayes
Hiebert	Hillyer
Hoback	Hoepfner
Holder	James
Jean	Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)	Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Kent	Kerr
Komarnicki	Lake
Lauzon	Lebel
Leitch	Lemieux
Leung	Lobb
Lukiwski	MacKay (Central Nova)
MacKenzie	Mayes
McColeman	McLeod
Menegakis	Menzies
Merrifield	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Nicholson
Norlock	O'Connor
Obhrai	Oda
Oliver	Payne
Penashue	Plamondon
Poillievre	Preston
Raitt	Rathgeber
Reid	Rempel
Richards	Rickford
Ritz	Saxton
Schellenberger	Seeback

Private Members' Business

Shea
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Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to
Wong
Yelich
Young (Vancouver South)

Kent
Komarnicki
Lake
Lebel
Leitch
Leung
Lobb
MacKay (Central Nova)
May
McColeman
Menegakis
Merrifield
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)
Nicholson
O'Connor
Oda
Payne
Plamondon
Preston
Rajotte
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Sweet
Toet
Trottier
Uppal
Van Kesteren
Wallace
Warkentin
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)
Weston (Saint John)
Wilks
Wong
Yelich
Young (Vancouver South)

Kerr
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lauzon
Leaf
Lemieux
Lizon
Lukiwski
MacKenzie
Mayes
McLeod
Menzies
Miller
Norlock
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Penashue
Poilievre
Raitt
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Rempel
Richardson
Ritz
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Zimmer— 154

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion defeated.

* * *

[*Translation*]

MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

The House resumed from February 16 consideration of the motion.

The Speaker: The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on Motion M-274, under private members' business.

• (1820)

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

(*Division No. 137*)

YEAS

Members

Ablonczy	Adams
Aglukkaq	Albas
Albrecht	Alexander
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)	Allison
Ambler	Anders
Anderson	Armstrong
Ashfield	Aspin
Baird	Bateman
Bellavance	Benoit
Bernier	Bezan
Blaney	Block
Boughen	Braid
Breitkreuz	Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Brown (Barrie)	Bruinooge
Butt	Calandra
Calkins	Cannan
Carrie	Chisu
Chong	Clarke
Clement	Daniel
Davidson	Dechert
Del Mastro	Devolin
Dreeshen	Dykstra
Fast	Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)
Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)	Flaherty
Fortin	Galipeau
Gallant	Gill
Glover	Goguen
Goodyear	Gosal
Gourde	Grewal
Harper	Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hawn	Hayes
Hiebert	Hillyer
Hoback	Hoepfner
Holder	James
Jean	Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)	Kenney (Calgary Southeast)

NAYS

Members

Allen (Welland)	Andrews
Angus	Atamanenko
Aubin	Ayala
Bélangier	Bennett
Benskin	Bevington
Blanchette	Blanchette-Lamothe
Boivin	Borg
Boulerice	Boutin-Sweet
Brahmi	Brison
Brosseau	Caron
Casey	Cash
Charlton	Chicoine
Chisholm	Choquette
Chow	Christopherson
Cleary	Comartin
Côté	Cotler
Crowder	Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Day	Dion
Dionne Labelle	Donnelly
Doré Lefebvre	Dubé
Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Dusseault	Eyking
Foote	Freeman
Fry	Garneau
Garrison	Genest
Genest-Jourdain	Giguère
Godin	Goodale
Grogulé	Harris (Scarborough Southwest)
Harris (St. John's East)	Hassainia
Hsu	Hughes
Jacob	Julian
Karygiannis	Kellway
Lamoureux	Lapointe
Larose	Latendresse
Laverdière	LeBlanc (Beauséjour)
LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)	Leslie

Private Members' Business

MacAulay	Mai	Julian	Kellway
Marston	Martin	Lapointe	Larose
Mathysen	McCallum	Latendresse	Laverdière
McGuinty	McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)	LeBlanc (LaSalle—Énard)	Leslie
Michaud	Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)	Mai	Marston
Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)	Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)	Martin	Mathysen
Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)	Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)	May	Michaud
Murray	Nantel	Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)	Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)
Nicholls	Nunez-Melo	Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)	Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)
Pacetti	Papillon	Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)	Nantel
Patry	Péclet	Nicholls	Nunez-Melo
Perreault	Pilon	Papillon	Patry
Quach	Rae	Péclet	Perreault
Rafferty	Raynault	Pilon	Quach
Regan	Rousseau	Rafferty	Raynault
Sandhu	Savoie	Rousseau	Sandhu
Scarpaleggia	Sgro	Savoie	Sims (Newton—North Delta)
Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor)	St-Denis	Sitsabaiesan	Stewart
Sims (Newton—North Delta)	Stoffér	Stoffér	Sullivan
Sitsabaiesan	Thibeault	Thibeault	Toone
Stewart	Tremblay	Tremblay	Turmel— 90
Sullivan	Turmel		
Toone			
Trudeau			
Valerioté — 119			

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

* * *

[English]

CANADA LABOUR CODE

The House resumed from February 17 consideration of the motion that Bill C-315, An Act to amend the Canada Labour Code (French language), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Speaker: The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at second reading stage of Bill C-315 under private members' business.

• (1830)

[Translation]

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

(Division No. 138)

YEAS

Members

Allen (Welland)	Angus
Atamanenko	Aubin
Ayala	Benskin
Bevington	Blanchette
Blanchette-Lamothe	Boivin
Borg	Boulerice
Boutin-Sweet	Brahmi
Brosseau	Caron
Cash	Charlton
Chicoine	Chisholm
Choquette	Chow
Christopherson	Cleary
Comartin	Côté
Crowder	Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Day	Dionne Labelle
Donnelly	Doré Lefebvre
Dubé	Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Dusseauit	Freeman
Garrison	Genest
Genest-Jourdain	Giguère
Godin	Gravelle
Groguhé	Harris (Scarborough Southwest)
Harris (St. John's East)	Hassainia
Hughes	Jacob

Ablonczy	Adams
Aglukkaq	Albas
Albrecht	Alexander
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)	Allison
Ambler	Anders
Anderson	Andrews
Armstrong	Ashfield
Aspin	Baird
Bateman	Bélangier
Bellavance	Bennett
Benoit	Bernier
Bezan	Blaney
Block	Boughen
Braid	Breitkreuz
Brisson	Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Brown (Barrie)	Bruinooce
Butt	Calandra
Calkins	Cannan
Carrie	Casey
Chisu	Chong
Clarke	Clement
Cotler	Daniel
Davidson	Dechert
Del Mastro	Devolin
Dion	Dreeshen
Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Dykstra
Eyking	Fast
Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)	Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Flaherty	Foote
Fortin	Fry
Galipeau	Gallant
Gameau	Gill
Glover	Goguen
Goodale	Goodyear
Gosal	Gourde
Grewal	Harper
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)	Hawn
Hayes	Hiebert
Hillyer	Hoback
Hoepfner	Holder
Hsu	James
Jean	Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Karygiannis	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Kent
Kerr	Komarnicki
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Lake
Lamoureaux	Lauzon
Lebel	LeBlanc (Beauséjour)
Leaf	Leitch
Lemieux	Leung
Lizon	Lobb
Lukiwski	Lunney
MacAulay	MacKay (Central Nova)
MacKenzie	Mayes
McCallum	McColeman
McGuinty	McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
McLeod	Menegakis
Menzies	Merrifield

NAYS

Members

Private Members' Business

Miller
 Moore (Fundy Royal)
 Nicholson
 O'Connor
 Oda
 Pacetti
 Penashue
 Poilievre
 Rae
 Rajotte
 Regan
 Rempel
 Richardson
 Ritz
 Scarpaleggia
 Seeback
 Shea
 Shory
 Smith
 Sorenson
 Stanton
 Strahl
 Tilson
 Trost
 Trudeau
 Uppal
 Valeriotte
 Van Loan
 Warawa
 Watson
 Sky Country)
 Weston (Saint John)
 Williamson
 Woodworth
 Young (Oakville)
 Zimmer— 185

Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
 Murray
 Norlock
 Obhrai
 Oliver
 Payne
 Plamondon
 Preston
 Raitt
 Rathgeber
 Reid
 Richards
 Rickford
 Saxton
 Schellenberger
 Sgro
 Shipley
 Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind-
 sor)
 Sopuck
 St-Denis
 Storseth
 Sweet
 Toet
 Trottier
 Tweed
 Valcourt
 Van Kesteren
 Wallace
 Warkentin
 Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to
 Wilks
 Wong
 Yelich
 Young (Vancouver South)

Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
 Bruinooge
 Calandra
 Cannan
 Chisu
 Clarke
 Daniel
 Dechert
 Devolin
 Dykstra
 Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)
 Flaherty
 Gallant
 Glover
 Goodyear
 Gourde
 Harper
 Hawn
 Hiebert
 Hoback
 Holder
 Jean
 Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
 Kent
 Komarnicki
 Lake
 Lebel
 Leitch
 Leung
 Lobb
 Lunney
 MacKenzie
 McColeman
 Menegakis
 Merrifield
 Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
 Moore (Fundy Royal)
 Nicholson
 O'Connor
 Oda
 Payne
 Poilievre
 Raitt
 Rathgeber
 Rempel
 Richardson
 Ritz
 Schellenberger
 Shea
 Shory
 Sopuck
 Stanton
 Strahl
 Tilson
 Trost
 Tweed
 Valcourt
 Van Loan
 Warawa
 Watson
 Sky Country)
 Weston (Saint John)
 Williamson
 Yelich
 Young (Vancouver South)

Brown (Barrie)
 Butt
 Calkins
 Carrie
 Chong
 Clement
 Davidson
 Del Mastro
 Dreeshen
 Fast
 Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)
 Galipeau
 Gill
 Goguen
 Gosal
 Grewal
 Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
 Hayes
 Hillyer
 Hoepfner
 James
 Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
 Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
 Kerr
 Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
 Lauzon
 Leaf
 Lemieux
 Lizon
 Lukiwski
 MacKay (Central Nova)
 Mayes
 McLeod
 Menzies
 Miller
 Norlock
 Obhrai
 Oliver
 Penashue
 Preston
 Rajotte
 Reid
 Richards
 Rickford
 Saxton
 Seeback
 Shipley
 Smith
 Sorenson
 Storseth
 Sweet
 Toet
 Trottier
 Uppal
 Van Kesteren
 Wallace
 Warkentin
 Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to
 Wilks
 Wong
 Young (Oakville)
 Zimmer— 150

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion lost.

* * *

[English]

CRIMINAL CODE

The House resumed from February 27 consideration of the motion that Bill C-299, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (kidnapping of young person), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Speaker: The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at second reading stage of Bill C-299.

• (1835)

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

(Division No. 139)

YEAS

Members

Ablonczy
 Aglukkaq
 Albrecht
 Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
 Ambler
 Anderson
 Ashfield
 Baird
 Benoit
 Bezan
 Block
 Braid

Adams
 Albas
 Alexander
 Allison
 Anders
 Armstrong
 Aspin
 Bateman
 Bernier
 Blaney
 Boughen
 Breitzkreuz

Allen (Welland)
 Angus
 Aubin
 Bélanger
 Bennett
 Bevington
 Blanchette-Lamothe
 Borg
 Boutin-Sweet
 Brison
 Caron
 Cash
 Chicoine
 Choquette

NAYS

Members

Andrews
 Atamanenko
 Ayala
 Bellavance
 Benskin
 Blanchette
 Boivin
 Boulterice
 Brahmi
 Brosseau
 Casey
 Charlot
 Chisholm
 Chow

Private Members' Business

Christopherson	Cleary
Comartin	Côté
Cotler	Crowder
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)	Day
Dion	Dionne Labelle
Donnelly	Doré Lefebvre
Dubé	Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	Dusseault
Eyking	Foote
Fortin	Freeman
Fry	Garneau
Garrison	Genest
Genest-Jourdain	Giguère
Godin	Goodale
Gravelle	Groguhé
Harris (Scarborough Southwest)	Harris (St. John's East)
Hassainia	Hsu
Hughes	Jacob
Julian	Karygiannis
Kellway	Lamoureux
Lapointe	Larose
Latendresse	Laverdière
LeBlanc (Beauséjour)	LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)
Leslie	MacAulay
Mai	Marston
Martin	Mathysen
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)	Murray
Nantel	Nicholls
Nunez-Melo	Pacetti
Papillon	Patry
Péclet	Perreault
Pilon	Plamondon
Quach	Rae
Rafferty	Raynault
Regan	Rousseau
Sandhu	Savoie
Scarpaleggia	Sgro
Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor)	St-Denis
Sims (Newton—North Delta)	Stoffer
Sitsabaiesan	Thibeault
Stewart	Tremblay
Sullivan	Turmel
Toone	
Trudeau	
Valeriote — 123	

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried. Accordingly, the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights.

(Bill read the second time and referred to a committee)

The Speaker: It being 6:38 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

* * *

[Translation]

CORRECTIONS AND CONDITIONAL RELEASE ACT

The House resumed from December 1, 2011, consideration of the motion that Bill C-293, An Act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act (vexatious complainants), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, thank you for dispersing the crowd around me so that I could give my second reading speech on Bill C-293. I would like to take this opportunity to say that the Liberal Party will support this bill at second reading. In other words, we will send it to committee so that

it can be studied in more detail, mainly because this bill raises some questions for us.

However, before I debate or consider the content of the bill, I would also like to take the opportunity to pay tribute to the staff of the Correctional Service of Canada, who are devoted to their mission. Every day, they carry out a task that is not always easy, to say the least, in a very professional manner and in good faith. It is a difficult task. They sometimes have to manage diverse populations within the same correctional institution. They work hard and carry out their duty to the best of their abilities.

A few weeks ago, a number of members of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security and I had the opportunity to visit two penitentiaries in Kingston—the Collins Bay and Joyceville prisons. We saw that the correctional staff is very concerned about the success and progress of the prisoners and is very proud of the correctional programs.

I would like to mention in passing that, in Canada, we have one of the best correctional programs in the world, to the point where other countries are implementing the programs that we have developed over the years. I am proud to be able to say, further to a question that I asked in committee to a representative of the Correctional Service of Canada, that many of the programs we export today were designed and implemented during Liberal governments.

I like to think that the Liberal Party's approach to justice was able to yield a positive return in this area.

The devotion of the employees working in prisons is clear, as is that of the administrative staff who work in office towers in Ottawa, where the department is headquartered.

Madam Speaker, I wish to say that it is difficult for me to address this issue because there is a lot of noise coming from the other side of the House. I understand of course, but perhaps you could help me in this regard.

● (1840)

The Deputy Speaker: Order. I would ask all members carrying on conversations to do so in the lobbies.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Madam Speaker, when we toured those two penitentiaries, we were studying drug use in prisons. During committee hearings and our visits to Joyceville and Collins Bay penitentiaries, we learned that relations between correctional officers and inmates are vitally important, even crucial, not just to ensure that the correctional environment is orderly, but also to help inmates follow their rehabilitation plan. In other words, I would not call it a friendship, but it is a relationship that provides support. By having good relations with the inmates, staff can help them and encourage them to follow their rehabilitation plans, as I mentioned.

Private Members' Business

For all intents and purposes, this bill addresses this relationship between the staff and inmates. It is very important that the bill be effective in encouraging good relationships and not hindering them. It is also very important that it be effective in terms of cost management. We know that if there are many complaints at a penitentiary, they are a burden on the administrative employees of the penitentiary. At a time of budget cuts, when there might be cuts to the penitentiaries' budgets, we have to ensure that the budget is managed very effectively. This bill, if I understand correctly, tries to make the complaints and grievance process more efficient within the penitentiaries. That in itself is a good thing.

However, it is very important that the bill not contribute to undermining the relationships that exist between the correctional staff and the inmates. In other words, if the bill causes the inmates any frustration, if they feel their complaints are not being heard, that can hinder this very important relationship between the staff and the inmates. We believe that the bill needs to be studied at length with that concern in mind.

We are concerned about the fact that the bill contains no definition of a vexatious or frivolous complaint. When terms are not clearly defined, in any field of endeavour, there is room for misinterpretation, for rules not to be properly applied or properly implemented. In this case, as I said, misunderstanding could interfere with orderly operations in the penitentiary.

The bill lacks a definition for a vexatious or frivolous complaint. What we are concerned about even more is that Correctional Service Canada itself, according to an audit of the current complaint process, recommended that a definition of a vexatious or frivolous complaint be provided. The bill does not do that.

We will have a lot of questions to ask in committee, but I truly look forward to addressing the matter again when the bill passes second reading.

• (1845)

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain (Manicouagan, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am honoured to be the last member of my party to speak to this bill, which does not use overly accessible language. The administrative subtleties of the prison system are only rarely revealed to average Canadians. Indeed, there are those within the legal profession who specialize in this field. To illustrate the scope of my observations, I will draw on my experience in the legal aid office where I worked for two years.

I will pick up where I left off during my last intervention. In 2006, after I was called to the bar, I returned to the land of my ancestors and was hired by the legal aid office. I was assigned to the itinerant court. I was a criminal defence lawyer, and I represented Innu and Naskapi people in remote regions. The court travelled from place to place, and I represented people charged with criminal offences.

During my two and a half years in the legal aid office, I worked with another lawyer, Ms. Gaudreau, who worked exclusively on the complaints and grievances from inmates at the Port-Cartier institution. In my riding, there is a maximum security penitentiary 35 minutes away from Sept-Îles, and Ms. Gaudreau worked full time on those files. I had many conversations with Ms. Gaudreau over the years. I even went to the penitentiary several times to see how such cases were handled. Among other things, thanks to my time in that

office, I saw that there were enough contentious claims from the penitentiary to make up the majority of a defence lawyer's, in this case, Ms. Gaudreau's, workload. The presence of a maximum security penitentiary in my riding also enabled me to deal directly with criminal files involving federal prisoners as part of my professional practice. There were not many of them, but there were some.

In addition, there was a large aboriginal presence in the Port-Cartier correctional institution. Accordingly, holistic aboriginal programming is offered at this institution. This holistic program includes a healing process borrowed from traditional Innu and Naskapi ways of life, a process that focuses on the principles of reintegration into one's home community.

In September 2011, the last time I toured my riding, I was asked to meet with the director of the Port-Cartier penitentiary, who wanted to talk to me about continuing this holistic program at his institution. We discussed the various measures that had been proposed over the years. The program has been in place for several years now. There is an area on the penitentiary's grounds where inmates who identify as aboriginal can go to get back to their roots. These inmates receive regular visits from elders and can have *innu mitsshu*, that is, traditional food, inside the institution. The goal of all this is to help them reintegrate into their communities after they have served their sentences.

A Statistics Canada publication from July 2009 highlights the higher proportion of aboriginal federal inmates who need help in areas like social interaction, attitude, employment and community functioning compared to non-aboriginal inmates.

As for social reintegration factors, problems and contentious issues in communities and on reserves are often resolved using aggression and methods that are outdated by today's standards. All the measures that come under the complaints and grievances hearing process incorporate this new aspect of communication and rethinking the adversarial process that is common in our society in 2012.

No examination of the complaints and grievances process that is part of the dynamic framework unique to the prison population can ignore the large proportion of inmates who do not have a high school diploma or a job. This situation results in many comprehension difficulties—problems understanding the subtleties of the complaints and grievances process available to inmates who want to appeal an administrative decision by the institution.

• (1850)

Given the long sentences served by prisoners in federal penitentiaries, it is conceivable for their everyday lives to be regulated, as in a type of micro-society. Guarantees offered to all Canadians, such as access to the justice system, may be modified so that they respond to the prisoners' situation.

Private Members' Business

This is where the complaints and grievances process comes into play; hearings are held for these cases based on an internal arrangement that promotes interaction between administrative authorities, staff and prisoners. A number of reports have established the importance of appointing a grievance coordinator within the prison's administration and increasing the resources allocated to the informal resolution of complaints.

This reasoning thus invites us to identify, develop and implement alternative methods for resolving contentious issues internally. The bill before us presents measures that are at the opposite end of the spectrum from the desired flexibility necessary in communications between prisoners and the authorities.

The internal complaints process offered to prisoners is, in and of itself, part of the rehabilitation process. I spoke about holistic procedures or measures. This is somewhat the same. It is rehabilitation. It is basically a healing process. Other than the purely clerical aspect of how complaints are lodged, the adversarial system that allows prisoners to lodge complaints and grievances gives them the opportunity to voice their concerns and ensures that the parties are able to discuss the facts and possible methods of resolution. This is thus an alternative method for resolving conflicts that is available and beneficial to prisoners. This principle of fairness allows prisoners or their lawyers, such as Ms. Gaudreau whom I mentioned, to present the facts and receive advice, at public expense if necessary—since, as I was saying, legal aid covers this type of case—in order to handle each case properly.

Just the simple possibility of designating inmates as “vexatious complainants” gives rise to many legitimate concerns, including concerns about the commissioner's discretion. It should be noted that no specific definition is found in the bill for vexatious or multiple complaints. What is more, labelling inmates as “vexatious complainants” will only fuel their sense of oppression, will not enhance the quality of relationships, and will even reinforce the adversarial nature of the relationship between the administration and inmates.

Having the Commissioner of the Correctional Service apply arbitrary rules to assess the pertinence of complaints will only unleash or increase hostile reactions, and undermine the relationship between the inmate population and the administration. According to my understanding of the situation, the complaints and grievances process provides an outlet of sorts for the tension often associated with the tumultuous life of inmates, especially in maximum security institutions. Often it involves the offenders in special protection. Just having access to this resource and having an opportunity to be heard and to make their case is a step towards rehabilitation. It is part of the journey that ultimately enables an individual to reintegrate into society and be an asset there. I submit this respectfully.

• (1855)

[*English*]

The Deputy Speaker: Seeing no one rising on debate, I will recognize the hon. member for Scarborough Centre for her right of reply.

Ms. Roxanne James (Scarborough Centre, CPC): Madam Speaker, Canadians gave our government a strong mandate to deliver safer streets and communities with our tough on crime

agenda, and that includes holding offenders accountable and developing a correctional system that actually corrects criminal behaviour.

During our last debate on Bill C-293, an act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act (vexatious complainants), the NDP member for Châteauguay—Saint-Constant was correct when he noted that this bill has a laudable goal. The goal of the bill is to crack down on vexatious complainants, attention seeking inmates who wilfully abuse the fair complaint process and prevent it from functioning properly.

The NDP member was also correct when he stated, “the complaint and grievance process is a tool that helps ensure transparency and accountability”. While the process is valuable, there is still room for improvement. Accountability is a two-way street and prison inmates who file grievances should be held accountable for the complaints that they file.

Bill C-293 would correct a costly problem that currently exists in Canada's correctional system. The bill targets a specific group of inmates who file more than 100 grievances per year. The accumulated total of these complaints account for a whopping 15% of all grievances filed, with some cases occurring where offenders have filed in excess of 500 grievances.

The bill would allow the Commissioner of Correctional Services Canada, or his assigned representative, to designate an offender as a vexatious complainant. Once this has occurred, the offender would be held to a higher standard of proof for future claims. Someone designated as a vexatious complainant would have his or her complaint shut down after the first of four levels of the grievance process if the institution decided that the claim was vexatious and not made in good faith.

I am certain that Bill C-293 would considerably improve how grievances are processed in our correctional system.

Bill C-293 is important to Canadians for the following reasons: One, the current system does not require that grievances be filed in good faith. Two, the current system is a financial burden on the taxpayer. Three, the system allows prisoners to act like they are the victims. Our government was given a mandate to support Canadian families and law-abiding citizens and this means supporting the real victims of crime. Four, allowing prisoners to file numerous frivolous complaints detracts from their ability to focus on real rehabilitation. Five, the present system creates a negative impact on the morale of staff involved in managing the grievance process.

The benefits of Bill C-293 are obvious. I must say that I am very pleased to hear that the members of the Liberal Party, hon. colleagues of mine, will be supporting sending this bill to committee.

I would like to state the specific reason Bill C-293 is a benefit. The correctional system would no longer require correctional staff to process large volumes of complaints without merit. This would mean that the correctional system with respect to the complaint process would function more effectively and in the manner that it is supposed to by focusing on legitimate complaints.

Ultimately, Bill C-293 would correct a costly loophole in our correctional system which would be a benefit to all Canadian taxpayers. In the last debate on Bill C-293, my hon. colleague from the NDP stated, “The NDP supports legislation that will make our prisons safer. We also support legislation that will allow our prisons to operate in a quick, fair and efficient manner”.

If that is the case, then I am sure the official opposition, the NDP, will vote with our government and the Liberal Party of Canada in support of the bill.

• (1900)

The Deputy Speaker: The period provided for debate has expired. Accordingly, the question is on the motion.

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

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

Some hon. members: Nay.

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

And five or more members having risen:

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 93, the recorded division stands deferred until Wednesday, March 7, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

• (1905)

[*English*]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, on November 29, 2011, I followed up on my questioning from the day before. I had asked, if the minister accepts that climate change is real, as he claims, and the government promises accountability and transparency, why is he planning to withdraw after the Durban conference? The parliamentary secretary, of course, ignored the question and finished with, “We have a plan, an action plan, and it's working”.

Let us unpack the spin. What plan? Just final stages of writing new regulations for coal-fired electricity and mere beginning consultations with the oil sands, cement, gas and steel industries? There is no plan. The government is proposing a sector by sector approach meant to delay rather than develop a comprehensive

Adjournment Proceedings

climate change strategy to reduce the annual \$21 billion to \$43 billion adaptation costs by 2050.

The basic elements of a cost effective greenhouse gas emission reduction strategy for Canada have been well understood and articulated for some time. The government should develop a green economy strategy to create a more environmentally sustainable economy. Specific measures might include green agriculture, energy supply, forestry, industry, the building sector, transportation and waste. This will require the meaningful engagement of all stakeholders, progress in investment of renewable energy and tough questions about the government's management of the oil sands.

Where is the long-term plan? What action has been taken to regulate the pace and scope of development? What progress has been made to protect air quality, boreal forest ecosystems and water resources? What assessments are being undertaken to investigate the potential human health impacts of development and what solutions is the government considering?

More stringent actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions cannot be postponed much longer, otherwise the opportunity to keep the average global temperature rise below 2°C is in danger. Serious impacts are associated with this limit, including an increased frequency and intensity of extreme weather events, shifts in growing seasons, and sea level rise. Tragically, the latest analysis suggests that the world is likely on track to a warming of 3.5°C.

The Prime Minister's opposition toward action on climate change was well-known before he ever took office, having once described the Kyoto protocol as a socialist plot.

Press from Canada's withdrawal in the international media was overwhelmingly negative. Christiana Figueres, the executive secretary of the UN framework convention on climate change said:

I regret that Canada has announced it will withdraw and am surprised over its timing.

Whether or not Canada is a Party to the Kyoto Protocol, it has a legal obligation under the Convention to reduce its emissions, and a moral obligation to itself and future generations to lead in the global effort.

A spokesman for China's foreign ministry told reporters that the decision was regrettable and that it flew in the face of the efforts of the international community. A spokesman for France's foreign ministry called the move bad news for the fight against climate change.

Then there was the low lying nation of Tuvalu, which is most at risk for rising sea levels. The lead negotiator said, “For a vulnerable country like Tuvalu, it is an act of sabotage on our future. Withdrawing from the Kyoto Protocol is a reckless and totally irresponsible act”.

Tim Gore, international climate change advisor for Oxfam, also condemned Canada's decision. He said:

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Canada's exit from the Kyoto Protocol, the one existing agreement that legally binds some countries to emission cuts targets, is an affront to the nearly one billion people who struggle every day to feed their families in the face of increasingly frequent and severe droughts, floods, heat waves and storms.

Ms. Michelle Rempel (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to begin by addressing the question of my colleague opposite by quoting something from the International Institute for Sustainable Development. A report by this agency noted that "Canada is moving in the right direction on GHG policy..." and is "establishing the policy architecture to reduce greenhouse gas emissions".

This is evidence of a real plan that is working. Finally, after years of inaction on climate change by Liberal governments, to the point where the previous Liberal party leader even said that his government had not got the job done when it came to climate change policy, we are seeing a balanced and strong approach put forward by this government. Balance means balancing economic growth with environmental stewardship and approaching the problem of climate change in a balanced, pragmatic, action-focused way.

Our approach is two-fold. First, we need to take domestic action at home, and we are doing that. We have a sector by sector regulatory approach by which we are seeking to regulate greenhouse gas emissions in some of the most intensive emission sectors. We are working together with partners in those sectors to make sure that those regulations are smart, implementable and workable and do not harm our economy.

This is real action. This is action at home. We are seeing a clean energy sector developing here in Canada, one that we can be proud of. We have a strong environmental regulatory framework here at home. These are things that our country can be proud of because we are a leader in this area.

The second prong of the approach, to deal with my colleague's question on the Kyoto protocol, is acknowledging that this framework does not have all major emitters sitting around the table and agreeing to binding targets. As the Kyoto protocol stands right now, a very low percentage of emissions are covered by that agreement.

In order for us to see real reductions on a global basis, we need to have the Chinas, Indias and Brazils of the world signing on to an agreement and requires them to be transparent in their reporting on greenhouse gas emissions. This is what we have been seeking to achieve in our talks in Copenhagen, Cancun, and this year at Durban.

With that two-pronged approach, taking international leadership and adopting a stance that we need something more functional than the Kyoto protocol, we will damage our economy and can take strong leadership at home.

Contrast that to the previous Liberal government where greenhouse gas emissions rose during its tenure.

My colleague opposite talks about our having no plan. The closest thing we have seen to any sort of plan from the Liberal government in recent years has been a carbon tax, which was resoundingly rejected by the Canadian electorate in 2008.

Our government's approach is balanced. It seeks real action, and it is one that we are proud of.

● (1910)

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Madam Speaker, we hear about this balanced approach, but what does it mean? It says nothing. Where is the green economy strategy, for example, in this plan? The government has reduced its targets by 90% and it can get us only 25% of the way there by 2020.

We need an ambitious, effective and fair agreement based on sound science. I urge Canadians across our great country to send the government a strong message on climate change. Together we can find a solution to our most pressing environmental challenge. Together we can build momentum to protect the only planet on which we are living, the only planet that we will hand over to our children, grandchildren and great-great grandchildren.

I beg our government to understand that our home planet earth is finite and that when we compromise the air, the water, the soil, we steal from the endless future to serve the fleeting present.

Ms. Michelle Rempel: Madam Speaker, I want to go back to the previous comments of my colleague opposite with regard to a green energy strategy and point out some shortcomings of a Liberal colleague of hers in the Ontario government. The premier of that government implemented a green energy strategy, which the auditor general of that province noted would see electricity prices potentially rising in that province by up to 41% and significant job losses in the private sector due to that increase.

That is why it is so important for us to have balance and pragmatism and action in our environmental policy. It is not about inaction. It is not about making grand promises and signing on to grand international accords with no plan to implement them. It is not about simply maligning our economy and our economic growth in certain sectors of our economy.

We have a strong sector by sector regulatory approach. We are focused on jobs and the economy, and we taking strong international leadership in asking for an agreement that all major emitters will sign on to.

● (1915)

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Madam Speaker, on November 29, I rose in the House to address what I thought was a disturbing trend happening at the Immigration and Refugee Board, or IRB. The trend appears to be that there are more and more Conservative appointments being made to that body and fewer and fewer claims for refugee protection are being accepted. We now have the lowest rate of approvals in Canadian history.

I and many MPs have stood in the House to highlight cases where the system appears to have failed and we have called on the government to act to help an immigrant family or refugee. Invariably, the minister or parliamentary secretary responds that all applicants have gone through our system and we must trust that the system works. They say that the process is fair. They claim the IRB is independent. They say that our system has several opportunities for appeal.

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Most important, when asked if there is anything they can do to prevent a deportation of a particular individual, they often point out that they do not want cases to be decided by the whim of the minister or to be subject to political interference. I could not agree more with that sentiment, but political interference is, regrettably, becoming apparent throughout the system. How are we supposed to have faith in our system when we hear about patronage appointments made to the IRB?

When I asked the minister about patronage appointments in the House, he said that he knew of only two appointments that had Conservative ties. In less than 24 hours, we were able to find 16 former Conservative politicians, candidates, donors or advisers to ministers of the government had, in fact, been appointed to the IRB.

Since November, we have learned of two more recent patronage appointments, people appointed to the IRB apparently because of their Conservative ties as opposed to their independence or expertise. Worst of all, we have learned that these board members seem to be biased against granting refugee protection. One member, who was recently reappointed by the government, was reappointed despite granting zero out of 169 refugee claims that he heard.

This would not be so troubling if the lives of people were not at stake, but they are. The integrity of the IRB is critical to the integrity of the whole system. If we cannot trust the independence of the IRB, then all the appeal processes in the world do not matter. What we know about appeals, particularly in relation to the Federal Court of Canada, is that the appeals are not based on the merits of the case. They are not even based on the facts of the case. The appeal process simply determines whether the process was followed properly and whether procedural justice and natural justice principles were observed.

We are told to trust the independence of the system, but the minister introduced Bill C-31, which inserts great potential for political interference into our immigration system. With Bill C-31, we learn that the minister wants even more power to be concentrated in his office. He has backtracked on a pledge he made to all parties in the House and all Canadians to approach refugee issues with a better sense of fairness and balance.

The minister wants the discretion to designate countries, in his opinion, as safe. He wants the sole discretion to determine by that discretion who has access to the Refugee Appeal Division. The minister wants the sole discretion to decide if a refugee's arrival in Canada qualifies as irregular. The minister wants the power to impose mandatory detention for up to a year on people whose biggest crime may be thinking that Canada will offer them safety from persecution.

It is getting harder and harder to take the government's advice to trust the system. How can we when we see the creeping of political interference and political judgment into a process that should be quasi-judicial and completely free of any kind of partisan hand.

Will the government stop this disturbing trend toward injecting political ideology into our immigration system and return to a commendable record of having an independent IRB and immigration system?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Madam Speaker, I take issue with virtually everything the member said.

First, with respect to the acceptance rate for asylum claims made at the Immigration and Refugee Board, it is actually 38%. This is by far one of the highest rates in the western world. If we looked at the acceptance rates for asylum systems in western liberal democracies like the EU, U.S., Australia and New Zealand, we would see that most of them are half as high as ours. Many of them are in the single digits. Canada is regarded as having one of the highest acceptance rates. Therefore, the notion that the IRB is arbitrarily rejecting claims unfairly I think is manifestly unfair and untrue.

Second, I think the member honestly misunderstands that one of the significant achievements of this government with respect to our immigration and asylum system has been to clean up the appointment process for the IRB. I will explain how we have done this.

We have put in place an appointments screening committee that is made up of representatives of the chairman of the IRB and, yes, people appointed by the minister. However, first people have to go through a written test and a resumé review. Then they are called in for interviews, another level of test. Ultimately only 10% of the applicants for the IRB are recommended to the minister. The minister, my office, has no role in deciding who is recommended. Only one out of every ten is recommended.

Since the government came to office, we have appointed over 300 individuals to the IRB and since I have been minister, over 150 individuals. I was only aware of two who had a connection to the Conservative Party. The member has done research, but he has even included people who gave a one-time donation to a provincial Conservative party. He mentioned candidates who ran for provincial Conservative parties 20 years ago. These are people I have never heard of except that they were recommended to me as being fit for the IRB.

But let us say that the member is right and 18 of these people committed the crime of having at some point been affiliated with the Conservative Party. That is 6% of the more than 300 people that we have appointed. By the member's own numbers, that means over 94% do not have any demonstrable affiliation with the Conservative Party. Of those that I know who had an affiliation, it is closer to less than 1%. Therefore, I reject out of hand this notion. I can say with all honesty that this is not patronage.

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Obviously, if someone is recommended to the minister and that person happens to have had some connection to a Conservative party in the past, I am not going to exclude him or her from appointment. That would be ridiculous and unfair. However, I can tell the member that I know I have appointed people who had connections to other political parties. I would be happy to show the member the resumé of all the people we have appointed, if the IRB is willing to do this in terms of privacy. He will see the quality of these nominees and their involvement in NGOs, with many on refugee issues. A huge number of them are lawyers. I think over half of them are women. There is a tremendous ethnic diversity.

We worked very hard for these quality appointments. This is light years ahead of where we were a few years ago when, frankly, the standard was defeated candidates, spouses of MPs and campaign managers. That is no longer the case.

I agree with the member that it is important to maintain the quality, quasi-judicial nature of the IRB. I believe we are doing just that.

● (1920)

Mr. Don Davies: Madam Speaker, I also want to thank the minister for being here tonight. This minister shows his commitment to his department by standing in this House and giving his perspective on the matter, and that is commendable. However, there are a couple of things I would debate with him.

One, the minister responded to my claim that Canada has the lowest rate in our history of approving refugee claims by comparing us to other countries. However, that is not my point. My point is that compared to previous years of granting refugee status, right now we are at the lowest rate in the history of Canada. I notice that the minister did not respond to that.

It was also mentioned that by my numbers there were 18 appointments to the IRB who had ties to the Conservative Party. The minister said in the House that he was only aware of two people who had ties to the Conservative Party. However, our research uncovered

that there were 18. The minister said that he appointed 150 people in the time he has been minister. Therefore, that is 12% of the appointments under this minister's watch who have had ties to the Conservative Party.

Peter Showler, the former chair of the IRB, has warned that the appointment process is, in his words, "secretive and political". I would like the minister or the parliamentary secretary to respond, not to my accusation, but to the observations of Peter Showler, an independent, objective observer.

Mr. Rick Dykstra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Madam Speaker, certainly everyone can see the importance of this issue when I as parliamentary secretary and the minister are here this evening.

At every opportunity, the minister and I, as parliamentary secretary, talk about the process that we have implemented since 2006 and the vigorous changes we made in 2007. The member opposite can argue percentages. The minister has made it very clear, 6% of the appointments that we made since 2006 are alleged to have a connection to the Conservative Party of Canada, or the Conservative Party of one of the provinces.

The fact remains that these are qualified individuals who have gone through a rigorous test. If the member opposite is questioning the testing process, that is fair game, but do not question the individuals who have gone through the testing, have gone through the process and who now represent all of the folks who sit on the IRB and hear claims, doing so in a very professional manner.

● (1925)

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:26 p.m.)

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