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(HANSARD)

Thursday, June 6, 2013

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, June 6, 2013

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

● (1005)

[*English*]

PRIVACY COMMISSIONER

The Speaker: I have the honour to lay upon the table the report of the Privacy Commissioner on the application of the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act for the year 2012.

[*Translation*]

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(*h*), this document is deemed to have been permanently referred to the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics.

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OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC SECTOR INTEGRITY COMMISSIONER

The Speaker: Pursuant to section 38 of the Public Servants Disclosure Protection Act, I have the honour to lay upon the table the report of the Public Sector Integrity Commissioner for the fiscal year ended March 23, 2013.

[*English*]

This report is deemed to have been permanently referred to the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates.

I have the honour, pursuant to Section 38 of the Public Servants Disclosure Protection Act, to lay upon the table the special report of the Public Sector Integrity Commissioner concerning an investigation into a disclosure of wrongdoing.

[*Translation*]

This report is deemed permanently referred to the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates.

[*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 36(8) I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's responses to 29 petitions.

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RESPECT FOR COMMUNITIES ACT

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-65, An Act to amend the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act.

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

* * *

[*Translation*]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

ACCESS TO INFORMATION, PRIVACY AND ETHICS

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the seventh report of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics concerning Bill C-461, An Act to amend the Access to Information Act and the Privacy Act (disclosure of information).

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

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PETITIONS

CROWN CORPORATIONS

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition in this House from over 2,600 people who oppose Bill C-60, particularly with respect to the Treasury Board's ability to interfere in the collective agreement negotiations of crown corporations. These people are extremely worried, even outraged, about this precedent. Crown corporations must be independent and able to negotiate their collective agreements on their own and at arms' length. This is known as freedom of negotiation and that is why I am presenting this petition today.

[*English*]

IMPAIRED DRIVING

Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise today to present petitions on behalf of 171 Canadians from Alberta and British Columbia regarding impaired driving causing death. These citizens want to see tougher laws and the implementation of new mandatory minimum sentencing for those persons convicted of impaired driving causing death.

These petitioners also want the Criminal Code of Canada to be changed to redefine the offence of impaired driving causing death as vehicular manslaughter.

NATIONAL PARKS

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present a petition on behalf of several hundred petitioners concerning Rouge Park, the largest urban park in Canada.

The petitioners point out that this is a great opportunity to save 100 square kilometres in a public land assembly. They want the government to strengthen and implement the ecological vision, to restore and protect the 600-metre-wide corridor, and to conduct a rational, scientific and transparent public planning process.

[*Translation*]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am presenting a petition that was drawn up in the wake of budget 2012. People in my riding are opposed to the measures in this budget, particularly the ones related to employment insurance reform. They are calling for these measures to be repealed immediately.

I want to present this petition because I believe this budget is still having some very negative consequences for my riding.

[*English*]

CHIEF FIREARMS OFFICERS

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, petitioners wish to have the federal government replace the chief firearms officers from the provinces and territories with a single civilian agency so that firearms laws could be applied equally across Canada.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition from constituents and others who are concerned about the possibility of an oil spill in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. They request the establishment of an immediate moratorium on oil and gas exploration and development in the Gulf of St. Lawrence and they call on the government to commit to establishing an environmental assessment review panel, which would include representation from all gulf provinces and aboriginal leaders, to determine the impact of oil and gas exploration and development in the Gulf of St. Lawrence.

● (1010)

SEARCH AND RESCUE

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present a petition on behalf of a number of residents of my constituency of St. John's East and other ridings in Newfoundland and Labrador. The petitioners are calling on the Government of Canada to reverse the decision to close the Canadian Coast Guard Maritime Rescue Centre in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador, to reinstate the staff and restore its full services.

These residents and many others in Newfoundland and Labrador are still outraged and concerned that the Government of Canada has closed this very valuable rescue coordinating facility in St. John's that has participated actively in saving lives for many years.

[*Translation*]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to present three petitions calling on the Government of Canada to reverse the devastating changes to employment insurance contained in its mammoth bill. The consequences of these changes have been felt since the spring of 2012.

[*English*]

FOREIGN INVESTMENT

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I rise this morning to present two petitions. The first is signed by literally hundreds and hundreds of people from Sidney, in my riding, Victoria, Vancouver, Prince George and many locations throughout British Columbia. The petitioners call on the Government of Canada to refuse to ratify the Canada-China investment treaty, based on the fact that it affects Canada's sovereignty and undermines our ability to pass domestic laws and regulations, municipally, provincially and federally, giving the People's Republic of China the right to challenge these laws and sue for billions.

We certainly wish good luck to the Hupacasath First Nations, who are before the Federal Court in Vancouver today.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is from residents of Ottawa, Wallaceburg, Kingston and other locations in Ontario. I have two petitions to the same effect. Petitioners are calling on the Government of Canada to cease and desist from promoting the Enbridge project and accept the wisdom of British Columbians that the project should not proceed.

[*Translation*]

STATUS OF WOMEN

Ms. Paulina Ayala (Honoré-Mercier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour of presenting a petition asking that the Financial Administration Act be amended to encourage balanced representation. Canadian women are currently under-represented on boards of directors of crown corporations, where they hold 27% of upper management positions. Diversity—which includes the male-to-female ratio, geographic representation, ethnicity and even the age of directors—is an essential part of good organizational governance.

[*English*]

IMPAIRED DRIVING

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to present two petitions. The first is a petition that highlights the sad fact that last year 22-year-old Kassandra Kaulius was killed by a drunk driver. A group of people who have also lost loved ones to impaired drivers, called Families for Justice, have put together this petition. They want to see tougher laws and the implementation of new mandatory minimum sentencing for those persons convicted of impaired driving causing death.

SEX SELECTION

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the second petition regards gendercide. Petitioners highlight that there are 200 million missing girls in the world right now because of discrimination against girls. They are calling on Parliament to condemn discrimination against females through gendercide.

MINING INDUSTRY

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure this morning to present two petitions. The first one is from residents of my riding of Nickel Belt. It concerns high-grade mining. Some miners, not all, will mine high-grade ore, leaving behind the lower grade ore. Then once the high-grade ore has been mined it is not profitable to go back and get the low-grade ore.

The petitioners are calling on the House of Commons to establish legislation enforcing guidelines that guard against unchecked and irresponsible high-grade mining.

PENSIONS

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition, again from residents in my community, calls on the Conservative government to reverse the changes to the old age security program, which they say are a direct attack on the poorest seniors who rely on money for daily living expenses.

As we know, the Conservative government has raised the age of OAS eligibility to 67 and these petitioners are calling on the government to return the age to 65 because a lot of seniors live in poverty.

● (1015)

SEARCH AND RESCUE

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, I present a petition today on behalf of residents from Thunder Bay, northwestern Ontario and across Ontario protesting the closure of the Thunder Bay Marine Communications and Traffic Services Centre. This is a safety issue. The centre is crucial to the safety of boaters and marine traffic on all of the lakes and rivers all the way from Lake Winnipeg down through to Lake Huron.

The petitioners are asking that this House reverse the government's decision to close this important safety centre, which has been an important institution in the northern marine community for over 100 years.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE—SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I am now prepared to rule on a point of order raised on May 29 by the hon. House leader of the official opposition regarding the process followed by the Standing Committee on Finance with respect to its consideration of Bill C-60, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on March 21, 2013 and other measures.

[*Translation*]

I would like to thank the hon. House leader of the official opposition for having raised this issue, and the hon. Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and the members for Winnipeg North, Richmond—Arthabaska and Saanich—Gulf Islands for their interventions.

[*English*]

In raising this point of order, the opposition House leader claimed that the order adopted by the Standing Committee on Finance on May 7, respecting its consideration of Bill C-60, went beyond the committee's authority as conferred by the House. Specifically, he explained that the committee order invited certain other standing committees to study different parts of the bill and, along with independent members, to submit amendments to the Standing Committee on Finance.

He explained further that the committee order also provided that such amendments would be deemed moved so that the committee could consider and vote on them. This, he argued, was an instance of a committee exceeding its prescribed authority, since the House had determined that the bill was sent to the finance committee only and since House rules dictate that committee membership is determined solely by the House and cannot include members of non-recognized parties. In addition, he noted that it contravened the rule that only committee members can move motions and that even they must, in fact, be present at the committee to do so.

[*Translation*]

The Leader of the Government in the House of Commons contended that it was an established practice that one standing committee could invite other standing committees to consider the subject matter of relevant sections of a bill it is studying with a view to submitting amendments. Furthermore, he suggested that the inclusion of independent members in the committee's proceedings was part of an evolutionary process, one that was in no way discriminatory since the deadline for submitting amendments was the same for all concerned: independent members, other committees and even members of the committee itself. He explained that, in effect, this process was simply an effort by the committee to respond directly to the suggestion that I had made in a ruling on December 12, 2012, on a similar matter.

[*English*]

For her part, the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands questioned whether the committee process was in procedural conformity with my ruling, as well as whether, as a result of the committee order, her rights as a member had somehow been restricted, even put aside. The hon. member for Richmond—Arthabaska made similar arguments, highlighting what he perceived to have been an erosion of his rights with regard to the submission of amendments at report stage.

In the case before us, in many respects, is a logical evolution of procedural events that have unfolded in the last year, and indeed of events of over 10 years ago. In fact, to place the matter in its proper context, it is necessary to refer to the March 21, 2001, statement by Speaker Milliken, found at page 1991 of the *Debates*, which set us on a path to where we are today with respect to the committee and report stages of the legislative process. That statement clearly established the guidelines that the Chair now uses to discharge its responsibility with respect to the selection of amendments at report stage. Indeed, the very process of selection was born out of a need to return report stage to its original purpose, that is, the consideration of only those amendments that could not have been moved in committee.

[*Translation*]

Speaker Milliken was clear in his intent when he urged:

> ...all members and all parties to avail themselves fully of the opportunity to propose amendments during committee stage so that the report stage can return to the purpose for which it was created, namely for the House to consider the committee report and the work the committee has done...

[*English*]

These guiding principles are embodied in the interpretive notes attached to Standing Orders 76(5) and 76.1(5), which have allowed committees to a large extent to remain the central focus for the detailed study of bills, thereby ensuring that report stage not become a repetition of committee stage.

[*Translation*]

House of Commons Procedure and Practice, second edition, explains, at pages 783 and 784:

> As a general principle, the Speaker seeks to forestall debate on the floor of the House which is simply a repetition of the debate in committee…Furthermore, the Speaker will normally only select motions in amendment that could not have been presented in committee. A motion previously defeated in committee will only be selected if the Speaker judges it to be of such significance to Members as to warrant further consideration at report stage.

● (1020)

[*English*]

However, the strength of these guidelines has been tested in the recent past as the House faced voluminous report stage proceedings, first in June 2012 with Bill C-38, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on March 29, 2012 and other measures, and then in November 2012 with C-45, A second Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on March 29, 2012 and other measures.

These two cases brought into sharp relief the difficulties faced by independent members with respect to committee proceedings on bills, specifically in reference to the provisions of Standing Order 119, which do not permit a member who is not a member of the committee to move any motion, nor to vote, nor to be part of any quorum. These circumstances cause some members to call into question the ability of the House's rules and practices to safeguard the intended purpose of report stage.

[*Translation*]

They also gave rise to a ruling on December 12, 2012, in which I addressed the issue of the participation of independent members in the process of amending bills, particularly in committee. In that ruling, I suggested that, until committees found a way to enable independent members to have their amendments considered at the committee stage, the Chair would continue to allow them to do so at report stage. I stated at that time, at page 13224 of the *House of Commons Debates*:

> The Standing Orders currently in place offer committees wide latitude to deal with bills in an inclusive and thorough manner that would balance the rights of all members.

and

> …there is no doubt that any number of procedural arrangements could be developed that would ensure that the amendments that independent members wish to propose to legislation could be put in committee.

[*English*]

To answer this fully would be to ask the Chair to reach into and adjudicate upon committee matters, a practice the House has long resisted, given that committees are masters of their own proceedings, as we are apt to say.

In my ruling of November 29, 2012, on a similar case, consistent with these long-standing practices of the House, I informed members that in the absence of a report from the committee, the Chair would not delve further into committee matters. In doing so, I quoted Speaker Milliken, who on November 27, 2002, stated:

> As Speaker, I appreciate the responsibility that I have to defend the rights of all members and especially those of members who represent minority views in the House. At the same time, it is a long tradition in this place that committees are masters of their own proceedings. Ordinarily the House is only seized of a committee matter when the committee reports to the House outlining the situation that must be addressed.

[*Translation*]

He then added:

That being said, it is true as well that committees are permitted a greater latitude in the conduct of their proceedings than might be allowed in the House. It may not always be clear in a particular set of circumstances how best to proceed and so the ultimate decision is left to the committee itself.

[*English*]

At the same time, the Chair is also cognizant of its responsibility for the selection of report stage motions and the fact that what happened in the finance committee in this instance has had a direct bearing on my selection decisions in the case of the report stage of Bill C-60 and on independent members. Accordingly, the Chair feels compelled to address some of the issues raised, particularly as they relate to their impact on independent members.

As I understand it, the principal concern raised about the committee process was the committee's decision to deem moved any amendments submitted by independent members and certain other committees during the committee's clause-by-clause consideration. The main concern expressed by the opposition House leader with this manner of proceeding is that in his view it exceeded the committee's mandate. He argued that to deem motions to be moved is a clear violation of Standing Order 119, which stipulates that only permanent members of a standing committee can move motions. The opposition House leader stated that as a result, the process adopted by the finance committee was fundamentally flawed.

It should come as no surprise to members that the House and its committees frequently resort to procedural motions to facilitate the flow of business. Procedure in committee is particularly fluid and varied, and many committees routinely use a wide array of processes to organize their work. Deeming things to have taken place is part of that body of precedent.

In the House, this is often achieved by deciding to forgo the usual procedural steps and to assume that certain procedural transactions have taken place even if they have not. For example, it happens from time to time that the House will see fit to adopt a bill at all stages, deeming that each stage has been agreed to. No movers' names are attached to the motions for second reading, concurrence at report stage or third reading.

Similarly, practically on a weekly basis, recorded divisions are deemed demanded and deferred. Again, no members' names are attached to the motions that make this possible. In fact, the House has even been known to tinker with the time-space continuum by deeming it to be a certain time, even when it is not, and by making, say, a Tuesday to be a Monday, as was done a few weeks ago on May 21. Again, no names of members are attached to the motions that make this possible.

Speaker's Ruling

Our House and committee annals are rife with examples of this kind. These commonly used procedural instruments are even provided for in some of our Standing Orders. What may be causing difficulty in this case is that while the practice of "deeming" is most often achieved through unanimous consent, it can also occur by majority decision, but of course at greater cost in House or committee time.

● (1025)

[*Translation*]

In the case before us, it appears that this is the approach that was used by the finance committee. A motion setting out the process to be followed was proposed, debated and ultimately agreed to. As far as the Chair can see, in the absence of a report from the committee to the contrary, Standing Order 119 was not flouted in the process. Instead, it appears rather that a procedural instrument was devised to provide for the manner in which the committee would conduct its business.

[*English*]

Turning to the issue of the rights of independent members, the Chair can only observe that the decision of the finance committee permitted them to do something they could not do before: namely, to have their amendments considered in the committee and, indeed, to be granted, pursuant to Standing Order 119, an opportunity to speak in committee. This is something that was not open to them before. In that sense, they succeeded in obtaining a form of participation in committee proceedings, as imperfect as it may have been in their eyes.

As Speaker, I can only speculate on whether other committees will emulate or, dare I say, perhaps even expand on the spirit of inclusion witnessed in the Standing Committee on Finance.

[*Translation*]

In summary then, while I am entirely sympathetic to the procedural consequence of this development for independent members at report stage, I must remind the House again of my obligation to ensure that report stage not become a repeat of the committee stage.

[*English*]

As a guardian of the rights and privileges of all members, it is also my duty in this case to ensure that the rules, practices and expectations of the House are upheld and, in so doing, ensure that members are afforded an opportunity to participate in the legislative process. To protect the integrity of report stage, the Chair would have to know that there was no mechanism at all, not just an unsatisfactory one, for a member to move motions in committee.

It is true that the rules of the House may result in varying degrees of participation for members, depending on the proceeding and depending on the status of that member for that proceeding. For instance, members of committees enjoy opportunities that non-committee members do not, and even committee members have varying opportunities to participate.

What the Chair must protect is members' rights to have some mechanism to put forward their ideas.

[*Translation*]

It is for these reasons that the Chair did not select any motions at report stage that could have been considered, or were considered, in committee.

[*English*]

Accordingly, for all these reasons, I cannot conclude that the rights of independent members have been diminished as a result of the proceedings in the Standing Committee on Finance, particularly when scores of members who were not members of the finance committee, and thus not in a position to propose amendments there, are likewise subjected to the very same report stage restrictions.

In addition, noting that this is a departure from the Chair's long-established practice of not commenting on committee proceedings, again in the absence of a report to the contrary on which to base its interventions, the Chair concludes that Bill C-60 is properly before the House and that it cannot find that a procedurally improper proceeding has taken place in the Standing Committee on Finance.

I would like to thank all hon. members for their attention on this matter.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*Translation*]

SAFE DRINKING WATER FOR FIRST NATIONS ACT

BILL S-8—TIME ALLOCATION MOTION

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

That, in relation to Bill S-8, An Act respecting the safety of drinking water on First Nation lands, not more than five further hours shall be allotted to the consideration of the third reading stage of the bill; and

that, at the expiry of the five hours provided for the consideration of the third reading stage of the said bill, any proceedings before the House shall be interrupted, if required for the purpose of this order, and, in turn, every question necessary for the disposal of the said stage of the bill shall be put forthwith and successively, without further debate or amendment.

● (1030)

[*English*]

The Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 67.1, there will now be a 30-minute question period.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this is a sad moment in the history of this country and the Conservative government has a sorry record. In fact, it has broken a record by moving more than 40 time allocation motions in order to shut down debate and democracy. We on this side of the House think that Canadians deserve better. They deserve a government that listens.

[*English*]

We heard from one Conservative member of Parliament yesterday, an ex-Conservative, who was willing to stand up for democracy and stand up for the Canadian House of Commons.

The member for Edmonton—St. Albert talked about the ministerial "opulence" of the Conservatives and the fact that the ministers are spending on their limousines and five-star hotels. He talked about the myriad spending scandals of the Conservatives as well. He said, and I quote, "...my constituents are gravely disappointed", and "My constituents demand better".

Canadians demand better than what we are seeing from this government.

He also said, referring to the Conservatives, and I quote: "...we have morphed into what we once mocked". He was referring to the spending scandals of the Liberals and their tendency to use closure to shut down the House of Commons.

The member for Edmonton—St. Albert also said, and this is probably the saddest thing for those who voted Conservative in the last election, "I no longer recognize...the party that I joined".

This is how the Conservatives lead: shutting down democracy, and refusing accountability and transparency. Canadians deserve better.

How many Conservative MPs are going to stand up against this motion for closure and stand up for their constituents in the House of Commons?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is clear that the member is not very much concerned about the substance of the subject matter of this motion.

The motion is about Bill S-8, safe drinking water for first nations. This bill is crucial to ensure that first nations have the same health and safety protections concerning drinking water and waste water treatment as are currently enjoyed by other Canadians.

It has taken seven years for us to get to this point. It has taken seven years of continuous dialogue with first nations, including formal engagement sessions and implementing measures to accommodate the concerns of first nations.

The proposed legislation before Parliament today is the result of hard work and collaboration. It is time to move forward.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a 2011 report by Indian Affairs and Northern Development clearly states that a significant financial commitment to infrastructure development will be necessary, and that it will cost $4.7 billion over 10 years to ensure the needs of first nation communities regarding water and waste water systems are met.

My question is for the minister. Why is the government refusing to invest in access to safe drinking water for first nation communities, despite the recommendations from its own group of experts?

● (1035)

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Speaker, the member's claims are completely untrue and are not based on the facts.

If she looked at the facts, she would see that, as part of the strategy the government has adopted in this bill to fix the situation, nearly $3 billion has been allocated between 2006 and 2014 to improve infrastructure on first nations reserves.

Furthermore, more than $300 million was announced in budget 2012—and is being invested as we speak—to upgrade infrastructure on first nations reserves.

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like my Conservative colleague to explain why his government insists on preventing us from speaking in the House of Commons and why he is in such a rush.

Canadians and members of Parliament, including the former Conservative member for Edmonton—St. Albert, want to be able to debate and want to see more transparency on the part of this government.

Why is this government not being more transparent with Canadians? That is what Canadians want to see.

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Speaker, we know that members of the New Democratic Party like to spin their wheels and waste time by talking instead of acting.

This issue has been before Parliament in one form or another for seven years. First nations across the country are the only communities that do not have a regulatory system that sets standards for clean water and sewage treatment that are similar to standards in neighbouring communities.

I understand that the NDP does not want to take action, which is why the motion is before the House. This country needs legislation that will treat first nations members like other Canadian citizens who enjoy rights that those living on reserve do not.

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, once again, it is sad to see that the government is cutting off debate by imposing a gag order reducing the time allocated to members.

For those of us who are not on committees, the House is often where hear about these bills. The same is true for our constituents.

I am aware that the minister was appointed to this position just a short while ago. Maybe he has not had the time to visit the aboriginal communities, which is perhaps unfortunate.

I know that these communities need drinking water and that they live in dry areas. Often, people have to collect drinking water from rocky places between other bodies of water. It is very difficult. It is essential to take a close look at this because the technologies must be good, otherwise there will be problems. It is important that the members have a chance to discuss this.

Will the minister reconsider his proposal to reduce the time for debate?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Speaker, not to disagree with the member, but we think enough time has been allocated to discuss and debate views and concerns about this bill.

The fact is that over 50 witnesses spoke on Bill S-11, the previous version, and on Bill S-8, the current version. Members heard from many organizations, including the Assembly of First Nations, the Atlantic Policy Congress of First Nation Chiefs, the Assembly of First Nations of Quebec and Labrador, the Institute on Governance and the Indigenous Bar Association.

Bill S-8 was introduced only after many hours of discussion. There has been enough debate. It is time to act.

[*English*]

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the minister for all the work he has done. This is a great day for first nations, as we have a government that is wanting to and will move forward. Access to drinking water and the effective treatment of waste water is a critical protection for first nations people.

As mentioned by the minister, already over $3 billion in this budget and another over $330 million over two years is going toward helping sustain progress. It is not only for building but for renovating existing water and sewage treatment plant facilities on first nations reserves. We have to understand that this involves not only building them but training so that people are trained to operate these modern plants.

I wonder if the minister would help us understand how these targeted investments our government has made are going to help move forward the three-pronged approach to improving water and waste water systems on reserve.

● (1040)

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Speaker, in response to the 2011 national assessment, our government worked with first nations to build a long-term plan to improve on-reserve water and waste water. This is founded on three pillars, as the hon. member referred to. We are talking about enhanced capacity building and operating training, infrastructure investment and enforceable standards and protocols. When we say enforceable standards and protocols, this is what this enabling legislation would allow. We cannot move seriously, effectively and efficiently in addressing this gap on reserves throughout Canada without the proper legislative framework that would put the regulations in place to protect first nations members.

I just cannot understand why the NDP and Liberals would oppose such a legislative framework. It is required and has been recommended by committee after committee. The first nations have called for it, yet they oppose it.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Paulina Ayala (Honoré-Mercier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we, the members on this side of the House, are against the fact that there is no debate and democracy is being weakened. We are against the fact that we are not given the opportunity to analyze things. That is why we are against this. We are against the fact that democracy is suffering, to the point where members on the other side of the House are getting fed up.

Does the minister think that we need to work together and restore a true, healthy democracy before criticizing everyone?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Speaker, I am always amazed to hear members of the New Democratic Party lamenting the lack of democracy in our great and beautiful country. I have a bit of experience in the House, and I had the privilege of seeing the Constitution repatriated. I have seen and I am seeing—every week and every month, in every community—peoples' representatives, elected by Canadians, who are living up to their responsibilities.

Here today, we have a mandate from Canadians. Improving the lives of first nations people is one of the objectives of that mandate. We know that there is a gap for first nations reserves in terms of the quality of drinking water and waste water treatment, yet when faced with a bill that all elected members are asked to vote on, they are voting no. We are asking them, urging them, to think for once about what is effective and best for the country, for first nations, and to vote in favour of this bill.

Mr. Denis Blanchette (Louis-Hébert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I find it sad that they keep breaking their own time allocation records. It is always the same story: it is oh-so-important, oh-so-urgent.

My question for the minister is very simple. If it is so urgent, if it really is a priority for the government, why did the last two versions of this bill come from the Senate?

● (1045)

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Speaker, I understand the ideological position of the member's party, which wants to make Canada the only western country and the only major democracy with a unicameral system. However, at present, we have a bicameral system, and this system empowers the Senate to introduce bills.

In the end, what matters is not how the bicameral system functions, but the end result. What matters here is that first nations urgently need us to take action. The member should know this better than anyone.

I understand that he likes to spin his wheels, but we want to take action and the motion is designed to do that.

[*English*]

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I think there is new record-setting every single day for time allocation, on bill after bill. The subject matter before us in this debate is time allocation, not the substance of the bill itself.

My question is for the hon. minister. Does the government, in which the minister serves on Privy Council, have any intention of ever allowing adequate debate on the bills before us?

This is an affront to individual members. People in my position, who do not have automatic speaking slots in debates, lose them for sure every time there is time allocation. It never gets around to allowing full participation of all members of this House on issues of critical importance.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Speaker, that is the member's point of view, one that I can respect, but that I totally disagree with.

Anyone who takes a hard look at the procedures will realize that any member who wants to do serious and reasonable work will have ample time to give his or her opinion on any bill before Parliament.

When we look at the work of committees, we see that a great number of people are asked to appear and give their opinion. There is no time allocation there. The idea is that at some point decisions must be made. I understand that the NDP like to spin their wheels, but we want to move forward and it is time to rectify the situation.

Mr. Pierre Jacob (Brome—Missisquoi, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to quote a former member of the expert panel on safe drinking water, Steve Hrudey, who testified in committee on May 23, 2013. He said:

> If those responsible for Walkerton's drinking water had simply satisfied the very limited guidance that was in place for treating Walkerton's water, that tragedy could have been averted. This disaster arose from a failure to do what needed to be done operationally...

What is the minister going to do to prevent a Walkerton-like disaster from occurring in first nations communities?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member is concerned about the Walkerton tragedy and its outcome, he should insist that all his NDP colleagues change their minds and support this regulation, which is essential to preventing such a situation. That is what this bill is trying to and will do. Once regulations are adopted throughout the country and once first nations are subject to regulations and standards, we will be able to ensure that the drinking water in those communities is safe.

If he is serious about protecting the interests of first nations, he should be the first to vote in favour of this bill, since that is its primary objective.

● (1050)

[*English*]

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the safe drinking water for first nations act is crucial to ensuring that first nations have the same health and safety precautions concerning drinking water and waste water treatment as are currently enjoyed by other Canadians.

Our government has been engaging with first nations partners since first coming to government in 2006, and we continue to engage with first nations on the proposed legislation every step of the way. There have been seven years of continuous dialogue with first nations, including formal engagement sessions and measures to accommodate the first nations. The legislation before Parliament today is a result of hard work and collaboration.

Would the minister please inform us as to whether the first nations will continue to be involved in the development and implementation of the regulations?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Speaker, indeed, the government will work with first nations and other stakeholders to develop regulations and standards on a region-by-region basis. As a matter of fact, the preamble of the bill makes it clear that this is the intention.

The government recognizes that many first nations communities face unique challenges, and their ability to meet federal regulatory requirements may vary from province to province and territory to territory. Developing federal regulations will take time. It will not happen overnight. These regulations will be implemented over a number of years, in full co-operation and collaboration with first nations and stakeholders.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc-André Morin (Laurentides—Labelle, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind the minister that, in French, the party's name is NPD, not NDP.

They do not understand some very simple things. I spent two years on a reserve providing services to the community. For example, I drove the tanker truck to deliver water to all the homes. One well would have been enough to provide water to the entire reserve. The only thing the community was missing was the money to buy pipes. It had an excavator to do the work and everything else that was needed. The community was trying to get funding to pipe water to homes on the reserve, but it never got it. I lived there in the 1980s, and I am still not sure the situation has been resolved.

There are many other similar cases. The people of Kitigan Zibi, a neighbouring reserve, solved 90% of their supply problems. Last I heard, they needed a half a kilometre of pipe to connect one neighbourhood to the water system.

These communities do not need a law. They need resources. That is what the Conservatives do not understand. Proposing this at the last minute, one week before the end of the session, and imposing a gag order is not the proper attitude for a government that claims to act in the interests of first nations.

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member would have us believe that he is concerned about the resources invested in first nations.

If he is so concerned, then how can he just stand there? Let him stand up and explain to aboriginals on the reserve he was just referring to why, in 2012, he and the other NDP members all voted against the government's budget, which invested $328 million in infrastructure.

Mr. Jean-François Larose (Repentigny, NDP): Mr. Speaker, honestly, to see what the government is doing makes me think of South Africa in days gone by. There is a tendency to generalize, as though every first nation were going through the same thing.

The problem is that each community is unique. I am proud that members from all parties are able to talk about their own realities because it is something they care about. Unfortunately, this bill does not take communities' individual realities into account. The government did not bother to listen to these communities or even slightly address their needs.

Why does the minister need to move a time allocation motion again when we are trying to share our ideas? I do not know any other hon. member who keeps using the same rhetoric over and over again. It takes some nerve to say that we are not serious. The word “honourable” is a title. Some have to work hard for it. He should know that. It is too bad.

● (1055)

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Speaker, I am not shocked by the member's comments. It sounds like something the New Democratic Party would say.

It is important to note that this bill is a response to various recommendations about drinking water on first nations land, including recommendations from the reports I mentioned earlier. These reports were from the Commissioner of the Environment, the expert panel on safe drinking water for first nations, the Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples, the national assessment of first nations water and waste water systems, and the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

They call it muzzling. We say it is time to take action. I understand that members of the New Democratic Party would like to see us end up with the same record as the Liberals at the end of our mandate, which is to say no progress on this issue. On the contrary, we have a detailed three-pronged strategy that includes regulation. That is what this bill will be able to do.

If they were seriously concerned about the issue, they would vote in favour of the bill so that it would pass.

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle (Rivière-du-Nord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the bill has to do with protecting sources of drinking water.

Another bill passed by the government provides for environmental deregulation to allow pipelines to be installed. Furthermore, a provision of this bill stipulates that nothing in the bill should abrogate or derogate from any existing treaty rights.

I have to wonder how the government will reconcile protecting sources of drinking water and making it easier for pipelines to cross first nations land. Is there not a contradiction there?

Furthermore, I do not understand what the minister means when he says that NDP members are used to spinning their wheels. That deserves an explanation. What does he mean when he says that members of the NDP are spinning their wheels?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Speaker, this is typical of the New Democratic Party, which is now questioning my French, likely because I am a simple Acadian from New Brunswick.

To come back to the question, perhaps the member would be more likely to understand if I said it in English. I am sure he would understand that.

I have to admit that aboriginal and treaty rights on first nation lands could be negatively affected if, for example, the land was used in a way that negatively affected the safety of the water. In that kind of circumstance, that could happen.

However, people's health comes first, and that is the priority with this bill.

Ms. Laurin Liu (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this government's actions are absolutely shameful. I am outraged that it would dare impose a 41st gag order on this Parliament, this time concerning Bill S-8, especially given that this bill contains significant flaws. In particular, these legislative measures will make first nations responsible for water supply systems, which have already proven to be inadequate, without giving them the funding and the means to construct systems that are better adapted to their needs.

Last year, the NDP member for Timmins—James Bay told the government about the heartbreaking situation in the community of Attawapiskat. It is clear that first nations are not a priority for the government. Why are the Conservatives not taking action?

● (1100)

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Speaker, they are upset because a similar motion has been moved 41 times. However, this proves that the New Democratic Party and the Liberal Party were categorically opposed to passing bills in the House. Any reasonable Canadian would wonder why they are systematically opposed to anything and everything that is in the interests of Canadians and first nations.

[*English*]

The Deputy Speaker: It is my duty to interrupt the proceedings at this time and put forthwith the question on the motion now before the House.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

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

Some hon. members: Nay.

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

And five or more members having risen:

The Deputy Speaker: Call in the members.

● (1140)

[*Translation*]

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

(Division No. 740)

YEAS

Members

Adler
Albas
Alexander
Allison
Ambrose
Anderson
Ashfield
Baird
Benoit
Bernier
Blaney
Boughen
Breitkreuz
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Butt
Calkins
Carmichael
Chisu
Clarke
Crockatt
Davidson
Del Mastro
Dreeshen
Dykstra
Fast
Flaherty
Galipeau
Gill
Goguen
Gosal
Grewal
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hayes
Hillyer
James
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Kerr
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lebel
Lemieux
Lizon
Lukiwski
MacKay (Central Nova)
Mayes
McLeod
Menzies
Miller
Moore (Fundy Royal)
Norlock
O'Connor
O'Neill Gordon
O'Toole
Payne
Preston
Rajotte
Rempel
Rickford
Saxton
Shea
Shory
Sopuck
Storseth
Sweet
Toews
Trottier
Tweed
Valcourt
Van Loan
Warawa
Watson
Weston (Saint John)
Williamson
Woodworth
Young (Oakville)

Aglukkaq
Albrecht
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Ambler
Anders
Armstrong
Aspin
Bateman
Bergen
Bezan
Block
Braid
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Barrie)
Calandra
Cannan
Carrie
Chong
Clement
Daniel
Dechert
Devolin
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Fantino
Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)
Fletcher
Gallant
Glover
Goodyear
Gourde
Harper
Hawn
Hiebert
Holder
Jean
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kent
Komarnicki
Lauzon
Leitch
Leung
Lobb
Lunney
MacKenzie
McColeman
Menegakis
Merrifield
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Nicholson
Obhrai
Oliver
Opitz
Paradis
Poilievre
Raitt
Reid
Richards
Ritz
Seeback
Shipley
Smith
Stanton
Strahl
Toet
Trost
Truppe
Uppal
Van Kesteren
Wallace
Warkentin
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)
Wilks
Wong
Yelich
Zimmer– — 150

NAYS

Members

Allen (Welland)
Ashton
Aubin
Bélanger
Bennett
Blanchette-Lamothe
Boulerice
Brison
Byrne
Casey
Charlton
Choquette
Angus
Atamanenko
Ayala
Bellavance
Blanchette
Borg
Boutin-Sweet
Brosseau
Caron
Cash
Chisholm
Chow

Christopherson	Cleary
Côté	Crowder
Cullen	Cuzner
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)	Davies (Vancouver East)
Day	Dewar
Dionne Labelle	Donnelly
Doré Lefebvre	Dubé
Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Dusseault	Easter
Eyking	Foote
Fortin	Freeman
Fry	Garneau
Garrison	Genest
Genest-Jourdain	Giguère
Godin	Gravelle
Groguhé	Harris (St. John's East)
Hsu	Hughes
Jacob	Jones
Julian	Kellway
Lapointe	Larose
Latendresse	Laverdière
LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)	Leslie
Liu	MacAulay
Mai	Marston
Martin	Mathyssen
May	McCallum
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)	Michaud
Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)	Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)
Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)	Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)
Mulcair	Nantel
Nash	Nicholls
Nunez-Melo	Pacetti
Papillon	Péclet
Perreault	Pilon
Quach	Rankin
Ravignat	Raynault
Regan	Rousseau
Saganash	Sandhu
Scarpaleggia	Scott
Sellah	Sgro
Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor)	
Sims (Newton—North Delta)	
Sitsabaiesan	St-Denis
Stewart	Stoffer
Sullivan	Toone
Tremblay	Turmel
Valeriote– — 115	

PAIRED

Nil

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

* * *

[*English*]

EXPANSION AND CONSERVATION OF CANADA'S NATIONAL PARKS ACT

BILL S-15—TIME ALLOCATION

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

> That, in relation to Bill S-15, An Act to amend the Canada National Parks Act and the Canada-Nova Scotia Offshore Petroleum Resources Accord Implementation Act and to make consequential amendments to the Canada Shipping Act, 2001, not more than five further hours shall be allotted to the consideration of the second reading stage of the Bill; and
>
> That, at the expiry of the five hours provided for the consideration of the second reading stage of the said Bill, any proceedings before the House shall be interrupted, if required for the purpose of this Order, and, in turn, every question necessary for the disposal of the said stage of the Bill shall be put forthwith and successively, without further debate or amendment.

● (1145)

The Deputy Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 67(1), there will now be a 30-minute question period.

[*Translation*]

I invite all hon. members who wish to ask questions to rise in their places so the Chair has some idea of the number of members who wish to participate.

The hon. member for Halifax.

[*English*]

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have about a minute for a question. Is that correct?

The Deputy Speaker: I have been allotting a little bit of extra time for the first question, but after that, yes, I expect the questions and the answers to be approximately one minute.

Ms. Megan Leslie: Mr. Speaker, often when time allocation is moved in the House, we, the NDP, the official opposition, stands. We are angry, because we find time allocation to be an abusive process for shutting down debate.

However, I am not angry today. I am actually standing here with sadness, because there was a legitimate attempt by the NDP to work with the government on this bill to get it through the House. This is a really important piece of legislation about a park, Sable Island park, that will actually be in the riding of Halifax, and I want to support this bill—

The Deputy Speaker: There is just far too much noise in the House. A number of you do not intend to stay for the full half hour. Those of you who are carrying on conversations, would you please take them outside the chamber? We are having a very hard time hearing the member.

The member for Halifax.

Ms. Megan Leslie: Mr. Speaker, as I said, I want to support this bill. I want this bill to get through. I want park protection for Sable Island. That is the thing I want most.

We opened a door for the Conservatives to say, "Let us talk about how we can expedite this and how we can get it through the House together and work on some of the problems together". We opened that door, and now the Conservatives are slamming it in our faces.

I am not angry standing here. I am profoundly sad. I apologize to the constituents of Halifax for thinking I could actually work with the Conservatives and that we could move something along together. I apologize for my naïveté.

My question to the minister is this: Why are they doing this? What it says to me is that there are other things I cannot trust in this bill. It says to me that maybe I should not be supporting this bill, because I cannot trust what the Conservatives put forward when I cannot even trust them to work together to get this bill through the House. I think there are other things in this bill I cannot support.

Why is the minister doing this? Why is he using time allocation?

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first and foremost, and I have spoken to my colleague about this on a number of occasions, our government appreciates the support we have received from other parties, both in the House and in the Senate. There was an agreement with regard to the number of speakers we would put up for the bill, which is largely embraced not only by all parties in Parliament but by all parties in the Nova Scotia legislature and beyond. I am talking about first nations, environmental groups and others, who for two years have considered and celebrated the action that has finally been taken, after 50 years.

This legislation, this protection of an iconic piece of Canadian nature, has been 50 years in the making. As we address many other bills in the final weeks of this session, the time has come for the House to vote.

● (1150)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is yet another sad day. This is not about Bill S-15. This is about a Conservative majority government under the Prime Minister and his attitude and his lack of respect for due parliamentary process.

The Prime Minister, more than any other in the history of Canada, has demonstrated borderline contempt in not allowing members the opportunity to address important issues. Canadians have a right to know that parliamentarians have been afforded the opportunity to speak and the opportunity to see a bill go through a natural process. The Conservative government has incorporated in its standard process as a majority government something that is totally abhorrent and disrespectful toward democracy.

My question is not to the minister. My question is to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons or to the Prime Minister. Why has the government decided to take such strong action with time allocation, unprecedented in the history of our country, to deny members the opportunity to debate?

If there were an ounce of good-faith negotiation, that is what should be taking place. We should have negotiation through House leaders so that there is a proper procedure to pass legislation through the House of Commons. Why is the government not doing what it should be doing in terms of preserving democracy inside the House of Commons?

Hon. Peter Kent: Mr. Speaker, this government embraces the concept of parliamentary debate. Unfortunately, the agreement that existed among parties seems to have fallen apart, and the time has come to vote.

I would remind my hon. colleagues that the passage of this legislation to protect Canada's 43rd national park reserve involves and requires mirrored legislation in the House and in the Nova Scotia legislature. Mirrored legislation was introduced there on April 24. It achieved second reading on April 25 and third reading on May 6. It received royal assent on May 10.

There has been full debate in the Senate. We had an agreement for debate in the House, which, for opposition reasons, has fallen apart. We are prepared today to take questions about the material content of Bill S-15 and to proceed to the time allocation vote.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would remind the minister that we are not in the Senate, and we have had no debate on this.

I am motivated to remark on the comments by my colleague from Halifax, who asked what is really going on in relation to this bill.

If we look at the preamble to the bill, it talks about amending it to ensure that, for the first time, I think, the Canada National Parks Act is subservient to any other legislation of Canada. Why is this being talked about in a bill that is supposed to set up a new reserve? Why would that vehicle be used to open a debate about the whole nature of how strong the commitment to national parks is in this country?

Hon. Peter Kent: Mr. Speaker, in fact, there has been debate. Debate began this past week. We were prepared to continue and conclude that debate today, until the opposition changed the terms of the agreement.

This bill, as I have said, is mirrored in legislation passed in the Nova Scotia legislature. We agreed that there were some clarifications that needed to be made on the record, which I am quite prepared to make, regarding the low-impact activity that will still be allowed on the island after it becomes a national park reserve.

Time is short in this legislative session. This has been well examined over the past two years, and it is time for the House to stand and vote.

● (1155)

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative ministers have come up with a new argument for their time allocation motions. They say that the bill has been on track for years. When speaking about a bill on the railways, the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities recently told us that we had already been discussing it for six or seven years. Now, the Minister of the Environment is telling us that we have been discussing this bill for two years.

Then why now? The parliamentary session is winding down and now suddenly there is some pressing need to pass these bills even though the Conservatives have been in power since 2006. If it has been such a long time, then it seems to me that we should have had formal discussions and debate on all these bills sooner.

In closing, I want to correct the Minister of the Environment. He said there was agreement among all parties about the number of speakers. I can assure you that he certainly did not talk to the Bloc Québécois to find out when we might speak. It is funny because when they need us they do not talk to us and we are a non-recognized party and when they do not need us then we no longer exist.

I would remind the House and all parties that all 308 members here are legitimately and democratically elected, from the Prime Minister to the ministers, to every other member, regardless of where they sit.

[*English*]

Hon. Peter Kent: Mr. Speaker, discussions with regard to procedures of this House should be conducted elsewhere. As you have informed the House, we are in this period to discuss the creation of Canada's 43rd national park.

In the 2000 Speech from the Throne, the Government of Canada made a commitment to create significant new protected areas. This legislation has been in the works for more than 50 years, starting with school children who wrote to protect the famous wild horses of Sable Island. In 1967, the government of the Rt. Hon. John Diefenbaker passed regulations protecting these horses, which planted the original seeds for the long-term protection of Sable Island.

The importance of the conservation gains of creating this new national treasure, this new national park reserve, cannot be underestimated. Sable Island is home to 350 species of migratory birds, the breeding ground for virtually the world's entire population of the Ipswich sparrow, and turning Sable Island into a national park would ensure its protection for generations to come.

Mr. David Wilks (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for his comments today. I wonder if he could comment a bit on one of the oldest established national parks, that being Yoho National Park, and some of the regulatory changes in this bill that would affect Yoho, and explain to the people how it would be a positive impact.

Hon. Peter Kent: Mr. Speaker, this piece of legislation does extend beyond the headline news, the good news of the creation of a Sable Island national park, and deals with the contemporizing and updating of a number of the management plans with regard to some of our most historic national parks in the western mountains. These changes would all conform with the National Parks Act and with the need to regularly re-examine the various land management plans, the various protections of habitat for the wildlife, the flora and the fauna of these traditional national parks bases, as we will in the decades ahead regularly revisit the management practices the 43rd national park, Sable Island.

● (1200)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I deeply regret that time allocation is being used on this bill. I sympathize enormously with the statement from the hon. member for Halifax. It is critical that we protect Sable Island properly. A Sable Island national park is something we all want, but not at the expense of undermining the integrity of the national parks system by allowing the Canada-Nova Scotia Offshore Petroleum Board to have rights to pass regulations that affect a national park. This is unprecedented.

Contrary to what the minister just said, environmental groups have contacted me from Nova Scotia, deeply concerned. They do not want the bill to pass in its current form, and they want to protect the integrity of the national parks system.

It requires full debate. Abbreviating that debate and pushing it through at the last minute is not only an affront to democracy. It is an affront to the integrity of the national parks system across this country.

Hon. Peter Kent: Mr. Speaker, I again thank my colleague for her input and her observations.

However, I would remind her, again, that in the consideration of this bill, in the public consultations, including consultations with environmental NGOs and with first nations in Nova Scotia, there has been widespread consensus on exactly how and under what conditions, stipulations and regulations this new national park would be created.

This bill was introduced in the Nova Scotia Legislature on April 24, second reading was on April 25, third reading was on May 6 and it received royal assent on May 10. In debate, the Liberal House leader said:

> ...we look forward to this bill moving on to the Law Amendments Committee and making its way through the House and...in conjunction with the federal government, we will soon see the official declaration of Sable Island as Canada's 43rd...park.

The same was heard from the Progressive Conservatives, and of course from the NDP government, wishing us well and hoping this could be passed into law and proclaimed this year.

With regard to the agreement with the oil and gas industry, this is in fact a protection of the island. We would not be in this House today considering the creation of Sable Island as a fully protected national park without the initiative and co-operation of the oil and gas sector. They have agreed to forego leases held for some years, potentially lucrative leases.

The agreement provides for the park to extend to the beaches at low tide with a further one nautical mile buffer zone to prevent any offshore activity. The foremost expert on Sable Island, Zoe Lucas, has been very forthright in saying that the limited activity in the past and what will be permitted in the future is of very low impact and is not expected to disrupt either the habitat or any of the species on the island.

Ms. Megan Leslie: Mr. Speaker, I am not very satisfied with the minister's answers. I am also not very satisfied with his characterization of what has been going on here.

The minister knows full well that the NDP has been trying to work with government for the past two weeks to try to get this bill to committee today. We have not held up those discussions or those negotiations. That is not what the NDP has done.

Today we walk in and find out that there is going to be time allocation on this bill. I am telling the minister that this completely undermines any trust we thought we had with the government. It makes me second-guess my own judgment here.

How can the minister stand here and say that things have gone off the rails and that discussions have broken down, when he knows that is not true? Why is the government doing this? Why is it slamming an open door in our face? Why does the government refuse to negotiate and work co-operatively to actually get legislation through this House?

Hon. Peter Kent: Mr. Speaker, again I thank my colleague for her questions.

I am not going to go into the mechanics of agreements that we thought had been made with regard to the number of speeches from all parties in the House. I will be very direct in saying that there are no surprises in this legislation. The legislation has been very well examined in a variety of fora over the past two years.

It is time now to stand and either vote for the creation of another jewel in the crown of Canada's protected spaces or not.

● (1205)

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, my question to the minister is not about why the NDP would decide to delay this when the NDP Government of Nova Scotia has asked us to pass it as quickly as possible. That is a question the NDP members need to ask themselves.

I am someone who has been on Sable Island at least a couple of dozen times. Other than the Minister of the Environment and the member for West Nova, I do not think any other members in this place have been on Sable Island.

It is a unique part of the world. It is a unique part of Atlantic Canada. We are going to have some low-impact activity allowed on the island.

Can the minister explain why this is unique to this agreement?

Hon. Peter Kent: Mr. Speaker, it is indeed a unique agreement. As I began to remark earlier, we would not be in a position to celebrate the creation of this new national park were it not for the co-operation and the initiative of the oil and gas sector.

In decades past, there were a number of petroleum wells drilled on this island before the companies were moved to step back, to abandon their leases to the greater interest of conservation in our country. However, there are probably about 10 wellheads of capped-off wells on the island, which because of the constantly moving sands of the island, are from time to time exposed and require inspection.

This is one of the definitions of the light activity that would be allowed. Again, as I said, Halifax researcher Zoe Lucas, who has spent decades on the island and is the foremost authority on the flora and fauna of the island, has said that she has experienced in the past only the absolutely best behaviour of the oil and gas sector, and she expects to in the future.

I know some of my colleagues have expressed concern about this because of their historic definition of the word “seismic”, but there is also provision for the latest in seismic technology, again in conjunction with past wells drilled on the island, to use this new and non-intrusive technology. Again, Zoe Lucas has said that is not intrusive and does not present a threat to either the habitat or the species on the island.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives curtailed debate twice this morning, once again limiting members' speaking time. We want to talk. Enough is enough. There are problems with the manipulation of public opinion. The members opposite are saying we do not want to discuss this issue. Hold on a minute. We do. The minister and the teams are in the process of discussing this matter.

Sable Island is a wonderful place. There was even a film made on this island, where birds come to nest. I think it is called *Les oiseaux des prés* or something like that. The island also has wild horses.

Of course we completely agree that this island must be protected. Environmental groups and aboriginal people also agree.

Where can we discuss this type of issue if not in the House? We must discuss it here, and the Conservatives must stop limiting members' speaking time.

[*English*]

Hon. Peter Kent: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question and her observations, and she is right that it is a magnificently unique piece of Canada. I had the great honour just last summer to make my first visit to the island in its entirety. Environment Canada has a major weather station on the island, which would remain on the island as it is transformed into a national park.

There is some cleanup to do from decades past, with regard to an old fuel storage facility and old light towers no longer in use. However, it is indeed a very moving experience to wander the 42-kilometre-long sand spit, some 300 kilometres northeast of Halifax, and observe these wild horses. Whether from vessels coming to North America or Spanish vessels going to Latin America, the precise origin of these horses is unknown. It is amazing that they have survived, numbering several hundred, over these years in such a barren space along with, as my colleague observed, several hundred species of birds and, from time to time depending on extreme weather events, birds and butterflies carried by hurricanes to the island.

● (1210)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this afternoon, I am amazed to hear the minister and many others before him talk about the beauty of the island and the beauty of his bill, when we should be spending the half-hour that we have talking about the Standing Orders and the 42nd time allocation motion—if I have counted correctly—that the government has imposed.

Over the past several months and even years, we have become used to the fact that the government thinks that the laws and the rules are there for others to follow. When laws and rules do not fit in with the Conservatives' agenda, they change them.

My question is very simple. Should we expect a bill to change the Standing Orders of the House to be introduced in the next few days or can we expect the Conservatives to one day follow the rules?

[*English*]

Hon. Peter Kent: Mr. Speaker, as I have remarked, a debate over procedure in the House is perhaps warranted, but not in this time space. Failing a question to the point, it may be worthwhile to recognize that Parks Canada, over the years, has been widely recognized as a world leader in conservation.

We received the World Wildlife fund gift to the earth for inspiring leadership, conservation achievements. A couple of years ago we received the Royal Canadian Geographic Society gold medal award, with the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society and the Dehcho First Nation, for expansion of the great national park in the Northwest Territories, Nahanni.

I was honoured to receive this year the Polar Bear International Champion of Polar Bears award for leadership and conservation work in Wapusk National Park in Manitoba. I am sure that in the decades to come, Parks Canada will receive any number of awards in recognition of this great conservation order.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the reality is that the Conservatives have botched a number of pieces of legislation by trying to ram them through the House. This is the 42nd time they have invoked closure. I do not think these excuses they have put forward constantly wash with the public anymore.

The member for Edmonton—St. Albert was very accurate when he exposed the seamy underbelly of the corrupt and corrosive government. He talked about ministerial opulence. He talked about the spending scandal. He said that the Conservative Party had morphed into one it once mocked, referencing Liberal spending scandals, arrogance and sense of entitlement that we saw previously.

He said as well, "My constituents are gravely disappointed. My constituents demand better. I no longer recognize the party I joined". That is the member for Edmonton—St. Albert. There are a lot of Conservatives across the country are asking those same questions when they see the Senate spending scandal and the arrogance of the government invoking closure 42 times.

My question for the minister is very simple. How does he think the government has any credibility to force now for the 42nd time, a sad record of Canadian history, closure in the House of Commons.

Hon. Peter Kent: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for making the effort, but I will speak to the point of this period of time and to the good news, the creation of Canada's 43rd national park.

A number of people have asked me why the Government of Canada would protect such a remote, hard to access piece of sand, a 42-kilometre length of sand so far off of Nova Scotia's shores. The answer is that it is remote. A number of our protected spaces are not easy to get to, but every year, and under the new national parks administration, some 50 to 250 people will be able to visit the island for science, research, light touristic visits, as well as to service and support the Meteorological Service of Canada weather station, which is placed there.

In the past seven years, our government has added over 50% to the land area of protected spaces in Canada. We have now protected about 10% of Canada's total land space. We are working in the months and the years ahead to protect even more of our unique natural spaces.

● (1215)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): It is my duty to interrupt the proceedings at this time and put forthwith the question on the motion now before the House.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

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

Some hon. members: Nay.

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

And five or more members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Call in the members.

● (1255)

[*Translation*]

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

(Division No. 741)

YEAS

Members

Adler	Aglukkaq
Albas	Albrecht
Alexander	Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Allison	Ambler
Ambrose	Anders
Anderson	Armstrong
Ashfield	Aspin
Baird	Bateman
Benoit	Bergen
Bernier	Bezan
Blaney	Block
Boughen	Braid
Breitkreuz	Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)	Brown (Barrie)
Butt	Calandra
Calkins	Cannan
Carmichael	Carrie
Chisu	Chong
Clarke	Clement
Crockatt	Daniel
Davidson	Dechert
Del Mastro	Dreeshen
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	Dykstra
Fantino	Fast
Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)	Fletcher
Galipeau	Gallant
Gill	Glover
Goguen	Goodyear
Gosal	Gourde
Grewal	Harper
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)	Hawn
Hayes	Hiebert
Hillyer	Holder
James	Jean
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Kent
Kerr	Komarnicki
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Lauzon
Lebel	Leitch
Lemieux	Leung
Lizon	Lobb
Lukiwski	Lunney

MacKay (Central Nova) — MacKenzie
Mayes — McColeman
McLeod — Menegakis
Menzies — Merrifield
Miller — Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal) — Nicholson
Norlock — Obhrai
O'Connor — Oliver
O'Neill Gordon — Opitz
O'Toole — Paradis
Payne — Poilievre
Preston — Raitt
Rajotte — Reid
Rempel — Richards
Rickford — Ritz
Saxton — Seeback
Shea — Shipley
Shory — Smith
Sopuck — Stanton
Storseth — Strahl
Sweet — Tilson
Toet — Toews
Trost — Trottier
Truppe — Tweed
Uppal — Valcourt
Van Kesteren — Van Loan
Vellacott — Wallace
Warawa — Warkentin
Watson — Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)
Weston (Saint John) — Wilks
Williamson — Wong
Woodworth — Yelich
Young (Oakville) — Zimmer– — 150

NAYS

Members

Allen (Welland) — Angus
Ashton — Atamanenko
Aubin — Ayala
Bellavance — Bennett
Blanchette — Blanchette-Lamothe
Borg — Boulerice
Boutin-Sweet — Brison
Brosseau — Byrne
Caron — Casey
Charlton — Chisholm
Choquette — Chow
Christopherson — Cleary
Comartin — Côté
Cotler — Crowder
Cullen — Cuzner
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway) — Day
Dewar — Dionne Labelle
Donnelly — Doré Lefebvre
Dubé — Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona) — Dusseault
Easter — Eyking
Foote — Fortin
Freeman — Fry
Garneau — Garrison
Genest — Genest-Jourdain
Giguère — Godin
Gravelle — Groguhé
Harris (St. John's East) — Hsu
Hughes — Jacob
Jones — Julian
Karygiannis — Kellway
Lamoureux — Lapointe
Larose — Latendresse
Laverdière — LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)
Leslie — Liu
MacAulay — Mai
Marston — Masse
Mathyssen — May
McCallum — McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Michaud — Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)
Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord) — Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)
Morin (Laurentides—Labelle) — Mulcair
Nantel — Nash
Nicholls — Nunez-Melo
Pacetti — Papillon
Péclet — Perreault
Pilon — Quach
Ravignat — Raynault
Regan — Rousseau
Saganash — Sandhu
Scarpaleggia — Scott
Sellah — Sgro
Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor)
Sims (Newton—North Delta)
Sitsabaiesan — St-Denis
Stewart — Sullivan
Toone — Tremblay
Turmel — Valeriote– — 114

PAIRED

Nil

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): I declare the motion carried.

* * *

[*English*]

SAFE DRINKING WATER FOR FIRST NATIONS ACT

The House resumed from June 4 consideration of the motion that Bill S-8, An Act respecting the safety of drinking water on First Nation lands, be read the third time and passed.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with very real frustration that I rise today to speak to Bill S-8, which is focused on federal regulations for water and waste water systems for first nations communities.

In his speech on Bill S-8 earlier this week, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs said:

> It is time to move forward and create the regulations needed to safeguard drinking water in first nations communities.

That is not what the government committed to when in 2011 it supported the Liberal Party motion:

> ...to address on an urgent basis the needs of those First Nations communities whose members have no access to clean, running water in their homes...

The same motion provided that:

> action to address this disparity begin no later than the spring of 2012.

Simply passing a bill—a year late—to allow for water regulations to be imposed on first nations is not the action contemplated in that 2011 motion passed unanimously by the House of Commons. Bill S-8 is not going to fix the problem.

People living in a large proportion of first nations communities do not have access to basic, clean, drinkable water. Lack of access to clean drinking water presents a serious health threat to first nations communities, creating a higher likelihood of disease and infection transmission and poorer overall health outcomes, as we saw with the H1N1 epidemic, particularly on the reserves in northern Manitoba. We are dealing with a crisis that needs much more than words from the government: it needs action.

Unfortunately, this legislation shows just how out of touch the government is in terms of the appalling state of water and waste water systems in hundreds of first nations communities. It will not provide clean water to one more home or one more trained operator for a first nations water facility. The only thing the bill would do is distract from the government's inexcusable inaction on confronting the appalling capacity gaps in these communities in terms of water infrastructure and maintenance.

The position of the Liberal Party has been crystal clear on this legislation since the beginning. In fact, I wrote to the then minister for aboriginal affairs in September 2011. In that letter I explained the Liberal position had two fundamental points.

First, Liberals would not support any legislation on safe drinking water that was introduced without an implementation plan for additional resourcing that fully addresses the deficiencies identified in the national assessment on first nations water and waste water systems.

Second, the government would have to collaborate with first nations and obtain their free, prior and informed consent on the range of regulatory options regarding safe drinking water, as identified by the expert panel on safe drinking water for first nations, before the reintroduction of legislation.

The government has failed to address either of these critical points.

Every report regarding the tragic on-reserve water situation states that the massive infrastructure and capacity gaps must be addressed before a legislative option is adopted.

The Assembly of First Nations commented:

> Bill S-8 will not guarantee that First Nations have access to safe drinking water. Bill S-8 creates new regulations and standards but does not provide First Nations with any resources to meet those new standards. ... Safe drinking water requires more than writing new regulations. Safe drinking water requires infrastructure and facilities, skills, training and resources.

The Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs wrote to the committee, stating:

> AMC has stated several times the fundamental problem is a financial resource one.

The Canadian Bar Association stated:

> From a policy perspective, what is still needed is a firm government commitment to provide resources to address water quality issues on reserves, not necessarily new legislation.

In fact, witness after witness came before committee in opposition to this legislation and, among other problems, specifically identified the government's decision to move forward without addressing the capacity gap as the primary issue impacting the provision of safe water to first nations communities.

● (1300)

Grand Chief Roland Twinn of Treaty 8 First Nations of Alberta reflected what the committee heard in general from first nations when he said:

> ...the Assembly of Treaty Chiefs of Treaties 6, 7, and 8 in Alberta has, from the very beginning, made significant efforts to work with the Harper government to fix the deplorable state of first nations' drinking water systems. Our efforts have been rewarded by the government with political spin, broken promises, and a meaningless piece of legislation that will do nothing to ensure safe drinking water for first nation people.

The government's own expert panel found:

> Regulation alone will not be effective in ensuring safe drinking water.... Regulation without the investment needed to build capacity may even put drinking water safety at risk by diverting badly needed resources into regulatory frameworks and compliance costs.

That is the key point. The government's own expert panel said that far from fixing the problem, this approach may even make matters worse.

That report, on page 29, line 2, also said that:

> ...adequate resources for plants and piping, training and monitoring, and operations and maintenance...are more critical to ensuring safe drinking water than is regulation alone.

The 2007 Senate report entitled Safe Drinking Water for First Nations, from the aboriginal peoples committee chaired by the Hon. Gerry St. Germain, a Conservative senator, stated in the conclusion:

> Sustained investment in the capacity of First Nations community water systems and of those running the systems is absolutely essential to ensure First Nations people on-reserve enjoy safe drinking water. Without this investment, we risk introducing a regulatory regime that burdens communities and does little to help them meet legislated standards.

Given the recommendations of the expert panel and first nations about the need to deal with capacity and resourcing issues before, or at least in concert with, legislation, it is shocking that the government decided to introduce the bill in the Senate, where it is subject to increased restrictions on incorporating resources. As a Senate bill there is, and can be, no funding appropriation attached to Bill S-8.

During his speech last week, the parliamentary secretary for aboriginal affairs bragged about the fact that his government "has made significant investments in water and waste water infrastructure...."

Despite actually taking credit for money yet to be spent, the parliamentary secretary neglected to note that his government's own 2011 national assessment of first nations water and waste water systems identified an immediate funding shortfall of $1.2 million and indicated it would require $4.7 billion of new money spent over the next 10 years to deal with the first nations water and waste water capacity gap. This funding shortfall took into account the current funding levels, which have not been increased since that time.

Let us be clear: the $330 million over two years the government points to in its 2012 budget is simply a temporary extension of temporary funding from 2010 and fails to address the capacity gap identified in the 2011 assessment.

In fact, not only is the government content to impose standards and regulations on first nations without providing the required investment in physical assets or capacity-building to deal with the problem, it is actually cutting the money allocated to first nations health and safety-related infrastructure projects, such as water facilities.

Budget 2011 proposed $7 billion over the next 10 years to continue to provide support for first nations, primarily for health and safety-related infrastructure projects. Given that over the past six years this program received an average of $1.2 billion annually, this "new" funding commitment actually represents a cut of approximately $345 million per year from the 2012 funding levels and $500 million from the six-year average. This is nothing short of shocking.

The legislation would result in significant new costs and responsibilities being imposed on first nations without any commitment to transfer the necessary resources.

Despite the Prime Minister's rhetoric at the Crown-First Nations Gathering about resetting the relationship, the Conservative government has shown a total disregard for the rights of indigenous people.

● (1305)

The Liberal Party has heard consistently in the Senate, in the House of Commons and in discussions outside Parliament that there were not appropriate consultations with first nations on this bill.

Grand Chief Craig Makinaw summed up this issue for the House of Commons committee studying this bill, when he stated, "...we shouldn't have one-day consultations across the country and conference calls. That's not consultation." Consultation requires both a substantive dialogue and for the government to listen and, when appropriate, incorporate what it hears into the approach. Many did not even get the courtesy of a one-way information session the government tries to pass off as consultation.

Chief Charles Weaselhead of the Blood Tribe put it simply for the commons committee when he stated, "...there has been no consultation with the Blood Tribe". Although first nations have a constitutional right to be consulted on matters like this, the Liberal Party believes it is also just good government to consult with all those impacted by decisions.

At committee, a representative of Metro Vancouver pointed out:

> A lack of acknowledgement of local government interests and the absence of a meaningful consultation process, including opportunities for local government involvement and input, pose serious challenges for local communities in that public interests with respect to Bill S-8 are not being fully considered.

Proper consultation leads to better policies and solutions that actually make sense. That has not happened regarding Bill S-8. The bill explicitly subjects existing aboriginal and treaty rights to a clause that suggests that such rights can be overridden. What is disguised as a non-derogation clause states, "to the extent necessary to ensure the safety of drinking water on First Nation lands".

When the Canadian Bar Association presented to the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, it noted, "We believe that the qualification 'except to the extent necessary to ensure the safety of the drinking water on First Nation lands' is in itself an explicit abrogation or derogation of existing Aboriginal or treaty rights pursuant to section 35 of the Constitution Act...".

Mr. Christopher Devlin of the CBA also made it clear to the committee, "Our simple point to the committee is that we don't believe this is necessary and we don't believe it is required for the bill to be effective as it's drafted."

Despite evidence from legal and aboriginal experts about the serious problems with this clause, the government stubbornly refused all opposition amendments to fix it. This prompted National Chief Shawn Atleo of the AFN to write to the minister after the bill was reported back to the House, urging him to correct this flawed clause before the bill is passed into the House of Commons. He made it clear in that letter, which states, "First Nations will not accept the diminishment of Aboriginal and treaty rights in Bill S-8." It is time for the government to listen.

All Canadians, regardless of where in Canada they live, whether it is in the north, the south or elsewhere in the country, have a fundamental right to have access to drinking water and adequate water facilities. The Liberal Party will not be supporting this legislation because the government has decided to move forward in a way that not only ignores the fundamental issues at stake, but may actually make things worse.

● (1310)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to the hon. member's speech.

She spoke in particular about the consultation process. Conservatives often say that they held broad consultations that cost so many millions of dollars. Yet, oddly enough, first nations, among others, often say they were not consulted as they would have liked.

In committee, while studying Bill S-2, for example, I heard the Conservatives say totally absurd things. They said they had talked to their husbands, their sons or their sisters. This was the kind of comment that kept cropping up. There seems to be a need to define what constitutes real consultation.

I would like the member to talk about this. If she is saying that there has not been enough consultation while the Conservative Party says the opposite, there may be a misunderstanding. Could the member tell us more?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Mr. Speaker, it is very important that we properly define the word "consultation". The first nations have been clear: there was not enough consultation on this bill.

What is more, how this government consults does not make it true consultation. The ability to listen goes hand in hand with true consultation. It is not simply an information session. That is very important.

There was not enough consultation on this bill. Had the government listened, it would have found it impossible to introduce this bill in the House.

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to my colleague speaking about this issue.

The question of consultation, of course, has come up. We have had the current Conservative government impose closure time and time again. There have been a record number of closures now. Over 40 times, the government has basically used a sledgehammer to push legislation through Parliament.

As we know, the Conservatives often botch it. They have one of the worst records in terms of actually getting the legislation right. The legislation is left subject to court challenges, or is hastily redrafted. The Conservatives seem to be doing their drafting on the back of a napkin somewhere in the PMO.

The question I have is around the issue of consultation. There are chiefs in Ontario, the Assembly of Manitoba, Treaty 7 nations in Alberta, all raising concerns about this legislation that the government is now trying to ram through rather than put in place the infrastructure funding that is required and rather than putting in place the kinds of investments that are required.

I would like to ask my colleague what she thinks about the government's drive to ram this legislation through and its lack of consultation.

● (1315)

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Mr. Speaker, I think that the one committee hearing where we heard from Akwesasne, the Blood Tribe and Ermineskin Nation was enough to explain that these people clearly could not have been consulted.

At Akwesasne, of course, with the jurisdictional straddle between Ontario, Quebec and the United States, it is absolutely impossible to actually think of applying provincial standards. There are such unique situations first nation by first nation, from the Blood Tribe that has a large population and would have to look after its own water system, to the smaller first nations that have to get their water from local communities, to the communities themselves that have asked what the bill would do to them if they are supplying water to a small band. It is so clear, again, if the Conservatives had listened to the committee hearing, that without the resources they cannot do the job.

What the bill would do is transfer all the liability to the band, but the red light, green light and the ability to assign resources rests with the government. The first nations would be blamed and liable for what the Government of Canada has not provided.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member has been a very strong advocate for many of our first nations communities across Canada. A while back, through her advocacy, we introduced an all-party motion in the form of an opposition day to try to deal with the issue of safe drinking water for all communities.

Could the member comment on the expectation that was set by the leader of the Liberal Party when we had introduced that particular motion?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Mr. Speaker, it was after the election of 2011, in July, when we realized that there had been this devastating report on the state of water and waste water across Canada, which was ready in April but was not released by the government until after the election.

When we looked at the status, where two-thirds to three-quarters of first nations had water systems that were at moderate to high risk, we were very upset. Therefore, we proposed the motion in the House, which received unanimous consent, to do whatever it takes to get first nations the quality of drinking water to which they are entitled.

It was very clear in the report that it would take $4.7 billion over the next ten years and $1.2 billion immediately. We have seen nothing coming from the government except cuts to the average expenditure on water and waste water across many years, and $330 million in last year's budget. It just goes absolutely nowhere to meet the needs of first nations.

There are so many communities that I visited during the H1N1 pandemic that were without any running water. We cannot ask people to wash their hands if there is no running water. It is totally inexcusable that in a place like Wasagamack, only 20% of homes have running water and that this is third world Canada.

Mr. Brian Jean (Fort McMurray—Athabasca, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments from the member. I find them kind of fanciful right now. She did spend considerable time with the previous Liberal government when they were in power. In 13 years, they settled somewhere around 8 treaties.

This government has settled over 80 treaties since 2006. It certainly says something about the focus of our government. Something else that says it clearly is that since 2006, we have built over 30 new schools for aboriginals, renovated over 200 schools, built over 10,000 homes and renovated thousands more. We have invested in safe drinking water. The Liberals left around 300 reserves without safe drinking water when we took over in 2006. We have increased funding for child and family services by 25%. We have delivered on our promise for accountability and transparency in reserves. We have invested in over 700 projects that are linked to aboriginals and spent over $10 billion per year in 34 departments.

Very clearly, the Liberals did absolutely zero during their time in office. They did zip. They did nada. I wonder what excuse she is using to suggest that we need to do more, even though we have done ten times more as far as treaty claims go, and in half the time.

● (1320)

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Mr. Speaker, I find it a bit rich that the member can stand up with the talking points on treaties and schools, when we are talking about getting safe drinking water to the first nations.

I want to see a plan. I want to see what, by when and how. Why can the government not let us know when 100% of first nations homes and communities will have access to safe drinking water?

The government tore up the Kelowna accord. They had $5.1 billion there, including a first nations-led approach to infrastructure and waste water. They tore up that money and the money for education and used it in other places when it had been promised by the provinces, territories and first nations Inuit-Metis leadership. If that Kelowna accord had gone forward, we would not be in the situation we are in today.

Mr. Ray Boughen (Palliser, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Mississauga.

Before I get into my remarks, I had better take a minute to help my hon. colleague across the floor, because unfortunately, she has the facts all fouled up. There are no facts in what she is talking about.

Let us take a minute to look at the time frame. There was a comment made that nothing has been done on this file for years and years. The truth of the matter is that the file became very active in the summer of 2006. We are now in 2013. I respectfully suggest that there has been a fair time frame between 2006 and 2013.

From February to March 2009, there was a series of engagement sessions with first nations communities to look at their problems and at anticipated solutions. In the fall and winter of 2009-10, government officials met with first nations chiefs to discuss their needs with respect to water and waste water on their reserves. From October 2010 to October 2011, without prejudice, first nations organizations addressed various concerns about water.

I mention water, because the hon. member across the way seemed to think that we did not do anything with this file, and nothing could be further from the truth.

There was also mention of there being no funding. Let us look at that for a minute.The government has committed $330.8 million over two years through economic action plan 2012. That plan runs, as members know, into 2013, as well. Therefore, there is indeed money for this project.

As we go further into 2014, the Government of Canada will have invested $3 billion to support delivery of drinking water and waste water for first nations. I respectfully submit for members that this is a sizable piece of change. Obviously, the government is taking water and waste water very seriously.

I stand today to declare my support for Bill S-8, the safe drinking water for first nations act. The proposed legislation would lead to further progress on the remarkable collaborative effort that has been under way for more than seven years to improve safe drinking water in first nations communities.

As the members of the House recognize, although considerable progress has been made to date, much work remains to be done to ensure that the residents of first nations communities have access to safe, clean and reliable drinking water. I am convinced that the key to safeguarding drinking water is to develop regulations using the same type of collaborative approach that has produced so much progress in recent years.

In 2006, the Government of Canada and the Assembly of First Nations agreed to a joint plan of action for first nations' drinking water. At that time, the parties committed to five specific action plans. They are, in no particular order, but all of them important, the following: implementing a clear protocol on water standards; ensuring that water systems operators are properly trained; making immediate fixes to water systems in 21 priority communities; establishing an expert panel to identify options for an effective regulatory regime for drinking water in first nations communities; and issuing regular updates on progress made through the plan of action. This collaborative plan inspired significant results and led to a further commitment of funds in an increased effort to make tangible, long-term progress.

For example, thanks to the government's ongoing investment in the circuit rider training program, the number of trained and certified operators, between 2010 and 2012, increased from 51% to 60%. First nations' drinking water systems have enjoyed this increased certification. For first nations' waste water systems, the number has risen from 42% to 54%.

The expert panel created under the plan of action staged a series of town hall sessions across Canada and identified three legislative options. We are talking about water and waste water, and as members in the House here this afternoon are aware, the focus is very much on targets.

● (1325)

One of these options, the delivery of regulations on a region-by-region basis, forms the basis of the legislative situation now before us. To improve the original version of that option, the Government of Canada has published a discussion paper and has met with representatives of first nations groups.

The government has been accused of not consulting, but here we are, a year later, after holding a series of 13 engagement sessions and hearing from more than 500 members of first nations. Throughout these sessions, the participants agreed on the urgent need to address health, safety and environmental concerns related to drinking water in first nations communities.

In 2010, the Government of Canada introduced a different version of Bill S-8, which died on the order paper at the dissolution of Parliament in March 2011.

I respectfully submit that the government has indeed paid close attention to waste water and water management on reserves. It has supplied dollars for the development of the programs. It has supplied training for the development of the programs. It has put in action a plan that ensures that the government has made a commitment to first nations for water and waste water, and it will continue that commitment over a period of years until all first nations communities have the same water and waste water as all the rest of Canada.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is quite interesting that in the debate we have had, what has emerged is that the federal Conservative government is not providing adequate funding for infrastructure to ensure that we have safe drinking water in first nations communities. That is the real debate.

The fact is that the Conservative government is wholly inadequate in its funding of first nations to ensure that we have safe drinking water. We have had a number of comments from the opposition.

The Conservatives have quickly realized the weakness of the legislation they have brought forward, which is that they are not attaching funding and are not providing for infrastructure. That is why they have moved closure. The Conservatives suddenly understand that in a debate in the House, with Canadians watching from coast to coast to coast, they are going to lose the debate, because they have not put their money where their mouths are. It is all well and good to say that first nations communities have to have safe drinking water, but they need to provide the funding and the infrastructure.

Why have the Conservatives not done this? Why have they failed first nations yet again?

● (1330)

Mr. Ray Boughen: Mr. Speaker, I enjoyed my colleague's comments. They were rather amusing.

He suggested that nothing has been done. Let me reiterate that there is $330.8 million over two years, a dedicated plan to deal with contaminated water and waste water and another plan to deal with potable water, all in partnership with the first nations.

Speaking of consultation, there have been seven years of consultation with first nations people designed to help facilitate their initial water plan program and then add to it. The basic design gives them a chance to look at it, and it gives them a chance to expand it and make it their own. It is not one-size-fits-all. Each will be developed according to their own requirements.

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, I want to thank this member for his important contributions to all the work we have been doing, particularly with respect to this piece of legislation.

What we just heard from the uninformed member across the way is the NDP's stand-pat solution to every problem: If in doubt, spend. Spend money on things without the critical pieces of the rest of the puzzle, such as training, such as actually taking the time to assess the amount of certification that is lacking in first nations communities across the country and to make those investments.

The circuit rider program, Northern Waterworks, and Confederation College are ensuring that we have certified workers to actually operate that kind of infrastructure before the infrastructure comes.

Can the member comment on the necessity of this legislation, in keeping with the other two pillars, which are capacity—reporting, monitoring and maintenance—and infrastructure? It is sort of a dialectical way of thinking about and developing policy.

Mr. Ray Boughen: Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, the plan is in place. There have been six or seven years of consultation. Not all reserves will fit into the plan, so the plan will be modified to fit the reserve. That is a very important point.

As my colleague said, training programs have been offered to people to learn how to handle waste water and potable water. Those programs are in place and working as we speak.

I do not know what my colleague was referring to when he said that nothing was in place. Everything is in place, and it is all working.

Mrs. Stella Ambler (Mississauga South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to speak to the House about Bill S-8, the safe drinking water for first nations act, a piece of legislation that deserves the full support of this House.

The proposed legislation is a crucial component of an integrated plan to resolve an issue that has persisted for far too many years and that threatens the health of tens of thousands of Canadians. Until regulations and standards are in place, the safety and quality of the water in first nations communities will remain at risk, posing a significant health risk.

I call on the opposition to stop stalling and to vote in support of this important legislation.

The long-term plan to improve the quality of drinking water in first nations communities is based on three pillars: capacity-building and operator training; investments in water and waste water infrastructure; and enforceable standards and protocols, which would be this legislation. Each of these pillars is designed to contribute in a specific way to the larger goal, which is access to safe drinking water for all first nations communities.

Improving operator training and community capacity is a case in point. One of the key problems identified in several studies on drinking water in first nations communities was the lack of capacity to operate and maintain water and waste water treatment facilities. In many case, there are simply not enough trained operators available to keep facilities running properly. Without trained and certified operators, any water system, regardless of where it is located, is unlikely to produce safe drinking water over the long term. The challenge is even greater when the system is in a remote part of the country, as so many first nations communities are. It is notoriously difficult to attract qualified workers and to retain them in these remote communities. This is true for a wide range of occupations. The remoteness of a community also contributes to delays in obtaining supplies, replacement parts and qualified repair technicians, which in turn can cause the system components to wear out more quickly.

The best way to address these challenges is to train and employ community residents, because they have a personal stake in ensuring the availability of safe, clean and reliable drinking water in their own communities. This is precisely what the circuit rider training program does.

Under this highly successful program, trainers travel to first nations communities and provide system operators with on-site, hands-on training on how to operate, maintain and monitor water and waste water systems. To increase the number of trained and certified operators, our government invests approximately $10 million each year in this program. Thanks to the circuit rider training program, there are now more trained and certified system operators than ever before.

In 2011, the national assessment determined that operators with the appropriate level of certification managed only 51% of first nations' water systems and 42% of first nations' waste water systems. One year later, annual performance inspections of the same systems concluded that these numbers had increased to 60% and 54% respectively.

Obviously, systems operated by properly trained and certified staff are more likely to consistently produce safe drinking water.

Less obvious, perhaps, are two other important benefits. First, properly trained operators are better able to ensure that facilities function effectively throughout their expected service life, maximizing the value of the infrastructure investments. Another benefit is that trained and certified operators will be better able to ensure that their systems can meet future regulatory standards.

Even the best qualified operators would struggle to consistently produce safe drinking water if they had to work with outdated or unserviceable equipment. That is why investments in water system infrastructure represent the second pillar in the Government of Canada's strategy to improve the quality of drinking water in first nations communities. Between 2006 and 2014, our government will have invested approximately $3 billion in water and waste water infrastructure in first nations communities. Economic action plan 2012 included more than $330 million over two years to build and renovate water and waste water infrastructure.

● (1335)

In this 2012-13 fiscal year alone, this investment supported some 286 major water and waste water infrastructure projects in first nation communities across the country. The government would continue to provide funding so that first nations could improve the quality of their water system infrastructure.

To get the full value of infrastructure investments, however, water systems must also be supported by enforceable regulations. That is what we are talking about today. These regulations would specify treatment standards, testing protocols, allowable levels of contaminants and all of the other factors that help define safe drinking water.

Regulations would foster accountability and provide community residents with the assurance they need to trust the water that comes out of their tap. Delivering safe drinking water on a consistent basis would require a chain of interventions: sources must be protected, for instance; and water must be filtered, treated and tested. Although these processes may vary, based upon the quality of the source water and the size of the distribution network, they must all be solid. Also, like all chains, the one that safeguards drinking water is only as strong as its weakest link.

Regulations would represent a key component of the overall process. They would specify science-based standards for quality testing, treatment protocols and other factors. Regulations would also assign responsibility for specific tasks. The organizations, such as municipal utilities, that supply water to the public must abide by these regulations.

Without regulations, there could be no assurance of the safety of drinking water in first nation communities. Regulations would provide the overarching framework of a drinking water system and guide the efforts of everyone involved in the system.

Bill S-8 would include a mechanism to establish regulatory regimes concerning the drinking water systems in first nation communities. This it the third pillar of the plan. The regimes would include rigorous standards and protocols and promote the accountability necessary to ensure that first nation communities have access to safe, clean and reliable drinking water.

To develop regulations, the legislation calls for a collaborative, region-by-region approach. In each region, first nations, the Government of Canada and other stakeholder groups would, together, design a regulatory regime tailored to local circumstances. The regulations used in nearby communities, such as provincial regimes, would serve as valuable guidelines.

I believe there is a tremendous value in this approach, because existing regulations are typically informed by the real-world challenges of producing water in a particular part of the country—challenges such as geography, weather and the quality and availability of water sources.

All three pillars must be in place to ensure that residents of first nation communities can access safe drinking water on a consistent and reliable basis. Operators must be properly trained; facilities must be functional; and standards, guidelines and protocols must be backed by regulations that must be in place.

Considerable progress has been made on all of these during the past seven years. The legislation now before us would support further progress.

Bill S-8 would be an essential part of a sensible, practical and balanced plan to improve the quality of drinking water and protect the long-term health of tens of thousands of Canadians.

Currently, laws are in place to protect the safety of drinking water accessed by every other Canadian, except for those living on reserve.

I call upon the opposition to stand up for first nations across this country and support Bill S-8.

● (1340)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is rather incredible for my colleague from Mississauga South to say that opposition members, including NDP members, must stand up in the house for the well-being of the first nations.

She knows, and she mentioned it in her speech, that the Conservative government has only invested $330 million over two years to fix the water supply problem. A study commissioned by the government found that a $5-billion investment over 10 years is needed, including $1.2 billion immediately. Throwing $330 million at the problem is not enough to provide first nations with a safe drinking water supply.

My question is for my Conservative colleague. When will the Conservative government stop treating first nations like second-class citizens?

[*English*]

Mrs. Stella Ambler: Mr. Speaker, I am afraid the member opposite may not have heard all of my comments.

The $330 million committed was simply over two years, and that was in budget 2012.

Between 2006 and 2014, the Government of Canada will have invested approximately three billion—that is billion with a B—dollars to support delivery of drinking water and waste water systems in first nations.

While there is no mention of funding in this legislation, that is simply because this is enabling legislation. It is about the regulations ensuring that those Canadians who live on first nations have access to the same standards that the rest of us Canadians know we can rely on for safe drinking water every day.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to pick up on the member's comments when she said $3 billion. She emphasized the letter B as opposed to M, meaning $3 billion.

She said that the money has been spent in a very short time frame of a few years. I am sure Canadians, in particular our first nations, would want to know exactly where that $3 billion has been spent. Is there a list of specific projects? Has it gone in the form of bureaucracy? How has that $3 billion actually been disbursed over the last few years?

Mrs. Stella Ambler: Mr. Speaker, that is an excellent question because it gives me an opportunity to say that the priority of this government is for that $3 billion to go into training and infrastructure. I mentioned the circuit rider training program in my remarks. This is so that operators on first nations can be trained to do what is necessary because, as we have found, if operators are trained elsewhere or come from off site, when they come to the reserve and try to fit in, it often does not work as well as if someone from the first nation community actually learns about the process and is able to do it himself or herself. Those are the kinds of investments we are making.

I also talked about the 286 projects that are planned for 2013. These are new plans. I wish that the member had been at the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development when the Canadian Bar Association talked about the fact that funding was needed for this. In my question to the witness from the CBA I was able to outline, because I happened to have the numbers right in front of me, all of the funding that has gone into this topic for the last seven years. I am so proud of what this government has done to support clean water on first nations reserves.

● (1345)

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise in the House today. For the second time in two days we will be addressing first nations issues. I would like to advise the Speaker that I will be sharing my time.

Today I am speaking with the help of the MP for Nanaimo—Cowichan, who has done a tremendous amount of work on the first nations file. It almost seems to me that she does more work for the first nations than the entire Conservative caucus put together.

The regulations the government wants to impose may incorporate by reference provincial regulations governing drinking and waste water in first nations communities. However, the expert panel on safe drinking water for first nations expressed concern about using provincial regulations, since that would result in a patchwork of regulations, leading to some first nations having more stringent standards than others.

These regulations would overrule any laws or by-laws made by first nations and limit the liability of the government for certain acts or omissions that occur in the performance of its duties under regulations.

New Democrats want to see safe, clean water and water systems that work for first nations communities, but imposing this legislation is not the solution. The federal government cannot simply unload its liability to first nations without providing the funding to bring the systems up to new standards.

First nations oppose the act because of the new liability provisions for first nations governments and the language around the non-derogation clause that is formulated to possibly be a first step to erode the constitutionally protected rights.

The delivery of safe drinking water to on-reserve first nations communities is critical to the health and safety of first nations Canadians, but for more than a decade, many first nations have lacked adequate access to safe drinking water. Bill S-8 is the second legislative initiative to address safe drinking water on reserve. Its predecessor, Bill S-11, did not proceed to third reading as a result of widespread concerns and subsequently died on the order paper when Parliament was dissolved on March 26, 2011.

Bill S-8 retains several of the features of former Bill S-11, particularly in areas to be covered by eventual federal regulations. Non-derogation language is still included in the proposed legislation, expressly allowing for the abrogation or derogation of aboriginal and treaty rights in some circumstances.

It also provides for the incorporation, by reference, of provincial regulations governing drinking water and waste water.

The text of the bill would not, on its face, adequately address the needs of first nations to build capacity to develop and administer appropriate laws for the regulation of water and waste water systems on first nations lands.

New Democrats agree that the poor standards of water systems in first nations communities are hampering people's health and well-being. They are also causing economic hardship.

However, this legislation would make first nations liable for water systems that have already proven inadequate, without any funding to help them improve their water systems or give them the ability to build new ones more appropriate to their needs.

In addition, although there is a slight wording change, there is a clause in this legislation that would give the government the ability to derogate from aboriginal rights.

A provincial regime of regulations would not do enough to protect first nations communities. The patchwork system of provincial laws was rejected by the government's own expert panel on safe drinking water for first nations. We need a national regulatory system.

Regulations alone will not help first nations people to develop and maintain safe on-reserve water systems. They need crucial investments in human resources and physical infrastructure, including drinking water and sewage systems and adequate housing.

This is not a difficult problem to solve. It just requires political will and adequate investment.

● (1350)

The Assembly of First Nations submitted the following to the Senate committee:

> Bill S-8, as part of ongoing process started with Bill S-11 prior to the CFNG, continues a pattern of unilaterally imposed legislation and does not meet the standards of joint development and clear recognition of First Nation jurisdiction. The engagement of some First Nations and the modest changes made to the Bill do not respond to the commitment to mutual respect and partnership envisioned by the CFNG.

The AFN also passed resolution no. 58/210 at its special chiefs assembly in December 2010 calling on the government to: ensure appropriate funds were available for any regulations implemented; support first nations in developing their own water management system; and work collaboratively with the AFN in developing an immediate plan on the lack of clean drinking water.

This resolution also puts the government on notice that the AFN expects any new water legislation to comply with first nations constitutionally protected and inherent treaty and aboriginal rights, the U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People and the report of the expert panel on safe drinking water for first nations.

Chiefs of Ontario, the Nishnawbe Aski Nation, the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs and Treaty 7 nations in Alberta have signalled continued concerns with the proposed legislation, citing, among other things, the need to address infrastructure and capacity issues before introducing federal regulations.

In 2007, Dr. Harry Swain, chair of the expert panel on safe drinking water for first nations, told the Senate committee on aboriginal peoples that:

> This is not...one of those problems in Aboriginal Canada that will persist for ever and ever and ever. This is one that can be solved and it can be solved with the application of a good chunk of money for a limited period of time,

The expert panel on safe drinking water for first nations argued that "Regulation alone will not be effective in ensuring safe drinking water unless the other requirements...are met...both human resources and physical assets".

In 2011, Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada released its "National Assessment of First Nations Water and Wastewater Systems—Ontario Regional Roll-Up Report". The results show that 1,880 first nations homes are reported to have no water service and 1,777 homes are reported to have no waste water service.

In 2011, the Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada commissioned an independent assessment on first nations water and waste water systems. The report clearly states that a significant financial commitment to infrastructure development will be necessary. It will cost $4.7 billion over 10 years to ensure that the needs of first nations communities in water and waste water systems are met. Instead, the Conservatives committed only $330 million over two years in 2010 and nothing in 2011.

I would just remind members of the House that most of us take for granted the fact that we own homes. When we are not in our riding we either live in a hotel or have an apartment. Every day, if we need a drink of water, we just turn on the tap. We take it for granted. Some first nations communities just cannot do that. We had a fine example of that lately in Montreal when there was a boil water advisory. People were shocked that they had to boil their water. All we have to do is think about the first nations that have to do that day in, day out every day of the year and have done so for years.

● (1355)

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, what an interesting metaphor, to turn on the tap.

We heard from the member for Burnaby—New Westminster what he and his party's policy solutions were, and that was, if in doubt, spend. Now that member has brought a new dimension to the debate.

In his speech he said that we should have a national regulatory framework, the same across the board. Somebody who has lived in isolated remote first nations communities in northern Ontario, where the member is from, knows that the landscape is much different there than British Columbia or the Arctic.

How can we establish those national frameworks when the instruments for measurement and for water treatment will be markedly different from one jurisdiction to another? Could he answer that question, or is he like the leader of the Liberal Party, just in over his head on this one?

Mr. Claude Gravelle: Mr. Speaker, I guess I was right when I said that the member from British Columbia and her staff had done more for first nations than the entire Conservative caucus put together, and the member just proved the point.

When I was talking about turning on the tap, I was referring to him, his home, his hotel or apartment. When he wants safe drinking water, all he has to do is turn on the tap. Unfortunately, because of the Conservative government, first nations cannot turn on a tap, and that goes on for days and decades. Unfortunately, the Conservative government has done nothing to solve the problem.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, shortly after the last federal election the leader of the Liberal Party introduced a motion through an opposition day dealing with the issue of clean drinking water.

I think most Canadians would be quite surprised to hear that there is a significant percentage of the population that does not have some of the basic necessities, such as going to the kitchen, turning on the water and being able to drink the water from the tap. Given the resources that Canada has as a nation, we could do a whole lot more.

Yes, we have legislation before us, but the real issue that needs to be addressed is working with our first nations.

Is it not time that we start looking at enabling our first nations and working with them to resolve these issues? Many of the drinking and bathing water issues that we talk about today could be met in two ways: first, provide the financial means to have those resources; and second, enable the first nation leadership to play a role in assisting and resolving a good portion of the problem.

Mr. Claude Gravelle: Mr. Speaker, I find that question coming from a Liberal member ironic.

The Liberals were in power for 13 years before the current government and they did nothing at all. In fact, in the last century, the Liberal Party had been in power longer than any other party and the needs of first nations did not improve, thanks to that party.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

● (1400)

[*Translation*]

ENVIRONMENT WEEK

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to wish everyone a happy Environment Week.

[*English*]

This is, indeed, Environment Week in Canada. Since 1985, there has been a requirement by statute for the Government of Canada to uphold and respect the first week in June encompassing World Environment Day, which was yesterday, and World Oceans Day, which is coming up.

Initially, former prime minister Brian Mulroney ensured that there was a million dollars in funding distributed to environment groups across the country to ensure Environment Week was noticed. Initially, there were actions by government at all levels: announcements, new parks, new efforts to protect the environment. So far, all I can find to mark Environment Week this year is a press release on the Environment Canada website. Perhaps it misread the name of the act and thought it was "Environment W-E-A-K". That would explain the action so far.

* * *

SYRIA

Mr. Chris Alexander (Ajax—Pickering, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as we in Canada fret about an unreformed Senate or corruption in our cities, the people of Syria are living out a genuine nightmare, one of suffering and death. Bashar al-Assad, his army and secret police have abandoned every pretense of restraint. They have bombed their own schools and massacred entire families and village. By all available accounts, they have used chemical weapons.

[*Translation*]

Up to 100,000 people have been killed, most of them civilians. What do we say to Abu Obeida, an opposition organizer in Aleppo, who organizes secret classes for 150 young girls in the basement of a mosque?

[*English*]

How do we explain international inaction to those mourning women raped and killed in Homs? Only concerted international action can stop the conflict in Syria. Those blocking such action of the Security Council are accountable to the Syrian people for their mistakes. Those who would arm a brutal regime with sophisticated missiles or terrorists from Hezbollah or al Qaeda to wage proxy wars will have to account one day to us all for visiting such bloodshed, radicalization and repression on a proud and innocent people.

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BOB BARLOW

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it was with great sadness on May 29 when I learned of the passing of my good friend Bob Barlow at the young age of 47.

It is not widely known, but Bob was the primary reason I ran for the federal NDP in the 2006 election. Back in 2004, as president of our riding association, Bob asked me to consider running for the nomination and I declined. However, in 2005, I believe it was Bob who drew Jack Layton's attention to my community work and passion for human rights. Between Jack's persuasiveness and Bob's unrelenting support, I agreed.

Few in NDP circles believed we could actually defeat the then government House leader Tony Valeri, but Bob never wavered. Bob set up my campaign office, got volunteers, even planned my days. Throughout that cold 54-day campaign, Bob was there with me day and night. I truly believe I would not be the MP for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek if it were not for the persistence and support of my friend Bob Barlow.

May he rest in peace.

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GUL NAWAZ

Mr. Bob Dechert (Mississauga—Erindale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to a great Canadian and a dear friend, Mr. Gul Nawaz. Gul was an active volunteer and a resident of Mississauga, who, sadly, passed away recently. The prayer room at the Islamic Society of North America Mosque in Mississauga was filled to capacity with family and friends to say goodbye to Gul.

Gul represented the best of our vibrant multicultural society. He was a proud and patriotic Canadian who never forgot the people of his native Pakistan, while constantly reaching out to befriend and assist people of every culture, especially newcomers to Canada. He was president of the Canada Pakistan Friendship Association and the Council of Pakistani Canadians. He was a founder and served as chair of the Heartland Creditview Neighbourhood Centre, which provides vital services to newcomers.

Gul received many awards and recognitions, most notably from the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, Mississauga Arts Council, Credit Valley Hospital, Sheridan College and the University of Toronto.

Inna Lillahi wa Inna Ilayhi Rajioon.

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● (1405)

HUMBER RIVER REGIONAL HOSPITAL

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last month, the Humber River Regional Hospital was recognized for its efforts to become North America's first fully digital hospital. This formal recognition given out at the Partnership Awards, held at the Park Plaza Westminster Bridge hotel in London, England, casts an international light on the hospital and validates what those in the hospital's catchment area have known for years: the new Humber River Regional Hospital will be a first-class facility and make the current hospital even better.

Humber stands out in the global field and has received praise for marrying highly-complex and good-quality design with an innovative approach. As a local resident, I am lucky to have the Humber River Regional Hospital in my community and, as an MP, I am honoured to extend my congratulations to the hospital's management team, staff, volunteers and all those involved in the project for showing the world the great things they are capable of.

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WING OF THE YEAR AWARD

Mrs. Patricia Davidson (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, at the recent Ontario group general meeting in Peterborough for air force associations, 403 Wing Sarnia was honoured as the winner of the Wing of the Year award. Also, three members of 403 Wing, Pauline Reaney, Mark Seuibutis and Frieda Stewart, were given the award of merit for their community efforts on behalf of 403 Wing.

403 Wing is very active in my community. The group made headlines for the decision to restore the famous Golden Hawk Sabre jet that has historically been located in Sarnia's Germain Park. The restored jet is a reflection of the pride in Canada's aviation history, as well as a reminder of the commitment that current members of 403 Wing have to their community and country.

403 Wing has a large membership and also a ladies' auxiliary, the 403 Wingettes. Its members also work closely with air cadets from the community. Considering its members' efforts, I applaud 403 Wing for its success and congratulate the group for being named Wing of the Year in recognition of its continued excellence.

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[*Translation*]

NORMANDY INVASION

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today is the 69th anniversary of the Normandy invasion.

On June 6, 1944, nearly 14,000 Canadians soldiers landed on the beaches of Normandy. Of those soldiers, 359 never returned to Canada. They gave their lives to defend their country, their families and other people's families.

Last weekend I attended two ceremonies that were held in my riding. I participated in a ceremony held at the Royal Canadian Legion in Sherbrooke. There, I met Joan Thompson, the honorary president, who is 103. Then, along with a number of veterans and members of the Canadian Forces, I attended a ceremony at the cenotaph in Lennoxville, where we paid tribute to the courage of those who served our country during this historic event.

As Canadians, we all have a duty to never forget the sacrifice they made. Lest we forget.

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[*English*]

RECREATION AND PARKS MONTH

Mr. John Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to give recognition to June as Recreation and Parks Month in Canada. As opposed to the fabulous work of Parks Canada at the federal level, this is about promoting the value of parks and recreation activities and services at the municipal level.

Some of us have just returned from the FCM annual conference in Vancouver where municipal governments shone a light on national health and fitness. Canadians recognize the tremendous mental and physical health benefits from participating in parks and recreation activities, yet Canadians are increasingly sedentary. Most adults and children fail to meet the recommended level of activity in Canada's physical activity guidelines. Obesity, diabetes and cardiovascular disease rates are climbing.

Parks and recreation facilities in Canada provide great opportunities for us all to get more physically active for the improvement of health of our citizens, communities and health care system. The Canadian Parks and Recreation Association partnered with MPs to declare the first Saturday in June as National Health and Fitness Day. I call upon all Canadians to proclaim National Health and Fitness Day and also to help celebrate that June is Recreation and Parks Month. Let us make Canada the fittest nation on earth.

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NATIONAL ADOPTION ACTION PLAN

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there are an estimated 30,000 adoptable children in Canada. That is why economic action plan 2013 takes action to expand the adoption expenses tax credit. However, there is more we can do.

Following on my unanimous Motion No. 386 and a study of federal supports for adoptive parents and children in 2010, this fall I will table a motion for a national adoption action plan to do the following: accurately measure, not estimate, the problem; start a conversation, including provinces and territories, to boost annual domestic adoptions above 5,000; improve supports to adoptive parents and children; promote adoption, from infants to teens; and track our results regularly.

Every Canadian child deserves loving permanence in a forever family. With that focus in mind and taking action together, we can make that happen.

* * *

● (1410)

[*Translation*]

QUEBEC'S DISABILITY AWARENESS WEEK

Mr. José Nunez-Melo (Laval, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Semaine québécoise des personnes handicapées is on now and wraps up on June 7. The theme is “Living Life to the Fullest”.

I would like to take this opportunity to renew my support for organizations in my riding, especially the Regroupement des organismes de promotion de personnes handicapées de Laval, a group of organizations that work with people with disabilities.

Throughout the week, many activities will be held to encourage people with disabilities to get involved socially and to promote the idea of social participation. As usual, theme days have been organized throughout the week. Today is “pay day”, which is designed to raise awareness about the challenges people with disabilities face in the workforce.

I therefore invite my colleagues here in the House of Commons to thank the organizations in their ridings that work with people with disabilities.

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[*English*]

69TH ANNIVERSARY OF D-DAY

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, D-Day was an offensive on a scale never seen before. As part of this massive surprise attack, Canadian soldiers of the 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion dropped in from behind enemy lines to stop German reinforcements, while the Royal Canadian Navy and Royal Canadian Air Force laid the path. All of this made the way for over 14,000 brave Canadian soldiers landing at Juno Beach who defeated the enemy, despite heavy losses. In so doing, they marked a major turning point in World War II.

D-Day is clearly one of Canada's most defining military achievements. Whether young or old, Canadians will never forget the sacrifice and bravery of those who were there. I stand with all members in this place today to mark the 69th anniversary of D-Day.

* * *

SECOND WORLD WAR BRAVERY

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the incredible bravery of a recently deceased constituent, Mrs. Nathalia Petrovna Buchan, and her husband, William Muir Buchan, who were Allied prisoners during the Second World War. I also rise to recognize and honour the extraordinary humanitarian actions of Tomohiko Hayashi, a Japanese diplomat who was the commandant of the Lunghua concentration camp outside of Shanghai. His son, Sadayuki Hayashi, came from Japan to be here today.

Mr. Hayashi ensured that prisoners received sufficient food, non-abusive treatment and medical care. He was the only commandant of a concentration camp who was acquitted of all charges following the war, due to his kind treatment of prisoners. His kind treatment included sending Mrs. Buchan to a hospital for treatment with his own car and driver. Her son, David, of Victoria, is also here today .

We should honour these acts of compassion and recognize that beauty and humanity can emerge even in the darkest hours of war.

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FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Ted Opitz (Etobicoke Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, recently, former KGB captain Mikhail Lennikov marked his fourth year of illegally hiding out in a Vancouver church basement.

Throughout its history, the KGB has committed untold atrocities against the people of eastern Europe. Rather than condemn this senior KGB official and call on him to immediately go back to where he came from, the NDP member for Burnaby—New Westminster has asked the government to show compassion and allow Lennikov to stay in Canada.

Frankly, this is appalling. Unlike Mr. Lennikov's comrades in the NDP, our Conservative government stands with the victims of Communism. There are no safe havens where our laws do not apply. This individual must be removed as soon as possible.

* * *

● (1415)

SACKVILLE RIVERS ASSOCIATION

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is a great day for the Sackville Rivers Association, which today celebrates 25 years of outstanding community service. Members of the association play a vital role in protecting the Sackville River, which happens to flow behind my constituency office. They have received a Canadian Environment Award for restoration and rehabilitation.

Let me highlight just a few of the organization's many accomplishments. There have been over 250 cleanup projects, which help remove tons of garbage from the river. There has been construction of wild Atlantic salmon pools and the restoration of over 60,000 square metres of salmon habitat, something our Sergeant-at-Arms would appreciate. They have stocked the Sackville River with speckled trout and helped more than 6,000 elementary school kids participate in river rangers and fish friends programs.

It is indeed a pleasure to say thanks to Sackville Rivers Association president, Walter Regan, and the countless volunteers who have been so generous with their time over the past 25 years.

* * *

LEADER OF THE LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon (Mississauga East—Cooksville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the leader of the Liberal Party has quite a track record when it comes to pitting one region against the other.

In February, 2008, the leader of the Liberal Party said, “Speaking one language is 'lazy'”. In November, 2010, he said, “Canada isn't doing well right now because it's Albertans who control our community and socio-democratic agenda. It doesn't work.”

When asked, he said he thought Canada was “better served when there are more Quebecers in charge than Albertans”. Most recently, the Leader of the Opposition said, “We have 24 senators from Quebec and there are only 6 for Alberta and British Columbia. That benefits us. To want to abolish it, that's just demagoguery...”

These divisive comments from the leader of the Liberal Party are shameful and show poor judgment. We call on him to stop opposing Senate reform and championing the status quo.

MEMBER FOR EDMONTON—ST. ALBERT

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I look at the government benches and I see a party that has lost its way and betrayed its roots. The member for Edmonton—St. Albert writes:

> I joined the Reform/conservative movements because I thought we were somehow different, a band of Ottawa outsiders riding into town to clean the place up, promoting open government and accountability. I barely recognize ourselves, and worse I fear that we have morphed into what we once mocked.
>
> My constituents demand better.... For a government that was elected on a platform of accountability, my constituents are gravely disappointed.... If we are measuring our ethical performance against the Sponsorship Scandalized Liberals, perhaps we need to set our ethical bar a little higher....the Government’s lack of support for my transparency bill is tantamount to a lack of support for transparency and open government generally.

I have debated with the member for Edmonton—St. Albert. We do not often agree, but what we do agree on is that MPs have a calling, an obligation to reject the politics of cynicism and manipulation and to stand up for the principles of transparency, accountability and open government.

* * *

NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Robert Goguen (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition misled Canadians when he stated that he stripped his official languages critic of his responsibilities the minute he heard of his outstanding tax debt.

We know that this member's tax woes go back a decade. This was all laid out in public record, so the Leader of the Opposition cannot deny knowing of it. The leader of the NDP should explain to Canadians why the member was selected as a candidate for the NDP, why he was picked as a critic and more importantly, why he continues to sit as a member of the caucus of the NDP.

The NDP has kept this hidden from Canadians for years. The NDP allows the member to continue to sitting. This underlines a complete disrespect for Canadian taxpayers by the NDP.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[*English*]

ETHICS

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Prime Minister admitted that he made his views on the Senate expense scandal “known to a range of our caucus and also my staff.”

Why then did the Prime Minister, last week, repeatedly deny ever having given any instructions to his staff on the Senate scandal?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, my views on this have been clear from the outset.

Our view is that all expenses have to be appropriate, and I mean by that not simply that they respect the rules but that they are defensible to any reasonable person and if there have been any inappropriate expenses, that those expenses should be repaid by anybody who took inappropriate expenses.

I think those views are very clear. They were expressed regularly. I continue to express them.

As I say, it is quite a contrast to the Leader of the Opposition who did not think for 17 years that it was appropriate to think that one does not offer politicians stuffed brown envelopes.

● (1420)

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, was Nigel Wright present when the Prime Minister instructed Mike Duffy to repay his expenses?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, I have indicated to all who have asked me that my view is that all expenses have to be appropriate, and that if any expenses are inappropriate, they will have to be repaid.

I have been very clear about that. I expected Mr. Duffy, if indeed he had inappropriate expenses, to repay those expenses. Indeed, I thought he had committed to do that and I thought he had announced publicly that he had done that.

It turns out that is not the case, and there will be consequences for those actions.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the question was, "Was Nigel Wright present?"

Canadians deserve an answer. They still have not had a clear answer.

[*Translation*]

When the Prime Minister spoke with Mike Duffy on February 13, was Mike Duffy claiming that his expenses were not illegal?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is up to Mr. Duffy to explain his own position and his actions in this matter.

My view has been clear from the outset: expenses have to be appropriate. If a senator or a member has inappropriate expenses, they must be repaid to the taxpayers. There will obviously be consequences for Mr. Duffy's actions.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on February 13, the Prime Minister told his caucus and the members of his senior staff who were present that he wanted the Senate scandal dealt with.

Just a few days later, the Prime Minister's chief of staff gave a senator $90,000 to make the Senate scandal disappear.

Is the Prime Minister really trying to convince Canadians that that is just a coincidence?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Mr. Duffy promised Canadians he would repay his expenses. He stated publicly that he personally paid back his expenses.

Now he must face the consequences of his actions.

[*English*]

Once again, the facts in this matter are very clear. I do not pretend they are good. Mr. Wright wrote a cheque on his own personal account and gave it to Mr. Duffy so he could repay his expenses. He told me about it on May 15.

He obviously regrets that action. He has said it was an error in judgment and he will face the consequences as a consequence.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the Prime Minister again because he still has not answered, and Canadians deserve a clear answer to a clear question.

On February 13, the Prime Minister told his caucus that he wanted the Senate scandal dealt with. Within a few days, the Prime Minister's chief of staff had given $90,000 to a sitting senator, Mike Duffy.

Is the Prime Minister really trying to convince Canadians that it was just a coincidence?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is this: I expected that if any member of the caucus, any senator, had expenses that were inappropriate, the member would repay those expenses.

I was also informed, as all Canadians were, that in fact that was what had transpired. We now learn much later that it was not the case. As soon as I learned that was not the case, I made that information public, the very same day.

I did not wait 17 years. The leader of the NDP knew of bribe attempts by the mayor of Laval. We did not wait 17 years for an entire culture of corruption in Quebec contracting to finally tell the truth.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the former Conservative caucus member, the member for Edmonton—St. Albert, said earlier today that the Prime Minister's Office "... doesn't seem to be accountable to anyone, not even the Prime Minister".

Is this why the Prime Minister contends that he knew nothing about the Nigel Wright-Mike Duffy situation?

● (1425)

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has been very clear on this matter, and my hon. colleague knows that there are independent authorities looking into this matter.

That is very different from what the Liberal Party is doing with its own Liberal senators. We know of Senator Merchant, who has $1.7 million in an offshore account, avoiding paying taxes.

Why is it that the Liberals are protecting the status quo and protecting their own millionaire senators from having to pay their taxes?

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for three weeks now the Prime Minister's story about how he felt about Mr. Wright has sort of evolved.

First he wanted Canadians to believe that Mr. Wright was a good Samaritan and did not have to resign. Then, as this thing blew up, Mr. Wright became Mr. Wrong and he had to go. Canadians do not buy it.

My question for the Prime Minister is very simple, and he should answer. On May 15, when he received the information about this situation, did in fact Nigel Wright tender his resignation?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, the Prime Minister was very clear on that matter. As soon as the information was made available to him, he made the information available publicly. Nigel Wright has taken sole responsibility for his personal behaviour, which is exactly as it should be.

If the Liberal Party believes in getting to the bottom of these matters, it should make sure that it holds its own Senate colleagues accountable for their behaviour. Liberal millionaire senators are hiding their tax obligations from the Government of Canada, and they should cut it out.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when the Prime Minister learned that Nigel Wright wrote a cheque for $90,000 to "protect taxpayers", why did he not tell him that he absolutely should not have done that and that Mike Duffy had to pay his own fine the same as everyone else or have his pay docked?

Why was that not his reaction? It was certainly the right thing to do. Is he afraid of Mr. Duffy?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is what the Prime Minister said. It is very important that every senator and every MP be held accountable and show respect for taxpayers.

The Liberal Party should also show this type of leadership with their Senate colleague who is currently avoiding her obligation to pay her taxes in Canada by hiding her money offshore.

[*English*]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister just said that he knows that the cheque was drawn "on Nigel Wright's personal account".

Has the Prime Minister seen the cheque to be able to affirm in the House that he is sure that the cheque was drawn on Nigel Wright's personal account?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, Mr. Wright has been extremely clear that he paid this out of his own personal funds. I can certainly assure the House that none of this money has come from the PMO or from any government account, nor, as the Leader of the Opposition has attempted to imply, has there been or will there be any attempt to reimburse Mr. Wright for those expenditures.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, is a trust account a personal account?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have answered these questions repeatedly. What is interesting is that the facts are clear. The people who did these things are before the appropriate authorities following further investigations and are being accountable for their actions.

We have here the leader of the NDP, who has known for 17 years of the kinds of things that are behind the Charbonneau commission, has denied their existence publicly for three years and is now refusing to tell us anything in any way that would explain his actions.

I think that is a pretty clear contrast.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Prime Minister refused to say whether he authorized his communications director, Andrew MacDougall, to state, "The prime minister has full confidence in Mr. Wright and Mr. Wright is staying on".

Why will the Prime Minister not just tell Canadians whether or not he authorized that statement?

● (1430)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have explained to the House many times, the facts of the matter are that Mr. Wright informed me of his actions on May 15. I immediately insisted that those facts be made public and that Mr. Wright consult the Ethics Commissioner.

As is also known, I did accept Mr. Wright's resignation. He has accepted full responsibility for his actions. He admits it was an error in judgment and he is prepared and will be prepared to accept the full accountability and consequences with the Ethics Commissioner.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that was on May 15. However, on May 17, Andrew MacDougall made that statement.

[*Translation*]

The question remains. Did the Prime Minister authorize Andrew MacDougall's May 17 statement or not? The question is clear and simple.

Canadians deserve a clear answer from their Prime Minister, the only person who can answer the question.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the facts are clear.

[*English*]

Of course, the other facts that are clear are these: In 1996, the leader of the NDP was apparently offered an envelope by the mayor of Laval that he, we are apparently led to believe, declined to look into. Fourteen years after that, when asked by the media if he knew anything about the activities of the mayor of Laval, he said he did not. He then admitted some time later that he was forced to admit certain facts to the RCMP, but he will not tell us the rest of the story.

We have been very clear. It is time for the leader of the NDP to live by his own demand.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what happened between the time, which was also February 13, when the Prime Minister stood in this House to say that he had personally reviewed Pamela Wallin's expenses and that there were no problems? What happened between that same day—the same day of the caucus meeting, the same day he stood in this House—and the day he threw Pamela Wallin out of his caucus?

What happened? Canadians want to know.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I indicated at that time, the facts of the matter are that the Senate had ordered a comprehensive audit into Senator Wallin's expenses, and we said that all of those expenses would be examined carefully.

We are now several moths later. That audit is ongoing. The issues are still not resolved. At this point, in our judgment, it is incumbent upon Senator Wallin to leave the caucus and explain those things on her own.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Prime Minister said that on May 15 he asked Nigel Wright whether any other payments were made to any other senators.

What else did the Prime Minister ask Nigel Wright at that time?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on May 15, Mr. Wright informed me as to his actions. I have been very clear as to what action I took. First and foremost, of course I made sure that the public was informed about the facts of the situation.

This, of course, is what the leader of the NDP should have done 17 years ago when he knew of the activities of the mayor of Laval and anything else he knew in between. Maybe if he and people like him had acted in that manner we would not have the Charbonneau commission today—

The Speaker: Order. The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what was the date on the cheque that Nigel Wright wrote?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, clearly, I was not the one who wrote the cheque. It was Mr. Wright. I do not know. An investigation is being conducted by the Ethics Commissioner.

Mr. Wright agreed to take full responsibility for his actions. He is prepared to give the commissioner all of the information required and he will accept the consequences.

● (1435)

[*English*]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on May 14, CTV reported that Mike Duffy wrote in an email that he, "...stayed silent on the orders of the PMO".

This is a simple question. Did the Prime Minister ever ask Nigel Wright if that were true?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the facts here are clear. Mr. Duffy actually said publicly, in late February, that he would repay and was willing to repay any inappropriate expenses. In the middle of April, Senator Duffy further said that he had in fact, himself, repaid those expenses. Those are his statements. They are on the record. Obviously, there is an investigation. He will be held accountable for those statements.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, does the Prime Minister regret any of his actions, not Nigel Wright's actions, not Mike Duffy's actions? Does the Prime Minister regret any of his own actions in this affair?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we answered that question a couple of weeks ago.

The fact of the matter is that, of course, as a result of accepting some responsibility, we insist that action be taken. That is what is being done.

On the other hand, I do have to ask the leader of the NDP this. Does he accept any of his responsibility for not reporting on the actions of the mayor in Laval for more than a decade and a half?

* * *

41ST GENERAL ELECTION

Ms. Yvonne Jones (Labrador, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the facts are clear. The Conservative Party pled guilty in a campaign finance scandal involving senior senators, the Federal Court declared that the Conservative Party's voter database was the source of campaign election fraud, and now Elections Canada has found that two more members of the Conservative government violated election laws.

The people of Labrador finally got to hold Conservative Peter Penashue to account. When will other Canadians get to hold the current Prime Minister and the current government to account?

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, these two members of Parliament acted in good faith in the last election. In fact, the member has said that Elections Canada accepted one interpretation in the 2008 election and an entirely different one in the 2011 election.

These are matters for the court to consider. Honest people can consider them in good faith, and I expect that will be done.

* * *

GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Hon. Gerry Byrne (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, despite an order to terminate from the commissioner of the public service, the defence minister's former right hand, Kevin MacAdam, still enjoys his $130,000-a-year salary at ACOA through outside influences.

Insiders Allan Murphy and Nancy Baker enjoy inside access to jobs at ECBC, thanks to some influences and a little whitewashing.

ECBC's president is under investigation, while ACOA's president has been cut in an investigation. They are the inside influences.

Would the government admit the common denominator to the outside influences is the Minister of National Defence?

Hon. Gail Shea (Minister of National Revenue and Minister for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we cannot speak to details of an ongoing investigation. However, as soon as I became aware of these allegations, I directed ACOA officials to refer the matter to the Ethics Commissioner.

ETHICS

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, principled Conservatives are now fleeing the caucus—and I repeat, "principled Conservatives".

Here are some of the greatest hits: RCMP raid on party headquarters; the in-and-out scandal; $90,000 payoff to Mike Duffy; the Penashue election scandal; and one of our all-time favourites, Bev Oda's orange juice and limousines.

Without changing the channel, why has the Prime Minister really left all this out there with so many questions to be answered?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has been very clear on this matter. Indeed, it was our government, when we were first elected in 2006, that put forward Bill C-2, the Federal Accountability Act.

The Liberal Party talks about principled Conservatives. The truth is that Canadians were looking for a principled government, and principled Canadian voters abandoned the Liberal Party.

* * *

● (1440)

FOOD SAFETY

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the report on the XL beef crisis made it clear that the largest beef recall in Canadian history was preventable.

The report says the minister should read chapter 4 of the Weatherill report, called "How does Canada's food safety system work?".

Yet again, the minister has failed Canadian families. When will the minister stand up and take responsibility for his failures?

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we welcome the panel report. We accept all of the recommendations. However, from that panel there are several quotes the member should read.

One says, "The Panel noted that, generally, both the food safety governance and management of this incident were sound."

Another one says, "...the incident revealed some of the strengths of Canada's food safety system—from monitoring and surveillance, to recall and incident management...".

And, finally, this one says, "CFIA's documentation of the incident was both thorough and well organized".

Canadians expect nothing less.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this is the minister's failure. It is his responsibility. He should apologize.

The issues raised in the report are the same as those identified in the report on the listeriosis crisis. Two crises, two reports and no action.

His mismanagement is endangering people's lives, and that is to say nothing of the impact that the cuts in his department are having.

What will it take for the minister to act? Another crisis?

[*English*]

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as officials showed members of the agriculture committee this morning, there have been absolutely no cuts to anything to do with food safety from this government.

We continue to vote, budget after budget, for hundreds of millions of dollars to make sure CFIA and Ag Canada have the capacity to continue to offer the best food safety system in the world. The opposition continues to vote against that. In the years we have been in government, we have added 20% to the personnel of CFIA to get that important job done. Again, they continue to vote against it.

* * *

[*Translation*]

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that kind of drivel is what we get in reply.

This lack of transparency was the straw that broke the camel's back for our colleague from Edmonton—St. Albert. He chose to abandon ship rather than to continue being a cheerleader for the Prime Minister. Instead of acting like the Liberals in the sponsorship scandal, he became the spokesperson for thousands of Conservatives who are disgusted that, under this Prime Minister, their party has become everything that he condemned when he was in opposition.

The Conservatives—who welcome with open arms members who cross the floor—compounded their hypocrisy by asking him to resign.

Will the Conservatives heed this reformer's call and finally embrace transparency?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has shown openness. We put forward our accountability act.

He has answered questions very clearly here, in the House, day in and day out, as Canadians deserve.

[*English*]

Equally, if the NDP is so strident about what it means when a member of the caucus leaves its party and what can be read into that, then what is to be read into the NDP leader's track record? There are three former NDP MPs who have left. One is the in the Liberal Party, one is an independent and one went back to the Bloc Québécois. Who else is going to go back and join the Bloc over there?

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it seems for a Conservative MP to take a principled stance on transparency and accountability, he has to leave the Conservative caucus to do so.

The moral of the story is that, when a political party abandons every principle on which it got elected, principled people will abandon it. What starts out as a trickle will turn into a torrent as more people realize that their party has come to most resemble that which they most condemned in their period of opposition.

Can the Prime Minister tell us, for the sake of future historians, at exactly what point he decided to jettison all their principles for the sake of political expediency?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the principle and mandate on which we were elected was to build a stronger and healthier country, and look at where Canada is today: the best job record in the G7, lowest taxes in 50 years, violent crime rates down and the biggest infrastructure program in the history of this country.

Again, the NDP should not be pointing at the government and what it means for someone to become an independent. It was an NDP member of Parliament who kept his word and stood with his constituents on the long gun registry, and the NDP leader's response was to throw him out of the party for keeping his word.

* * *

● (1445)

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Terence Young (Oakville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it was 69 years ago today that Canadian veterans stormed the beaches of Normandy and began the drive to end World War II.

They fought with heroism and distinction to bring freedom and liberty to Europe.

Would the Minister of Veterans Affairs please update this House on why today is such an important day for Canadian veterans?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Minister for La Francophonie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Oakville for reminding us that the reason we are able to have debates in the House is that on June 6, 1944, 14,000 Canadians landed in Normandy.

Five thousand of our Canadian soldiers never returned. There are still some surviving veterans of that campaign, and we can take this opportunity to thank them.

Thank you for democracy. Thank you for freedom. Thank you for having fought against Nazism and the violation of human rights. Thank you to our veterans.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Ms. Annick Papillon (Québec, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in an act of courage, Corporal Glen Kirkland testified yesterday in parliamentary committee about the post-traumatic stress he has experienced following his deployment to Afghanistan. He testified in spite of attempts to keep him quiet.

Corporal Kirkland courageously served his country, but he does not have access to the health care he needs, and now he is worried he could lose his pension.

How many veterans will have to testify in parliamentary committee before this government provides some assistance? How many? Shame on them.

[*English*]

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Indeed, Mr. Speaker, Corporal Kirkland gave compelling and courageous testimony yesterday, or this week, before a parliamentary committee. He is a true Canadian hero.

I have sought and received assurances from the Department of National Defence, from our military, that he will receive every and all benefits to which he is entitled.

I will go further and commit to him and his family that he will suffer no ramifications for his testimony. We need to hear from veterans like Corporal Kirkland, and as well he will not suffer any consequences from coming forward.

In addition to that, he will continue to serve as long as he decides to serve in the Canadian Armed Forces.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the question would be, why would he? Corporal Glen Kirkland served his country in Afghanistan with great courage and great valour.

Unfortunately, he came back with severe injuries. He was denied medical aid. He was told to keep quiet about his problems. He was also offered a dishonourable discharge if he came forward.

The reality is that the Prime Minister owes Mr. Kirkland and all those other veterans out there an apology for that type of treatment.

Will the minister put in writing that Mr. Kirkland will not suffer any retribution for his testimony yesterday?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Putting aside the usual feigned outrage from the member opposite, Mr. Speaker, this is now in *Hansard* so it is in writing.

I will repeat: Corporal Kirkland is a Canadian hero, is courageous for coming forward, but more important than that, he shed blood in the service of his country.

He will of course receive the proper benefits. He will of course suffer no consequences, and will continue to serve in the Canadian Forces as long as he decides.

We are incredibly grateful to him. We are incredibly grateful to all our veterans, all our serving members and their families, and this government as a consequence has increased their benefits and their protections, all of which the member voted against.

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ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we hope the minister will actually follow through with his commitments, because there is a lack of trust that they will see those kinds of results.

This Conservative government promised a new relationship with aboriginal peoples, but it was all just empty words.

National aboriginal organizations are being warned that they will face more cuts, up to 40%, for next year's project funding. Organizations will now be pitted against each other, and they will be competing for the remaining dollars.

Is this the minister's vision of a new relationship, cutting funds to projects in health, housing and education?

● (1450)

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is totally false. Housing will not be cut because of that, and no other social programs will be cut because of this. These are projects that are funded annually. What we want to ensure is that project funding for aboriginal organizations, not first nations, is focused on the delivery of essential services and programs in key areas, such as education, economic development and community infrastructure, and these are shared priorities with first nations.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain (Manicouagan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives just lost another member of their caucus, but that has not stopped them from avoiding being held accountable.

While the Conservatives just announced new cuts to funding for aboriginal organizations, which will affect health programs in particular, a study released today on suicide risk factors in Nunavut shows that the suicide rate there is 10 times higher than the Canadian average.

How can the minister think these new cuts put him in a better position to deal with this crisis?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the member did not rely on notes prepared by others, he would know that those announcements were made in September 2012, which was quite a while ago.

The answer is the same. We want to ensure that project funding—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development.

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Speaker, we want to ensure that project funding for aboriginal organizations is focused on the delivery of essential services and programs in key areas such as education, economic development and community infrastructure. That is what we will continue to do.

* * *

[*English*]

FOOD SAFETY

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, since the outbreak of E. coli at Brooks, Alberta, Liberals have been telling the Minister of Agriculture that it was triggered by inadequately trained CFIA inspection staff, a failure to exercise CFIA oversight responsibility at the plant and inadequate inspection practices. These facts are now confirmed by the independent review of the XL crisis.

Would the minister finally agree with these findings, and by when will he implement all the report's recommendations? Canadians deserve to know a date.

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the question from the member opposite, because it gives me a chance, again, to say we accept all of the recommendations. We thank the panellists for the great work they did.

We will continue to bolster the CFIA in its food safety regime. We continue to do that through budget after budget. We have added 20% to the personnel. Of course, we are focused on making sure that we improve the inspection regime with education. We strengthened food safety rules, and we improved the communication to Canadian consumers. We are getting the job done.

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what date? This is the second major food outbreak on the minister's watch, and nobody believes food safety is his foremost priority. The report's primary finding was that the E. coli outbreak was entirely preventable and that it was a lack of a strong food safety culture at the CFIA that directly led to the outbreak.

It is time for the minister to overcome his contempt for transparency. Does he finally have the decency to apologize to Canadians and immediately call for an independent, comprehensive audit of the CFIA's resources, which should have been done years ago?

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, of course, we welcome suggestions from everyone on how to bolster our food safety system. The panel also noted that generally, both food safety governance and management of this incident were sound.

CFIA is doing its due diligence. It is continuing to work on lessons learned from this particular incident, but I am happy to tell Canadians that the incidence of this particular type of E. coli is down some 60% from what it was just a short time ago.

* * *

[*Translation*]

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat (Pontiac, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a very simple question for the Prime Minister.

Why did the government amend Bill C-461 in order to hide information on salaries under $480,000?

● (1455)

[*English*]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in fact, all salary ranges for public servants are already disclosed. That being said, we have expanded access to information to an additional 70 agencies and crown corporations, including the CBC.

Nobody has done more for transparency than this government.

* * *

DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat (Pontiac, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last night, the PMO spokesperson was making up new policy on Twitter. He said that by-elections are needed when a member leaves a caucus, even to become an independent, but when the Conservatives had an opportunity to support my bill to ban floor-crossers and force them to face by-elections, the Conservatives opposed it. They welcomed David Emerson and Wajid Khan when they betrayed their constituents to join the Conservative caucus.

Let us try. Will the Conservatives now support the NDP's bill to ban the practice of floor-crossing, yes or no?

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member for Edmonton—St. Albert did resign from caucus, and the people of Edmonton—St. Albert did elect a Conservative MP. The member himself said just a month and a half ago on one of his blogs, "I'm elected as a Conservative Member of Parliament. My constituents expect me to support the prime minister and the cabinet".

We do think he should do the right thing by him and by his constituents: run in a by-election as an independent.

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CANADIAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill Gordon (Miramichi, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday Radio-Canada announced a rebranding campaign that would remove the word "Canada" from its name.

Can the Minister of Canadian Heritage please tell the House what our government thinks of this change?

[*Translation*]

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

I spoke with the president of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation today and made it very clear that Canada's public broadcaster should be obviously Canadian.

[*English*]

In the Broadcasting Act, Canada's public broadcaster's name is the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation; in French, Société Radio-Canada.

I said to Hubert Lacroix, the president of the CBC, today that Canadian taxpayers will support a Canadian public broadcaster only if it ensures that the Canadian public broadcaster is Canadian in content, in name, in both official languages, in every part of this country.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Lise St-Denis (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is on the same subject.

We were very disappointed to learn that Radio-Canada, the CBC French-language service, will be dropping its traditional designation and rebranding itself as "ICI". This institution, widely known to all francophones and francophiles across Canada and around the world, has been with us and informing us for decades.

As the minister said, and we are very proud of it, will he stand by his position that this decision can be reversed?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know it is always difficult to ask a question that was just answered, but I appreciate my colleague's support on this.

As I just said in English, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Société Radio-Canada in French, is Canada's public broadcaster. It must carry clearly Canadian content in Canada's two official languages in every part of this country.

It must be proudly Canadian in content and in name, period.

* * *

[*English*]

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the community pasture program is a 75-year-old success story of resource conservation that helped smaller western farmers thrive in the face of market uncertainty and that conserved threatened grasslands.

Saskatchewan farmers want the pastures saved, and they fear the lands will fall into the hands of speculators. They just need time to pursue options. Will the Minister of Agriculture commit to stopping the sell-off and support farmer-led efforts to save these lands critical to their livelihood?

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is the exact procedure that is in play. It is a six-year transition. The land has always and will continue to belong to the Government of Saskatchewan and the Governments of Alberta and Manitoba.

We have never owned that land. We simply managed it when those provinces did not have the resources to do it. They certainly do now in that they run their own pastures. They are now going to take over the management of these lands as well, and we welcome that.

● (1500)

JUSTICE

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the previous Liberal government instituted a justice system that put a greater emphasis on the rights of criminals than on the rights of victims. Our government promised to change that.

To further stand up for victims, I introduced Bill C-478, the respecting families of murdered and brutalized persons act. This bill would give judges the discretion to increase the parole ineligibility period for murderers who abduct, rape and brutally kill their victims. Unfortunately, the opposition refused to put victims first.

Could the Minister of Justice please reiterate the government's position on my bill and its reaction to yesterday's vote?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the opposition parties are always trying to hide the fact that they are soft on crime. Over the years, there is no end to the excuses as to why they vote against legislation that would better protect victims. Yesterday was certainly no different.

This legislation will end repeated parole hearings for Canada's most violent and dangerous criminals, ensuring that victims are not constantly re-victimized by their own criminal justice system. I am proud that our government always puts victims first. Why is it so impossible for the Liberals and the NDP to do the same thing?

* * *

[*Translation*]

HEALTH

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Quebec Stevedoring, the Port of Québec and the Minister of Transport are passing the buck in trying to find out who is to blame for the dust that is falling on Limoilou.

Now Quebec City is to blame because its hydrants do not have enough pressure.

When will the minister come to Quebec City to see how badly the port, for which he, as minister, is responsible—and I mean responsible—needs federal investment to update its facilities in order to protect public health?

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is unbelievable. Now the water pressure in Quebec City's water system is the federal government's responsibility.

The hon. member absolutely does not understand how this works. Does he think we needed an invitation from an NDP MP to go to the Port of Québec? That happened a long time ago.

He met with the representatives of the port in April and they explained everything to him. He said he was satisfied, but today he still does not get it. If he cannot figure this out, then let him come see me and I will explain it to him.

[*English*]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, in 2001, the Prime Minister wrote a famous letter to the former premier of Alberta in which he urged him to act "to limit the extent to which an aggressive and hostile federal government can encroach upon legitimate provincial jurisdiction". Six days ago, the provincial government of British Columbia said no to the Enbridge project. It said that Enbridge had completely failed to demonstrate any evidence that it knew how to clean up a spill or even knew what would happen with the bitumen and diluent.

Will the Prime Minister confirm that under no circumstances will the federal government become the aggressive and hostile government that approves a project as long British Columbians say no?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the project in question, of course, is subject to a joint review panel process. Obviously, we believe in the rule of law and in adjudicating these things based on scientific and policy concerns. The government will obviously withhold its decision on the matter until we see the results of the panel and its work.

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PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: To commemorate the 69th anniversary of D-Day, I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of Mr. Ken Hanna, a veteran who was at Juno Beach on D-Day.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

* * *

● (1505)

POINTS OF ORDER

ELECTIONS CANADA

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we were told recently that the Chief Electoral Officer sent a letter through you to the House regarding the election filings of the member for Saint Boniface and the member for Selkirk—Interlake.

I ask you, Mr. Speaker, to make that letter available to all members so the House can be informed of its contents.

The Speaker: As the hon. member knows, this is currently the subject of a question of privilege, and I will be coming back to the House.

In the meantime, my understanding is that these types of things are made public by Elections Canada and it is even up on some websites. I am sure the member will be able to obtain a copy of that if he so desires, or perhaps he could contact Elections Canada.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

[*English*]

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Internet can be a confusing and confounding place, I suppose, for some friends.

[*Translation*]

I have a simple and clear question for the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons. Could he tell us what is on the agenda for the rest of the week and for the coming weeks?

[*English*]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do want to start by reviewing what our House has accomplished over the preceding five days since I last answered the Thursday question.

Bill C-51, the safer witnesses act, was passed at third reading. Bill C-52, the fair rail freight service act, was passed at third reading. Bill C-63 and Bill C-64, the appropriations laws, passed at all stages last night as part of the last supply day of the spring cycle.

Bill S-2, the family homes on reserves and matrimonial interests or rights act, has been debated some more at third reading. Bill C-60, the economic action plan 2013 act, no. 1, was passed at report stage. Bill S-8, the safe drinking water for first nations act, was passed at report stage, was debated at third reading, and debate will continue.

Bill S-14, the fighting foreign corruption act, was passed at second reading. Bill C-56, combating counterfeit products act, was debated at second reading. Bill S-15, the expansion and conservation of Canada's national parks act, was debated at second reading. Bill S-17, the tax conventions implementation act, 2013, was debated at second reading.

On Bill C-62, the Yale First Nation final agreement act, we adopted a ways and means motion, introduced the bill, passed it at second reading and it has since passed at committee. I anticipate we will be getting a report from the committee shortly.

Bill S-16, the tackling contraband tobacco act, was given first reading yesterday after arriving from the Senate. Bill C-65, the respect for communities act, was introduced this morning.

Substantive reports from four standing committees were adopted by the House.

On the private members' business front, the House witnessed three bills getting third reading, one being passed at report stage, two being reported back from committee and one was just passed at second reading and sent to a committee.

Last night was the replenishment of private members' business, with 15 hon. members bringing forward their ideas, which I am sure we will vigorously debate.

The House will continue to deliver results for Canadians over the next week. Today, we will finish the third reading debate on Bill S-8, the safe drinking water for first nations act. Then we will turn our collective attention to Bill S-15, the expansion and conservation of Canada's national parks act, at second reading, followed by Bill S-2, the family homes on reserves and matrimonial interests or rights act, at third reading.

Tomorrow we will have the third reading debate on Bill C-60, the economic action plan 2013 act, no. 1. The final vote on this very important job creation and economic growth bill will be on Monday after question period.

Before we rise for the weekend, we hope to start second reading debate on Bill C-61, the offshore health and safety act.

On Monday, we will complete the debates on Bill S-15, the expansion and conservation of Canada's national parks act, and Bill S-2, the family homes on reserves and matrimonial interests or rights act.

[*Translation*]

Today and next week, I would like to see us tackle the bills left on the order paper, with priority going to any bills coming back from committee.

As for the sequencing of the debates, I am certainly open to hearing the constructive proposals of my opposition counterparts on passing Bill S-6, the First Nations Elections Act, at second reading; Bill S-10, the Prohibiting Cluster Munitions Act, at second reading; Bill S-12, the Incorporation by Reference in Regulations Act, at second reading; Bill S-13, the Port State Measures Agreement Implementation Act, at second reading; Bill S-16, at second reading; Bill S-17, at second reading; Bill C-57, the Safeguarding Canada's Seas and Skies Act, at second reading; Bill C-61, at second reading; and Bill C-65, at second reading.

Mr. Speaker, I am looking forward to having another list of accomplishments to share with you, and all honourable members, this time next Thursday.

● (1510)

[*English*]

Suffice it to say, we are being productive, hard-working and orderly in delivering on the commitments we have made to Canadians.

There having been discussions among the parties that it will receive unanimous consent, I would like to propose a motion. I move:

> That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practices of this House, the member for Peace River be now permitted to table the Report of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development in relation to Bill C-62, An Act to give effect to the Yale First Nation Final Agreement and to make consequential amendments to other Acts.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[*English*]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS AND NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the eighth report on the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, entitled "Bill C-62, An Act to give effect to the Yale First Nation Final Agreement and to make consequential amendments to other Acts".

The committee has studied this bill and has decided to report this bill back to the House, without amendments.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order, just to clarify the record.

Earlier this week, during question period, I unintentionally shared some information that was not correct when I accused the government of spending $90,000 for 30-second spots advertising the Canada jobs grant on the playoff hockey games each evening. The amount of $90,000 was not correct; it is the semi-finals now, and it is $110,000, so—

The Speaker: Order, please. I would just remind the hon. member that correcting the record is rarely seen as a point of order by the Chair. If he would like to do so at a future question period or other times of debate, he is welcome to do it.

The Chair also has a question of privilege from the hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley.

* * *

PRIVILEGE

COMMENTS BY THE MEMBER FOR WELLINGTON—HALTON HILLS

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of personal privilege that I think will have some relevance to my colleague across the way, the House leader for the government, as well as the House leader for the Liberal Party.

I rise on a question arising from some troubling insinuations made last night over the course of debate. I have been reviewing yesterday's debate and I was surprised and not somewhat concerned but very concerned by some serious allegations that were made by one of my colleagues across the way. These statements call into question the integrity of the House and the House leaders, and I wanted to raise them with you today, Mr. Speaker, as soon as possible.

During the debate on vote 1 on the main estimates, while referring to Bill C-290, an act to amend the Criminal Code sports betting, the MP for Wellington—Halton Hills mentioned:

> In fact, what transpired on Friday, March 2, 2012, was that the House leaders worked together to force debate to collapse before the full two hours of third reading had transpired, preventing members like me from "standing five" to request a full standing division on that piece of legislation.

By saying that, the member for Wellington—Halton Hills is insinuating that the House leaders had come up with some kind of conspiracy to bypass the parliamentary process. Not only does this show a lack of understanding of the legislative process, it puts the credibility of the officers of the House into doubt. Moreover, Mr. Speaker, it puts your credibility into doubt by insinuating that you would allow such a conspiracy to take place.

My friend across the way knows this place well and knows the rules that govern the House. He has been here for some time now, so I find it passing strange that he has gone so far as to suggest that there was a coordinated effort to trample his rights as a duly elected member of Parliament. Perhaps a brief review of what happened in this case can help clarify the situation for him and for all, and perhaps invoke some retraction or apology to both yourself, Mr. Speaker, and the House leaders.

Bill C-290 was debated at second reading on November 1, 2011. During the debate, all MPs had the opportunity to express themselves on this bill. This opportunity was seized by the member of Parliament for Windsor—Tecumseh, the member for Windsor West, the member for Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, the member for Edmonton—St. Albert and the member for Charlottetown. Following these interventions, because no other member rose to speak, the Speaker put the question to the House, as is proper.

This is the normal procedure at any time when no further members rise to speak on a bill. If the debate collapses, the bill can be adopted or rejected at that point, or a recorded division can be requested by any five members in the House. In the case of this bill, there was not a single MP from any party who expressed their opposition to the bill being read a second time and referred to the committee.

The member for Wellington—Halton Hills could have expressed his concerns at this time by simply standing up. He chose not to. During the committee study, any MP could have submitted their concerns on the bill or encouraged the committee members to recommend that the House not proceed with the bill at all. This is good legislation, so no member availed themselves of this opportunity and the bill was passed by the committee, once again without opposition.

Members had a third opportunity to express themselves at the report stage on March 2, 2012. Indeed, as prescribed in the Standing Orders, when a bill comes back from the committee and there are no amendments, the Speaker automatically puts the question at report stage. Once again, the bill passed through this stage without any opposition whatsoever.

The debate at third reading provided a fourth chance for the members to examine and debate the bill. Once again, representatives from all three recognized parties took the opportunity to address the bill. It was a lively debate. The member for Wellington—Halton Hills, as well as other MPs, had the chance to give a speech on the bill at that point, but they did not. For a fourth time, the bill was passed by members of the House, without opposition.

The MP for Wellington—Halton Hills had all of these occasions to speak on Bill C-290 and to move any amendments or changes, but he chose not to. The order paper shows us well in advance when a bill is to be debated. It is not a secret. However, instead of standing to speak his voice, he chose to stay in his seat or not be present. Now he claims that there was somehow a conspiracy against him, blaming his House leader, myself and the House leader for the Liberal Party of having conspired to prevent him the opportunity to use his democratic voice.

Moreover, the MP for Wellington—Halton Hills seems to think that it is unheard of for a private member's bill to go through all steps without a standing vote. Since the beginning of this Parliament, at least two bills from opposition MPs went through all stages in the House of Commons without a standing vote. This was the case for Bill C-278, An Act respecting a day to increase public awareness about epilepsy, as well as Bill S-201, An Act respecting a National Philanthropy Day.

● (1515)

There was also Bill C-313, An Act to amend the Food and Drugs Act (non-corrective contact lenses) and Motion No. 319 from the MP for Ottawa—Orléans.

These four private members' business items all passed through the legislative process without a standing vote in the House. We heard no such cries of conspiracy or condemnation from the member who is raising the complaints now or from any other member because this is the practice of the House. My friend from Ottawa—Orléans knows this practice well and used it.

These assertions that have been made are broad sweeping and undermine the integrity of the House officers of the various parties by calling into question the work that we undertake on behalf of our parties. The member for Wellington—Halton Hills is calling into question the integrity of this House and the legislative process, a process he knows well. I hope that this is not what the member was suggesting or insinuating last night. Maybe it is just that the member has misplaced certain rules of the House.

If he feels that his rights to express himself in the House have somehow been violated, I also invite him to discuss this with his House leader or others who try to maintain an orderly and conducive debate in this place. He does not have to try and intimidate those of us in this House. We New Democrats, more often than anyone else in this place, believe in and defend the institution and the rights of members of Parliament to speak. We have opposed the 42 motions that have been moved by this government to shut down debate every single time. The insinuation that there is somehow a conspiracy to prevent certain members from speaking on a piece of legislation, simply because they are in opposition, is both offensive to myself and I would suggest to the other House leaders, although they will have their own positions and feelings about this.

I would also argue that this assertion puts your credibility into doubt by insinuating that somehow you would allow such a conspiracy to take place. I believe that these allegations constitute a prima facie breach of privilege.

If you come to the same conclusion that I have, I would be prepared to move the appropriate motion to have this studied by the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

I look forward to the interventions by my colleagues across the way.

● (1520)

The Speaker: I want to thank the hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley for bringing this up. I know, having worked with him for the past few months since he has been made opposition House leader, that he does take these types of things very seriously in terms of procedure.

I have had a chance to look at the passage that he referred to. I will say that there are many reasons why debate collapses from time to time. Sometimes there is agreement, sometimes there is not. However, I cannot see that anything that the member for Wellington—Halton Hills said, in terms of what his thoughts might have been about why debate collapsed, would rise to the threshold of becoming a prima facie breach. It seems to me to be more a matter of debate about how events came about and less an actual breach of someone's privilege. I appreciate his raising it. I know he takes these things seriously. I know the goodwill that exists between House leaders is very important and I hope that continues going into the future.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

SAFE DRINKING WATER FOR FIRST NATIONS ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill S-8, An Act respecting the safety of drinking water on First Nation lands, be read the third time and passed.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to rise in the House to speak to a very important bill and a very important issue for the people I represent in northern Manitoba. I am honoured to represent the people of Churchill. That includes 33 first nations, first nations that are diverse, young with tremendous energy and tremendous opportunity. However, immense challenges exist on these first nations. Nowhere is that challenge more evident than the lack of access to safe drinking water, water services and sewage services on first nations.

When the reference to third world conditions is made, it is made because of the lack of access to safe drinking water that exists on many first nations in northern Manitoba. I think of the Island Lake community, four first nations that are isolated on the east side of Lake Winnipeg. I think of St. Theresa Point, Garden Hill, Wasagamack and Red Sucker Lake. All of these communities are growing, like many first nations, at a high rate. There are a lot of young people and young families. Overcrowding and lack of housing are very serious issues.

However, what is evident in these communities is the impact of the lack of safe drinking water in terms of health outcomes, in terms of broader indicators of quality of life, in terms of the mortality rate that unfortunately among first nations remains lower than the Canadian average. That mortality rate is connected to a number of factors, but the fundamental lack of access to safe drinking water is key.

It is unacceptable that in the year 2013, in a country as wealthy as Canada, that first nations, simply because they are first nations, lack access to a basic right, the right of clean water and access to safe drinking water. They lack access to the kind of infrastructure that would ensure a healthier lifestyle in line with that which all Canadians enjoy.

While members from the governing party have spoken to the disastrous indicators, what they fail to speak to is their own failure to uphold their fiduciary obligation to first nations, their own failure to live up to the treaties, to respect aboriginal and treaty rights in ensuring that first nations, no matter where they are, have access to safe drinking water.

Instead of recognizing that failure and investing in the kind of infrastructure that is necessary, investing in the kind of training that is necessary for first nations to be able to provide access to safe drinking water, the government has chosen to uphold its pattern of imposing legislation on first nations. Not only has it imposed legislation in this case, Bill S-8, but it has done so without consultation, without recognizing the tremendous concerns that first nations have brought forward with respect to previous iterations of the bill. Fundamentally it is disrespecting its commitments under the treaties, under the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which it signed. Even more reason for concern is the fact it is putting first nations in even greater danger than they are already in.

We know that Bill S-8 provides no funding to improve water systems on reserve. This is shameful because, given the rhetoric that we hear from the government about commitments to first nations, the reality is that when it comes to making a difference for safe drinking water, the need for investment in infrastructure and investment in capacity building is extremely serious.

I was there in February this year, but I remember being in Little Grand Rapids a couple of years back where the water treatment plant operator talked to us about how the chemicals he needed to be able to make sure that the water was safe for his community to drink were going to run out halfway through the year. I have spoken to water treatment plant operators who have talked about the lack of access to training programs so that they can improve their skills, so they can have the knowledge and skill set to be able to provide safe drinking water for their community members.

● (1525)

I have heard from water treatment plant operators, sewage treatment plant operators and leaders in communities who have expressed real concern about their inability, with the little they are given from this federal government, to provide what is a basic standard of living to their people. That onus falls entirely on the backs of the federal government.

Unfortunately, this is a result of years of neglect by the previous Liberal government, the imposition of the 2% cap that was halted, and has frozen in many cases, the kind of funding that is necessary for first nations to operate, and has been very much continued by the Conservative government.

We have seen that first nations that are continuing to grow, where their needs are continuing to grow, are turning to a federal government that is not only not prepared to make the investments in infrastructure, but is actually imposing its colonial agenda to boot.

We are very concerned in the NDP that on Bill S-8, like previous bills, Bill S-2, and so many others that impact first nations, Bill C-27, the government has insisted on shutting down debate on these very important bills, preventing members of Parliament from speaking out on behalf of their constituents who would be negatively impacted as a result of this legislation. We believe that by doing so, it is also silencing the voice of the first nations in this House.

This practice has unfortunately also been applied to committees where the facts have not been heard because of the government's attempt to muzzle those who oppose its agenda.

We in the NDP also stand in solidarity with first nations that have decried the government's continued pattern in which bills affecting first nations also include a clause, and we see it in Bill S-8, that gives the government the ability to derogate from aboriginal rights. The clause says, “Except to the extent necessary to ensure the safety of drinking water on first nations land”.

It is unconscionable that a federal government that is charged with a fiduciary obligation to first nations, that is there to honour the treaty relationships it is party to, would go so far as to derogate from aboriginal rights, to be able to break that very commitment it has to first nations. That is a failure on the part of the government. First nations have risen up against this failure, through the Idle No More movement, and through activism and leadership that first nations have consistently shown, saying that they are opposed to the government's agenda, and Bill S-8 is one of those reasons if we look at it clearly.

We are also very concerned about the pattern of unilaterally imposing legislation. We recognize that the AFN, the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, a series of representative organizations of first nations have been very clear in their opposition to Bill S-8.

The reality is that the government is trying to change the channel on its own failed rhetoric around accountability and transparency, words that it cannot take to heart, given the recent scandals that have emerged. The government is trying to change the channel and put the blame on first nations.

When it comes to something as serious as access to safe drinking water, there is no room for these kinds of political games. The government should stand up, and instead of changing the channel, instead of imposing legislation, instead of breaking its commitment under the treaties and disrespecting aboriginal rights, it should work with first nations in partnership to make the investments that are necessary and obvious to ensure that safe access to drinking water exists in first nations communities the way it exists in communities across the country.

For the people of Island Lake, for first nations across this country, for all Canadians, we deserve better from the government.

* * *

● (1530)

POINTS OF ORDER

ELECTIONS CANADA

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a point of order.

The Speaker, in the chair that he or she occupies in this place, is a position that has to be beyond reproach. I have been a member of Parliament for nearly 20 years in this place, and by your ruling, my confidence in the Speaker has been thrown into jeopardy. Let me explain.

My concern is based on the Speaker's response to a point of order raised by the member for Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel immediately following question period about a letter from Elections Canada that referred to the member for Selkirk—Interlake and the member for Saint Boniface. The member for Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel asked that the Speaker table that letter.

In my view, a letter to the Speaker with that kind of content is a letter to us in the House of Commons. The response from the Chair was that the letter is on the Elections Canada website. We have now looked. That letter is not there. The letter is on CBC's website.

However, this concern goes far beyond whether the letter is available or not. A letter with that kind of content, referring to the ability of members to sit in this House of Commons and suggesting that two members should be suspended, is, I believe, a letter to all of us. That letter should be tabled, in my view, by the Chair.

I am certainly willing to accept that in the heat of the moment, your office thought that it might be available through Elections Canada. Maybe you did not have time to consult with the desk and respond accordingly.

However, Mr. Speaker, in all seriousness, this is a serious matter for our chamber and our confidence in the Speaker and how the Speaker operates.

I respect the position. I respect the individual. I think an error has been made here in terms of the kind of response to that question.

I am asking the Speaker to reconsider—maybe not right in this moment, but I am asking the Speaker to reconsider.

● (1535)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): I appreciate the comments from the hon. member for Malpeque. I will take this matter further under advisement and ensure that the comments are considered carefully. I will get back to the House as may be the case.

* * *

[*Translation*]

SAFE DRINKING WATER FOR FIRST NATIONS ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill S-8, An Act respecting the safety of drinking water on First Nation lands, be read the third time and passed.

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, to begin, I would like to thank my colleague from Churchill for her wonderful speech and, above all, for her passion for her constituents. I know that she takes their rights and interests to heart. She demonstrates that day after day in the House.

The member spoke about the government's obligation to consult and accommodate aboriginal peoples, and I would like hear her say more about that.

Every time we raise the issue of fundamental aboriginal rights, as set out in the Constitution, it seems that the government has forgotten that aspect of its obligations. Each time, numerous aboriginal organizations, including the Assembly of First Nations, write to the government to complain about the lack of consultation and, in particular, the lack of accommodation. That obligation goes hand in hand with the obligation to consult.

I would like to hear more from the member on that because I know that the Assembly of First Nations, for one, has complained about it.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague.

I would like to say that it is truly a privilege to be able to work with him. He is a leader among Canada's aboriginal people. I am proud that, together, we can promote the NDP's vision, which is very supportive of aboriginal peoples. We will stand firm and fearless in opposition to this government. We will oppose its agenda, which is colonial in nature and paternalistic towards first nations.

In answer to his question, I would like to quote the Assembly of First Nations. This text, which is only available in English, is about this bill and was submitted to the Senate committee.

[*English*]

> Bill S-8, as part of an ongoing process started with Bill S-11 prior to the CFNG, continues a pattern of unilaterally imposed legislation and does not meet the standards of joint development and clear recognition of First Nation jurisdiction. The engagement of some First Nations and the modest changes made to the Bill do not respond to the commitment to mutual respect and partnership envisioned by the CFNG.

Not only is it against the duty to consult and not only is it against the Prime Minister's commitment to a new relationship during the Crown–First Nations Gathering; this bill also continues, unfortunately, a historical pattern of imposing a colonial view. As a piece of legislation on something as serious as safe drinking water, it is going to cause more damage, create the potential for tremendous liability and not actually live to up to any of the things that the government ought to be doing; in fact, it would further impoverish and marginalize first nations that need the federal government to act.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to commend the hon. member for Churchill, who gives her all every day defending aboriginal peoples, among others. She is the NDP caucus leader at the Standing Committee on the Status of Women. We just came from our review of Bill S-2, and she was able to share her vast knowledge on the subject.

Earlier, the hon. member talked about the importance of information. This concept was also raised this morning by the hon. member for Mississauga South. In her speech, she said that since we do not have enough trained people to do the work in the communities, such as installing sewers and water systems, which requires rather technical skills, we would train people there, either aboriginals or other people.

One of the challenges we are dealing with in the committee studying Bill S-2 has to do with money. People on site are being given responsibilities, but not the means to carry out those responsibilities.

I would like to hear what my colleague has to say about that.

● (1540)

Ms. Niki Ashton: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for raising such an important point.

I will begin by saying that I invite all the Conservative members, who are listening to me closely I am sure, to visit our region in northern Manitoba to see for themselves what it means not to have access to drinking water and related essential services. That is the reality for these first nation communities.

They did not ask for this. This government and the previous Liberal governments did not invest enough money in infrastructure and training. The Harper government continues to marginalize the first nations. This is a national disgrace and it must change.

It will change in future thanks to NDP leadership.

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): I would remind all hon. members not to refer to other hon. members in the House by their given names, but, rather, by their titles or ridings.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Peace River.

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege for me to stand this afternoon and speak to Bill S-8.

I have the privilege of serving as the chair of the aboriginal affairs and northern development committee. I note, Mr. Speaker, that it is a role you undertook prior to your current position, and it is a privilege to succeed you in that role.

It has been a privilege to serve as chair amid the relationships that have developed across party lines, and I believe our committee has been able to undertake some good work. We have been able to do that in a way that respects not only the desire to bring different perspectives together but to move things forward. It has been a privilege for me to serve in this capacity, and I owe a debt of gratitude to all committee members of all parties who have worked together.

In the consultations and work we did in reviewing Bill S-8, that relationship was paramount, because we desired to hear from folks from different locations across the country. We desired to hear from first nations as well as experts, and from municipalities in addition to that. We desired to hear from people who could speak to the issue of drinking water on reserves specifically, and how we might move toward safe drinking water for all first nations communities and for all first nations people across the country.

There has been much said already about the bill, some of which I agree with and some of which I do not. However, this piece of legislation is enabling legislation. It will allow for regulations to be created to ensure that the water every first nation is using and providing to their local grassroots members is safe.

Clean, safe drinking water is something that we all, as Canadians, take for granted. Water in most municipalities and water systems is provincially regulated, and we know that the regulations that have been established do provide assurance of cleanliness and safety. However, this is not the case in first nations communities. I wanted to note that off the top.

One of the privileges that I have had as well is to serve with the member for Medicine Hat on these important issues. I will be sharing my time today with the member from Medicine Hat.

An important thing to note with regard to this legislation is that some people have asked for additional clarity or for provision of what the regulations would look like once they are done. We recognize as a government—and I think our minister and the minister before him have articulated it well—that it is important that we do not create, or try to create, a one-size-fits-all approach. First nations across the country were loud and clear that one size does not fit all. It never will and never has, for a number of reasons.

Number one, there are differences in our geography in terms of where water comes from, in terms of the number of people it serves and in terms of the technologies available.

There are also differences in what has been undertaken by different municipalities and different provinces. Often first nations communities depend on or collaborate with neighbouring municipalities, so if a set of regulations in one province is different from the regulations in another province, yet they both comply with their respective provincial regulations, then to try to manufacture a national, pan-Canadian regulation system would not take in the differences that we should all accommodate.

Just because there are different regulations does not mean there are different levels of water quality. Different regulations are often required because of different hydrology or different sources of water that local people are drawing from, as well as a result of the number of people who live in certain areas. A water system that serves 100 people or 25 people is vastly different from a water system that supports tens of thousands of people.

● (1545)

That is the reality in municipalities. It is also the reality in first nations communities. That is why an enabling piece of legislation would allow flexibility to work with first nations, to respond to their desires and hopes but also to the realities within their communities. I think we all want a system that will work and provide assurance for clean drinking water into the future.

Our government has invested significantly in providing clean drinking water. I can say that in my own constituency, we have seen significant amounts of money allocated toward water systems that provide water to first nation communities. In some cases, these water systems have been set up to be separate and only for first nation communities. In other cases, we have collaborative efforts that have been undertaken between first nations communities and neighbouring municipalities. The water systems that are built are different because the needs are different and because the water sources are different. However, I can say that with the money that has been leveraged into these systems, many first nations throughout my constituency are being better served with cleaner water and the assurance of that.

However, if we build these systems without regulations, we know that there is a possibility we cannot be assured that the people who are running these systems are trained to run them, and we heard testimony of that at committee. We heard again and again of the necessity of ensuring that for the water systems. All the money in the world could be spent on a water system, but if there is no one running it who knows how to do so, there is a chance that these systems will fall into disrepair, or as a result of either flooding or some type of change in the source water, there may be contamination or problems in terms of the water. Therefore, it is important that we have trained folks, and that is what regulations would set out. Obviously they would ensure that the people who should be running these systems are doing so.

As we look across this country, we see significant diversity. When we look at it region by region, we know we will have to be responsive not only to different realities in terms of population but also different realities in terms of the demographics, geography and distribution needs.

We have heard some concern from the members opposite that maybe people were not consulted to the extent they should have been. I can say we heard person after person come to our committee and say they had been consulted but they still had some desire to see things articulated in the regulations, which is the exciting thing about this undertaking. This process would continue to be a consultation. It would continue to work with first nations to build a regulatory regime that would work for them in their region.

We heard from first nations, some of which span between provinces where half the community is in one province and half in another. We heard from communities that live near urban centres and from some that are quite a distance from urban centres, from some that are in remote locations and from some that live where there is access to different technologies. However, the exciting thing about this process is that there would be a region-by-region recognition and implementation of different regulations.

This goes back to the fact that we are not a government that believes that a one-size-fits-all approach is the right approach. We recognize that, with more than 630 first nations, there is diversity of opinion in terms of what should work but also practical differences in terms of geography and demographics, and these things need to be addressed with regulation. This is why we believe strongly that working in collaboration with the jurisdictions in which these communities are located, whether that be provincial jurisdictions or municipalities, we can come up with a regulation that is uniquely tailored to the communities that these regulations are intended to serve. Rather than a one-size-fits-all approach, it would be a more customized approach to ensure that people who are living in first nations are well served by the regulation.

We know this is not a quick fix. We know it will take many years to ensure that all systems across this country are established to ensure everyone is receiving clean drinking water. However, we are well on our way, and this enabling legislation would ensure we continue to move in that direction.

● (1550)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat (Pontiac, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it was a great honour to meet with the Algonquin people in my riding after being elected.

There are two first nations in my riding, namely the Kitigan Zibi Algonquins and the Algonquins of Barriere Lake, or Rapid Lake. From the outset, they told me they faced a lot of challenges in regard to drinking water, especially tap water. At Kitigan Zibi, 60% of the people do not have drinkable tap water. In Barriere Lake, or Rapid Lake, the situation is even worse.

This country is witnessing a water crisis on first nations lands, and this problem will not be solved by half measures or goodwill. A thorough consultation is badly needed, but the Algonquin people in my riding told me they do not think they were consulted.

I appreciated my colleague's speech, but can he rise in the House today and honestly say that this bill will provide real solutions to this problem and the crisis affecting many of our aboriginal peoples in Canada?

[*English*]

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Mr. Speaker, I do sincerely believe that this legislation would lead to a lasting solution to the issues of challenges with clean drinking water in communities.

What the government was told during consultations for this bill is that first nations do not need and would be hindered by a one-size-fits-all approach across this country. Therefore, our government recognized that there needed to be a region-by-region approach. That is why this is enabling legislation. It does not spell out every aspect of every water system that would be placed in every community across this country. It says that there would be basic standards that would be upheld and that, through region-by-region local regulation, we would ensure every community has a regulatory system that works for it.

What we have heard is the hon. member saying that the necessity is still out there to engage first nations. Our government is saying that, through this legislation, we would be able to engage those first nations and address their concerns.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is no doubt that there is a legislative need out there. How the government ultimately brought this particular bill before the House is somewhat questionable in terms of what we hear from first nation leaders and the concerns they have expressed even in terms of the manner in which it was brought forward.

Having said that, the other side is also the need for financial resources. One of the member's colleagues spoke a little earlier stating that the government has allocated and spent $3 billion on improving the quality of water on reserve or in our rural communities.

The question I posed to her is the same question I pose to this member, which is this. If the government has spent $3 billion, can it provide to the House something that clearly shows where that $3 billion was spent? Was it on civil servants or on pipes? Where was the money actually spent?

● (1555)

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Mr. Speaker, I can tell the hon. member that the money was spent on water systems for first nation communities across this country.

We do know that the vast majority of that went into infrastructure. We know there is an infrastructure deficit across this country. Unfortunately, that was something our government inherited, something we take seriously. Therefore, we have implemented an aggressive strategy to build an infrastructure system to ensure there is clean drinking water.

When we build these systems we also have to have a regulatory regime to ensure that we address the people who are running these systems, the protocols in terms of drawing source water and a number of other aspects. I am not a water expert, but I understand there is a whole complex necessity for regulation to ensure clean drinking water. I think the Canadian taxpayer needs to be assured that the $3 billion that has been placed into infrastructure thus far would not be compromised by a lack of regulation.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): We will be resuming debate, but there seems to be a lot of interest in questions and comments this afternoon. I will let hon. members know, as well as those who may be giving their 10-minute speech, that I will be watching during the period for questions and comments to try to keep those interventions to no more than one minute so that other members will have the opportunity to participate in that important part of the debate.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Medicine Hat.

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, like my colleague, I had the privilege of sitting on the aboriginal and northern affairs committee under your tutelage as the committee chair, and also under my colleague from Peace River. That was an important part of an opportunity to learn a lot about the first nations.

Now, of course, we have the safe drinking water act. I am really pleased to be able to stand here and speak to this. The legislation includes a mechanism that would allow for the development of these regulations. They are desperately needed to safeguard drinking water and allow for proper waste water treatment in first nations communities.

It is time to move forward to create the regulations needed to safeguard drinking water in first nations communities. Bill S-8 addresses an urgent need, and I implore the opposition to support the government on this legislation.

Currently, provincial and territorial regulations protect the safety of drinking water in the vast majority of communities across Canada. In first nations communities, however, no such regulations apply. The lack of regulations has been a major contributor to the poor state of drinking water in many first nations communities.

A lengthy process of consultation did occur, and engagement and review contributed to the legislation now before us. The process began more than seven years ago, when the expert panel on safe drinking water for first nations considered a series of regulatory options. The panel hosted a series of public hearings in first nations communities across Canada. More than 110 people presented to the panel, and a total of more than two dozen individuals and organizations provided written submissions. This work helped identify that a region-by-region approach was needed to develop effective regulations, as stated by my colleague from Peace River. Bill S-8 proposes this approach and recognizes that no one-size-fits-all solutions exist.

In 2010, the Government of Canada introduced Bill S-11, a different version of the legislation now before us, which also called for a region-by-region approach. Although this version died on the order paper, the review conducted by the standing committee of the other place clarified many of the issues that remained to be addressed. A key issue was that legislation on drinking water might abrogate or derogate from existing aboriginal and treaty rights of first nations. Most first nations representatives and many parliamentarians repeatedly raised concerns that the legislation and subsequent regulations on drinking water could infringe on existing aboriginal and treaty rights. Section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982, protects these rights.

Between Bill S-11 and the introduction of Bill S-8 in February of last year, the Government of Canada continued to discuss legislative options with first nations groups. A breakthrough on the non-derogation issue came during the "without prejudice" discussions that the Government of Canada held with regional first nations organizations. During these discussions, first nations proposed that future legislation include a non-derogation clause, a provision clarifying the relationship between drinking water regulations and first nations rights. This was also a sentiment echoed by many witnesses who appeared to speak to Bill S-11. The clause now included in Bill S-8, clause 3, is virtually the same as the version proposed by the first nations as a result of those discussions.

In essence, the non-derogation clause included in Bill S-8 would not prevent the government from justifying a derogation or abrogation of aboriginal and treaty rights if it is necessary to ensure the safety of first nations drinking water. The non-derogation clause in Bill S-8 would effectively balance the need to respect aboriginal and treaty rights under section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982, and the need to protect human health.

It is a delicate balance to strike, but I believe the clause in Bill S-8 succeeds and would help achieve a larger goal. Consider the following example. Let us say that the only feasible water drinking source for the first nations community is on reserve lands. Under Bill S-8, regulations could be developed to protect this drinking water source, even if the regulations limited the ability of first nations individuals to use the land pursuant to their treaty rights.

● (1600)

Perhaps the first nation wanted to build a commercial development on the land. If the proposed land use threatened the viability of the water source, and by extension, the health and safety of community residents, derogating from a possible aboriginal treaty right to use the land could be justified.

The inclusion of the non-derogation clause in Bill S-8 would immensely strengthen the proposed legislation. It would address a key concern of first nations and other groups while promoting the health and safety of members of first nations communities.

Another important development that occurred with Bills S-11 and S-8 was the publication of the national assessment of first nations water and waste water management systems. It represents the most comprehensive study ever done of the facilities used to treat and distribute drinking water in first nations communities. The national assessment is valuable, because it provides not only an important point of reference but also an impetus for parties to work toward an effective solution.

It is important to recognize that Bill S-8 proposes a collaborative process to establish regulations in each region of the country. The government will work with first nations and other stakeholders to draft effective regulations. These regulations could be crafted to meet the particular circumstances of the region and the needs of the first nations community.

Much work remains to be done to ensure that residents of first nations communities can have the same level of confidence as other Canadians when it comes to their drinking water. Moving ahead with Bill S-8, complete with the non-derogation clause, represents an essential step forward in providing first nations with the regulations needed to safeguard drinking water in first nations communities. I encourage the members of the opposition to stop voting against Bill S-8 and to recognize the important health and safety issues at stake.

Canadians across this land, in most communities we are aware of, have safe drinking water. It is really important that all Canadians have safe drinking water, including first nations, who have suffered for a long time, in certain circumstances, without it. It is incumbent upon our government to assist those first nations to make sure that, in fact, they have the same kind of safe drinking water that all other Canadians enjoy.

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative side is trying to say that its members heard at committee what first nations really want. I can tell the House that this is not what we heard. Over and over again, we heard that there was not proper consultation with first nations on this bill.

The Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs came to committee, and this is what it had to say:

> We have watched with dismay as legislation after legislation continues to be drafted and passed with little regard or participation from First Nations while resulting in significant impacts over our lives.

They made some recommendations, including this one:

> It is also recommended that the Committee take a position in favour of First Nations that Bill S-8 be abandoned or tabled to establish a good faith and honourable process that explores the Custom Water Law option from the Expert Water Panel.

How could Conservatives say that they did proper consultation, when chief after chief and first nation after first nation told us otherwise? Not only did they tell us otherwise, but I can say that the Metro Vancouver position paper and presentation said the exact same thing. Does he truly believe that they did the proper consultation for moving this bill forward?

● (1605)

Mr. LaVar Payne: Mr. Speaker, in terms of consultation, I would like to point out to the member that in 2006, the expert panel held hearings across Canada. It heard from over 110 participants and received more than two dozen submissions. In February and March 2009, a series of engagements was held with first nations communities, regional first nations organizations, and provincial and territorial officials. There were 700 participants, of which there were 544 first nations.

I find it hard to believe that there was no consultation. We know that there was, in fact, consultation. We know that there were over 700 organizations and individuals, and of those, at least 544 were first nations. How can the member stand in her place and suggest that we did not have any kind of consultation? The member needs to go back and have another look.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was not going to enter into this debate at this point, but I just have to remind my colleague that maybe he would like to take another look at the definition of "consultation" as it pertains to the legal context.

Consultation means more than just asking what someone thinks of it; it means accommodating some of the legitimate concerns brought forward by those 500-some-odd first nations, most of whom gave the government and that panel an earful. They said that this piece of legislation would go nowhere near meeting the legitimate needs of their communities. Many were offended, in fact, that the only consideration of the urgent, crisis conditions in their communities would be this lip-service regulatory legislative piece of paper we have before us.

Consultation is meaningless without the accommodation of the legitimate concerns brought forward by those they invite.

Mr. LaVar Payne: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for his comments on consultation. I find it hard to believe that he did not understand that as part of this consultation, we consulted with first nations. One of the big issues they had was derogation and what it would do in terms of treaty rights under the Constitution. We have taken that into consideration.

My colleague from Peace River also said that in every region, we will be talking with each and every individual organization to help develop the regional requirements.

I do not understand where this member is coming from in saying that we are not doing the consultation we need to do. It is important. As my previous colleague said, we are putting over $3 billion into infrastructure for first nations. I think we are going a long way, as opposed to what the Liberal government in 13 years under its watch.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, maybe I will have an opportunity to expand somewhat on those thoughts and remind my colleague again of the legal meaning of the word "consultation" and all that it implies.

Let me preface my remarks today with two opening comments. First of all, I am holding the bill we are debating today in my hand, an act respecting the safety of drinking water on first nation lands. There could be no more important subject for the House of Commons to be seized with, I would argue, given the state of the nation as it pertains to the right to safe drinking water in first nations communities. However, it also goes on to say "AS PASSED BY THE SENATE June 18, 2012".

There are two things about that. Where does the Senate get off dealing with a piece of legislation before the House of Commons gets its kick at the can on it? How do the senators pass legislation? Who gave them the right, the mandate, to generate legislation? Where does their legitimacy come from? I would argue that they have no legitimacy, have no right and have no mandate to generate legislation in the other place. They have things completely turned around backwards.

Legislation is generated here by the duly elected representatives of the people of Canada, as chosen in a fair and free federal election, at least when it is not meddled with by the Conservative Party rigging elections. We are the representatives of the people. We deal with legislation. Senators have the constitutional right to review the legislation we pass. They even have a history of vetoing legislation in the Senate.

In the early years of this country, fully 10% of all the legislation passed by the people's representatives was vetoed outright by the other place. Fully 25% was amended significantly. However, rarely, and in fact, I would argue never, in those days, as per the founding fathers of Confederation's vision of our federal system, did we see legislation generated in the Senate. This is a new phenomenon.

Now senators are cranking bills out like there was no tomorrow. Bill after bill after bill comes to the House of Commons. We get the second shot at looking at something that has already achieved all the levels of debate, scrutiny and oversight in the Senate. It is fundamentally wrong. Every time they come to our door with another piece of Senate legislation, we should reject it. We should march it back down to the Senate, drop it on the doorstep and leave it there, because I argue that they have no right. It offends the sensibilities of anyone who would call themselves a democrat, in my view.

The second thing I would point out is that in light of the importance of the subject matter we are dealing with, we should really take a moment today and reflect on the fact that the government has moved closure on this important bill, once again. If one asked how often the government uses the intrusive heavy hand of the tyranny of the majority to shut down debate and pull the shroud of its oppressive nature over our opportunity to deal with this matter, I would answer that it does it every time.

It used to be a rare, infrequent thing. Only when there was a logjam on issues of national significance or national importance would the government of the day advance a bill in spite of it being against the will of the other chamber. They were issues such as the national pipeline debate, in the late fifties. They were huge issues of national significance. Now Conservatives do it at every stage on every piece of legislation, and they do not allow a single amendment to a single bill in the 41st Parliament.

I would argue that our democracy is in tatters. This is only a facsimile of a democracy that is left here. It is kind of like a California strawberry. It has the look of a real strawberry, but when it is bitten into, it tastes like cardboard. This has the outward appearances of a democracy, but in actual fact, it falls short in every respect, because all the checks and balances have been stripped away. All the checks and balances that used to put some restraint on the absolute power of the Prime Minister's Office and the ruling party have been tossed aside. Again, that offends me.

● (1610)

I do not want to use my whole speech railing about those two items, but it makes my blood boil to watch the status of our great chamber deteriorate and be undermined and sabotaged by, what I would argue, some very insensitive people. We are dealing with an issue of grave concern and I want to give it the attention it deserves.

I start my remarks by telling the House that the social conditions of our first nations, Metis and Inuit people are our country's greatest failure, our country's greatest shame.

We live in the richest and most powerful civilization in the history of the world and we cannot provide basic needs to a family to survive in 2013.

In Pikangikum, Ontario pipes are laying there with weeds growing over them because they have been there 5 to 15 years. There have been 100 false starts to its promised fresh water and sewage system and yet those first nations still have no running water in their homes and they are using a five gallon oil pail as a toilet. It is a national disgrace.

I have been here 16 years and for 16 years we have been saying that very same thing. When Jim Prentice, a friend of mine, was made the minister of Indian affairs, he announced that this would be his number one priority. Then I watched other ministers of Indian affairs year after year adopt one theme. Andy Scott's number one priority was education. With Jim Prentice, it was going to be water, that most fundamental and basic human right and need. How many years has it been since we have seen Jim Prentice around here? His government is now imposing, and I use that word with all the weight that it implies, a pile of regulations instead of addressing the legitimate basic needs of first nations communities.

Without fresh water and adequate housing, this permanent underclass in our society will continue. As elected representatives, it is our greatest failure. I find it hard to express how disappointed I am in us, and I say that collectively, that we have not been seized with the issue sufficiently to make significant progress on something that is so easy. We are talking about fresh water for communities. We can do this. This is not rocket science.

The government says that it is all about money, that it cannot keep shovelling money at the problem as that is not the solution. I have news for the Conservatives. That is the solution. It is a complete paucity of money that causes those pipes in Pikangikum to lay there with weeds growing over them. The government's solution is to imply that all first nations leadership is either corrupt or incompetent.

That was the government's big priority. It was not a government priority to address the basic needs of first nations people. The government wanted to clean up the act. It said that it gave them lots of money, but there was nothing to show for it. Let us do the math. With 1 million people and $7 billion in total project, $3 billion or $4 billion gets lost, what we call line loss in engineering, and $3 billion or $4 billion gets to an intended person. That amounts to $7,000 per person for their housing, education, health care and infrastructure. We pay $15,000 per student for just high school in Manitoba in non-aboriginal communities and the government allows $7,000 per person for everything. We wonder why we have a permanent underclass and we why children do not achieve their full potential.

Children are growing up in chronic, long-term, multi-generational poverty and they are not being welcomed into the full economy, even though we have all of these skill shortages. The government will bring in 500,000 temporary foreign workers and allow an unemployment rate of 85% in communities in northern Manitoba, that is people between 16 and 25 years old. Who is failing to make this connection? We are, as elected representatives. It is an appalling situation.

● (1615)

The shortcomings of this legislation are legion and well-documented by all of the witnesses. Virtually all of the witnesses representing legitimate first nation organizations condemn this legislation, yet it is being imposed in the customary way for them.

The Conservatives have been looking for validators. They have lost their number one stooge, Patrick Brazeau. They had to kick him out of their caucus. Therefore, they do not have a stooge anymore to support some of these initiatives, to say that this is exactly what first nations need, that the reason they are poor is because they are all corrupt. Therefore, they can pass some legislation to ram and impose some more accounting down their throats.

If the Conservatives knew anything about the reality of life administering a first nation reserve these days, they would know, as the Auditor General pointed out, that first nations are over-audited. These people have to put in 160-some-odd financial reports per year, over three a week, to the five funding agencies. They are doing nothing but paperwork. If they file one of those 160 documents incorrectly, they are told that they will be put under trusteeship, third-party management, because they are not managing their money properly.

Then the Conservatives impose, through the Indian Act, an instrument of oppression, if I ever heard one, an instrument of oppression unworthy of any western democracy. As per the Indian Act, they have to re-elect a new band council every two years, so nobody ever develops any expertise in doing this kind of thing.

It is a paternalistic Eurocentric cluster something is what it is.

I remind anybody who has any working knowledge of these things, and I have noticed some of the guys claiming they have spent some time on the aboriginal affairs committee, to read this penultimate Harvard study that took place a number of years ago. It noted that the degree of successful economic development in first nation communities all over North America, not just in Canada, was directly proportional to the degree of self-determination and independence. If they can get out from under the yoke of the paternalistic Eurocentric Indian Act and the meddling of naive people who are trying to impose some set of rules without any sensitivity to culture, heritage or anything else and starved for resources and finances, there would be a road forward.

This bill represents the worst manifestation of that same paternalism that we have seen since the Indian Act was imposed on day one. There is pretty much a blanket condemnation here.

This reminds me of the days of the first nations governance act, the Liberal version of imposing even more Eurocentric naivety on them. It had many of the same properties of some of the critics who came forward condemning this, after being consulted and not having any of their concerns accommodated. Some of them were blanket condemnation of which we should really take note.

Jim Ransom, the director of the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne, said:

> The last concern we have with Bill S-8 is in the sense of how it confers to the provinces jurisdiction over first nation water systems.

What a hodgepodge of overlapping jurisdictions that is sort of a recipe for paralyzing any progress. It is almost institutionalizing some long squabble over jurisdiction and obligations.

In Manitoba, we have been dealing with this for years now when it comes to child and family services and health services. Even though the Conservatives adopted Jordan's principle, as put forward by our colleague from Nanaimo—Cowichan to make the case that a child is a child is a child and deserves equal treatment whether it is under section 15 of the charter or section 35 or under first nations rights, we are not going to squabble about that. We are not going to wait for an air ambulance to take some kid to Winnipeg because nobody could figure out who is going to pay for the treatment of this child. We are going to do it now and we are going to fight with Ottawa later. That is what we are left doing.

The same is true for education. We have kids in Thompson off reserve. The budget is $15,000 a year to keep a kid in high school there. The budget for educating a similar student in a reserve 100 miles away is $8,000 per year. That is almost a 50% difference.

● (1620)

Some would argue that it should cost more to provide a comparable level of education on reserve because of the isolation, all kinds of different costs, the economy of scale and so forth, but it is about 50%. Then we wonder why the outcomes are poor in the education system.

No one can tell me that it is not about money and that in the richest and most powerful civilization in the history of the world we cannot provide for the basic needs of a child and indeed a family to survive, because that is an absolute myth.

I heard a speech one time by the Reverend Jesse Jackson. He had a very poignant way of pointing things out. He said that if one had five children and only three pork chops the solution would not be to kill two of the children, but neither would it be a solution to divide those three pork chops into five equal pieces. The social democratic view of that problem is to challenge the basic assumption that there is only three pork chops because that is the big lie in a society and a civilization like this. There is enough money to provide for the basic needs of families in this society.

Nobody worked with the communities, nobody worked in a respectful nation-to-nation relationship that we had all been promised for so many years when the government dedicated that $330 million to infrastructure in the first nations. It has become almost a meaningless cliché. People actually cringe when we use that term now because that commitment has been broken and compromised so many times that nobody believes it anymore. The relationship is so strained, the leadership is so challenged to keep a lid on that simmering pot of unrest that it is tempting fate.

I am not here to speak for anyone, but I have nothing but admiration for the leadership in first nation communities to have kept the youth down as much as they have in terms of social unrest because it is a recipe for social unrest. A bunch of able-bodied young ambitious 18- to 25-year-old youth completely excluded from the economy yet seeing on television and on their iPads what the world is really like in western society and they have none of it is a recipe for social unrest and we had better get in front of that bus or we will get run over by it, in my view.

Shawn Atleo has announced that the level of unrest this summer could be a concern. It is dependent on the level of accommodation that they get from the government. The leadership has to be able to tell the people that there is hope, that there is promise on the horizon. If it is the status quo and more of the same, it cannot keep a lid on it forever. I hate to say where I would be if I was a young aboriginal man today. I think I would have a very difficult time containing myself, given the injustice of it all, the social injustice of the social conditions of our first nations, Metis and Inuit youth.

I have used much of my time criticizing the fact that this bill comes from the Senate when it should not. The government has invoked closure not once, not twice, but 41 times in this Parliament on every bill, every stage of every bill and has never accommodated a single amendment to a single piece of legislation in the entire 41st Parliament.

Our democracy is in tatters. It has become a farce in three acts. The Conservatives are losing members. Principled MPs are walking out and I believe more will as they realize they have come to most resemble that which they used to most condemn, which was the corruption of the Liberal Party. It was the culture of secrecy in the Liberals that allowed corruption to flourish. The Conservatives are obsessed with secrecy and they are not making any progress on what I believe is the most pressing social emergency of our day, and that is the social conditions of our first nations, Inuit and Metis people.

● (1630)

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Fraser Canyon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is always entertaining when that member rises to his feet and speaks about just about anything but the bill in front of us. He did that again today.

The member talked about lip service. He asked us to do the math. We have some math here. Between 2006 and 2014, approximately $3 billion will be invested to support first nations communities in managing their water and waste water infrastructure. In 2011-12 alone, there were 402 major and minor first nations water and waste water infrastructure projects, with 286 more planned for this fiscal year.

The hon. member talked a lot, but not about Bill S-8. He talked about the lack of funding, when there has actually been $3 billion. He talked about a lack of projects, when there have been 600, approaching 700 projects.

Perhaps the member could reconcile the facts with the rhetoric in his speech.

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, the fact is, $330 million was spent in 2011, we have a record of zero in 2012 and we do not know what the long-range plan is. We do know that these figures were arrived at without the necessary prerequisite consultation.

We know the status quo, and the record has been abject failure. The conditions have not improved dramatically. If it was an urgent emergency in any other community in the country, if it was Selkirk or Plum Coulee, Manitoba, or any other community, people would be swooping in there and fixing the problem. It would be addressed.

There would not be yet another panel struck, and yet another consultation asking 700 people if they have any water or if they have a toilet in their house. The answer is no, they still do not have toilets.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, to make this personal, to make this real to people in this chamber, 82-year-old Mr. Taylor is diabetic. He requires dialysis every few days. He has no bathroom and no running water. He draws his water from a hole in the ice. He has an outhouse, but the temperatures drop to -40° C.

Former auditor general Sheila Fraser reported that the government had failed time and again to take measures that would improve the quality of life for first nations. The basics of life, such as adequate housing, clean drinking water, child welfare and education, are persistently and dramatically substandard.

Ms. Fraser said, in her parting words to Parliament, "a disproportionate number of First Nations people still lack the most basic services that other Canadians take for granted.... In a country as rich as Canada, this disparity is unacceptable."

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for reminding us of the powerful words of one of the most respected auditors general Canada has ever seen, and the admonition that she expressed as one of her parting speeches.

We just heard that Elijah Harper passed away, quite an iconic aboriginal leader. My colleague is right, in Red Sucker Lake, there is no running water and that is where he is from. There was a funeral service for him. My colleague, the member for Churchill attended. It is not that there is no running water, it is that a lot of the houses have no running water in Red Sucker Lake.

Shamattawa, Pukatawagan, Poplar River, we have toured those communities. It is absurd. Not only are there 15 people living in a house designed for 5, but when we took off the drywall to observe, we found black fur mould. Kids were crawling around on the streets. They have mold in their houses, no running water and are using a five-gallon oil can as their toilet.

We should not tolerate these conditions. Why do we? Desmond Tutu had it right when he visited Canada. He shook his head at our northern reserves and said, "Ah, yes, we have this, too, in my country. It is appalling".

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in all of our dealings with first nations, there is always the honour of the Crown that is involved. My colleague also rightly pointed out that the corresponding obligation with consultation is accommodation, in order to respond exactly to the concerns that were expressed in those consultations.

In the Haida case, the Supreme Court stated that consultation may also involve full consent. Those are not my words, but the Supreme Court's. On very serious issues, that is what the Supreme Court said.

Is it just me, or are we missing the point again here?

● (1635)

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for reminding us, and I do acknowledge his long experience and expertise in this field as a well-respected leader of the James Bay Cree and the northern Quebec Cree people.

We are missing the point collectively, but some people are missing the point by design and deliberately. It is very convenient when they keep changing ministers and they keep changing members of the aboriginal affairs committee, so that nothing ever happens. We are paralyzed. It is almost too important to be left in the hands of political discourse. It is just basic needs, and it should simply be done. We might have to book $5 billion, which is the estimate of the immediate shortfall just to provide running water, never mind adequate sewage treatment, et cetera, to the homes. We are missing the boat.

I do not want my grandchildren to look up to me someday and say, "Grandpa, what did you do to address the appalling social conditions that used to exist in Canada? Were you part of the problem or part of the solution?" All of us in this chamber should be asking ourselves the same question.

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the phony outrage from my friend opposite is almost too much for me to bear, having 10 reserves in my constituency and he having none.

The contrast between the reserves in my constituency and the thriving agricultural communities around them is very stark. The agricultural communities are self-sufficient, thriving and have a very important difference from the reserve communities: people have property rights. When people have property rights, they generate property taxes. The comparison between how much money is spent by the federal government and students in general is an apples and oranges comparison, because those agricultural communities generate property taxes because they have property rights.

One thing that my hon. friend said that I did agree with is that the Indian Act needs to be changed. I agree that the Indian Act should be changed, to allow private property rights on reserves. The great Peruvian economist, Hernando de Soto, says that the key first step in the development of poor and desperate communities is property rights.

Would the member agree with a move by our government if we decide to do this, to allow private property rights on reserves?

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, that is what this debate really needs: more Eurocentric ignorance from a bunch of redneck hillbillies. That is really helpful.

I once sat with a bunch of women from the Six Nations including Cayuga, Oneida and Mohawk. This is just an example of how insensitivity and naiveté are not helpful. They said that in their community women are not even allowed to run for chief. Everybody shook their heads and said that seemed terrible. However, she said that the men are not allowed to vote. Over thousands of years, they had arrived at a system that worked for them. It may not match the Human Rights Code of Canada, but over thousands of years the women were in charge of electing the chief, even if the women could not themselves run for chief. It worked for them.

One does not impose one's Eurocentric ideas on traditional cultures with thousands of years of history. Home ownership is actually not part of the culture in many communities; more of a co-operative ownership is. Therefore, it is a simplistic example from my colleague who illegally mails into my riding far too often, using his MP's mailing privileges. I am saving all the envelopes to deliver back to him, in Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette someday, all of the propaganda that he fires into my riding, which is 20% first nations by their own self-identification in the last census. That would be 20,000 people who self-identify, so I guess I have quite a few first nations people in my riding too, probably more than he has.

● (1640)

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Fraser Canyon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is indeed a pleasure to participate in this debate today. I want to say at the outset that I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Edmonton Centre.

Just this morning we saw the results of the good work of the Conservative government when it comes to working with first nations people. We were in the aboriginal affairs committee discussing the Yale First Nation Final Agreement, which involved Chief Robert Hope of the Yale First Nation, the Government of Canada and the Government of B.C. I am hopeful that will move ahead quickly. We saw how it can work when we work together. Certainly, I want to congratulate the Yale First Nation in my riding of Chilliwack—Fraser Canyon for all its hard work over 20 years at the table and finally getting the resolution they have been seeking with their treaty.

I am here today to talk about Bill S-8, the safe drinking water for first nations act. I believe this is an act that fully deserves the support of all colleagues in the House. The proposed legislation would address the serious problem of chronic unsafe drinking water in many first nations through an innovative and collaborative process, which is the key. The proposed process would have first nations work alongside government officials to design and implement regulatory regimes.

A starting point for this work would be the regulations that currently apply to communities adjacent to first nations, which is good common sense. More precisely, this means reviewing provincial or territorial regulations and adapting them to recognize the particular circumstances of first nations communities. We certainly recognize that an Ottawa-based, one-size-fits-all solution is not the solution that first nations need.

Members of this House need to recognize that currently no legally enforceable drinking water and waste water regulations exist for first nations on reserve. This is simply unacceptable. Regulations provide the framework for safe drinking water and waste water systems. They are essential because they map out clear lines of responsibility for each of the many steps required to safeguard water quality, such as source protection, regular quality testing and close adherence to established standards and protocols for water treatment and distribution. This is why regulations are essential for first nations communities. We must safeguard the drinking water for first nations members.

In essence, Bill S-8 is enabling legislation, as the member for Peace River, the chairman of the aboriginal affairs committee, stated earlier. It would authorize regulatory regimes developed through the collaborative process that I have just described. The proposed legislation does not dictate what the regimes must contain.

Unfortunately, some critics have chosen to misinterpret this approach and portray the bill instead as an effort by the Government of Canada to offload some of its liabilities. A closer look at the issue, however, reveals that this is simply not the case.

The truth is that collaboratively developed regulations would clarify the roles and responsibilities of all parties, including chiefs, band councils, water operators, and federal departments and agencies. The Government of Canada has no plan to offload or download its responsibilities to first nations, or to provinces and municipalities for that matter. Bill S-8 aims to engage as many stakeholders as possible in the design and implementation of regulatory regimes that protect the safety of drinking water.

Collaboration has been a defining characteristic of our government's efforts to resolve the issue of first nations access to safe drinking water since the very beginning. Seven years ago, the Government of Canada and the Assembly of First Nations agreed upon a joint plan of action. For instance, both partners appointed members to the expert panel that reviewed regulatory options. Although the panel did not recommend a particular option, it did lay out the benefits and limitation of various options. The panel's final report repeatedly emphasized the need for ongoing collaboration.

Here is an excerpt from that report:

> The federal government and First Nations partners should take steps to pare away bureaucracy, collaborate with provinces on tri-partite harmonization, and both simplify and update procurement procedures. Over time, First Nations should take on an increasing share of the activities directly related to planning, procuring and gaining approval for plants.

● (1645)

Bill S-8 proposes to follow the expert panel's advice by authorizing regulations developed with the direct input of first nations and designed to meet the particular needs and circumstances of their communities. The government's approach with Bill S-8 effectively rejects other options that have been considered in the past, such as imposing a single federal regime or merely incorporating provincial and territorial regulations without adaptation. These one-size-fits-all approaches are attractive because they should make it easier and faster to establish regulations and assign responsibilities, but these approaches could never reconcile the significant differences that exist among first nations communities. The truth is that we believe the best solution is to design and implement regulations by working directly with first nations and other stakeholders. This is a bottom-up rather than top-down exercise.

To get a sense of what the process might look like, I draw the attention of the House to an effort led by the Atlantic Policy Congress of First Nations Chiefs Secretariat. Known as the APC, this advocacy and policy group comprises representatives from more than 30 first nations located in the Atlantic provinces. For the last few years, the APC has been studying regulatory options for drinking water.

Representatives of the APC described this work to the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development on May 23. Mr. John Paul, APC's executive director, said the organization appreciates that drinking water is ultimately a health and safety issue. Here is an excerpt of his testimony. He said:

> We need to own whatever regulations come out of this, and we need to believe that they're workable and to figure out exactly what we need to do on the human resources side, the governance, and all of those different things.

In an effort to take ownership of regulations, the APC contracted one of Canada's most qualified experts in drinking water, Dr. Graham Gagnon, director of the Centre for Water Resources Studies at Dalhousie University. With Dr. Gagnon's help, the APC has developed a list of the technical benchmarks that could provide the basis for a regulatory regime. Perhaps more significantly, however, the APC and Dr. Gagnon have been working on a new approach to regulating the safety of first nations drinking water. The approach would involve a regional first nation water authority. The authority would be similar to those that other communities in Canada use to help govern public utilities and post-secondary education institutions.

Here is how Dr. Gagnon described the proposed authority to the standing committee:

> Implementation of a first nations regional water authority would enable coordinated decision-making, maximize efficiencies of resource allocation, and establish a professionally based organization that would be in the best position to oversee activities related to drinking water and waste water disposal. This would, on a day-to-day basis, transfer liability away from chiefs and councils, and pass it to a technical group.

That is very important. He said this would, on a day-to-day basis, transfer liability away from chiefs and councils and pass it to a technical group. As the quote indicates, the creation of a first nations-owned authority could be a valuable part of the solution, at least for Atlantic first nations. APC continues to investigate this option.

It is impossible to say if all first nations would pursue such an approach, but the mechanism proposed in Bill S-8 would provide first nations with the opportunity to propose and develop solutions that best meet their needs and best protect their communities. As the APC's example indicated, liability would not be downloaded or offloaded to first nations but, rather, options would be developed to address the role and responsibilities of the various stakeholders by region. This collaborative approach is precisely why we should endorse the legislation before us.

Our government fully supports Mr. Paul and the APC as they develop their regulations, and we hope the opposition will realize how important this is and support Bill S-8. The bill would help us move forward and work with first nations to develop regulations that serve them well and help provide safe drinking water for first nations right across the country.

● (1650)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Francine Raynault (Joliette, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his fine speech.

Now there is something I would like to know: why did the government ignore the Assembly of First Nations' recommendation to address the issue of safe drinking water for everyone?

Why is the government again calling for the incorporation by reference of provincial legislation, effectively transferring responsibility to the provinces?

How much is this going to cost the provinces? Will the provinces turn to the federal government to ask for money to cover the costs of clean water in aboriginal communities?

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Strahl: Mr. Speaker, as chance would have it—and I am not sure if the hon. member heard that speech—I did give a riveting speech on incorporation by reference of regulations just last week. I know she was there for that.

We are working closely with first nations to develop these regulations. Certainly, we have been at the table with significant funding to ensure we are providing that infrastructure for first nations, as I mentioned earlier in the debate. Between 2006 and 2014, we will have provided $3 billion in infrastructure upgrades. Since just 2007, nearly 700 projects have been undertaken to provide that critical infrastructure for first nations who do not have it.

We are going to work with the first nations. Again, the government has committed $330.8 million over two years through economic action plan 2012 to help sustain progress made to build and renovate water infrastructure on reserve.

We continue to be there, both with a collaborative approach with first nations and with financial resources to ensure we are providing first nations with the infrastructure they need.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is interesting. I have heard a number of the Conservative members make reference to the fact that they are going to work with first nations. I had the opportunity a number of months ago to meet with some members from our first nations community. There is a sense that the government is not working with them in dealing with the legislation itself.

Now the government is passing through the legislation in a way that very much limits debate, opportunities for amendments and so forth, yet, once the legislation passes, we are being told not to worry because the government has set some money aside. It says it will have this legislation and now it will work with our first nations.

My question is related to the credibility issue. In the minds of many first nations, in particular the leaders of first nations, there is this sense that the government has not been working with them in good faith to try to resolve this issue.

How does the member envision his government will fix the damage that has been caused as a result of the bad faith that is there? It is very real. I have seen it first hand. We hear it in committees and so forth. Is there not an issue there that has to be dealt with to build up that trust?

Mr. Mark Strahl: Mr. Speaker, let me just say that I will certainly put the record of this government on delivering results for grassroots first nations people up against the record of 13 years of inaction of the previous Liberal government.

We have worked together. I mentioned that at the beginning of my speech. We worked together today and debated a treaty in committee, working together with three levels of government to deliver results. There is certainly no broken trust there.

We have also been involved in an extensive engagement with first nations on this issue since we formed government. In the summer of 2006, the expert panel held public hearings across Canada. It heard from 110 presenters. In March 2009, there was a series of engagement sessions with more than 700 participants, of which 544 were first nations. In the winter of 2009-10, we met with first nations chiefs to discuss implementation and engagement during the earlier sessions. From October 2010 until October 2011, we held without prejudice discussions with first nations organizations to address their concerns.

This is a collaborative approach. We are going to continue to work with first nations. We know that working with them will deliver results for first nations communities.

● (1655)

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to rise to speak to and declare my support for Bill S-8, the safe drinking water for first nations act.

The proposed legislation is based on a thorough review of the considerable amount of evidence available, including numerous reports and studies and testimony provided to parliamentary committees.

I believe that anyone who consulted this material would reach the inescapable conclusion that Bill S-8 must be enacted for Canada to make lasting progress on the issue of safe drinking water in first nations communities.

It is my hope that Canadians do not base their opinions of Bill S-8 on other sources of information, such as the popular media or views expressed by various interest and advocacy groups. Unfortunately, some of these sources present false or misleading information.

In my remarks today, I will identify and disprove many common myths about Bill S-8. The first myth is that the Government of Canada did not consult first nations prior to introducing Bill S-8. This could not be further from the truth. When we examine the facts, we will see that an extensive engagement and consultation process has been under way for more than seven years. Furthermore, this effort would only continue once Bill S-8 has passed, as government and first nations officials would work together to design and implement regulations.

Here are the relevant facts. In 2006, our government, working with the Assembly of First Nations, established an expert panel to hold public hearings to examine potential regulatory options. More than 110 individuals presented to the panel. Another two dozen submitted written reports. Almost all of the submissions and presentations came from first nations groups.

In April 2007, we held a joint workshop together with the Assembly of First Nations and its technical water expert group to engage in the proposed options for regulations and identify any challenges or issues.

In early 2009, we conducted a series of 13 engagement sessions with first nations communities and organizations and with provincial and territorial groups. Of the approximately 700 participants, more than 540 were members of first nations.

In September 2009, government officials met with first nations chiefs and organizations to discuss some of the specific issues raised during the engagement sessions. Starting in October 2010, a series of without prejudice discussions continued for another full year with first nations organizations, and that collaboration continues today. Clearly, consultation has taken place.

A second pervasive myth about Bill S-8 is that it would negatively impact aboriginal and treaty rights. The truth is, however, that this is not the case. Bill S-8 includes a carefully crafted non-derogation clause. In essence, the non-derogation clause included in Bill S-8 would not prevent the government from justifying a derogation or abrogation of aboriginal treaty rights if it is necessary to ensure safety of first nations drinking water.

We believe this clause effectively balances the need to respect aboriginal treaty rights under section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982, and the need to protect human health.

A third myth is that the Government of Canada would not provide first nations with the money needed to abide by new regulations governing water. Once again, this is absolutely false. Between 2006 and 2014, our government will have invested approximately $3 billion in water and waste water infrastructure in first nations communities.

Last year's economic action plan alone committed $330.8 million over two years to build and renovate on-reserve water infrastructure, and our government has reiterated on multiple occasions in this House, before committee and in writing to every chief in Canada our commitment to provide ongoing financial support for drinking water.

Instead of focusing on what Bill S-8 would not do, members should focus more on what it would do. The bill proposes to finally create a mechanism to develop regulations in collaboration with first nations. Until regulations are drafted, it is impossible to know exactly how much money first nations would need to be able to comply with them. This is precisely why strong collaboration is central to this government's strategy to ensure safe drinking water for first nations.

Our government would continue to provide funding for first nations for their need to participate in a process to design, implement and comply with regulations.

Another myth put forward is that Bill S-8 would incorporate provincial and territorial regulations without adaptations and would give authority to the provincial or territorial governments.

Once again, this is false. Building on and adapting to provincial and territorial regulatory frameworks would not give provinces or territories control over drinking water and waste water systems on first nations lands. Rather it would produce federal regulations that are comparable to provincial-territorial regulations and provide first nations communities and municipalities with opportunities to work together in areas such as training and new technologies.

● (1700)

Adapting provincial and territorial regulations would ensure comparability with existing, well-understood regulations, thus increasing certainty about regulatory standards for users and operators of drinking water and waste water systems. This would allow the government and first nations to use existing provincial and territorial water regulations as a starting point to identify areas that could be used as federal regulations and to adapt them according to the needs of first nations.

Bill S-8 would lead to the establishment of a series of regional regulatory regimes. Each of these regimes would be based on relevant provincial or territorial regulations, but the regulations would be adapted to meet the particular needs and circumstances of first nations communities and would be developed and finalized with first nations.

Closely tied to this myth is another misconception that Bill S-8 would impose provincial or territorial jurisdiction on first nations. In reality, there is nothing in Bill S-8 that would give provinces or territories control over drinking water and waste water systems on first nations lands. The proposed legislation would create federal regimes that use provincial or territorial regulations as a template. That would inspire opportunities for collaboration among first nations and neighbouring communities and municipalities.

Some critics contend that first nations would have no input into what the regulations developed under Bill S-8 would contain. The truth is exactly the opposite. First nations would have a great deal of input into the development of regulations. Our government would work in partnership with first nations and other groups, such as provincial agencies, to develop federal regulations and standards. The regulations would be based on meeting the real-world challenges of providing safe drinking water in a particular region. This approach works. The Atlantic Policy Congress has already been working with government officials on regulatory development. These collaborations will be the foundation of regulations developed under Bill S-8.

The next myth is that Bill S-8 would somehow prevent first nations from initiating and enacting their own regulations, policies and laws on drinking water. There is nothing in Bill S-8 that would take away a first nation's authority to create bylaws under paragraph 81(1)(*l*) of the Indian Act. In fact, it is possible that a first nation's bylaw could supersede regulations created under Bill S-8. This would occur if the first nation's bylaw established a comparable or superior level of health and safety. Bill S-8 would also allow for the use of existing first nations bylaws, if appropriate.

Finally, there is the myth that Bill S-8 would somehow expose first nations to liability issues. However, regulations developed from this proposed act could add protections against liability by establishing what the limits on liability would be for all parties involved, including first nations. Regulations would define the roles and legal responsibilities of all parties, and in the process, clarify responsibilities related to drinking water. The best options would be developed to address the roles and responsibilities of the various stakeholders by region, because as was said previously by my friend from Chilliwack—Fraser Canyon, there is no one-size-fits-all or cookie-cutter approach. We have 631 first nations, and many of them have unique circumstances.

I call on opposition members to start listening to the facts on Bill S-8. I could say that they are hard of hearing, but that would not be true. I would say that they are probably hard of listening. We would like them to listen to the facts on Bill S-8 rather than to the many myths. If they do this, I am confident that they will not be able to vote against Bill S-8—hope springs eternal—and will finally agree that first nations deserve safe drinking water.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his speech.

He wants to talk about the facts, so we will. He is repeating over and over that the government consulted with first nations and that it is a myth that they were not consulted. I would like him to talk about that, since it is important to me. Existing constitutional law requires that the government consult and accommodate first nations. There is the matter of consultation, but there is also the obligation of accommodation. The government must address the concerns raised during these consultations.

I would like to hear the member speak to that. Major aboriginal organizations such as the Assembly of First Nations have expressed doubts about this consultation. I would like to know how he defines consultation.

● (1705)

[*English*]

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Mr. Speaker, consultations take many forms. Consultations on a project like this are obviously ongoing. They are a work in progress. The simple fact is that we have consulted very extensively, on this and other issues, with first nations. We talked about some that I mentioned in my remarks. There were various consultations, where there were hundreds of participants, the majority of whom were first nations. There were various consultations in September 2009 with first nations chiefs and organizations.

We talked about the Atlantic group, which has seen some results from those kinds of consultations. That is the kind of thing we need to do, replicate and adapt to local circumstances in the rest of the country.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech. I am responding to his wanting facts.

The United Nations has recognized water and sanitation as a human right. In July 2010, the UN General Assembly overwhelmingly agreed to a resolution declaring it a human right to have safe and clean drinking water and sanitation. The resolution had 122 countries vote in its favour, while 41 countries, including Canada, abstained.

At the time of the resolution, more than 100 boil water advisories were in effect on reserves. For another 49 first nation communities, boiling water did not make the water safe enough for consumption. As of July 2011, there were 126 first nation communities across Canada under drinking water advisories, an increase from 106 communities in 2008.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Mr. Speaker, I never doubt my colleague's sincerity, but I have to point to the record Canada has achieved since 2006. Over 700 projects have been put in place, and there are more to come. There is $3 billion being spent. We do not need the United Nations to tell us how to do that kind of business.

I will ask, with the greatest respect to my colleague, because she was not here at the time, if it is fair to say that we are doing less than the Liberals talked about. The difference is that we are actually doing something, and we are doing a lot. It is easy to talk. It is tougher to do. We are actually doing something.

Mr. Dan Albas (Okanagan—Coquihalla, CPC): Mr. Speaker, one of the things I have heard in the debate today is that with over 600 different first nations, we have non-treaty, treaty, rural and urban areas. This is a wide, encompassing topic. One thing I have heard time and again from members is that the government is collaborating and the approach is on a case-by-case basis.

For example, the Penticton Indian Band has a tremendous opportunity in the Arrowleaf development it wants. It needs water to go ahead with that, among other things. The band may choose to work with the adjacent municipality or may choose to go on its own. It will not be clean water for just the members' own consumption. This will allow them to expand their economic development.

I would appreciate it if the member could highlight some of the other points in relation to better drinking water and more waste water sanitation opportunities, with a focus on economic development and helping on a case-by-case basis.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that question, because it gives me an opportunity to talk about that. We talked about clean water, waste water and so on, and that is critically important. However, there is a longer-term aim here, and that is to help our first nations get educated and trained. They can develop some economic opportunities for themselves in whatever municipality they are in or nearby.

There is nothing to say that they could not take on providing waste water services and clean drinking water for a non-aboriginal, non-first nations community. We want that kind of economic development. We want that kind of participation from our first nations people throughout the country. It is going to be different in Nova Scotia, Alberta and wherever else. That is why it is so important that we collaborate locally, that we do it in good faith and that we do it flexibly and aggressively.

● (1710)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will share my time with the member for Manicouagan.

I rise today to speak to Bill S-8. I had the opportunity to speak to this bill last November. I sat on the committee and I must say that the testimony from witnesses only reinforced the NDP's opinion that this is a flawed piece of legislation.

At the heart of this debate is a basic human right: the right to safe, affordable and adequate drinking water. Unfortunately, this is a challenge in many Canadian communities, including several first nations and Inuit communities.

Canada has such an abundance of water that it is hard to imagine that such problems could exist in such a developed country.

[*English*]

While the appropriate course of action is to develop safe, reliable systems in partnership with the communities in need, the Conservative government has chosen to legislate regulations that would force these communities to go it alone. In fact, this legislation seems more about pursuing a Conservative view of how first nations should be run than about dealing with the actual problem. It would create demands and conditions for first nations, yet it is predictably short on the resources that would allow these communities to comply.

Bill S-8 excuses the government from its primary obligations to first nations while subjecting them to substantial risk, significant financial burdens and a patchwork of provincial standards for the delivery of safe drinking water.

This bill fails miserably when it comes to the real challenge, which is helping first nations build the capacity that would allow them to do the work of administering water and waste water systems on their lands. It is a classic case of putting the cart before the horse. In the case of communities that have been consistently asking for assistance for specific problems, they are getting rules and regulations instead of help with bricks and mortar.

The problems we have seen with flooding this spring in Kashechewan help illustrate this point. That community has been asking for help with waste water, which has been identified as problematic, since flooding in 2008. It has asked for assistance in developing storm sewers and with placing back-flow limiters on each house. Guess what? The government has consistently refused to step up, and this spring, homes in that community were inundated with backed-up raw sewage, which then forced the community to be evacuated. The minister tried to blame this on the lack of training, yet it was a company that was actually monitoring this.

On a larger scale, we can consider the testimony the committee heard from a municipal group that included the mayor of Maple Ridge and metro Vancouver's general manager of corporate services, both of whom sit on metro Vancouver's aboriginal relations committee. They reminded the committee that the report of the 2009 national assessment of first nations water and waste water estimated the cost to bring 618 individual first nations up to standard would be $4.7 billion, and it would take a decade. In addition to that, the cost to operate these improved systems would be $419 million a year.

The metro Vancouver delegation told us that local governments were concerned about this legislation's broad powers to delegate to any person or body any aspect of drinking water provision, monitoring and enforcement, which could have significant implications for local governments, as providers of utility services. It also highlighted areas of concern identified by local governments.

On that note, I want to tell the House that what we were hearing was that it may be very difficult to have municipal governments even wanting to assist first nations in hooking up to their systems because of the onerous aspects of this legislation.

Among their concerns were the following: there has been a lack of consultation and local government input; the transfer of responsibilities is unknown; the level of services is unclear; there are challenges with bylaw regulations and enforcement; there are legislative and jurisdictional uncertainties, which appear to be similar to the First Nations Commercial and Industrial Development Act; regulatory authority over reserves is unclear; there is a need to clarify financial liabilities; there are unknown funding capacities; and there is a lack of an adequate implementation plan. Does that sound like legislation that is ready to roll out? I do not think so.

● (1715)

As I mentioned, the committee heard from many witnesses who spoke to the deficiencies in Bill S-8. The Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs has made three submissions on this bill and its predecessor, Bill S-11. It echoed many of the criticisms of other witnesses and stated:

> We remain alarmed and concerned with the federal government's continued approach and insistence that legislation is the answer for First Nations. We question why the current Canadian Government must be compelled to legislate as opposed to doing what is humane and just by providing adequate resources to ensure comparable water systems as the rest of Canada.

It went on to state:

> Trust is earned through respectful, reciprocal and honourable actions and good faith negotiations.

It added:

> The creation of legislation and policy without seeking and meeting the realistic needs of First Nations will not create success or the accountability that government is seeking for its investments.

It is not for a lack of desire that first nations do not have appropriate systems to deliver safe drinking water or manage waste water. If there is a deficiency in the process, it is certainly related to being able to deliver on those desires.

I have heard from Whitefish River First Nation on this subject as well. In a letter to the minister, Chief Shining Turtle provided the government with some basic math that showed how flimsy the government's community infrastructure investment was, and also illustrated the incredible costs related to doing the kind of work that Bill S-8 would make mandatory for these communities.

Here is the math that I believe needs to be considered by all members. The government has committed $155 million over 10 years, so let us do the math. This comes out to about $15 million a year, divide that over 8 regions that INAC uses and it becomes $1.94 million a year per region. We are going down. Divide the $1.94 million over the Ontario region's 133 first nations and the total is $14,567.67 a year. How far will that go?

One more crucial number that has been provided is the cost per metre to construct water mains on the Whitefish River First Nation. It is $300 per metre.

While the government brags about the size of their investment in community infrastructure for first nations, in reality that money is only enough to build 48.5 metres of water main a year.

In addition to these problems, Bill S-8 regulations may incorporate, by reference, provincial regulations governing drinking and waste water in first nations communities, but those regulations are not uniform, which could lead to unequal burdens for communities for what is primarily a federal responsibility.

The expert panel on safe drinking water for first nations expressed concern about using provincial regulations, claiming it would result in a patchwork of regulations leading to some first nations having more stringent standards than others.

In addition to that, the regulations in this bill would overrule any laws or bylaws made by first nations. Bill S-8 would also limit the liability of the government for certain acts or omissions that occur in the performance of their duties under the regulations the bill sets out.

As I mentioned at the outset, safe drinking water is a basic human right. The connection to health and economic well-being that flows from safe, dependable and affordable water cannot be dismissed, but this legislation is missing the mark entirely.

In addition to that, the bill would leave communities on the hook for existing problems they may not have created themselves. In those instances, if what these places really want is to start over in an attempt to get things right, the reality is they will be saddled with problem systems they have inherited.

It will make first nations liable for water systems that have already proven inadequate, but offers no funding to help them improve those deficient systems. Even if a first nation wants to build a replacement to better suit its needs, it will have to maintain its old, often costly systems at the same time.

Here is an example of how that will work. Constance Lake First Nation's water supply has been through a state of emergency. Its traditional water source was contaminated by blue-green alga, which resulted in a shutdown of its water treatment plant. It has drilled two new wells and has been off boil-water advisories for the first time in years, but also requires a new system to ensure quality and to meet its growing demand. Under the provisions of this legislation, it will be liable for the old system, while it tries to build a new one. It will be forced to waste money instead of being allowed to invest it smartly.

I see my time is up, and I will finish up the rest during the question and answer period.

● (1720)

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will focus on one point to give my colleague time to make her other points.

The concern that many of us have is that instead of fixing a problem, the Conservatives are actually going to complicate the problem more, based on the point the member just made, and that is to make matters worse through administration and not providing the capacity. Most of those problems could have been avoided if they had listened to the people who came to committee and had consulted in real terms the very people we are trying to help.

Could the member comment on that and elaborate a bit more on the other points she wanted to make?

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Mr. Speaker, this is exactly what we are talking about. We need to build capacity and we need to have the resources, but we cannot do that through this type of legislation.

What the Conservatives are trying to do is really download onto municipalities, the first nations and, in some respects, onto provinces. This is exactly what I was talking about. This is a recipe for failure, not a fix for the basic problem that plagues too many first nations communities. Again, had the Conservatives listened to these communities, they would have known as much.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Francine Raynault (Joliette, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for her speech.

I would like to hear her opinion on the lack of access to drinking water on reserve. How does it affect people's health and education? When I say education, I am not talking about how parents raise their children, but about the education these children are getting in school. If they do not have enough drinking water, it cannot be very pleasant to go to school.

I would like to know what is happening to aboriginal people across the country who are in a similar situation, meaning, who are dealing with a lack of water or who have undrinkable water.

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her question. I really appreciate that the NDP is so engaged in this issue.

I can talk about the problems related to a lack of drinking water. Tuberculosis is more common among first nations who do not have a reliable source of drinking water. There are a variety of health problems related to this issue. It also creates a significant problem in the community's ability to diversify and build a strong economy. It is difficult to encourage industry to come to the community if there is no infrastructure. Drinking water is a necessity.

We also heard about municipalities that have first nations reserves connected to their water supply. That is very problematic because, in the context of this bill, the government did not take the time to consult either first nations or the municipalities that have to provide this service.

I think that we will find there are municipalities that are not interested in providing that service to first nations. Good relations could have developed in those instances.

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her excellent presentation on a fundamental and crucial issue.

I wanted to ask a more legal and specific question. I know that the member for Manicouagan will talk to us about this shortly.

In December 2011, the Assembly of First Nations adopted a resolution that called on the government to guarantee that appropriate funding be available for any regulations governing implementation, to support first nations in the process of developing their own water supply systems, and to work together with the AFN to develop an immediate plan to address the lack of clean and safe water.

I do not know if I am the only one, but does my colleague also have the impression that we are just scratching the surface of the problem, and that the bill is a half measure?

● (1725)

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Mr. Speaker, I will be very brief.

The first nations that appeared before the committee said that they could put in place a good system to help their communities if they had the necessary means and resources. We can help communities access clean drinking water by giving them the means and the resources they need, not by introducing bills such as this.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Before I recognize the hon. member for Manicouagan, I want to inform him we have just four minutes remaining. He will have more time when the House resumes debate.

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain (Manicouagan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I had a very quick look at my recent speeches in the House, and I noticed a common underlying thread in a large number of bills introduced in the House. I have already made at least three speeches this week that touched on the same subjects, the same common thread and the same trains of thought.

At the risk of being redundant, I want to point out that the government is gradually and stealthily trying to distance itself and step back from its obligations. This is evident with the introduction of both private members' and government bills that allow the government to gradually transfer its obligations to provide services to Canadians across the country. For example, it is delegating its obligation to deliver services to charities, which are not accountable. Bill S-8 is no different.

When I consider my brief experience here in the House and the many hours I have spent in committee, I come to the same conclusion. In reality, many initiatives that focus on "Indianness" and aboriginal issues seek to allow the government to opt out of its obligations and shift the burden it has because of the fiduciary relationship, among other things, onto the backs of third parties or band councils.

This relates to Bill S-8, which pertains to safe drinking water. I am thinking, in particular, of the First Nations Land Management Act. This initiative was brought forward to, ultimately, technically and officially, give first nations communities back a certain amount of control over land management and authorizations related to partial occupancy.

In reality, if a legal expert truly focused on the enactment and the letter of this law, he would clearly see that the burden shifts the moment an agreement is signed under the First Nations Land Management Act. The environmental liabilities—past, present and future—are then assumed by the band.

As a result, all the profiteering and negligence of successive governments over the years in relation to environmental monitoring, management and assessments just add to the negligence we are seeing in 2013. The results could be catastrophic. That is why the government is trying to opt out of these obligations. It is important to remember that the reclamation of a single parcel of land on a given reserve can easily cost $100,000. It depends on whether we are dealing with oil or other pollutants and contaminants.

The same reasoning applies in the case of Bill S-8. The government is simply shifting its obligations with regard to access to safe drinking water, infrastructure upgrades and water management and filtration onto the backs of first nations and band councils, which do not have enough funding to take on these sometimes costly responsibilities. I am just thinking about my community, which recently had to deal with contaminated water. There are huge costs associated with these types of problems.

An informed review of the proposed legislative initiative indicates that there are non-derogation clauses whose interpretation and application would open the door to the abrogation of ancestral and treaty rights.

● (1730)

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

[*English*]

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

* * *

YALE FIRST NATION FINAL AGREEMENT ACT

(Bill C-62. On the Order: Government Orders)

June 6, 2013—Report stage of Bill C-62, An Act to give effect to the Yale First Nation Final Agreement and to make consequential amendments to other Acts—the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development.

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there have been consultations with respect to Bill C-62, an act to give effect to the Yale First Nation Final Agreement and to make consequential amendments to other acts.

Before I propose the motion, I want to thank the official opposition and all members of this House who have been working in co-operation to move expeditiously in advancing this legislation to implement the Yale final agreement.

I move:

That, notwithstanding any standing order or usual practices of this House, Bill C-62, An Act to give effect to the Yale First Nation Final Agreement and to make consequential amendments to other Acts be deemed concurred in at the report stage and deemed read a third time and passed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Does the hon. member for Peace River have the unanimous consent of the House to propose this motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Agreed and so ordered.

(Motion agreed to, bill concurred in at report stage, read the third time and passed)

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*English*]

CRIMINAL CODE

The House resumed from May 21 consideration of the motion that Bill C-489, an act to amend the Criminal Code and the Corrections and Conditional Release Act (restrictions on offenders), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with pleasure that I stand today to speak on a bill that I acknowledge has come forward from a private member who deserves a lot of merit. Obviously the individual has put in a great deal of time and thought in bringing the bill forward.

In reading through his speech, I found that the MP for Langley made reference to a very personal situation in his constituency. I thought it was worth repeating because by doing so, we get a better appreciation of why the member felt so compelled to bring in this private member's bill.

He stated:

> ...a sex offender was permitted to serve a house arrest right next door to his young victim. In another case, the sex offender served house arrest across the street from the young victim. In both cases, the poor victims lived in fear and were re-victimized every time they saw their attacker.

I can appreciate why the member found this completely unacceptable.

All sorts of different crimes take place in our communities. When a crime is against a person, such as a physical assault or a sexual crime of any nature, it has quite a different impact compared with, let us say, a home break-in or a car theft, which are crimes of property damage.

We want our laws to not only ensure that there is some sort of a consequence when a person commits a crime but also that we can provide support for our victims, and we do that in different ways.

We want to prevent victims from being re-victimized by the same individual who might have caused them harm in the first place. I believe that is what the member is attempting to do with this piece of legislation. That is the reason I am very sympathetic to and comfortable with what the member is proposing to the House.

The restriction that we are talking about, a two-kilometre perimeter to not knowingly be in the presence of or living near a victim, seems to be a reasonable request.

Not travelling in a vehicle with someone who is 16 and under again seems to be a reasonable request.

There are all sorts of situations that could arise that I think members will try to deal with in a fair fashion, and I think that in this situation we are seeing just that.

I noted that the new restriction on sex offenders that is being proposed would prohibit sex offenders from being in close proximity to their victims. That is a substantive and ultimately, perhaps, a very useful change. That is why we feel fairly comfortable supporting the initiative from the member.

It is important that we recognize that often the interests of a victim are ignored, even though it might be unintentional, when a judge or another area of our judicial system takes an action.

The focus of our system is to look at the criminal and ensure that an appropriate consequence to whatever type of crime might have been committed is actually put into place. We think in terms of the consequence. Often, at times, the aspect that is left out is the consideration given to victims.

● (1735)

In this situation, we have a proactive approach in recognizing that there is more we could do. As such, the member is proposing an amendment to two pieces of legislation that would go a long way in dealing with that concern.

It is important that we recognize, as I have, that a sexual offence is a unique kind of offence that makes victims quite vulnerable. The violation is unique in comparison to other types of crimes, and we need to take that into consideration. There is a profound psychological impact that will often follow an individual for many years after being the victim of a sexual crime. Often victims will relive or suffer the consequences of the crime, while the perpetrator of the crime may come back into the community. As the member has pointed out, a perpetrator living next door to or always being around the victim re-victimizes the individual every time she or, in the odd case, he sees the perpetrator.

That said, it is important that we recognize that the bill is an attempt to prevent someone from being re-victimized. I appreciate the manner in which it has been brought forward.

Liberals take the issue of crime and safety in our communities very seriously. We want to ensure that our judicial system allows our judges the discretion to make good rulings and deliver appropriate consequences in all ways, as much as possible. By doing that, we are allowing judges to take into consideration a wide variety of potential reasons and rationales as to why a crime might have been committed in the first place, to contrast that with a number of other variables and to come up with a fair and just disposition.

Upon reflection, we might see that we do not necessarily have a perfect system. I do not believe any society in the world has a perfect system. At times there is a need to make changes to improve the system we have. In my short term in Ottawa, legislation has passed that has not necessarily taken a fair approach in the delivery of justice, but on occasion legislation with a great deal of merit in what it is hoping to achieve has passed and would receive fairly wide support.

It is the principle of what is being proposed that makes me fairly comfortable in saying that it is, in essence, a good bill that deserves support. I anticipate that it will likely pass.

Hopefully it will make a difference going forward, as I suspect it will, because, as I say, we are talking about a type of crime that makes a lot of people feel quite vulnerable because of its very nature.

● (1740)

Mr. Dan Albas (Okanagan—Coquihalla, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to speak on Bill C-489, a bill that proposes to amend the Criminal Code and the Corrections and Conditional Release Act.

I would like to begin by recognizing the member for Langley for his hard work in bringing this important bill forward.

[*Translation*]

I would like to start by commending the hard work done by the member for Langley to introduce this bill to the House.

[*English*]

Like others in the House, I am a relatively new member here. However, in the few years I have been the member for Okanagan—Coquihalla, I have already encountered the very challenging situation on which this bill proposes to take action. I suspect I am not the only parliamentarian who has encountered these difficult situations.

When a victim who has been violently sexually assaulted learns that the criminal responsible seeks to return to the very same neighbourhood where these crimes were committed, serious challenges arise. Likewise, when a child predator desires to return to a neighbourhood, there are similar challenges.

These are not hypothetical situations. In fact, there have been three such incidents occurring in my riding over the past few years. These situations re-victimize and create legitimate fear. In some situations, it is even worse. No citizens should be forced to live in fear within their own neighbourhood.

When these situations arise and fearful citizens meet with their elected representatives, they need our help. They need action. That is why I commend the member for Langley, as his bill creates new tools that would help find the solution to these challenging situations.

This bill would enhance the safety of victims, children and the public when an offender is released into their community. Specifically, the bill proposes to amend existing provisions that provide authority to impose conditions on offenders who are already subject to probation orders, conditional sentences, child sexual offender prohibitions, child sexual offender peace bonds and conditional release orders made pursuant to the Corrections and Conditional Release Act, which include parole and temporary absences from federal penitentiaries. These five different orders cover the vast majority of situations where criminal offenders are released into a community.

The amendments proposed in Bill C-489 would ensure that courts take into consideration the implications that contact could create between an offender and victims, their families and witnesses. As an example, some of the proposed amendments would create mandatory non-contact conditions, while others would create new legal tools for the court to impose similar conditions on a discretionary basis.

Currently, section 161 of the Criminal Code does provide sentencing courts with the discretion to impose post-release conditions on offenders convicted of child sexual offences. These conditions can include prohibitions from attending a public place such as a park, playground or community centre where children are present; seeking, obtaining or continuing any employment that involves being in a position of trust toward a child; having any contact with a child; and using the Internet. In contrast, Bill C-489 proposes to add two new conditions to this list that would allow a geographical condition restricting the offender from being within two kilometres of a home where a victim might be present without a parent or guardian, and the ability to prohibit an offender from being in a private vehicle with a child.

Bill C-489 also proposes important amendments to the list of mandatory conditions imposed upon an offender released into the community under a probation order, a conditional sentence order or a conditional release order made pursuant to the Corrections and Conditional Release Act.

● (1745)

In particular, it is proposed that sentencing courts or the Parole Board of Canada be required to prohibit offenders from communicating with victims, witnesses or other persons named in the order. This could also include a prohibition from going to any specified place.

What I view as important in Bill C-489 is that these conditions are considered mandatory. In other words, it becomes the default standard that in these situations offenders are prohibited from making contact with their victims.

However, Bill C-489 also recognizes that if exceptional circumstances exist, the court or parole board may choose not to impose them. In other words, there is still flexibility. However, the default standard is to protect the witness and not the offender. In these exceptional circumstances, the court or parole board would be required to provide written reasons for not imposing such a condition. This would bring increased accountability and transparency to the process.

Bill C-489 also proposes to amend peace bonds, as defined under section 810.1. Currently, peace bonds are court-imposed orders that are issued when there are reasonable grounds to believe that an individual may commit a child sexual offence. These orders may be in effect to a maximum of two years and can also be renewed. Currently, these orders contain conditions that a judge believes are appropriate in the circumstances to prevent an offender from committing a child sexual offence.

Bill C-489 proposes to add new discretionary conditions that could prohibit communication with a person identified in the order or prohibit going to any specified place identified in the order. These new conditions would not be mandatory, and as such, would maintain the current discretionary approach that could be used by judges in issuing these orders. Ultimately, I believe that the measures proposed in the bill would help to ensure victims were better protected from offenders.

There is no question that Bill C-489 would strengthen the tools of our justice system that could be used to prevent offenders released into a community from contacting victims or from travelling to other locations where such contact could occur. In other words, it would eliminate loopholes that can be exploited under our current system.

These proposals would also ensure that, by default, victims had protections that often can only occur under the present system after an unfortunate incident has occurred.

Victims of crime, their families and witnesses deserve this default level of protection from offenders. People deserve to feel safe in their communities. That is why I will be supporting Bill C-489 moving forward to committee for further review and study. I believe these amendments are important in helping to close existing loopholes and to better protect victims.

● (1750)

[*Translation*]

I sincerely believe that these amendments are essential to improving the Criminal Code's current provisions and ensuring better protection for the victims of crime.

[*English*]

I also believe that increased clarity and enhanced public safety provisions in the bill would be of benefit to offenders' long-term interests as well. The current system, in my view, allows too much potential for conflict and has too many loopholes. These amendments would increase public safety by better protecting the rights of victims and their loved ones.

I had the opportunity to teach martial arts professionally for 15 years. During that time I trained hundreds, if not thousands, of young persons to better protect themselves from child predators, to look out for themselves. One of the things I did during that time was to give them the tools to help protect them.

Recently, a child asked me if I missed teaching martial arts. I certainly do miss elements, but I am devoted to helping make sure children get the protection they need.

The member for Langley has put together some very important amendments that I feel would help close these loopholes and better protect these children. There are also the members for Kootenay—Columbia and for Brampton—Springdale. All of them have brought forward important amendments to help protect children.

I ask all hon. members to join with me and with the member for Langley and support these important changes that would help keep our families safe.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Francine Raynault (Joliette, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is never an easy thing to talk about a subject that concerns people who have been the victims of crimes such as violence or sexual assault. I can very clearly imagine the victims' frame of mind.

Although the legislation permits a certain level of control over the accused or the person convicted of a crime, the restrictions with regard to the victim are not enforced immediately. At the moment, these restrictions are the responsibility of wardens, the Commissioner of the Correctional Service of Canada, and the Parole Board of Canada.

Bill C-489 makes it mandatory to impose certain provisions, which until now have been imposed on an ad hoc basis. This should help the victims of crime feel safer while at the same time giving them the tools they need to know what is happening with their attacker once the sentence has been handed down. Unlike other measures that have resulted from the Conservatives' "tough on crime" mentality, I must admit that the bill is just common sense and it should be allowed to continue its course. I will therefore support the bill at second reading.

That said, I recommend that the government hold all the necessary consultations—I repeat, all the necessary consultations—and listen to what all those involved have to say, in order to draft legislation that is truly appropriate.

I am in favour of the bill because I fully support measures that promote fairness and protect victims. I approve of this measure in the same way and in the same spirit as I would approve of subsidized housing, for example. It is a social justice issue. It goes without saying that some victims of crime have suffered immeasurably. My desire to help them arises not from sensationalism, but from the point of view of a world where everyone is treated fairly. From this perspective, it makes sense to try to offer greater peace of mind to those who have lived through difficult and disturbing events.

That being said, the NDP will consult with victims' groups in order to find out whether Bill C-489 really responds to their needs or whether it will only apply in rare cases. We have an opportunity to listen to them and draft a bill that is based on fact. We must seize this opportunity at any cost, and work together with the citizens of this country.

In addition to listening to what victims of crime have to say, I would also like to ensure the bill is scrupulously constitutional. Bill C-489 has all the elements for success, but we know that there is a weakness in terms of clause 1, the clause amending subsection 161 (1) of the Criminal Code.

This reservation comes from the clerk of the Subcommittee on Private Members' Business, who expressed concerns about the constitutionality of such a measure, one of his reasons being because the offender is expected to know the address of the victim's residence. It should be noted that the committee nevertheless deemed the bill votable. It is surely not a shortcoming that is impossible to correct, and I am convinced that we will be able to clarify the matter before third reading.

In order to give the victims of crime the best protection we can, I think it is important to consider these few reservations. We have before us an opportunity to improve Bill C-489 and give Canadians a bill that lives up to their expectations.

Furthermore, it is interesting to mention the point of view of Michael Spratt, of the Criminal Lawyers' Association of Ontario. In Mr. Spratt's view, Bill C-489 may be difficult to enforce in its current state, because it may lead to disproportionate measures.

This bill is quite restrictive because of the mandatory nature of the measures it puts in place.

● (1755)

In addition, there are already provisions that impose a minimum distance of 100 metres between the criminal and the victim, and others that prohibit contact between those on probation and their victims. We know that it is not always a simple matter to ensure this is respected.

Mr. Spratt concluded that Bill C-489 would be difficult to enforce in small communities, as well as in urban areas, as the distances are smaller. In his view, the fact that the bill could technically be used in an extreme way in the case of relatively minor offences threatens its constitutionality.

These are interesting issues that have been brought forward by someone who knows what he is talking about. We will therefore have to consider the bill in greater detail and ensure that everything is correct. After all, if the Conservatives are defending the constitutionality of an institution as antiquated as the Senate, surely they will not have any problem refining Bill C-489.

I will not go as far as to say, as Mr. Spratt did, that the bill is a disproportionate response to very specific cases, but this is my own opinion. I think that there is in fact room for providing better protection for victims of crime. For instance, the bill could allow victims to have more information about the stages in their attacker's correctional process.

It may well be very worrying for a victim to be unaware of what is happening to the person who caused him harm, once the sentence has been handed down. Will the offender be getting out of prison soon? What is his behaviour like? Has he begun the rehabilitation process? For a person who has suffered enormously from someone else's actions, it may be reassuring to believe that it is possible to correct deviant behaviour.

Furthermore, this is the underlying principle of our correctional system. I am pleased to see that the Conservatives all believe that a person can change and correct his behaviour, as it partly opens the door to many options that the core of their "tough on crime" approach obsolete.

In conclusion, I would like to say that I support Bill C-489 at second reading because I believe we must help victims of crime for the simple reason that it is fair to do so. However, I urge the House to listen carefully to the recommendations made by those who are the most affected by considering the recommendations made by groups representing victims of crime.

● (1800)

[*English*]

Mr. Kyle Seeback (Brampton West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, like so many of my colleagues, I am happy to be able to speak today with respect to my colleague's private member's bill, Bill C-489, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Corrections and Conditional Release Act (restrictions on offenders).

I am proud to support this bill. It is another great piece of legislation that has been brought forward either by our government or members of our government who bring forward what I like to describe as, in many cases, common sense and practical solutions to some of the issues that are facing our criminal justice system today.

It reminds me of a couple of other pieces of legislation that we have brought forward, for example, when we brought forward the issue with victim surcharges. Part of the problem in that case was that judges were not imposing the surcharge, and when they did not, they were supposed to give written reasons. We found out that 90% of the time that surcharges were not imposed, the judges did not actually give written reasons. We made it mandatory that those victim surcharges would be put in place.

This bill would continue to support our agenda to make sure that our streets and communities are safe for all Canadians. It does it in a couple of meaningful ways, and I will go into that as I speak about it.

In a quick summary, the bill would ensure that sentencing courts and parole boards more regularly impose conditions when appropriate to prohibit specific types of contact between offenders and their victims. It proposes that such conditions be imposed to protect witnesses and other individuals who need similar protection.

Again, I say these kinds of things that are being brought forward just make sense. If we asked the average person if there should be conditions to prohibit types of conduct between offenders and victims, people would say, "Yes, that makes sense".

I am not surprised that in many instances the opposition and opposition members would suggest this bill is not necessary, because the current law already provides that this could take place, but that is the problem. These conditions are not being put in place in many circumstances.

That is the same issue as the victim surcharge issue. For example, in this case, prohibition orders always include three mandatory conditions. These conditions are to keep the peace and be of good behaviour, of course the promise to appear when required, and to notify the court or probation officer in advance of any change of name or address, or any change of employment or occupation.

A sentencing court may also impose any of the optional conditions that are set out in subsection 732.1(3) of the Criminal Code, which includes drug and alcohol prohibitions, restrictions against travel, weapon prohibitions, requirements to support dependants and community service conditions.

The list of mandatory and optional conditions does not include conditions that restrict contact between offenders and victims. This is what I go back to when I say these reforms are such common sense things. One would think that would be at the top of the agenda, restricting contact between the perpetrator of a crime and the victim of a crime. Sentencing courts are also not required to provide reasons when they do not choose to do that. I would submit that makes absolutely no sense when we take a moment to think about it.

Lastly, subsection 732.1(g.1) provides a residual condition under which a court may impose reasonable conditions that are desirable for protecting society and for facilitating the offender's successful reintegration into the community. It is only pursuant to this residual provision that a sentencing court has the authority to impose a condition that would limit contact between the victim and the offender, or prevent the offender from moving across the street from the victim. It is a residual provision.

This is why a reform like this is so absolutely necessary. There are some examples in the case law where sentencing courts have imposed conditions restricting contact between offenders and their victims. For instance, in the case of R v. Horton, the offender, a G20 demonstrator, was made subject to a condition of non-contact with a named police officer who was a victim of the offender's actions.

● (1805)

That said, the appellate decision on the use of this provision underlined the problems with respect to its use in limiting contact between offenders and their victims. Specifically, the courts may refuse such conditions if by their nature they act against the successful reintegration of the offender. This is upside down. This is topsy-turvy. This is what we are talking about. We are putting the rights of the person who perpetrated a crime ahead of the rights of a victim. These imbalances need to be addressed in our justice system.

The Supreme Court of Canada stressed that in order for the probation order conditions to be lawful, they must not offend the objectives of protecting society or the successful reintegration of the offender. It is saying both are important and have to be given due consideration. Two Supreme Court of Canada cases, R. v. Proulx and R. v. Shoker, were very clear about this principle. There must be a nexus between the condition imposed, the offender's behaviour, the protection of society and the successful reintegration of the offender into society. We are trying to reinstitute that balance to make sure that the victim and protection of society is going to be back in that equation. However, as I said, the offender's interests supersedes the rights of the victim and the protection of society, and that is exactly what we are going to address with this legislation.

A good example of this can be found in the decision of R. v. Rowe, where the Ontario Court of Appeal found that a condition directing a repeat domestic violent offender to stay out of the province of Ontario for the duration of the probation order would be an obstacle to the successful reintegration of the offender, a repeat domestic violent offender. That kind of an order is an obstacle to reintegration. What about the obstacle to the victim? That is what we are trying to put back into focus. This is a problem that makes relying on the existing provision difficult and why we need this reform.

As I stated before, the courts are not required to provide reasons for not imposing such conditions, so we do not even know if that condition was considered by the judge or why the judge considered it and did not impose it. These are the kinds of problems that we have with the existing legislation. As a result of this, non-contact conditions simply fall through the cracks, and victims are asking why no one thought about them, why are they falling through the cracks? These are important reforms.

Bill C-489 proposes a real sound solution to the problem that we are talking about. I go back to this again. What I say often is that it is common sense. When explained to average people on the street that we are making this kind of a change, they are shocked that the law did not provide for this before. They cannot believe it. The justice committee is studying some of the changes to not criminally responsible, and we let them know what some of the changes are. People cannot believe that the changes that we are proposing are not already in existence now.

Bill C-489 proposes to amend the probation provisions to make it mandatory for the courts to impose non-contact conditions, unless there are exceptional circumstances not to do so or unless the victim or other individuals mentioned in the order consent. This is going to give more protection, more mental protection as well, to victims. Imagine that a perpetrator continues to be in contact with a victim of domestic violence. The victim will ask why some kind of prohibition order was not put in place.

Many of the concerns I have identified are applicable to other orders. This is why Bill C-489 proposes that the same types of conditions be mandatory for conditional sentence orders imposed by sentencing courts and for all conditional releases imposed by the Parole Board of Canada.

This bill would also require courts to consider imposing such conditions in all child sex offender peace bonds. This just makes sense. It is a reform that we absolutely need to move forward with.

Victims, their families and witnesses need the protection of the courts and parole authorities when an offender is released into the community. We have to get this done; it is going to provide more safety and ensure that witnesses and victims are protected.

This legislation is consistent with our government's commitment to putting victims' rights back on the agenda. That is why I am proud to support the bill.

● (1810)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is my great pleasure to speak to Bill C-489. However, I definitely do not share the enthusiasm of my colleague who has just spoken.

I will explain that. I have had the honour of serving on the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights and having the opportunity to examine various private members' bills brought forward by Conservative members. I will not pretend that it has not been somewhat dismaying to see the Conservatives' remarkable talent for transforming gold into lead, using some process of alchemy that completely exceeds my powers of comprehension.

I sound like I am teasing or trying to make a joke about it, but we must always be very careful when we embark on amending the Criminal Code. This is fundamental, because the Criminal Code is very complex and has very wide application. Amendments can sometimes create more complications than solutions, at least when they are made without due care and attention.

However, I have to say that the bill introduced by the member for Langley is in fact very important. What is particularly worthwhile about it is that it potentially offers some real measures to protect and support victims of crime. That is what my New Democratic colleagues on the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights will be looking at very closely. I have absolutely no doubt of that.

We cannot deny that the bill is relatively promising. What concerns me, first, is the marketing job being done by the member for Langley and his colleagues. By focusing attention on the protection of minors, they are pandering to their political base. They are tugging at people's heartstrings and then trying to score an easy goal in an area like this.

This is a very debatable approach. However, compared to a number of bills proposing Criminal Code amendments that were very punitive and went down the road of lengthening sentences for criminals, without a thought for victims, this is something innovative and different. As I said, it is promising, from what I have been able to see of it.

First of all, we will have to see what the effect of this bill is and what problem it will remedy. I am going to cite a case in Quebec City that received a lot of media coverage, the case of police officer Sandra Dion, who was a victim of a violent crime. She was assaulted with a screwdriver and was very traumatized. The worst thing is that Ms. Dion learned that the offender who had savagely attacked her, and who has psychiatric problems, was potentially eligible to live in a halfway house in Quebec City near her own home. This distressed her enormously. She reacted by moving to Ottawa for a few days. In fact, she came to try to meet with members and make them aware of her case, particularly members of the party in power. Her efforts met a somewhat disappointing fate.

However, based on her testimony and her case, and other similar cases, we can perhaps hope to improve the bill or at least determine whether it covers her situation. If not, we should improve the bill so she will have a way of getting what is needed so she can have some assurance of her safety and some influence over the situation and the release of the assailant who savagely attacked her.

● (1815)

I should note that Ms. Dion was in fact able to use the existing system to ensure that the authorities who supported releasing her assailant did not send him to the halfway house that had been planned, because it was not equipped to handle him, given his very significant medication needs.

As I said, I will support the bill at second reading because I have confidence in the work that will be done at the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights.

I would nonetheless like to share some concerns with my colleagues. When I was a member of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, I observed the Conservative members' very bad knee-jerk response as they sought to limit the powers of the judges and other authorities who carry out decisions.

I understand that some decisions made by the courts can sometimes be difficult for the public to understand, and decisions can seem out of sync with the media reports of a case, which unfortunately often do not tell the whole story.

Our justice system is predicated on the presumption of innocence. Obviously, it then provides for justice to be done, both for the complainant and for the defendant. If we do not maintain that balance, what confidence can all of the parties involved, not to mention the general public, have in our justice system?

When we too readily do an injustice, and do it repeatedly, it may offer a false sense of security, and that can lead to a great many problems in our society. There is nothing worse than an innocent person having to suffer the stigma associated with a charge and the impossibility or serious difficulty of restoring their good name or being able to shed all of the suspicion they have been tarred with.

To come back to the accused persons who are affected by the bill, we must never forget that every case is unique, although the law tries to cover all cases. One of the ideals is to make rules and provisions that apply generally and allow for some individualized interpretation or involvement by judges, with the help of the justice system and the lawyers, both for the Crown and for the defence. Instead of easily applying a strict rule that is inappropriate in some cases, the judgment of justice system experts can be applied in an individualized manner.

That is something that will have to be investigated and ascertained when the bill goes to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights. I cannot emphasize that enough. I am in fact confident that my colleagues on the justice committee want to take a good look at this aspect, and I am going to watch the proceedings very closely.

To conclude, I cannot emphasize enough that, as I said at the outset, what is most worthwhile about the bill brought forward by the member for Langley is that it opens the door part-way to concrete measures that will potentially assist victims of crime in order to provide them with support. I think this is really the point we have to focus on. We have to hold onto that so we can find common ground, so we can propose a bill that will amend the targeted provisions in fairly and efficiently and genuinely protect the public interest.

I will hold onto that thin ray of hope.

● (1820)

[*English*]

Mr. Brian Jean (Fort McMurray—Athabasca, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to be here tonight to talk about the first bill I have ever had a hand in drafting. The mover of the bill said that some year and a half to two years ago he talked to me about the bill because of my past experience with criminal law and we generally drafted it out. Today, we draw the conclusion that it is a great bill and does exactly what this government has been doing since the beginning, and that is standing up for victims.

We have a criminal justice system in our country that puts straight laws out there and people either obey them or disobey them. If they disobey them, the police will arrest them and then the court will deal with them. However, victims have fallen through the cracks since 1892, when the first Criminal Code was enacted in Canada. Victims of crime have been left aside for too long. I am glad to see the member has recognized that and is standing up for victims, as is our government.

I have seen some very deplorable situations. In Fort McMurray, where I practised criminal law, I saw a situation where a father abused three of his daughters. He did not just abuse them as they grew up into their teens. He continued to abuse them for some 20 years thereafter even though there was no true physical contact. The abuse continued by way of being reminded of that crime forever. When people live only several blocks away from where they have grown up in a community, they are continuously put in front of that crime time and time again. I know this is something victims complain of often.

We need to ensure that those victims are protected forever, especially in cases of sexual assault, which is why this bill is good. However, as a past criminal lawyer, people who commit sexual assaults against children need to be monitored forever under strict and specific conditions, such as wearing an anklet or an electronic monitoring device and never out of sight of the authorities. I say that for a number of reasons. Many people would say that I am wrong in my assumption that these people cannot be cured. As a result of my experience, I do not believe the people who commit these violent, often unnecessary and quite horrid crimes can be cured. From my experience in the courts, it usually passes on from generation to generation and the victims continue to mount.

Our Conservative government will take more positions to support victims because that is the third pillar that was not properly dealt with. However, seeing all of the members in the House come together on a bill like this is very important. It sends a clear message to Canadians that we, as their representatives, will stand up for the weak and the needy when necessary.

I have known the member of Parliament for nine years. He has a very strong passion for his community and constituents and a lot of loyalty for our government, our Prime Minister and our country. I compliment him on this bill. He has done tremendous work on it. I know he would appreciate me saying more wonderful things about him. However, I can say for sure that, based on my criminal law experience, the bill goes a long way in protecting the victims who have been forgotten for too long. It falls fully in line with our government's commitment to keep our streets and communities safe.

I did mention that there were three pillars. The first is the police, the second is the courts and the third is the victims. In the bill, members will clearly see that it is mandatory for judges to impose conditions on these offenders that would keep them away from the victims and, as a result, incur less expense on the criminal justice system.

● (1825)

We do have criminal compensation in most provinces and services that are provided are psychological and mental health services. These are tremendously expensive. If we do not take steps to deal with victims of crime and the ability to keep them away from those continuous reminders of what took place and making them victims time and time again, it will also cost our system a lot of money.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak today. I would like to go over it again very briefly that on this side of the House we are standing up for victims. I am glad to see the other members of the House are doing the same thing and joining the Conservative government and the member for Langley to push this forward to committee and to get it passed at all stages.

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a real honour to speak to the bill.

I want to share with the House how the bill came about. About two years ago, a constituent visited me in my office. She was a mom and she told me the story about her daughter who had been sexually assaulted by the neighbour right across the street. That was a horrific experience for the whole family. Then the horror continued as the courts permitted the offender to serve a large portion of the sentence at home.

The family lived in terror, keeping its blinds closed. The members of the family were afraid to go out because they might have seen the offender. Every time they would return to their neighbourhood and home, a home that should be safe in a neighbourhood they loved, from work or school, the whole family, the mother, the father, the siblings would have this horrible feeling in their gut of whether they would see this person and how would they respond to the person.

It was a very friendly, close-knit neighbourhood, with neighbourhood barbecues on the street, and that all ended when the courts provided the offender the opportunity to serve the sentence at home, which was right across the street from the victim.

I appreciate my colleagues across the way expressing concern that this may be a knee-jerk reaction. I can assure them this is not. Shortly after reviewing this horrific story, I contacted other members, including the member for Fort McMurray—Athabasca. I knew of his legal experience. Through the consultation process, even talking to members across the way, Bill C-489 was developed.

I thank all members of the House for indicating support for the bill to go to the next step, the justice committee. It is important we develop something that will consider the victims and the impact of sentencing on the victims, and I believe the bill does that.

I thank the legal experts from private members' business. I thank the Minister of Justice and the minister's staff, particularly Dominic. I thank the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and the member for Okanagan—Coquihalla, the member for Brampton West, the member for Kildonan—St. Paul, the opposition members and the critics. I would not have been able to move forward without their help.

The duty of each of us is to make Parliament work. We are doing that with Bill C-489. I look forward to critiquing it, amending it, so it makes it even safer.

On behalf of all Canadians, I thank all members of Parliament as we work to make all Canadian homes safer.

● (1830)

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The motion is adopted.

Accordingly, the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights.

(Motion agreed to, bill read the second time and referred to a committee)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*Translation*]

SAFE DRINKING WATER FOR FIRST NATIONS ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill S-8, An Act respecting the safety of drinking water on First Nation lands, be read the third time and passed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Resuming debate. The hon. member for Manicouagan has six minutes remaining.

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain (Manicouagan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will continue my speech.

We were talking about the Canadian government's desire to distance itself from highly contentious issues, such as the provision of services to Canadians, and also matters pertaining to drinking water and the upgrading of drinking water infrastructure.

That is why these clauses have been added and why a trend is emerging from this initiative and many others as well. We see that it is fragmented. The Canadian government is trying to gradually distance itself from highly contentious issues on which the national and international media have shone a rather unfavourable spotlight.

However, first and foremost, with respect to the provision of services to Canadians, we have seen that the government's priorities

are clearly focused on natural resource extraction. In keeping with what my hon. colleague said, the government is pandering to its political base. That is why there will be cherry-picking and certain issues will be given priority in the Conservatives' hidden agenda.

Now, with regard to Bill S-8, the government is adding phrases such as "to the extent necessary to ensure the safety of drinking water on First Nation lands". This type of phrase opens the door to the unilateral violation of aboriginal rights. That is extremely shameful and questionable. We know that aboriginal, treaty and other rights exercised by aboriginal peoples in Canada are enshrined in the Constitution. The fiduciary relationship also comes into play. Simply put, a fiduciary relationship necessarily implies that the first nations' interests will be the Canadian government's primary concern when it introduces legislation or plans to impose unilateral measures, such as those before the House.

This is enshrined in the Constitution and has been reiterated by the courts, including the Supreme Court. Once the Supreme Court has taken a position on a specific case, it becomes immutable. In this case, the Supreme Court indicated that these obligations were associated with every initiative that could potentially interfere with the traditional and modern way of life of first nations peoples.

As a result, the moment the government considers or makes a decision, whether it is based on policy or what is actually happening on the ground, before doing anything to implement that decision, it must ensure that the decision does not in any way interfere with the traditional activities and way of life of Canada's aboriginal peoples. Therein lies the problem in most cases. The government is generally reluctant to hold consultations and seek public approval because it is a lot of work. What is more, we know that when public consultations are held, there is a good chance that people will not agree and that they will be fairly vocal about it. People will openly express their opinions. That is the concept behind direct democracy: the public is called upon to take a stand.

As the hon. member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou mentioned, when people are consulted, there is the possibility that they will not agree with what is being proposed. That is always one of the options that a person has. That person can simply say no and reject the measure that is being proposed, and that is a valid response.

Social acceptability often appears to be the desired outcome, because it confers prestige. This is not nearly as meaningful in 2013. It has been tarnished and taken over by industry. I would say that social acceptability is rather abstract and not something that ought to be pursued. It may well be that there is simply no acceptability and that people take a position against certain projects.

The Supreme Court clearly established that any infringement of aboriginal prerogatives must be seen in light of the methods preferred by aboriginal peoples to exercise their rights. It must also take into consideration the need to avoid any infringement of aboriginal rights to the greatest extent possible. There is nothing exhaustive about this list. I am just briefly listing a number of criteria. It also needs to include fair compensation in the event of expropriation and, lastly, it necessarily implies that there be consultations.

As I just mentioned, the issue of consultations is the sticking point in 2013. In the case of most, if not all of the statutes and legislative tools brought to my attention over the past two years I have sat in the House, the government has shown little desire to consult the aboriginal population in general.

● (1835)

The government seems content to have asked nine community leaders for their opinion. Turning to the 3,000 members of a community and being prepared to brave the storm is not exactly at the top of the Conservatives' agenda in 2013. This is understandable, because public support is not necessarily in the cards. Some Conservative members have even been stopped from going into a Tim Hortons for a coffee in their own riding because the locals want to tear off their heads.

In short, the social and political conditions are not right for their policies, their approach and the directives coming from their backbench MPs.

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Manicouagan for his speech.

People always feel threatened by his razor-sharp mind. I found his perspective very interesting and would like to make a daring comparison. I hope he will forgive me.

As a result of my experience to date as a member of the Standing Committee on Finance, I have detected a general trend, which is not exclusive to the Conservative government, towards offloading more and more responsibilities on putative grounds of economic realism and the need for budget cuts. This means that such responsibilities are transferred to other levels of government that could be described as lower.

As I was listening to my colleague's speech, I was thinking that this was clearly one of the consequences, and that it was probably based on similar considerations. I would like to know what he thinks of it.

Is the federal government generally attempting to shirk its responsibilities?

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. I would go even further and say that they are trying to unburden themselves by shifting responsibility to organizations that are not accountable.

Often, the common thread binding some of these issues is that they are more or less contentious or controversial. That is why the government is attempting to distance itself and to cut ties to avoid being accountable for the negative impacts of its sometimes unreasonable decisions.

The most recent trend—which I have observed of late—is to transfer everything to NPOs or charitable organizations because it is rather difficult to point fingers at a charitable organization and say that it has made a hash of managing a project. By definition, an NPO is a non-profit organization.

In short, public policy implementation is now being delegated blindly. We need to condemn this approach.

● (1840)

Mr. Raymond Côté: Mr. Speaker, I would like to comment on something else that my colleague discussed.

I would like to suggest the following, because it would be the most promising and productive avenue for the future. I am talking about dialogue, the exercise of democracy, discussions and negotiations.

The federal government has frequently failed to broaden a number of debates. There are other examples as well of contentious issues across Canada. Some such issues are settled with some groups at the expense of others, without getting the latter involved.

Because my colleague raised this issue, I would like to ask whether he believes that the preliminary negotiations and dialogue in connection with this bill have at least been adequate?

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain: Mr. speaker, I thank my colleague once again for his question.

I am going to support my own views with facts. Once again this morning in committee, we were talking about signing a treaty that would exclude a nation in British Columbia, specifically the Sto:lo. There is a dispute over salmon and land.

I would say that Machiavellianism is still alive and well here in Canada's Parliament. This is unfortunate, but true. Aboriginal communities have an oral tradition, and have had for tens of thousands of years; everything is based on brotherly exchanges and on "emulatory" principles in accordance with which people tell the truth.

In 2013, the Conservatives and other governments before them—the blame must be placed on a single organization—successfully worked to divide and ensure that aboriginal bands, Indian bands, had disparities and claims that would ultimately bring them into conflict with one another. This mutual dislike was nurtured because it is much more profitable for some people to work with certain bands as individuals rather than as a part of a whole. When I give my own presentations and travel to reserves, I say that the solution and the future of aboriginal peoples reside in unity and a return to the values and oral cultures with which we grew up.

That is what I wanted to submit to the House.

[*English*]

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Edmonton—Leduc.

Mr. Speaker, I am thankful for the opportunity to explain to the opposition, and to Canadians, why I support Bill S-8, the safe drinking water for first nations act, and why I urge my hon. colleagues to stop voting against a bill that would give first nations access to safe drinking water.

The solution at the heart of Bill S-8 is the product of more than seven years of engagement and discussion with a wide range of groups, including first nations, provinces, municipalities, parliamentary committees and organizations devoted to the science of drinking water.

Perhaps the best way to fully appreciate the considerable value of Bill S-8 is to trace its evolution.

In March 2006, our government, working with the Assembly of First Nations, announced the joint plan of action for drinking water in first nation communities. Among the five points in the plan of action was the development of an appropriate regulatory framework.

To help identify what the framework should consist of, the plan called for a panel of experts to be chosen by government and first nations officials. The expert panel held a series of hearings across Canada, in 9 locations in all, to hear from a total of 110 representatives from first nation communities, as well as other stakeholder groups. The panel also received and considered more than two dozen written submissions, most of them prepared by first nation communities and organizations. In its final report, the panel examined three regulatory options and provided valuable advice on the advantages and the disadvantages of each one.

The next step in Bill S-8's evolution occurred in 2009, when the Government of Canada held a series of engagement sessions with first nation groups. The sessions began in Whitehorse, Yukon, and continued in 12 other cities. The 13 engagement sessions attracted more than 500 participants representing first nations.

It is important to note that while work on a regulatory framework continued, our government continued to live up to the commitments it had made through the plan of action. Progress reports were tabled in Parliament, for instance, and budget 2008 invested approximately $330 million, over two years, in projects to improve drinking water in first nation communities. Budget 2009 included an additional $165 million per year, over two years, for first nation water and waste water infrastructure projects.

Our government is also committed to expanding the circuit rider training program and funding a national assessment of first nation water and waste water systems.

In 2010, the government introduced Bill S-11. A standing committee in the Senate held a series of hearings to review the proposed legislation and heard from 40 individual witnesses. Now, although this version of the bill died on the order paper in the initial review, it identified a number of challenges that have since been addressed.

In the interim, government officials continued to discuss regulatory options with first nation groups. Of particular note were the without prejudice discussions with regional first nation organizations across the country. It was during these without prejudice discussions that the first nations proposed a non-derogation clause that would resolve what was perceived to be a major problem with the previous version of Bill S-8. The problem involves the relationship between federal legislation and the constitutional rights of first nations.

The proposed clause would not prevent the government from justifying a derogation or abrogation of aboriginal or treaty rights if it were necessary to ensure the safety of first nations' drinking water.

● (1845)

A second significant development came in the summer of 2011 when our government published the national assessment of first nations water and waste water systems. I am proud to say that this was the most comprehensive examination of first nation water and waste water infrastructure in history.

This report shed a new light on the larger issues at play. The report found that many water systems in first nations communities had a high risk of failure to produce safe water if a problem were to arise. The report identified a need for clear guidelines and recommended the establishment of a regulatory framework for water and waste waster systems. This provided additional momentum to move ahead with the practical solutions.

Last year we introduced Bill S-8, a stronger version of its predecessor. There are several improvements worth noting, such as that the preamble in the proposed legislation explicitly states the government's intention to improve the health and safety of first nations and to work with first nations to develop drinking water regulations.

The new version includes a non-derogation clause that clearly addresses the relationship between the legislation and aboriginal and treaty rights under section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982.

Clause 4.(1)(b) of the new version clarifies that any regulation on source water protection on first nation lands would be restricted so as to protect it from contamination.

The new version also clarifies that regulations could not include the power to allocate water supplies or to license users of water for any purpose other than for accessing drinking water.

There is new language to clarify that the regulations could confer to any person or body only the powers necessary to effectively regulate drinking water and waste water systems. Wording that was perceived to negate first nations authority over water on their lands has been deleted.

Another part of the previous version that has been removed is language that could be interpreted as powers to compel first nations into an agreement with third parties to manage water and the waste water on first nations lands.

Finally, Bill S-8 also features language to clarify that first nations would not be held liable for systems owned by third parties that are on first nations lands.

There have been many changes to this legislation since its last iteration in order to address the concerns raised by first nations, parliamentarians and other stakeholders. In fact, these changes respond directly to the concerns raised by first nations groups.

Moreover, the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development recommended an amendment to the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development that further addresses concerns raised by first nations to remove the opt-in provision from the bill, demonstrating that our government is listening to first nations concerns and working to address them. I am pleased to see that the hard-working members of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development agreed by removing this from the bill.

The proposed legislation now before the House has been informed by a comprehensive process of consultation, review and improvement.

Bill S-8 proposes an effective solution to a problem that continues to threaten the health and safety of residents of first nations communities. I hope that the opposition can recognize the urgent health and safety issues at stake here and support Bill S-8.

● (1850)

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to talk about health.

Grand Chief David Harper clearly told the Senate committee in February 2011 that the lack of running water in more than 1,000 homes in northern Manitoba was a violation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. He explained that his people were living in third world conditions, that families in the Island Lake region of Manitoba had less water every day than people in refugee camps. People in the Island Lake region survive on just 10 litres, usually carried by family members in pails from local water pipes. Additional water comes untreated from lakes and rivers that tested positive for contamination.

I would like the House to know that Ecojustice issued a report card on water, and its lowest mark was awarded to the federal government.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Speaker, the national assessment identified 1.5% of homes on first nations lands as having no water service, and many of those homes are in Manitoba. In 2011-12, $5.5 million was allocated to the four Island Lake first nations. It was used to purchase and ship material for retrofitting up to 100 homes, six water trucks, seven sewage trucks and building material for garages. In addition to these projects, the funding is being used in 2012-13 for first nations to carry out retrofits and to build the garages for the water and sewage trucks.

The Canada economic action plan 2012 investment included $2 million for Bunibonibee first nation to develop a plan to address the service needs of homes in that community and to purchase materials to begin work to retrofit homes with plumbing.

Our government is listening and is working on this.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I read Bill S-8. I can see that the regulation-making powers are extensive but without action to ensure that there is capacity in first nations communities, and there have been some expressions of concern from first nations, to make sure that there is money to make this work.

I cannot see anything wrong with Bill S-8 now that the egregious section that suggested that the bill might abrogate first nations treaty rights has been fixed. I accept that it has been fixed.

I am wondering if the hon. member knows if there is a larger plan and a commitment to funding to make the skeletal regulatory authorities in this bill result in clean water.

● (1855)

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite mentioned capacity and the ability to ensure that the water is clean.

Under the circuit rider training program, first nations operators receive ongoing on-site training and mentoring on how to operate their drinking water and waste water systems. Since 2006, AANDC has increased funding from approximately $5 million per year to approximately $10 million per year to hire more circuit rider trainers to ensure that the services are available to all first nations communities. There are currently approximately 65 circuit rider trainers working in first nations communities across the country.

Since the results of the national assessment of first nations water and waste water systems was released in July 2011, the percentage of first nations systems that have primary operators certified to the level of drinking water systems has increased from 51% to 60%. That is for 463 out of 771 systems. The percentage of waste water systems that have primary operators certified to the level of waste water systems has also increased, from 42% of operators to 54%, which is 280 out of 519 systems.

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton—Leduc, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure today to stand in this House and speak in support of Bill S-8, the safe drinking water for first nations act.

This proposed legislation is a key part of a collaborative, comprehensive plan to improve the quality of water available to first nation communities. The bill includes a mechanism to establish regulatory regimes to safeguard water quality. These regimes, typically under provincial law, exist in every community in this country, except first nation communities. While the primary goal of these regimes is to establish water treatment and water quality standards to protect the health and safety of Canadians, they also serve to protect the sizeable investments made in infrastructure, such as the treatment facilities and distribution networks that serve these communities.

Bill S-8 strives to ensure that first nations communities can access the same benefits that regulations afford other communities: safe drinking water, with efficient treatment and distribution facilities that function effectively throughout their entire operational life cycles.

To fully appreciate the importance of this bill, we must also understand the other parts of this plan, in particular the investments in infrastructure.

Our government continues to invest a significant amount of resources in the infrastructure needed to deliver safe drinking water to residents of first nation communities. In fact, between 2006 and 2013-14, our government will have invested approximately $3 billion. These investments are supporting first nations to fund a variety of projects, including installations of new systems, repairs to aging systems and the replacement of components. The projects have involved all aspects of water systems and waste water infrastructure, such as treatment facilities, pumping stations, storage tanks and piping networks. These investments are helping these communities meet their needs.

A closer look at a few of the projects supported by these investments demonstrates the very tangible impact they have on these communities and the people who live there. Let us consider the four first nations of St. Theresa Point, Wasagamack, Red Sucker Lake and Garden Hill in the Island Lake region of east-central Manitoba.

Providing safe drinking water has long been a challenge in this region, for several reasons. Until the late 1990s, diesel generators represented the only source of electricity in Island Lake communities. Local geography in the Island Lake region creates a second challenge. The community sits on the hard, mostly bare rock of the Canadian Shield, making it difficult and expensive to install and maintain pipes to distribute water to each home. A few homes have indoor plumbing and bathrooms, which are amenities that have to be added to take full advantage of an integrated water and waste water system. Addressing these challenges has required careful planning and considerable investments.

Since April 1, 2006, the government has made investments of $50 million to improve and maintain water and waste water systems in these communities. Major investments include over $26 million for a piped-water distribution and sewage collection system at Garden Hill, and nearly $10 million for a water treatment plant, two water trucks and a sewage truck at Red Sucker Lake.

Today, residents of the four first nations access drinking water through a hybrid system of pipes, cisterns, tanks, standpipes and a fleet of trucks. Work on these projects continues this year. To help the first nations plan and implement further improvements, the Government of Canada has also provided resources for feasibility studies.

According to Chief Alex McDougall of Wasagamack First Nation, the projects have had a dramatic impact on Island Lake communities. In his words, and I quote: “It means a healthier and cleaner environment, clean drinking water for the entire family.... This has been a true effort to work together, and that relationship needs to continue to be nurtured”.

Similar results are being achieved in dozens of first nation communities across Canada. Earlier this year, Marcel Colomb First Nation, located about 600 kilometres northwest of Island Lake, opened a new water treatment system, thanks to a Government of Canada investment of more than $8 million.

We are investing more than $2 million to support the design and construction of a pumphouse and water storage tank for Bouctouche First Nation in New Brunswick. An investment of a similar amount led to last year's completion of upgrades to a water treatment system that serves both the Gitanmaax Band and the village of Hazelton. These two communities in northwest British Columbia have a long history of co-operation and share a number of services, including water storage and distribution and waste disposal.

The last project I will mention today involves Wasauksing First Nation, located near Parry Sound, Ontario. Thanks in part to a government investment of more than $16 million, this first nation has a new water treatment system that takes into account local geography and hydrology.

● (1900)

The system includes a new intake and low-lift pumping station, a slow sand filtration system treatment plant, an elevated water reservoir and a delivery truck and heated garage. The project created 15 temporary jobs for members of the first nation and three full-time permanent positions for two plant operators and one driver.

These are just a few of the numerous first nations drinking water and waste water projects our government has supported over the last seven years. The project's aim is to improve the health and safety of community residents. To ensure that these systems can continuously produce safe drinking water, they must be supported by regulatory regimes that stipulate quality standards and treatment protocols. Until an appropriate accountability mechanism is in place, investments in water infrastructure will remain at risk. Bill S-8 proposes to establish these necessary accountability mechanisms.

Bill S-8 is an important part of a larger comprehensive strategy, built on three pillars, to improve the quality of drinking water in first nation communities. Along with the establishment of regulations and ongoing investments in infrastructure, the strategy calls for improvements in the training and certification of the men and women who operate first nations' water systems.

Our government invests approximately $10 million annually to train and certify these operators. In the last year alone, the number of certified operators of water and waste water facilities has increased by 10%. This is significantly increasing the water quality enjoyed by first nations across the country and is decreasing the risks associated with these water systems. This is in addition to funding the maintenance and operation of some 1,200 on-reserve water and waste water systems.

Our government will continue to make these investments so that residents of first nations communities can access safe, clean drinking water. Nevertheless, without the support of regulatory regimes, these investments and the health and safety of thousands of Canadians living on reserve will remain at risk. The regulations stemming from Bill S-8 will provide residents of first nation communities with the same level of confidence as other Canadians when it comes to their own drinking water.

I therefore ask all hon. colleagues on both sides of the House to stand up for first nations and those communities across the country and to join me in supporting this piece of legislation.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I just want to pick up on the member's last comment on standing up for first nations in support of the legislation.

There is a great deal of concern among many of our first nations leaders that quite often the government has made the decision to bring in legislation without working hand-in-hand with them. We have had court rulings that have made it very clear to the government that it has an obligation to work with our first nations before it brings in legislation. There is a sense that the government has not been co-operative in working in consultation prior to bringing in legislation.

The specific piece of legislation before us dealing with safe water is something that is really important to our first nations communities. It is not only legislation. It is also having the resources necessary to make it happen.

I have heard a number of Conservative members talk about the $3 billion the government has invested. Can the member provide us with a clear indication of where that $3 billion has actually been spent?

● (1905)

Mr. James Rajotte: Mr. Speaker, the first part of the member's question dealt with consultation. He is correct in the sense that the government obviously has a duty to consult. To respond to him on that point, since 2006, there have been expert panel public hearings held across Canada. They heard from over 110 presenters and received more than two dozen submissions. There was a series of engagement sessions held with first nations communities in February and March 2009. There were 700 participants, of which 544 were first nations. In the fall and winter of 2009-10, government officials met with first nations chiefs and organizations to discuss specific regional issues raised during the engagement sessions. From October 2010 to October 2011, there were discussions held with first nations organizations to deal with this as well.

His own party, and the former leader of the party, introduced a motion in the House to address the urgency with respect to water quality for first nations communities and those residents. That is exactly why the government is acting on this.

With respect to the $3 billion in investments between 2006 and 2013 the member referenced, during my speech I mentioned a number of the communities that have received very specific investments. One community received $10 million. The Bouctouche First Nation in New Brunswick received $2 million. The Wasauksing First Nation, located near Parry Sound, received $16 million. There are very specific investments across the country. I referenced the—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order. I would ask all hon. members to pay attention to the Chair when they are answering, for a signal that their time is drawing to a close. Questions and comments. The hon. member for Halifax.

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to read a quick piece from the member's minister. I think this is testimony from the committee.

He said:

> You may recall that one of the key findings of the national assessment of first nations water and waste water systems was that the majority of the risk identified in high-risk systems relates to the issue of capacity, with only 30% relating to design risk and infrastructure issues.

If the question is really of capacity, why is the government not putting forward something to deal with capacity, actually investing in people while they invest in the infrastructure?

Mr. James Rajotte: Mr. Speaker, in terms of capacity, my colleague from Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke mentioned the circuit rider training program. I think this is an excellent program that members on both sides can certainly support.

The government invested in the development and implementation of a remote watering system, for instance, in my own province of Alberta. The total cost for this initiative was $4.3 million. It was in direct response to a number of recurring issues that have been identified by the circuit rider trainers.

It is a very specific example with respect to capacity to ensure that these changes were going to be made both in terms of regulation, but also in terms of investments. They can make a real difference in terms of the impacts for people who live in first nations communities.

● (1910)

Mr. Kyle Seeback (Brampton West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to speak to Bill S-8 today. I will be sharing my time with the member for Calgary Centre.

I am a member of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs, so I am very familiar with this legislation. It is important legislation, necessary legislation, and legislation that I am proud to stand here and support.

One of the things that often gets lost in this debate, and I have heard over and over again at committee, is the misunderstanding of what this legislation actually is designed to do. We often hear from members on the opposite side of the House who say that the bill does not do this or does not do that.

It is not designed to be a panacea. It is not designed to solve every single problem. It is designed to solve one specific issue that was raised by the expert panel, and that is the need for regulations to set safe drinking water standards. The panel recommended other things as well, but that was one of the key issues that the experts said needed to be moved forward. That is why this legislation is so important. It would give the authority to enact regulations to ensure we have standards consistent to allow for safe drinking water. Safe drinking water is important, and we know that. It is a huge issue.

The issues that we have with first nations communities are varied and many. We have geographical challenges and different circumstances. They are complex. We have to find ways to filter water to remove contaminants, and we have to find ways to deal with waste water.

A lot of these issues are faced by non-aboriginal communities across Canada, and what is the number one tool that they will use to ensure that they have safe drinking water? It is a system of regulation that is designed to ensure that treated water is up to certain standards, and that is why this legislation is so important. Right now, there are no legally enforceable standards to regulate both water and waste water on most first nations communities. There are some self-governing first nations that do, and they have established and enforced water quality regimes, but they are the exception and not the rule. Bill S-8 would help to turn that exception into the rule.

People have come to the committee and said that the legislation could do this or that, and it might transfer some liability to first nations. I remind them that is because this is enabling legislation. The legislation does not say "it shall" do this or that. What it says is, here is a list of things that may end up being regulated. It would give the authority to engage in a comprehensive discussion with first nations communities with respect to regulations that need to be in place to suit each community. We always have to remember that this is enabling legislation.

We have a strategy on safe drinking water, and there are three pillars: continuing investments in water and waste water infrastructure, developing enforceable standards and protocols, and enhancing capacity building and operator training. We just heard the member for Winnipeg North ask a question about capacity. Of course, we have invested a significant amount in capacity through the circuit rider training program, which is a fantastic program that is making big differences.

When we talk about some of the issues surrounding capacity, we can say that seven years ago only a small minority of first nations had water systems that had trained and certified operators. There were very few. The progress is clear. By 2011, the national assessment found that operators with the appropriate level of certification managed 51% of first nations water systems and 42% of first nations waste water systems. Therefore, we have gone from a few to 51% and 42%. That is a significant increase.

● (1915)

A year later, annual performance inspections of the same systems had determined that these percentages had increased to 60.1% and 53.9%. Yes, it is not 100%, we want it to be at 100%, but we are getting there. Properly trained operators will ensure that the systems comply with regulations and consistently produce clean and reliable drinking water.

We are looking at all of these things. They do not operate in a vacuum; we have to have the regulations. That was raised by the expert panel. We have to have skilled operators. We are making those investments. We also have to have investments in the infrastructure that is necessary to produce the safe water and the drinking water and the waste water. That is why we have invested close to $3 billion in waste water and drinking water systems since 2006. Those investments are making a real difference.

However, not only are we making those investments, we are making the right investments. Why are we doing that? It is because we went forward with the most comprehensive review in the history of our country to look at water and waste water systems. It is a review that was not done by the previous government. We did that. We wanted to know which systems needed to have those investments. Systems are rated as high risk, medium risk and low risk. Therefore, we can prioritize where the investments need to be. Look at the high-risk ones. Let us work on those first. We look at this as a multi-faceted approach, one that is going to make a significant difference.

When we look at the regulations, we want time to do that. We are saying we are going to take time and develop them in consultation with first nations to make sure that we have the right regulations to ensure we have safe drinking water and properly treated waste water.

Some people have said "Wait a minute, where is the money? We cannot impose these regulations without money." Well, I say, how does one build a house without knowing what the designs are? Someone does not just go up and say, "I want a house. Here's the money." They have to actually design the house. That is what the regulations do. They are designing. They are saying these are the regulations that need to be in place. Once they know what those regulations are, then they can figure out what it is going to cost to implement those regulations. That is exactly the process we are following. We are going to develop the regulations, in consultation with first nations, and then we are going to figure out what, if any, funding arrangements need to change.

Seven years ago, the Government of Canada and the Assembly of First Nations agreed to work together on drinking water. Today, the House has the opportunity to support this collaboration by endorsing Bill S-8. Surely, residents of first nations communities have waited long enough to have these regulations brought forward and put in place. We want to move forward with this and I am hoping that we are going to have the support of all parties in the House to make sure that we can move forward with regulations that will help bring safe drinking water and waste water to first nations communities.

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague's speech was interesting to listen to, but there was one part that kind of stuck in my craw a little. He talked about needing regulation first and then deal with the money piece later and one cannot build a house unless one knows what the design is.

I can buy that argument, except when I look at the Conservative track record. For example, we had a national housing strategy bill in the House that was just the framework. The reason the Conservatives said they voted against it was because it would cost millions and billions of dollars and bankrupt the country. However, hang on, this piece of legislation is just the design plans. It is just the structure that we need and we will deal with what it will cost and what it will actually look like after. I wonder how the member can stand up in the House and make that argument when it is clearly a pretty hypocritical position?

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Mr. Speaker, I do not see it as hypocritical at all because we are talking about an important issue with first nations drinking water. If we are going to do it we are going to do it right. We have to know what the regulations are before we say what it is going to cost. This is a very simple thing.

We are not coming up with, as she was talking about, an amorphous national strategy. What we are saying is we are going to develop specific regulations. Once we know what those specific regulations are and what standards are going to have to be applied, then we can determine what that is going to cost. We cannot put the cart before the horse, and we are not going to do that.

● (1920)

Mr. Dan Albas (Okanagan—Coquihalla, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have learned a lot on this subject from today's debate. I would like to go back to the previous member's comments. When we talk about these things, most of the time the devil is in the details. I remember reading the bill the member spoke of, which called for all affordable housing, a provincial responsibility, to be up to LEED standards. That is just not acceptable. It will not be acceptable by the provinces and at the end of the day we would end up with less affordable housing with less money going towards these programs.

Why does the member believe the approach the government is taking, specifically on a case-by-case basis, would benefit an individual first nation band? At the end of the day, it would be that band that would benefit by a case-by-case system. I would like to hear his comments about how the bill would help move that forward.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Mr. Speaker, my colleague has quite clearly pointed out the differences with what my colleague here was suggesting in this bill. We have to have the regulations. I keep going back to that, and I know I am, because we have to have the design of what the program would be before deciding what the funding envelope would have to be. That is exactly what we do.

I keep going back to this over and over again. I say it when we are going through this at committee. This is enabling legislation. It would enable us to go forward and put forward regulations to regulate waste water and drinking water. Again we would do that constructively with first nations, and once we had that, we would then be able to figure out what costs we needed to go forward with. Of course we would continue the investments we have made with respect to building infrastructure and building capacity. Then we would go forward with regulations.

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member is talking about referencing provincial laws right across the country. My question is very straightforward. What that means is effectively placing on the province a lot of the responsibility for the monitoring, enforcement and so on. It is a form of downloading. I wonder if the member would like to comment on how much this would cost the provinces.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Mr. Speaker, that question shows the complete misunderstanding of this legislation. It is the same thing we faced at committee. People came to the committe“ and said this legislation would do that. It actually says they ”may” incorporate by reference provincial regulations. It does not say “we will”. It says “we could”. It is one of the options that is on the table. That is why I say this is enabling legislation. It would put the whole host or suite of options before the government when it chooses to regulate. No, it would not download to provincial responsibility. It would not cost the provinces money. We are not there.

Ms. Joan Crockatt (Calgary Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I support Bill S-8, the safe drinking water for first nations act, because it stands to benefit all Canadians, regardless of where they live.

As other members of the House have explained, the legislation that is before us now would actually lead to the development of systems governing water quality in first nations communities. These systems are badly needed and would promote and protect the health and well-being of all Canadians, regardless of where they live. Surely, the urgent health and safety needs alone are enough reason that the opposition should be supporting Bill S-8.

For those who do not believe that the health and safety of first nations people are more important than the perceived challenges we have heard about tonight from the opposition, I want to outline even more valuable reasons why they need to be supporting this very important legislation. The simple fact is that the quality of the water that is accessed by all other Canadians who do not live on reserves is protected by law, by provincial, territorial and municipal regulations that dictate maximum levels of contamination and a lot of other standards. However, no such regulations exist to protect water quality in first nations communities, which I think a lot of people in Canada would find shocking, and this legislation is overdue.

It is simply unacceptable that these communities do not have the ability in 2013 to put enforceable water standards in place that are going to protect the health and safety of the people who live in their communities. I am sure that all reasonable people and all Canadians would agree. In fact, my own mother called me last night and asked me why the opposition would not be in favour of a bill that supports clean drinking water for first nations people. That is incomprehensible to most Canadians.

I want to take this opportunity to point out that Bill S-8 is the direct result of seven years of collaboration. We often hear that there has not been enough time and there is not enough money. There is never enough time and money to satisfy everyone, but that is no reason not to act.

This bill would enable co-operation to happen between first nations and other jurisdictions, such as provinces, territories and municipalities, when it passes. It was ably explained by my colleagues earlier today, but this legislation would authorize the creation of regulatory systems through a collaborative process so that representatives from first nations could work with their counterparts from nearby communities and the federal government to design, develop and implement regulations around drinking water.

Laws currently used to regulate drinking water of nearby communities could provide a template, a starting point for these discussions about what the new regime would look like and how it would apply. Existing regulations could then be adapted to suit the circumstances of every individual first nation community. It is not one size fits all. These communities are different, and they need to be treated that way. They will find different solutions. I am convinced that this really is a process that would lead to new partnerships between first nations and their nearby communities, which will, in turn, benefit all Canadians.

Fostering collaboration between first nations and non-first nations communities is very important and actually generates social, economic, cultural and recreational opportunities. The proof is in the pudding, as they say. Strong partnerships already exist between many first nations and non-first nations communities across Canada. It is no coincidence that often the partnerships between first nations and non-first nations are among the most prosperous in the country. That is right; these partnerships could help first nations become among the most prosperous in the country.

Part of the wisdom behind the approach is that it strives to inspire a lot more of these partnerships to take place. The best partnerships are unique because they meet the specific needs and interests of both parties involved. When we consider the kinds of partnerships that Bill S-8 might inspire, it is important that we keep an open mind. That is why the legislation before us rejects the one-size-fits-all, top-down model. That is not what we would create here. We would create a bottom-up model, where the parties themselves would be encouraged to design a system that would meet their own individual circumstances and needs.

● (1925)

I will now turn the attention of my hon. colleagues to some of the kinds of partnerships that already exist between first nations and other jurisdictions. The most common is a formal arrangement with a municipality for services, and that might be treatment and distribution of drinking water, sewage treatment, fire protection, recreation and animal control. These are known as municipal-type agreements or MTAs.

The national assessment of first nations water and waste water systems lists 95 water and 91 waste water MTAs that already exist between municipalities and first nations communities. The vast majority of these are in B.C., my own home province of Alberta and Ontario. While the MTAs will differ from one to another, all of them strive for mutual benefits for all the parties.

To get a better sense of the potential benefits, look no further than a guide published last year by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. The federation administers a program that helps municipalities partner with first nations on community infrastructure, and it really works. Here is a bit of an excerpt from the guide:

> First nations and municipal governments across Canada often face similar challenges when working to build and maintain infrastructure, create economic opportunities, enhance social conditions, and improve quality of life in their communities. Economies of scale, and the increasing expense of providing, operating and maintaining community infrastructure, naturally lead to a consideration of partnerships when addressing infrastructure issues. By forming partnerships, sharing knowledge and expertise, and pooling assets, First Nations and municipal governments have the potential to improve existing community infrastructure and services.

That makes a lot of sense. The phrase "economies of scale" really helps describe the principal advantage of most municipal-type agreements. Another phrase for it is "many hands make light work". When we work together, jobs are easier. When everyone pitches in, tasks are manageable. A small community partnering with a large community often helps that small community get access to higher quality services than it might be able to afford on its own. It can also free the smaller community from having to deal solely with the regulatory burden associated with some of these responsibilities.

It is very clear that this legislation now before the House must also be seen as a central component of a larger, multi-faceted strategy to improve the quality of drinking water that is available for our first nations communities. This strategy includes investments in first nations drinking water and waste water infrastructure, operator training and other elements of capacity development.

Should it become law, these investments would continue during the collaborative processes that would create the regulations for first nations drinking water. They would be phased in as first nations acquired the capacity and expertise to meet them. This incremental approach is a great one. It would help all parties understand their role in the process.

The development of regulatory standards represents a really major first step toward ensuring that what we all take for granted, quality drinking water, is accessible to residents of first nations communities and that it meets the high quality all Canadians expect and deserve.

We urge the opposition to support this legislation. It would allow the government to work with first nations and other stakeholders to develop these regulations and ultimately, through the proposed legislation, strengthen our first nations communities and make them better able to participate equally in, and contribute fully to, Canada's prosperity.

I urge all my hon. colleagues here today to seriously look at Bill S-8 and the opportunities it would provide for first nations, and join me in supporting it.

● (1930)

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I know my friend on the other side really does believe what she is saying and believes what is there.

I was interested in her whole concept of partnering. I would like to ask the member a question. If the nearest municipality to the first nation is 1,000, 1,500 or 2,000 kilometres away, how does partnering work in that particular kind of situation?

Ms. Joan Crockatt: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question from my hon. colleague because he is thinking about how it might work, and that is the first step toward getting this legislation passed.

How the legislation would work is first nations would not be required to partner, and that is why we are not going for a one-size-fits-all program. There is a community nearby and there are many close to where I live, where I have seen this in progress and it works extremely well.

There are many communities where there are collaborative processes. They will be set up where the first nations community can take advantage of a nearby municipality and quickly get clean water onto first nations reserves. There are others where this will be more of a challenge.

Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to my friend across the way very closely and to the other member who just questioned her with regard to partnerships. Having lived in northern Ontario, I know communities that are many thousands or at least many hundreds of miles apart cannot partner. I am thinking of the city of Timmins partnering with some of the first nations territories along the James and Hudson Bay coast, working with them on minor hockey and other enterprises.

To be specific, the member may want to expand on this notion. Many first nations territories do not have any experience with fresh water chlorination plants that are designed to do just what this legislation is designed to do. Those communities would benefit from people who do the work and come from communities where they have been doing this for decades, such as my hometown.

Could the member expand on that and could she further expand on the need for the proper training of people who run those plants? That is one of the most important parts of this whole enterprise. I have experienced that along the James and Hudson Bay coast with a first nations community where, because the chlorination plant was not properly run, the water ended up in a crisis. Could she expand—

● (1935)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The hon. member for Calgary Centre.

Ms. Joan Crockatt: Mr. Speaker, that is a very important aspect of this bill.

Part of the bill will very definitely include training. There would be a ramp-up period required, for which the bill provides. We can provide training and enable first nations to get the kind of expertise they will need to sustain a drinking water supply that actually is healthy and safe, the way all Canadians expect it should be.

When communities can partner with a municipality that may be nearby, those municipalities may have had decades of experience in how to provide clean and safe water. First nations can take advantage of that experience and technology.

We do not need to reinvent the wheel at every first nation. We can take advantage through these partnerships, through the MTAs and utilize that expertise on first nations. Again, this is for safe and clean drinking water on first nations. What Canadian could oppose that?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Giguère (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to say that I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Thunder Bay—Rainy River.

Let me point out a few unfortunate facts. At this time, over 117 aboriginal communities have no access to running water and waste water treatment. I can guarantee that if this was happening in one of our municipalities, this Parliament would be up in arms. Imagine 117 members of parliament seeing one of their white communities deprived of water. They would not stand for that.

Unfortunately, these 117 communities have no water. They will continue having no water, and the only reason I can think of to explain this situation in a country like ours does not make me happy. I am proud of my country, but this is humiliating. If these were not aboriginal, first nations and Indian communities, they would have gotten their water long ago. This is called racism, and it does not do us credit.

The reasons for opposing Bill S-8 are self-evident. This bill affects thousands of homes with no running water and no sewage treatment and 117 communities lacking the basic necessities. Sadly, this has gone on for decades.

It is not rocket science. It will take 10 years and $4.5 billion. Yet, all this government offered was $330 million, and then it attached all kinds of conditions to it. That is the problem. That is the crux of the matter. We, as Canadians, need to understand that that is why people are rejecting this legislation.

Every member in the House wants first nations to have access to drinking water. The question is how to make that happen. Considering the proposed approach, we have to wonder how sincere they are about all Canadians—and they are Canadians—having the same rights. The right to water is essential, as is the right to air. We cannot just do without.

Not only do we need to invest in the technical aspects, but if we really want to address the issue of drinking water once and for all, we need to give them both the technical abilities and the resources to maintain the water system. We need to address expertise and technological culture along with the economics of it.

Obviously, there is no way they can bring in engineers from Montreal or Toronto, or plumbers from Thunder Bay, Fort Chimo, the Laurentians or the Gaspé every time there is a problem or every time something breaks.

These are nations, and a nation must have the proper technological abilities to address truly essential issues. Drinking water supply is certainly an essential issue. That is what it means to be a nation. Being a nation means having the ability to create, develop and manage appropriate laws so that citizens have access to water. If we want to give them nation status—without treating them like simple-minded children—we need to take action.

As a French Canadian, I have been called a white nigger by an MP. It was odd for 2012.

● (1940)

I am putting myself in their shoes. I have seen them in the Standing Committee on Finance. They said that the suicide rate where they live is staggering. It is not that more people commit suicide, it is that they do not have the social services to cope with people who are suicidal.

I saw the premier of a territory beg the committee. She said that people were dropping like flies. I saw committee members behave in a condescending manner. If I were that person, I might not have remained so polite. She did remain polite and I seriously wonder if she made a mistake. She might have been better off blowing a gasket. She might have been better off saying enough is enough.

Aboriginal demonstrations were held. People said they would like to be able to live and that that was not too much to ask. Not having enough water or the necessary means to obtain it is an economic consequence. Aboriginal communities are not rolling in money, despite what some might think. Aboriginal communities are not full of multi-millionaires. That is just an urban legend. It is odd that urban legends are often about an ethnic community, particularly when that community is a visible minority.

I see Canada as an extremely generous and great country. I think that is an accurate assessment for the most part. We have helped peoples in the past and we have been quite generous. When Europe was oppressed, we sacrificed tens of thousands of our own. We spared no expense. However, when it comes to aboriginals, that generosity disappears.

One of the problems with this bill is that it calls for a lot of sacrifices. Aboriginal peoples are being asked to give up some of their rights in exchange for access to water. It is hard to build the concept of nationhood when you are forced to give up your rights as a nation. It does not stop there, however. The bill would force aboriginal peoples to give up their rights in exchange for maybe one day getting drinking water. This is a prime example of the government not walking the talk. The government keeps talking about it, but the water is not there. That is a problem.

The government cannot say that this will be resolved in 10 years. I challenge any member here to say that they would wait 10 years before giving drinking water to a neighbourhood in their city or municipality. Any politician knows that that that is not the way to go if you want to be re-elected. Unfortunately, first nations members often do not vote. If they did, there would be far fewer MPs in this government. This kind of moral misconduct is unacceptable.

Bill S-8 should not be defeated just because it is a bad bill for first nations, even though that is true. Bill S-8 should not be defeated just because it is a bad bill technically. That is also true. The bill should also be defeated because if we want to remain Canadian and remain a generous nation and a great people, this bill must be relegated to the dustbin of history.

● (1945)

[*English*]

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, key reports regarding this tragic water situation have been clear that the massive infrastructure and capacity gap must be addressed before a legislative option is adopted. The Assembly of First Nations and the government's own comprehensive survey have identified almost $5 billion of additional federal investment to address the crisis. The bill does not provide any additional resources or funding to address the gap.

In January 2013, we still had 113 first nation communities under a drinking water advisory. Does the hon. member think the government should immediately target sufficient financial resources to close the gap in infrastructure and training?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Giguère: Mr. Speaker, I sincerely believe that all members of the House voted in favour of giving first nations access to education and safe drinking water. I sincerely believe in good faith; however, the Conservatives need to wake up and realize that they are dragging their feet and they need to tell us why. We are talking about $4 billion over 10 years. Let us look at what has been going on with us and first nations. When the two peoples or traditions were pitted against each other, there was one winner and one real loser.

Could we not just simply extend a hand to them and assure them that we are going to work together?

That is all they are asking. Nothing more.

[*English*]

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened intently to the member's comments. Actually, I think he needs to wake up.

Our government has put more than $3 billion into infrastructure already for first nations, and we continue to spend money. However, the member indicates that we are not doing anything for first nations.

In the proposed act, there is a clause of derogation so that members of first nations would be able to manage, under the Constitution, their own facilities. However, there is a position in there saying that for the health and safety of those individuals, there may be some other rationale for not allowing some form of development that could be hazardous for safe drinking water for first nations.

I wonder if the hon. member would actually acknowledge that this measure is already in the proposed act for first nations.

● (1950)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Giguère: Mr. Speaker, that is an interesting question. However, we are talking about nations, and the government is asking them to give up some of their ancestral rights.

The member said so himself. He said that derogations are necessary. The Conservatives are therefore giving themselves the power to override the jurisdiction and ancestral rights of first nations, but what are the first nations getting in return? A promise? The government will have to follow through on that promise.

I am not making up the fact that 117 communities do not have running water. I did not pull that number out of thin air. The member said that his government made many investments. Clearly, those investments are not enough. They are not enough to set up and maintain the necessary infrastructure.

That leads me to a second problem. Since these nations do not have the necessary training or resources, the government needs to invest and ensure that the investment does not deteriorate, yet nothing is planned in that regard, and that is the problem.

If the Conservatives want to demonstrate their good faith, they must go one small step further.

[*English*]

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak on this particular bill today.

All of the government members have talked about two things. One is regulation, which is what they say this bill is all about, and the second is that they say that implementation will come later.

In other words, what they are saying is they will impose the rules, but they are not going to follow up or carry on or commit to ensuring that any funding is there to make that happen. Therefore, it is destined for failure.

I do not know why the government did not put just one little clause in this bill that said, "Here are the regulations as we see them, and this is what we think needs to be done".

By the way, although there is some provincial jurisdiction, it is hard to argue with regulations that talk about the training and certification of operators, source water protection, location, design, modification, maintenance, operation of water systems, drinking water distribution by truck if it is needed, the collection and treatment of waste water, monitoring, sampling, testing. No one can argue with that, whether it is a first nations municipality or a non-first nations municipality. Those kinds of things make sense.

Of course, at any given time in this country, we have more than 100 first nations on boil water advisories, and that situation continues.

Here we have regulations that are not followed up with any kind of commitment from the government. That is where the main part of the problem lies with this particular bill.

Why did the government not put a clause in the bill that simply says, "Here are the implementation rules. This is what we think needs to happen. By the way, we will ensure that this is funded to make sure that 100-plus first nations across this country do not have boil water advisories, and in fact that boil water advisories will not exist anywhere in this country any longer. We will ensure that all first nations have all the regulations in place and, by the way, we are going to back it up with money."

We heard Conservative after Conservative say that they will pass the regulations and worry about the money and the implementation later. It seems to me that a lot of red flags should go up with all Canadians right across the country when they hear that.

Let me read a couple of quotes from first nations groups as to what they think about this bill, because the red flags have certainly gone up with first nations.

The Chiefs of Ontario recently had a headline on a news release that said, "Federal Bill S-8 fails to 'protect' drinking water for first nations".

Nishnawbe Aski Nation, which I am very familiar with, is in northern Ontario, and by the way, many communities are fly-in communities, so I am not sure how this partnering thing that a previous member was talking about is going to work. The headline from there reads, "Water Legislation Fails to Address Critical Lack of Infrastructure in NAN First Nations".

Dr. Harry Swain, the chair of the expert panel on safe drinking water for first nations, stated:

> This is not...one of those problems in Aboriginal Canada that will persist for ever and ever and ever. This is one that can be solved and it can be solved with the application of a good chunk of money for a limited period of time.

The end of that quote puts it all in a nutshell for us. We are not talking about money forever; we are talking about money spent, and if these regulations are the regulations that the government thinks need to be established, let us make sure the funding is there.

However, there is no commitment for funding at all.

The regulations, by and large, are the same kinds of regulations that non-first nations municipalities have right across Canada, and they are mostly governed by the provinces.

● (1955)

I asked a question of a government speaker earlier today. I asked what it is going to cost the provinces to monitor and implement this measure. The response was that it is not going to cost the provinces anything. I am not entirely sure, but we are going to have to take that speaker at his word. It is something to think about as we carry on this debate.

Sometimes people say that it is not about money and that we should not worry about money, because it is about regulations and making drinking water safe. The fact of the matter is that we have to commit to spend the money to make that happen.

I see some heads nodding "no" on the other side. I hope the member has a question for me later on.

We cannot put regulations in place in communities that in some cases have absolutely no infrastructure for water delivery and or for handling waste water and expect them to say, "Let us follow the regulations; no problem, we can do that". How do they do it?

I would be interested to hear what my hon. friend across the way has to say about that.

There is another issue here, which is that these regulations could very well overrule any laws or bylaws that a first nation might have in its own community.

I think that is a concern. It limits the liability of the government for certain acts or omissions that occur in the performance of its duties under the regulations.

I think not just New Democrats but all of us want to see safe, clean water and water systems that work for first nation communities, but imposing this legislation is not the solution. The federal government cannot simply unload its liability to first nations without providing the funding to bring those systems up to the new standards in the bill.

First nations oppose this act because of the new liability provisions for first nation governments. My hon. friend across the way said that the non-derogation clause is formulated to possibly be the first step to erode constitutionally protected rights. These things are not spelled out in black and white in the bill, but they are concerns that first nations have.

The delivery of safe drinking water to on-reserve first nations communities is critical to the health and safety of first nations Canadians, but for more than a decade, many first nations have lacked adequate access to safe drinking water.

As a bit of history, this is the second legislative initiative to address safe drinking water on reserves. The predecessor was Bill S-11, but it did not proceed to third reading as a result of widespread concerns. Because it did not proceed, it subsequently died when Parliament was dissolved before the last election.

Bill S-8 retains a number of features from Bill S-11, particularly in the areas to be covered by eventual federal regulations. Non-derogation language is still included in the proposed legislation, expressly allowing for the abrogation or derogation of aboriginal and treaty rights in some circumstances. It also provides for the incorporation by reference of provincial regulations governing drinking and waste water.

Why are we opposing the bill at this point in time? New Democrats agree that the poor standards of water systems in first nation communities are hampering people's health and well-being and causing economic hardship. However, this legislation would make first nations liable for water systems that have already proven inadequate without any funding to help them improve their water systems or to give them the ability to build new ones more appropriate to their needs.

I see my time is up. I certainly welcome questions from the floor. Let me just say in closing that this is a very important bill, and I hope that someone from the other side is going to ask me a question about the implementation of this bill, should it pass.

● (2000)

Mr. Dan Albas (Okanagan—Coquihalla, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for asking for questions, particularly on the subject.

First of all, does the member acknowledge that first nations, particularly Indian band reserves, are federally regulated, not provincially regulated? That is the first part.

The second part is that Dr. Gagnon, an expert in this area, gave testimony at committee specifically pointing out that this would not transfer risk to councils. It would actually transfer risk to the engineers and technicians who would then run those water systems, because they would come under their expertise. This would allow first nations to develop infrastructure.

Rather than 600 plus different standards across the country, we would end up with a standard that is chosen and selected, whether it be harmonizing with the provincial rules or taking other measures into consideration. Approximately $3 billion has gone to investments in waste water treatment and water treatment. We need to have standards so that those investments are utilized and keep people safe over a period of years.

I would like to hear the member's comments regarding the provincial regulations, as well as the liability issue.

Mr. John Rafferty: Mr. Speaker, I think my friend across the way will acknowledge that first nations right across the country are all in different situations.

I am travelling this Saturday to a first nation in my riding. I have ten first nations in my riding, and I am travelling to one that actually has good water. It has a good water system, it has trained individuals and it has good waste water systems. That particular first nation governs according to provincial regulations and they meet those regulations.

Not all of my first nations have that same kind of capacity. Certainly, north, in the Kenora riding, many of those first nations, particularly the fly-in nations, really have no capacity at all. They certainly have no capacity to deal with events such as flooding and so on. This is not a difficult problem to solve. It just requires political will and, I want to emphasize again, adequate investments.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as my colleague knows, there was an expert panel on safe drinking water for first nations. According to its November 2006 report:

> ...regulation alone would not ensure safe drinking water. The report indicated that regulations governing the provision of on-reserve drinking water must be accompanied by adequate investment in human resources and physical assets. It suggested that it is not "credible to go forward with any regulatory regime without adequate capacity to satisfy the regulatory requirements."

Again, the bill does not provide any additional resources, and many witnesses at committee expressed frustration with the government's failure to consult first nations regarding the development of this bill.

● (2005)

Mr. John Rafferty: Mr. Speaker, the one thing that has not been talked about, and I agree with the quote the member used, is the question of crucial investments. I think she said crucial investments in human resources and physical infrastructure. That needs to be done.

However, there are some corollary items that need to be dealt with. I am just thinking of one, which is housing. Part of the problem with a lot of first nations in northern Ontario is that they do not have adequate housing or the housing infrastructure to ensure that these water systems work and to make sure that they are there.

We can talk about regulations, saying that people have to be trained and this is what happens with water coming in and out. The fact of the matter is that housing is very inadequate on many first nations. Many of them are without running water. It is not just a question of a water system here and a water system there, it is also a question of making sure the total infrastructure has the funding to make it all work.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth (Kitchener Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is indeed an honour to rise today to speak in support of Bill S-8, the safe drinking water for first nations act.

I would like to begin by describing, perhaps for those who have not yet heard, the framework of this and how we arrived at this place tonight in debating this bill. In Canada, water and waste water operations and systems are generally the responsibility of the provincial and territorial governments. Over the years, different jurisdictions have developed comprehensive regulatory regimes for the protection of source water, water quality standards, and the oversight of water treatment plants and water delivery services.

Over the time that Canada has been growing as a nation, we have, in our various communities, learned from our mistakes. For example, most tragically, Walkerton, which is in my own province. Therefore, the provinces and territories have developed a highly regarded set of regulations across the country which serves the majority of Canadians very well. Of course, it guides the infrastructure that is necessary to provide for safe drinking water and water services.

However, because section 91, paragraph 24 of the Constitution Act of 1867 grants to the federal government exclusive jurisdiction over "Indians and lands reserved for Indians", provincial regulatory water standards do not apply to on-reserve first nations communities. To date, there has been no federal legislative framework governing drinking water and waste water in first nations communities beyond what is set out in a welter of public federal policies, administrative guidelines and funding arrangements.

We have to ask ourselves here tonight, and Canadians across the country have to ask: Why is it that after almost 150 years, since Confederation, first nations are the only Canadians who do not have proper and healthy regulations for drinking water and waste water?

I must say that when I speak to my constituents about first nations issues, I always begin by explaining to them how complex it is, the lengthy history we have of relationships with our first nations, and what a diversity of views there are. Chief among them has been the constant question of first nations sovereignty, to what degree the Government of Canada can deal with first nations on a local, regional or national basis, and who is responsible for what.

Determining roles and responsibilities is a problem. There are three federal departments involved, and I am just going to mention one of them when it comes to drinking water and waste water, and that is Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada. It provides funding, including funds for capital construction, upgrading and a portion of operating and maintenance costs.

How much funding? Well, 80% of first nations' operating and capital costs is paid by Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada to first nations for the provision of water services to their communities. It also oversees the design, construction and maintenance of water facilities. However, first nation communities, through their chiefs and councils, are responsible for the design, construction, operation and maintenance of water systems, and they assume 20% of the costs.

Where has that taken us?

Well, reports have been done over the years, but I think at this point it is fairly notorious that waste water and drinking water conditions on reserves have been in very poor shape.

● (2010)

In fact, there was an inspection done in 2011 of 587 first nations communities across the country, 97% of all first nations communities. It was found that of the assessed water systems, 39% were at high overall risk, 34% were medium and 27% were low overall risk.

At that time, it was estimated that the cost to upgrade existing water and waste water systems to meet federal protocols and guidelines, as well as provincial standards and regulations, would be $1.08 billion. Is it the case that the Government of Canada, after all these years has not been willing to spend the money necessary? No, that is not the case. That is not where the problem lies. In fact, between 2006 and 2014, the life of the present government, the government will have invested approximately $3 billion to support first nations communities in managing their water and waste water infrastructure and related public health activities.

Let me repeat that so that listeners at home do not think they misheard. Three billion dollars in eight years to really do what the report suggested would cost $1.08 billion. In spite of that, we hear continued calls from the opposition for more funding.

I will not pretend to know what the value of a billion dollars is. It reminds me, if memory serves me, of a Liberal minister who a few years ago was taken to task for saying "What's a million?" Today, the refrain from across the aisle is, "What's a billion?" In fact, what is $3 billion?

In light of the fact that we have been at this 150 years, and particularly acutely in the last 10 years, and particularly having spent $3 billion in the last seven or eight years alone, we still have these problems, we have to look elsewhere. We have to start elsewhere to solve this problem.

The government has gone at it with a willing heart. Bill S-8 was introduced in Parliament on February 29, 2012, to provide for the development of federal regulations governing the provision of drinking water, water quality standards and the disposal of waste water in first nations communities. The bill would also establish that federal regulations may incorporate by reference provincial regulations governing drinking water and waste water in first nations communities.

The reality is, water is water and health needs are health needs and all Canadians, all citizens of the country, including first nations, should enjoy the benefit of the same minimum standards. There is no reason why those standards cannot apply in first nations. It is true, first nations would be responsible for implementing them, but only responsible for 20% of the cost. The government is more than prepared to come up with the other 80% and to oversee and supervise the implementation of these standards.

However, this is not the first time. That is what really makes it frustrating. The member who spoke last talked about a lack of political will. Well indeed, that is what we are witnessing here tonight if we do not pass the bill because it has been tried before.

Bill S-11 in the previous Parliament was introduced in the Senate on May 26, 2010. It was referred to the Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples for examination in December of 2010. From February to March, the committee held nine meetings on the proposed legislation and heard witnesses and listened to ideas. However, unfortunately, thanks again to the opposition and the bringing down of the last Parliament and the provoking of an election, Bill S-11 died on the order paper when Parliament was dissolved on March 26, 2011.

● (2015)

Bill S-8 does retain several of the features of the former Bill S-11, but there are key differences. It would be beyond the scope of my time to go into those.

I just have to say that the delivery of safe drinking water to on-reserve first nations is critical to the health and safety of the communities' residents. Access to safe, clean, potable water is also closely tied to the economic viability of individual communities.

It is up to this Parliament to just take this step. We would do more. This would not be the end of it. However, let us at least get off the ground with this step forward. I urge the members opposite to support this bill.

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: It being 8:19 p.m., pursuant to an order made earlier today, it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the third reading stage of the bill now before the House.

[*English*]

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

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

Some hon. members: Nay.

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

And five or more members having risen:

[*Translation*]

Pursuant to an order made on Wednesday, May 22, 2013, the division stands deferred until Monday, June 10, 2013, at the expiry of the time provided for oral questions.

[*English*]

EXPANSION AND CONSERVATION OF CANADA'S NATIONAL PARKS ACT

The House resumed from May 31 consideration of the motion that Bill S-15, An Act to amend the Canada National Parks Act and the Canada-Nova Scotia Offshore Petroleum Resources Accord Implementation Act and to make consequential amendments to the Canada Shipping Act, 2001, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment has 18 minutes left for debate on this issue.

● (2020)

Ms. Michelle Rempel (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague, the hon. Chief Government Whip for his support. It is such a pleasure to be here tonight.

I was actually quite impressed with some of the testimony that came out the last time we were speaking to this bill, on Friday. I have geared my speech to address some of the issues that came up. I looked a bit through the Senate committee testimony that came up as well as some of our technical briefing documents, and I hope to address some of my colleagues' concerns that were raised on Friday.

The critical points that were raised on Friday related to some of the issues around seismic activities on the island as well as aboriginal consultations and inclusion within the bill. Questions were raised around Parks Canada consulting the Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia. I can assure this House that we are taking important measures with respect to the Mi'kmaq, that we have consulted and will continue to consult them and that Parks Canada is continuing to work with them.

In designating Sable Island as a national park reserve, the Government of Canada would be protecting the asserted aboriginal rights entitled to this area. A national park reserve designation, which is clearly defined under the Canada National Parks Act, is used where there are outstanding claims by aboriginal peoples regarding aboriginal rights and titles and these claims have been accepted by Canada for negotiation.

In her remarks, the member for Edmonton—Strathcona expressed her concern that, while the preamble refers to the Mi'kmaq's asserted rights and title, the bill itself does not. I just want to assure the House that this is standard when it comes to designating national park reserves under the Canada National Parks Act, in that specific reference is not made to the aboriginal people claiming rights and title to a specific national park reserve. Rather, it is the designation as a reserve that protects their asserted rights. When it comes to concerns over the integrity of the national parks system, the Canada National Parks Act is also clear that a national park reserve is protected just as much as a national park, all the while respecting the assertions of aboriginal or treaty rights. It is not a lesser category of national park. Parks such as Nahanni in the north, Mingan Archipelago in Quebec and the Gulf Islands in British Columbia are all currently designated as national park reserves while we work with the aboriginal people who use these areas to finalize an agreement through which they would co-operatively manage these areas in collaboration with Parks Canada.

To be clear, we will not move to designate Sable Island as a national park of Canada until we have concluded our consultations and negotiations with the Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia.

In fact, to illustrate this point, when our government first took office in 2006, Labrador's Torngat Mountains was then designated as a national park reserve. That year, the hon. member for Edmonton—Spruce Grove signed a park impacts and benefit statement with the president of Makivik Corporation representing the Nunavik Inuit of northern Quebec who had a claim to the area in Labrador covered by the park reserve. Only with the signing of that agreement did the government move to formally transition the reserve to what is now the Torngat Mountains National Park of Canada.

With respect to consultations, in May 2010, Parks Canada, as required under the consultation protocol established under the made-in-Nova Scotia process, wrote to the Assembly of Nova Scotia Chiefs, the Nova Scotia Office of Aboriginal Affairs and the Native Council of Nova Scotia requesting consultation on plans to designate Sable Island as a national park.

In November 2010, the Mi'kmaq people wrote to Parks Canada confirming that they were in agreement that Sable Island be designated as a national park by bringing it under the Canada National Parks Act by an act of Parliament. They also stated that they looked forward to working together with Parks Canada in the development of a management plan for Sable Island and other opportunities for the Mi'kmaq to be meaningfully and actively engaged in the vision and management direction for Sable Island as a national park.

Consultation with the Mi'kmaq during the designation process would continue until the final step in the establishment process, namely designation of Sable Island as a national park. Once a final accord had been negotiated by Canada, Nova Scotia and the Mi'kmaq through the made-in-Nova Scotia process, Parks Canada would undertake the necessary steps as defined under the final accord to transition Sable Island from a national park reserve to a national park.

Parks Canada enjoys a productive relationship with the Mi'kmaq. Parks Canada and the Mi'kmaq are close to concluding a contribution agreement, the purpose of which is to enable the Mi'kmaq to conduct research and consult with member communities to develop a thorough understanding of the cultural and historical connection of the Mi'kmaq people to Sable Island.

● (2025)

The results of this project would inform the future governance and advisory approach for a Sable Island national park reserve and would build practical working relationships with the Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia. This work would provide an important foundation for the participation of the Mi'kmaq in the planning and management of the national park reserve.

As we have heard, Sable Island is located in one of the largest offshore hydrocarbon basins in North America. I know that during the debate last Friday, concern was expressed about the future of Sable Island and the petroleum activities that may be permitted within this region. I believe that the Government of Canada and Nova Scotia have negotiated an approach to Sable Island that balances conservation and the fact that this is a large hydrocarbon development basin.

All petroleum-related activities in Nova Scotia's offshore, including on and around Sable Island, are administered under the Canada-Nova Scotia Offshore Petroleum Resources Accord Implementation Act. As the preamble to this bill makes clear, section 4 of the accord act states that the act takes precedent over all legislation that applies to the offshore area, including Sable Island.

Therefore, it is into this legislative framework, put in place by previous parliaments, that we must fit this new national park reserve. To that end, through Bill S-15, we would amend the accord act to, for the first time, legally prohibit drilling from the surface of Sable Island. This is a point that should not be lost on this House because this would be of huge benefit to protecting this very unique piece of ecosystem and land that is so dear to all Canadians for the future. It is one of the core purposes of putting this bill forward to begin with. We would also put in place a buffer zone from the low-water boundary of the national park reserve out to one nautical mile where the drilling ban would also apply.

Many of my colleagues here have raised concern about the definition of "low-impact petroleum-related activities". I think this is a fair discussion to have, because we want to make sure we get this right. Therefore, I will give a bit of background on my understanding of what this means, based on Senate committee testimony as well as discussions that the Nova Scotia government had, I believe, in the development of its bill related to this issue, because I think this should be considered, should this bill be supported by my colleagues and brought to committee stage.

Bill S-15 lists several low-impact petroleum-related activities that might be permitted on the island, including seismic. While some equate the word seismic with blasting and explosion, this is not the case in this situation. Low-impact seismic, as described by Mr. Stuart Pinks, chief executive officer of the Canada-Nova Scotia Offshore Petroleum Board, before the Standing Senate Committee on Energy, the Environment and Natural Resources, stated:

> It is...emitting a sound source that, if it was done on the island, would travel down through the sand...through the rock formations, and some of the sound or energy waves are actually reflected back up. There are listening devices that will pick that up.

This activity was conducted on the island once before in the last several decades. In 1991, Mobil Oil Canada conducted seismic work on and around Sable Island. The company agreed to follow a strict code of practice that was developed in collaboration with Ms. Zoe Lucas, a long-time resident expert on Sable Island, and with the Green Horse Society, which is the leading environmental non-governmental organization for Sable Island.

In following this code of practice, industry made significant changes to its program design and implementation, including delaying the start of the program to avoid the peak periods for nesting birds, pupping harbour seals and foaling horses and changing the layout of seismic lines to avoid biologically rich areas.

Under the 1999 program, Mobil Oil Canada used two vibro-seismic vehicles on the island as sound sources on the north and south sides of the western third of Sable Island. They were restricted to the unvegetated outer beach areas. These were the sound sources. Sixty-two receiver lines were laid across the island for the purpose of receiving the sounds. In placing these receiver lines, no vehicle traffic was permitted on any vegetated terrain and all traffic on vegetation was on foot and restricted to the receiver lines. All the gear used during the program, including cables, geophones, batteries and so forth were carried into and out of the vegetated areas by personnel travelling only on foot.

Ms. Lucas concluded in a 2000 report that, "In general during the 1999 seismic program on Sable Island there was a very high compliance with the Code of Practice". She also observed that "the [seismic] program had limited and short-term impact on Sable Island". Furthermore, she concluded that compliance with the code of practice by the survey company "indicated that any group operating on the island could be expected to comply with similar guidelines".

● (2030)

I would also point out that under the terms of the 2011 National Parks establishment agreement that was signed that year, Canada and Nova Scotia agreed that low impact exploratory work could continue to be authorized. When asked about the possibility of amending Bill S-15 to prohibit such activities by the Senate committee examining the bill, Mr. Leonard Preyra, minister of communities, culture and heritage with the Government of Nova Scotia, confirmed that having the potential to permit such activities, "is an important building block for the agreement itself. In a way, it's a deal breaker".

During our debate in second reading, concern was expressed that Bill S-15 could set a precedent for other national parks with respect to continuing petroleum-related activity. This is clearly not the case with Bill S-15, as it does not amend the Canada National Parks Act to permit low impact petroleum activities in existing or future national parks. Rather we are amending the Offshore Petroleum Resources Accord Implementation Act to restrict the board's current powers to authorize seismic activities on Sable Island to low impact activities.

For that reason, I would suggest that our government is not compromising the integrity of Canada's national park system, as has been suggested on several occasions by the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands.

In creating new national parks, governments are often challenged to make tough decisions when it comes to allowing certain activities, be it mining roads in Nahanni, traditional land use activities, including hunting in Wapusk, or access to timber resources for local use in Gros Morne. In each case, we balance the need to maintain the integrity of the national park system, while trying to seize the opportunity to enhance the conservation of some of our special places, such as Sable Island.

The fact is that we have succeeded in negotiating a stronger conservation regime for Sable Island than currently exists and that is the goal here. It is to protect this area, it is to bring a greater degree of conservation and it is to understand that this indeed is one of the most special places we have in the country and we should be protecting it. That is the intent of the bill, full stop.

I would argue that our government is strengthening the integrity of our national park system and is working to significantly expand our national marine conservation area. It is because of this pragmatic approach in dealing with the various challenges inherent in creating new national parks that we are making tremendous progress.

For example, in 2006, our government established the 5,565 square kilometre Saoyú-?ehdacho National Historic Site in partnership with the Déline Land Corporation and the Déline Renewable Resources Council. This is the first northern cultural landscape commemorated by the Government of Canada, the first northern national historic site co-operatively managed by Parks Canada and an aboriginal group and the first protected area established under the Northwest Territories protected areas strategy.

In 2007, the Prime Minister joined with the Government of Ontario in announcing the creation of Lake Superior National Marine Conservation Area. At more than 10,000 square kilometres, including the lake bed, islands and north shore lands, this is the largest freshwatrer marine protected area in the world.

In 2009, the House passed legislation resulting in the dramatic sixfold expansion of Nahanni National Park Reserve. For their efforts in achieving this decades-old dream, the minister of the environment, the Grand Chief of the Dehcho First Nation and the president of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society were awarded the prestigious Gold Medal by the Royal Canadian Geographical Society.

Last August, the Prime Minister joined with the leaders of the Sahtu Dene and Metis to announce the creation of Nááts'ihch'oh National Park Reserve of Canada for the purpose of protecting the headwaters of the South Nahanni River. This conservation action will bring to a conclusion the work of so many to protect the Greater Nahanni Ecosystem.

In the 2011 Speech from the Throne, our government pledged to the people of Canada to create significant new protected areas. For example, Parks Canada is working to conclude negotiations to create a new national park on Bathurst Island in Nunavut and a new national park reserve in the Mealy Mountains of Labrador. Each of these new parks will bring ecological, social and economic benefits to aboriginal people and northern communities. Each new park will also shed light on a new and fascinating destination for visitors, providing an opportunity to diversify the local economy and to open the door to new and fascinating stories about these places.

We will continue our work to conclude the consultations and feasibility assessments for proposed national marine conservation areas in the ecologically rich waters of the southern Strait of Georgia in British Columbia and Lancaster Sound in Nunavut, and for a new national park reserve in the Thaidene Nene area of the east arm of Great Slave Lake. In each case we are working closely with the provincial and territorial governments as well as aboriginal peoples.

● (2035)

I want to assure the House that while our government continues to work to protect national parks and marine conservation areas, we are also working to promote urban conservation. We also want to bring the inspirational messages of such faraway places as Sable Island to urban populations because we want people in urban communities to be inspired to take action to protect their natural areas.

As we move to bring Sable Island under the Canada National Parks Act, our government stands to make a special contribution to urban conservation in Canada in establishing the country's first urban national park in Rouge Valley in the greater Toronto area. Rouge national urban park will be a unique concept that would include the conservation of natural and cultural assets, sustainable agriculture, opportunities for learning and a wide range of recreational activities.

Canada's national parks already make an important contribution to urban conservation, through the provision of clean air and water and the economic benefits in natural areas. For example, the protective watershed of Banff National Park supplies life-giving drinking water, provides recreational opportunities and supports farmers and industries well beyond its boundaries.

Parks Canada's places also provide sustainable ecosystems that are home to our migratory areas for many species, such as warblers and monarch butterflies in Point Pelee National Park. These species are in turn a key link in the ecological chain of urban areas.

While the provision of clean air and water and the ecological benefits of natural areas are an incredible contribution, in fact, they only make up a fraction of what Parks Canada provides to Canadians in urban conservation.

Arguably, Park Canada's largest role in this matter is to provide the opportunities of experiencing nature first-hand, an increased public awareness of sustainable development and natural heritage and an inspiring sense of pride in taking conservation action. This is a cornerstone of what it means to be Canadian.

There is a large body of research that demonstrates that exposure to natural environments helps people cope with stress, illness and injury and improved concentration and productivity.

As I wrap up, I encourage my colleagues opposite to support the bill. I am very encouraged by the high level of productive dialogue that we have had. I am very much looking forward to having a good discussion at committee on the bill, to review each of the concerns my colleagues have brought forward. I have tried to provide some clarity on those tonight. The minister will be speaking later as well.

I certainly hope this is an example of where we can work together within this place, do a wonderful thing for conservation in Canada and also protect one of the most sacred and ecologically-sensitive areas in our country, not just for now but for generations to come.

I am so proud of what the Nova Scotia government has done in this matter. I am so proud of what industry has done. Together, in the House, we can take the final step and make the Sable Island national park reserve happen.

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, people at home probably are not used to seeing debates in the House that are not really incredibly partisan, but we may actually have a debate tonight about issues.

I thought her speech was very good in content and so, I have a content based question.

The parliamentary secretary rightly points out that there are a lot of concerns expressed by community and community organizations about the definition of "low-impact exploration" on the surface of Sable Island. I note that low-impact is not actually defined in the Canada National Parks Act. Nor is it defined in the Canada-Nova Scotia Offshore Petroleum Resources Accord Implementation Act.

We have to bring this to committee. We have to hear from witnesses what "low-impact exploration" means. At that point, would the government be open to a possible amendment to the act to maybe insert a definition into the act of what we exactly mean by "low-impact exploration"?

Ms. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, I share my colleague's concern about ensuring that we get the terminology right within the bill so we are setting a precedent for the long-term protection of this area and we can be very clear on what these activities mean.

The example I gave tonight within my speech was, I believe, one of the only instances of this activity occurring, so it gives me cause for hope that this could potentially happen within a very defined context and also see ecological benefits.

As my colleague said, I am looking forward as well to hearing from witness groups.

On the point of amendment, we have to ensure the Nova Scotia government and other partners that have been involved in the creation of the bill are comfortable with any changes that could or could not be made, given that there is a mirror agreement in place.

However, the discussion needs to start at committee. We need to hear from witnesses. I would certainly be amenable, as a member of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development, to personally exploring what low-impact seismic activity means, then looking at it within the context of the legislation and moving forward from there.

● (2040)

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the details that were given. It is important that we understand the possible impacts of the seismic activity on Sable Island. Parks Canada has told me that it has only one study. I am wondering if the parliamentary secretary could therefore share with the House how seismic activity can affect the environment and wildlife. There is real concern that this could be a precedent.

Could the member guarantee that this new park will not set a precedent and that the integrity of Canada's national parks will not be undermined, but protected?

Ms. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, those are all excellent questions. Given the constraints of time, for the latter half of my colleague's question with regard to the precedent setting nature of this, I would direct her to check *Hansard* on the front end of my speech because I laid out quite a bit of text around that concern.

The member asked about the seismic activities. I did a little research in this regard. I have a couple of points.

First, the resident of Sable Island who I spoke about in my speech was involved in the follow-on study to the last seismic activities that happened at the park. A study done in that regard showed this activity could be done within a very tight framework with very strict guidelines and still preserve the ecological integrity of the island, which is the key component in ensuring the creation of our national parks.

Again, given the length of time that I have this evening, I am happy to speak to my colleague at committee about some of the other concerns she has about the potential ecological impact of seismic activity. We have some examples here, but I would probably spend five minutes reading them into the record and I am sure we will have witness groups that will come and talk about this at the committee stage as well.

I am certainly looking forward to addressing these concerns. I share her concerns and I look forward to hearing witness testimony at committee.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the parliamentary secretary for her excellent work. I was a member of the environment committee for a number of years. I was a former national park warden in our parks in Alberta and had a tremendous opportunity there. I worked with some fantastic people in Parks Canada. It is a great agency. I was glad to represent Rocky Mountain House National Historic Site too and the wonderful work that has been done out there to commemorate our past and the work of David Thompson.

My question is for clarification on what the difference is between a national park reserve and a national park, the levels of protection. I know there are some games being played by some of the opposition in trying to confuse Canadians about what that is.

Clearly this is not going back to the way the Liberals, under Pierre Elliott Trudeau, used to do things, which was to expropriate land for the creation of Kouchibouguac National Park where some 1,200 people were uprooted and basically thrown off their land indiscriminately. That is clearly not happening in this case. We have good examples like Grasslands National Park Reserve where it is a willing seller and willing buyer. These are the kinds of things that were brought in by a previous Conservative prime minister Brian Mulroney. We have Pacific Rim National Park Reserve where those protections are afforded, yet there are still outstanding land claims and so on.

What kind of assurances can the parliamentary secretary provide to those who would seek claim there? Are people going to be disrupted the way they so rudely were so many years ago in the creation of some of our national parks?

Ms. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, this gives me the opportunity to reassert the importance of partnering with first nation communities in the creation of protected spaces in our country. Absolutely we need to have robust consultation as well as ensure that any claim rights are respected in the development of further protections for these types of areas.

To the distinction between Canada's national park and a national park reserve, as I said earlier in my speech, a reserve definition is clearly defined under the Canada National Parks Act and it used where there are outstanding claims by aboriginal peoples regarding aboriginal rights and title and these claims have been accepted by Canada for negotiation. Just to be absolutely clear, a national park reserve is protected just as much as a national park, all while respecting the assertion of aboriginal or treaty rights.

Again, while I have time here tonight, on behalf of all of my colleagues in the House, it is such a pleasure to see a positive partnership such as the one that has been established with the Mi'kmaq, with the Nova Scotia government and with industry to come up with a solution, a made-in-Nova Scotia solution, to protect such a very special piece of land. I certainly look forward to celebrating that by passing this bill through this place.

● (2045)

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Sable Island is, of course, the graveyard of the Atlantic. One of the concerns is that it is a moving sandbar.

I have two questions for the parliamentary secretary.

First, because of the fragile nature of Sable Island, will there be a buffer around the island to protect its interests? Second, grey seals are exploding off Sable Island. Many fishermen are concerned about this explosion of grey seals and the effect they will have on Sable Island itself. Would this legislation ensure the possibility of some kind of harvest of grey seals to reduce the damage they may cause to Sable Island?

Ms. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, those are two very good and important questions that have come up during the discussion of this legislation.

To the first point on the buffer, I believe that there is a one-nautical-mile buffer created by the bill that prohibits petroleum drilling activities in that area to ensure that the ecological integrity of the park is protected.

With regard to my colleague's question about the seal population, Parks Canada has a detailed policy for species management within a variety of national parks. In this context, it would be seals. In other national parks, there are other species that become overpopulated from time to time. Parks Canada has a protocol to manage such situations. I want to reassure my colleague that while the protocols exist to allow that, they have strict ecological integrity components and they are done under strict management practices. While I do not have those in front of me tonight, that is certainly an excellent question to bring up at committee, because I believe that it should be put on the record.

We on the government side, and my colleagues on the opposition side, have heard that this is a concern among fishermen in the area that has come up several times over.

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to be standing here tonight speaking to this bill. It has been a long time coming. It has been decades coming. This is a really important piece of legislation.

Some games have been played with regard to this legislation, and despite the assertions of the member for Wetaskiwin, the games have not been played by the opposition. The games, in fact, have been played by the Conservatives. I think this legislation is too important for games. If there is time at the end, I will address what happened. All of that aside, I want to jump in and talk about the substance of this bill, so let us take look at the legislation.

First, I want to say that I want to support this legislation, but I will not do it at any cost. This is absolutely worth supporting at second reading. We need to get this to committee. I am eager to get it to committee. I am eager to work with both the Conservative and Liberal members of the environment committee to take a good look at this legislation, hopefully resolve some of the issues we may have with it and eventually pass it.

As members know, this legislation will establish Sable Island national park reserve of Canada. That is pretty exciting. It is a huge step.

As members might know, Sable Island is a long, narrow crescent of sand in the North Atlantic. It is about 290 kilometres off the southeast shore of Nova Scotia. Believe it or not, Sable Island is actually in the riding of Halifax. I am the member of Parliament for Sable Island, for the one person, Zoe Lucas, who lives there, and all of those horses.

My provincial counterpart in the Nova Scotia legislature, Minister Leonard Preyra, represents Sable as well. The name of his constituency is actually Halifax Citadel-Sable Island. He is lucky enough to have Sable Island in the name of his riding, which is pretty fun.

Sable Island is characterized by sand dunes and grasses. It is home to over 190 plant species. It has the world's largest colony of grey seals, as we heard from my colleague from Sackville—Eastern Shore. There is a borderline problem with grey seals on the island because of the population explosion.

There are 350 species of birds, including roseate tern, which is protected under the Species at Risk Act.

It is a little anomaly there in the ocean, but it is a pretty special place. I have never been. I am not sure that I want to go, because I respect the idea that we should not all be heading to Sable Island. I respect that we can learn about it and appreciate it from the mainland. However, it certainly occupies a special place in the hearts of Nova Scotians.

Of course, as members know, the island's most famous inhabitants are wild horses. There are about 375 of them on the island. The Sable Island horse is Nova Scotia's official horse. Who knew that Nova Scotia had an official horse? Every single Nova Scotian knows that.

Sable is on the edge of the continental shelf, and as a result, it has some pretty wicked storms, with big surges and rough seas. As a result, it is known as the graveyard of the Atlantic. There have been about 350 recorded shipwrecks on the island.

What does this bill do? This bill is a culmination of years of work by community members, the federal government, the provincial government and Parks Canada. They have all come together to work to protect Sable Island's unique nature and ecosystems.

In 2004, the federal and Nova Scotia governments concluded that "it would be in the public interest to use a federal protected area designation to achieve conservation objectives for Sable Island".

That was in 2004. That was really the beginning of the big thrust to turn this into a national park. Since then, Parks Canada has engaged in very real and meaningful consultation, including public sessions where they just reported back on where they were and gave us status updates. I attended a number of these in Halifax.

● (2050)

I need to take a moment to acknowledge the work of the people at Parks Canada who have been handling this file. They have done an incredible job. They have listened to concerns and have been very open. Huge credit goes to them. They have done an excellent job of establishing trust in our communities.

As I said, this island occupies a special place in the hearts of Nova Scotians, and as a result, everybody is afraid that something will go wrong. What would a park designation mean? Would it mean that it would turn into Disneyland or something? There was a lot of hesitation. Parks Canada worked slowly and patiently with communities, heard out their concerns, and built an incredible amount of trust in the communities.

I also want to note the work of Zoe Lucas, from the Green Horse Society, who we have already heard about tonight. She is an incredible person. There is the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society. Right now, Chris Miller is handling this file. There is the work of Mark Butler with the Ecology Action Centre, including many other people who have championed this work. I would also like to give a special shout out to Leonard Preyra, who has really been a champion of this bill in the legislature.

We have the bill in the House. What would it do? It is not perfect, and it is okay that it is not perfect. It is not perfect, but I think it is a step in the right direction. I have some issues with the bill that I am hopeful we can explore at committee. I understand that the minister will be speaking to this bill in the House. I am grateful that he will be part of the debate tonight and will hear my concerns, and hopefully, even speak to them.

There will be a proposed section 140.1 of the Canada-Nova Scotia Offshore Petroleum and Resources Accord Implementation Act. I will call it the offshore act. The change states:

> 140.1 No person shall carry on any work or activity related to the drilling for petroleum, including exploratory drilling for petroleum, in Sable Island National Park Reserve of Canada or within one nautical mile seaward of its low-water mark.

That means that there will be no drilling. That is a complete ban on drilling. That is my interpretation of this section. That is very important. There will be no surface drilling within one nautical mile. That is my understanding or interpretation of that section. Keep that in mind while I move on to the next section, because I want to apply that no-drilling part to another section.

Section 142.1 of the act will be amended to say in proposed subsection 142.1(3):

> 142.1(3) With respect to Sable Island National Park Reserve of Canada, the surface access rights provided for under this section are limited to the following:
>
> (a) access to existing wellheads for the purposes of safety and environmental protection;

I will skip to proposed paragraphs 142.1(3)(c) and 142.1(3)(d) which state:

> (c) emergency evacuation capacity for offshore workers; and
>
> (d) the operation, maintenance and inspection of emergency facilities, including helicopter landing and fuel storage facilities.

I skipped proposed paragraph 142.1(3)(*b*), but I have no problem with what I read. Of course, there are already existing wellheads. I understand that the wind blows the sand off the wellheads, and people need to be able to deal with them. Having emergency facilities like a helicopter landing in case there is an emergency offshore makes good sense. I do not have any problems with those parts of the bill.

However, proposed paragraph 142.1(3)(b) is the exploration we are talking about. It states:

> (b) petroleum exploration activities with a low impact on the environment, including seismic, geological or geophysical programs;

If we go back to the surface drilling piece, my interpretation of the legislation says that exploratory activities would mean no drilling also. I would interpret this to mean that even seismic is no drilling. I would interpret this to say that one could take soil samples. It is not drilling to take a spade and dig a little bit, but I interpret this to mean no drilling, and I want to explore that at committee to make sure that this is a correct interpretation.

Going further with this idea of the exploration activities, there is a huge problem with the issue of seismic. I have already started getting emails and being contacted by people in the community saying that they do not understand what this means, that this is really worrying for them, and I share that concern. What does seismic look like? I heard the speech by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, who talked about how seismic has changed and that it is much more low impact here.

● (2055)

My understanding of seismic is that it is a not very big kind of box, probably the size of this podium, that sends out sound waves, and they can take a picture that way. It does not involve dragging giant cables or drilling. However, I want to find out from the Canada-Nova Scotia Offshore Petroleum Board, CNSOPB, if this is what it is talking about, because there is no definition here of what "low impact" is. It is not in the National Parks Act and it is not in the offshore accord act, so what is this seismic?

I am also looking forward to testimony from the CNSOPB about this idea of low-impact exploration. Does that have to be approved by the CNSOPB as well, or is it something that companies can do just by virtue of being in this section of the bill?

I talked about companies. ExxonMobil actually has the rights for drilling on the island. They do not drill on the island right now, and they do observe a one nautical mile limit, but it is voluntary, so it is very positive that the bill would put into legislation something that is happening voluntarily.

However, the leases will still exist. I am having trouble wrapping my head around the fact that if the leases still exist but they are not allowed to drill, do they need permission from the CNSOPB to do this exploration? What does it look like? What kinds of impacts will it have on the environment?

The parliamentary secretary talked about how Zoe Lucas was able to work with industry to come up with best practices when it comes to this kind of exploration. I would love to hear more about that and maybe have Zoe Lucas come to committee and testify as a witness. I understand that she has worked closely with industry to avoid things like dragging equipment through the dunes, making sure there is a moratorium on this work during certain mating seasons and those kinds of assurances.

Zoe Lucas spends most of her time on the island. She is an extraordinary scientist, and I trust her. Therefore, if this is something that she has worked on, my inclination is to say that it is probably to a pretty high standard, but that is something I think we need to explore at committee.

We have banned surface drilling. We have banned drilling within one nautical mile. However, to me this means that at 1.1 nautical miles, we could have platforms. What does that mean for noise pollution and light pollution? We are dealing with species at risk on the island, and I want to know if there are those kinds of environmental concerns.

Let us imagine this platform at 1.1 nautical miles, just outside the range. There is still drilling under the island. I have had a number of contacts from people in communities saying that it is outrageous. My instinct is to say that is outrageous, but I am trying to understand what it means, and I am also trying to understand if it is technically possible to be 1.1 nautical miles out, drill down below bedrock and then do horizontal drilling.

We all know that horizontal drilling is real and that we have the technology to do it, for example, in hydraulic fracturing, but is it technically possible right now to do that kind of drilling? If it is below the bedrock, what are the potential environmental implications?

Sable Island, as members know, is in a gas field, so I am not as concerned about things like oil spills. However, I would like to flesh out this idea of drilling under the island, because it is pretty concerning. I would also like to hear from the CNSOPB and the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society about their perception of the environmental impacts of this drilling.

My colleague from Etobicoke North and the parliamentary secretary for the environment raised the precedent-setting issue. This is a funny beast, because Sable Island falls under the jurisdiction of the Coast Guard and under this offshore petroleum accord. However, the offshore petroleum accord is being amended here, not the parks act, when it comes to drilling. I do not see how it would be a precedent for other parks, because it is such an unusual situation: there are no other parks under the jurisdiction of the offshore accord act.

● (2100)

I suppose this question would be best put to the department to flesh out what the potential precedents are. I do not think there are any. That is my interpretation when I read the legislation, but I would like to flesh out that concept a little bit more.

Regarding the consultation with the Mi'kmaq, I did hear the explanation from the parliamentary secretary about the issue of park reserve versus park. She explained that while this Made-in-Nova Scotia Process is happening, we actually should not be designating things as parks but rather park reserves, which offers the same protections and obligations.

I understand that argument. That is also my interpretation of the legislation, but again I would like to flesh that out at committee with the department. I know as well that some people from the Confederacy of Mainland Mi'kmaq testified at the Senate, and I would like to hear from them too.

My colleague from Sackville—Eastern Shore raised the issue of the seal population on the island. I think we need some answers from Parks Canada about the seal hunt. To the best of my understanding, hunting is allowed in some national parks.

There is a big difference between a seal hunt and a seal cull. The NDP has been supportive of a hunt, but not necessarily of a cull, so it would be important to know if hunting would still be allowed on the island. This is not a make-or-break issue, but it is an important piece in understanding this legislation.

Those are my major concerns with the actual legislation. I am looking forward to working with my Conservative and Liberal colleagues on the environment committee to try to figure out what we do with this legislation and whether we can and should amend it. As I have said, I will be supporting it at second reading to get it to committee.

I want to come back to something that happened this afternoon, because it really does trouble me. It is the fact that we are sitting until midnight. We have been sitting here until midnight for a while now. That is okay. I am pretty tired, but it is okay, because every moment in the House, even if it is a tired moment, is a real privilege. It is a very special thing to be here. Even though it is until midnight, I am still honoured.

I am pretty tired and my skin is pretty thin, quite frankly, because that is what happens when we are tired. I still had quite a bit of spirit, but today in the House, my spirit was broken a little bit.

I do not understand why we are sitting until midnight. I do not understand what the urgency is and why we cannot work co-operatively to get some of these things through the House. I do not understand why we are debating bills that we could have debated when the Conservatives prorogued the House and we were not sitting. Perhaps we could have debated these laws then, because most of them are repeats, but they needed to shut debate down at that time.

Regardless of all of this, being tired and having thin skin, I have kept my spirits up. I have done my best to do my job. I have tried my best to do my job. However, today, as you saw earlier, Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives moved time allocation. They moved to limit the debate on this bill.

That in itself is not special. In itself it is nothing new, because today's time allocation was the 42nd time that they have moved time allocation. The upsetting thing is the fact that the NDP was trying to work with the government to move this bill forward. This is what I spoke to during the questions and answers around time allocation. We were trying to negotiate. We opened a door to say, "Let us try to pass this and do something together", but they took that door and slammed it in our face.

Usually our adversaries are the critic and the parliamentary secretary, but this is not about the parliamentary secretary. We have a very good working relationship. This is about the leadership of the Conservatives. It is about the House leader's leadership. It is about the fact that all they know is to pick up a hammer, and when one has a hammer, everything looks like a nail.

It is very hard for me to think that we are going to be able to do this at committee, have that kind of negotiation and work together. I have lost a tremendous amount of trust, and I think it is worth saying it again on the record that this is the reality.

● (2105)

I need to get this to committee. I am open to working with my colleagues, but it is going to be pretty hard.

Ms. Michelle Rempel (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from Halifax for her very thoughtful questions. I am looking forward to exploring many of those issues at committee and I am hoping that we can come up with a witness list that is collaborative and will answer these questions. If she could give me some of that ahead of time, we will make sure that we work to schedule it.

I have two questions for her.

One is with regard to the bill. She mentioned raising the possibility of amendments in committee. I wonder if she already has specific ideas for the definition of low impact or if she has heard anything from her contacts in the ENGO community that we could begin to do some research on.

The second question is a more esoteric one. She spoke about colleagues working well together in this place and she talked about leadership. She talked about how negotiations go down in this place. I would like her thoughts, because it takes two to tango, on how perhaps her party, as well as ours, could raise the level of debate in the House, because it is about negotiation. If she has some positive feedback or suggestions that my colleagues here could take back to our caucus, I would be willing to listen to those as well.

Ms. Megan Leslie: Mr. Speaker, that is a great question about the amendments. The Parliamentary Secretary and I have spoken outside of the House about what those possible amendments are. I did commit to trying to get some to her before we went to committee. I am actually finding that a really difficult task because I feel as though I do not have quite enough information at my fingertips yet to be able to do that.

I do not know if it would mean an actual definition of low impact or if we need to maybe alter proposed paragraph 142.1(3)(b) to say no to some specific things. I am open to either one, but to clarify would be a great idea.

On her point about raising the level of debate, I do think that there is a failure to collaborate in the House. Everything is about getting it in, getting the time allocation and pushing everything to the limit. Maybe the government gets the right to do that when it is a majority. I do not know; I cut my procedural teeth in a minority government, so there was a lot more negotiation. There was give and take.

I would hope that our House officers would take a more collegial approach when it comes to figuring out how we get legislation through the House and actually make it better. I do think it is a leadership issue. Those of us who are not House officers, who are not in those leadership roles, would follow suit very gladly.

● (2110)

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, like my colleague, I am very concerned about the lack of definition of low impact. At a departmental briefing, officials explained to me, and I quote, that there are no exact details and no discussion of when low impact becomes high impact. Low-impact activities must be defined for parliamentarians when they are reviewed at committee.

My other major concern is regarding precedent.

The officials have said that future parks are legislatively protected from exploration. Regardless, I would like the government's word that the integrity of Canada's national parks will not be undermined but instead protected, that creating a national park among oil and gas exploration is not a foot in the door, an opening or a setting of precedent to allow development in our treasured national parks.

Ms. Megan Leslie: Mr. Speaker, can I ask a point of clarification before I answer? I was unclear about the first part of the question that my colleague asked. I was unclear if it was a quote.

Would she mind repeating where the quote came from?

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Mr. Speaker, it is a quote from an official: "There are no exact details, no discussion of when low impact becomes high impact".

Ms. Megan Leslie: Mr. Speaker, thank you. Now I understand.

Absolutely, she is right. As I noted, there is no definition in the parks act, nor is there in the accord act.

I do not quite yet know where to go with this. I do not know if it means a definition. I do not know if it means looking at proposed paragraph 142.1(3)(b) and actually listing what is not acceptable. That might be a way through. We need to talk to Parks Canada and the CNSOPB to figure out the best way to do this, of course with consultation from environment groups.

I do not have an answer for her, but I agree with her 100% that it is a matter of concern, and we need to figure it out.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question is for my colleague from Halifax but directed to the parliamentary secretary as well.

Environmental groups in Halifax and across the country have a lot of distrust. I was there in 1995 as a private citizen when Sable Gas was starting up its lease explorations and explaining to the people of Nova Scotia about the lease process, about drilling for gas and everything offshore. The company had big maps in the Waverley fire hall. A map showed a blacked out Sable Island with a circle around it. Officials of Sable Gas said that under no circumstances would it touch this very precious piece of Canadian heritage. It was going to leave it alone. I thought that sounded great, but the problem was that five years later the company did seismic testing on the island. It completely broke its word.

My personal view is low impact, high impact. My advice is no impact, no seismic testing under any circumstances on that island. The island should be left alone.

I was really impressed by my colleague from Halifax who represents Sable Island. As I said, I have had the opportunity to go to Sable Island and it truly is one of the most beautiful areas on the planet. She herself says that she may not want to go there because of the effect that oil and gas exploration may have on the island.

I have two questions for my colleague. First, does my colleague believe in no impact in terms of oil and gas exploration on the island? Second, by turning Sable Island into a national park, one of our concerns is that many people may want to visit it, and human activity could have a serious effect on that island. I would like to have her comments on that please.

● (2115)

Ms. Megan Leslie: Mr. Speaker, the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore has been a wonderful mentor to me back home. He has really shown me around the community.

Visitors on the island are a huge concern. That is one of the reasons why there is talk of having an interpretive centre not on Sable. We can learn about Sable. We can enjoy Sable Island without actually going there. There could be pretty serious impact if the island turns into a big visitors' centre and people are out there on their Sea-Doos in their wetsuits.

I believe in no impact absolutely. No impact sounds great and would absolutely be my preference.

I am admittedly trying to be a bit of a pragmatist here because I did read the testimony at Senate committee. The Nova Scotia government did say ExxonMobil is giving up its rights to drill on this island. Everybody is saying a one nautical mile limit for drilling. There is give and take there. I am putting a lot of faith in the fact that there was a true and honest negotiation, but my preference would be no impact.

Ms. Michelle Rempel (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that the concept of visits to the island came up. While ecological integrity is one of the key tenets of the Canada Parks Act, we want to see that maintained in this legislation. We discussed visitor access; obviously the ecological needs of Sable Island are quite different than, say, those of Banff National Park.

My colleague brought up a potential visitors' centre. Obviously Parks Canada would engage in consultation on this. Given that she is the local representative, I am wondering if she could provide some thoughts on how that could be accomplished, assuming that this legislation passes through the House of Commons. What would be an ideal visitors' centre? Could she tell us what she is hearing from the local community with regard to some of the best elements that should be incorporated in that?

Ms. Megan Leslie: Mr. Speaker, this has captured the imagination of people at home not just in Halifax, but all around the province. Some people have come up with ideas that are crazy and some ideas that are really inspiring. I cannot recall them right now because I was not thinking about preparing them for my speech, but there are great ideas on the ground. People are talking about them. People are excited. Their imaginations are running wild.

Parks Canada needs to consult with folks on the ground, and I know it will do that. Parks Canada is going to be absolutely awed by what it hears from people.

The Deputy Speaker: Resuming debate. I understand we have a request for unanimous consent from the Minister of the Environment. Does the minister have unanimous consent to speak at this time?

Some hon. members: Yes.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of the Environment.

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak in support of Bill S-15, the expansion and conservation of Canada's national parks act.

This bill would bring legal protection to Nova Scotia's Sable Island as Canada's 43rd national park. It is a key action toward the Government of Canada's commitment in its 2011 Speech from the Throne to create significant new protected areas. The passing of this bill would mark the end of the steps to which the Government of Canada agreed, with the Province of Nova Scotia, to designate Sable Island as a national park reserve, and the start of a new iconic national park reserve for all Canadians.

In fact, in October 2011, the hon. member for Central Nova and I were honoured to join with the Premier of Nova Scotia, Darrell Dexter, in Halifax to sign the memorandum of agreement for a national park at Sable Island. I know that each of us shared, that day, a strong sense that not only were we concluding almost 50 years of work to conserve Sable Island, but that we were taking the necessary action to protect this iconic landscape for the benefit of future generations. The dream of protecting Sable Island is a long-standing one that we hope to realize very shortly with the passage of Bill S-15.

As the hon. member for South Shore—St. Margaret's noted earlier in this debate, it was the call of schoolchildren from across Canada to stop the proposed removal of the famous Sable Island horses that resulted in the first federal conservation action in 1961, and, as the Sable Island region became the focus for petroleum development in the late 1960s and early 1970s, organizations stepped forward to draw national attention to the future of the island. During this time, the level of development and human use of the island declined, allowing nature to once again reassert itself.

As someone who has had the honour and the distinct pleasure of visiting Sable Island, I can attest to this House what a special place we are bringing under the protection of our world-class national parks system. In size, Sable Island is tiny in comparison to the 30,000 square kilometres now protected in Nahanni National Park Reserve in the Northwest Territories, thanks to the actions of Parliament in 2009 when it significantly expanded Nahanni. However, from my first-hand experience, I can tell members that it is no less important. Nature indeed has reasserted itself, reclaiming Sable Island as a sanctuary for life on the edge.

As we fly into Sable Island, we cannot help but be impressed by the fact that this isolated sandbar island, located, as my colleagues have said, just under 300 kilometres from Halifax, has survived. It is amazing that it has survived, let alone sustained life. The island is a remarkable formation, not only for its geography as the only remaining exposed portion of the outer continental shelf in the northwest Atlantic, but for its wildlife. Some 190 plant species live there, including 20 that have restricted distribution elsewhere. It is a sanctuary for some 350 species of migratory birds, including the roseate tern that is listed as endangered under the Species at Risk Act. In fact, Sable Island is the breeding ground for virtually the entire world population of the Ipswich sparrow.

Perhaps most famously, Sable Island is home to a band of feral horses. The numbers vary, from year to year and from decade to decade, from 300 to 500 animals. It is one of the few bands in the world that remains entirely unmanaged. These horses were introduced, it is believed, in the 1730s, and were declared protected by the Diefenbaker government in 1961. As a Canadian, as a member of this House and as a visitor to Sable Island, I am proud to stand in this chamber to help conclude the work started back in 1961. What a legacy for this Parliament to leave to future generations.

And, what a legacy passed on from previous generations. As we have heard, Sable Island has a very long human history, some of it tragic. About 350 shipwrecks are recorded there, earning the island the title often referred to of “graveyard of the Atlantic”.

● (2120)

Life-saving stations were established there over 200 years ago and in subsequent years lighthouses and shelters for shipwrecked sailors were built, much attributed to the resourcefulness and determination of Canadians. Thanks to the professional expertise of Parks Canada, we will continue to tell these stories and will continue to share them with Canadians and people around the world.

The bill before us amends schedule 2 of the Canada National Parks Act to add the legal boundary description of Sable Island National Park Reserve of Canada. Using the national park reserve designation respects the ongoing discussions that the federal government is having with the Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia under the Made-in-Nova Scotia Process. The Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia support the national park reserve designation for Sable Island. The Government of Canada is committed to negotiating an agreement with the Mi'kmaq once the Made-in-Nova Scotia Process is completed in order to transition Sable Island to final full national park status.

Until that agreement is finalized, Sable Island would remain a national park reserve. I wish to stress that a national park reserve enjoys all the same protections that a national park does while respecting assertions of aboriginal or treaty rights. It is not a lesser category of national park. Some of our iconic parks, such as the Nahanni, in the Northwest Territories, and Gwaii Haanas and Pacific Rim on the west coast, are also still national park reserves. Nor is this time limited. We will not effect the transition to a full-fledged national park until we have concluded our work with the Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia.

As we heard, Sable Island is located in one of the largest offshore hydrocarbon basins in North America. I know that during this debate I heard again this evening concern expressed about the future of Sable Island and the petroleum activities that may be permitted within this region. However, at the end of the day, given that Sable Island National Park Reserve is being created in a region that is the subject of active petroleum exploration and development, I believe that our government and the Government of Nova Scotia have negotiated an approach to Sable Island that balances conservation and development in creating Canada's 43rd national park.

Members should consider what we would be accomplishing with this bill as it pertains to Sable Island. We would be creating a new and exciting park reserve on Sable Island that would conserve one of the largest dune systems in eastern Canada, habitat for endangered species and of course for the wild horses of Sable.

We would be protecting the asserted aboriginal rights and title of the Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia while launching a new collaboration between Parks Canada and the Mi'kmaq. For the first time we would be putting in place a legislative ban on exploratory and extractive drilling for petroleum resources from the surface of Sable Island. We would be creating a legislated buffer zone around the national park reserve that prohibits drilling from the park boundary, which would be considered the shoreline at low tide, out one nautical mile.

We would be legally limiting the number of current petroleum-related activities that can be undertaken from Sable Island while directing those activities, if authorized, have low impact. I would be glad to speak to that in questions after these remarks. We would be putting in place a legislative requirement for the Offshore Petroleum Board to consult Parks Canada before consideration of any permits for this low-impact activity on Sable Island.

Finally, we would be providing opportunities for Canadians to experience and learn about Sable Island, whether by visiting the island itself or learning through various media.

At this time, I would like to echo the remarks of previous speakers in thanking the holders of petroleum discovery licences on or near Sable Island who voluntarily agreed to amendments that now fully and in perpetuity prevent them from drilling on the island and within the buffer zone of one nautical mile.

I too want to express my sincere appreciation to the Minister of Natural Resources and the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans for their work in helping to create a national park reserve on Sable Island.

● (2125)

I want to again express my sincere appreciation to the Province of Nova Scotia for working with us from day one to realize this new national park reserve.

I would like to assure this House that for Parks Canada, Bill S-15 would be but a first step as it takes on administration of the island and begins to deepen the connection Canadians make with this remote place in the northwest Atlantic Ocean.

In the coming years, the agency would work with partners and shareholders to protect this land of wild horses and windswept dunes, of shipwrecks and sea birds. The wild character of this island would continue to be a defining feature for those who make the once-in-a-lifetime journey there.

I have heard questions of mild concern to this effect, but Parks Canada would carefully facilitate experience opportunities while protecting the special place in perpetuity for the benefit of present and future generations.

At the same time that Parks Canada maintained Sable Island's ecological integrity, it would consult with the public and it would work with partners and stakeholders to prepare a management plan to guide all aspects of the future management of this wonderful national park reserve.

Now I wish to briefly describe the other proposed amendments to the Canada National Parks Act made in the second part of the bill.

First, with regard to the other proposed amendments in the second part of this bill, the bill before us would address issues raised by the standing joint committee for the scrutiny of regulations, in particular to correct the discrepancies between the English and the French versions of subsection 4(1). These changes are minor in nature. They would not alter the meaning of the clause.

The bill would also add a new subsection 4(1.1), which clarifies the authority of the Minister of the Environment to use section 23 or section 24 of the Parks Canada Agency Act to set fees in national parks.

In fact, an amendment to this bill in the Senate brought greater clarity to these changes. The bill would make changes affecting two national parks in western Canada. It would make minor changes to commercial zoning in the community of Field, British Columbia, in Yoho National Park, to reflect the current reality in Field while at the same time respecting the commercial limits established for that community and the community plan.

Finally, the last set of amendments is that Bill S-15 would change the leasehold boundaries of the Marmot Basin ski area that is within Jasper National Park of Canada by removing an area that is an important wildlife habitat for woodland caribou, for mountain goat, for grizzly bear and for wolverine in exchange for a smaller area of less ecologically sensitive land. This would result in a significant gain for the ecological integrity of Jasper National Park.

The Government of Canada is proud to table this bill to formally establish a Sable Island national park reserve of Canada, and to give this national treasure the highest level of environmental protection in the country. Sable Island would join with other places that have become Canada's premier natural and cultural icons in a national parks system that covers more than 326,000 square kilometres, an area that is 4 times the size of Lake Superior and that celebrates the infinite beauty and the variety of our land.

Bill S-15 marks the third time our government has brought before Parliament a legislative proposal to increase the size of Canada's internationally acclaimed network of national parks and national marine conservation areas.

In fact, in May 2011, Parks Canada was awarded the prestigious Gift to the Earth award by World Wildlife Fund, its highest accolade to applaud conservation work of outstanding merit. In recognizing a conservation action as a gift to the earth, WWF highlights both environmental leadership and inspiring conservation achievement, which contribute to the protection of our shared living world.

The Gift to the Earth award recognizes Parks Canada's conservation leadership and its globally outstanding track record in creating new protected areas and in embracing precedent-setting aboriginal participation in the establishment and the management of our protected areas.

● (2130)

I would like to briefly speak to some of these new protected areas, which would soon see Sable Island among them.

In 2009, Parliament unanimously passed legislation resulting in a sixfold expansion of Nahanni National Park Reserve, bringing the park to 30,000 square kilometres in size.

It was remarked in the House that this was the conservation achievement of a generation, one that was accomplished with the close collaboration of the Dehcho First Nations. Designated one of the planet's first world heritage sites, this expanded park now protects in perpetuity significant habitat for grizzly bear, caribou and Dall sheep, as well as the famed South Nahanni River.

A year later, after a parliamentary review, the Gwaii Haanas National Marine Conservation Area Reserve and Haida Heritage Site became the first marine protected area to be scheduled under the Canada National Marine Conservation Areas Act. In a global first, this new marine protected area, along with the existing Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve and Haida Heritage Site, protects a contiguous area that extends from alpine mountaintops right down to the bottom of the ocean floor—a rich temperate rainforest and its adjoining marine ecosystem now protected for the benefit of future generations. All of this was accomplished as we worked hand in hand with the people of the Haida Nation.

It is important to note that our government has not only worked to protect large or remote natural areas such as Nahanni, Gwaii Haanas and Sable Island, but we are also working to protect endangered habitat and species and to conserve some of the last large remaining natural areas in more developed settings.

In 2011, the government announced the purchase of the historic Dixon family ranch lands of the Frenchman River Valley, in southwest Saskatchewan, in order to protect it for future generations as part of Grasslands National Park of Canada.

This land acquisition of approximately 111 square kilometres within the west block of Grasslands National Park's existing boundary is significant for its spectacular scenery and its native grasslands, which includes critical habitat for species at risk.

Allow me to quote the hon. member for Edmonton—Spruce Grove, when she observed:

> This vast, windswept prairie was home to millions of free-roaming bison prior to European settlement. With the re-introduction of bison—an icon of the prairie—the park will restore grazing to this mixed-grass prairie ecosystem, enhance the long-term integrity of the park and once again give Canadians the opportunity to view these symbols of the prairie after over a century's absence in this area.

It is these kinds of actions that speak to the power of our national parks. Not only do they protect the natural areas that have been handed down from generations before us, but they also provide us with the opportunity to restore what might have been lost.

Again to Grasslands National Park, in 2009, Parks Canada reintroduced the black-footed ferret, a species that had disappeared from this region more than 70 years ago.

Finally, I am particularly proud of our government's initiative to bring the message of protected areas and conservation to the Rouge Valley of Toronto.

In the 2011 Speech from the Throne, our government announced that it would work to create a national urban park, the first national urban park in Canada, in the Rouge Valley. This is an important initiative that would help increase the profile and public investment in urban conservation. I am also proud of the fact that our government will invest over $143 million, over 10 years, for park development and interim operations, with an annual budget of $7.6 million to continue operations.

The overall size of a Sable Island national park reserve and Rouge Urban National Park are not as large as our great northern and Rocky Mountain national parks, but they are no less important. They complement the mandate of large protected areas by focusing on some of our most endangered ecosystems, and they provide yet another opportunity to inspire people to take action to conserve their local natural areas.

Passage of Bill S-15 would ensure that the natural and cultural features of a Sable Island national park reserve of Canada would be protected forever, for the enjoyment, the appreciation and the benefit of current and future generations of Canadians.

I hope that hon. members across both sides of this House will join me in supporting Bill S-15.

● (2135)

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am grateful for the opportunity to pose a question to the minister. My question is about a very specific piece of the legislation. I am going to read from the bill as follows:

> Existing leases, easements and licences of occupation in or on Sable Island National Park Reserve of Canada are continued under this Act....

I am not quite sure I understand why existing leases are continuing. In the minister's speech he talked about the protection of Sable Island. He also talked about development, as my colleague from Sackville—Eastern Shore pointed out to me. That sends a red flag to me when he is talking about development in his speech about creating a national park. It brings me to this piece about the existing leases and easements being held. I do not have a problem with easements, but not so leases being held. I wonder if he can explain that section and what exactly it means for us.

● (2140)

Hon. Peter Kent: Mr. Speaker, it is good to have concerns when one is uncertain of the implication of the language, either in the bill or in the offshore boards agreement. However I can assure my colleague that the Canada-Nova Scotia Offshore Petroleum Board can occasionally call an issue for bids a time to consider subsurface. The surface rights have been completely given up by those lease holders, but as you know, as has been remarked in debate, this is one of the largest offshore basins in North America. There are, at different levels, reserves under the island and near the island.

The last time a company undertook a seismic program on the island, as I said earlier today, it was observed by Zoe Lucas who is probably the foremost authority on the natural environment on the island and what is necessary to protect the habitat and the species there. A company undertook what is called a 3-D seismic program, where it temporarily installed listening devices and mild vibrating devices to provide a sound source. No explosives were used, no air guns were used, no drilling was permitted, nor will any drilling be permitted in the future. However this low impact activity provides for examination of the subsurface and, as you know, we have been discussing the rights of the oil companies.

When you stand on Sable Island today and look in two different directions, you can see the large, modern offshore rigs, which are operating outside this buffer zone, and their horizontal drilling is capable of accessing any new pools they may find under the island. They will not be allowed and have given up all rights to do any drilling on the island.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for coming and speaking tonight. One of our concerns is regarding the extent and oversight of natural resource development that Bill S-15 would authorize. These include petroleum exploration activities, which might include seismic, geologic or geophysical programs on Sable Island.

I am wondering if the minister could describe what is meant by seismic. People are concerned that only one study has been done to explore the impacts of seismic testing. Could he describe what seismic impacts are possible on the ocean and wildlife?

Second, I am going to ask very directly that this park created among oil and gas exploration will not be used as a foot in the door, an opening or a setting of precedent to allow development in our treasured national parks. Minister, do I have your word?

The Deputy Speaker: Before the hon. Minister of the Environment answers, this is the third time that comments have been directed to a member. The minister has done it. The member for Etobicoke North has now done it. All direct comments should come through the Chair.

The Minister of the Environment.

Hon. Peter Kent: Mr. Speaker, that is a thoughtful question. Just to follow on from my earlier answer, the seismic technology which may be contemplated today, and there is no certainty of when or at what time this might take place, is very different from the seismic technology of years past.

I look forward to watching and listening with the member when Ms. Lucas testifies at committee, I hope next week. She observed and, I suggest, may have guided those technicians who worked on the island in the past. She made very clear notes in a report, which stated in part, "in general, the seismic program had limited and short-term impact on Sable Island". She said that the code of practice with the survey company indicated that any group operating on this island would be expected to comply with similar guidelines.

With regard to the reality of the continuing exploration and development, as I have said, there are big offshore rigs around the waters of Sable Island. Again, they are under the oversight of the National Energy Board and the offshore board. Their practices are very closely monitored and, in fact, from time to time, when weather presents a risk to those platforms, the workers on the platforms are allowed to take shelter on Sable Island temporarily.

The creation of this park, and the government of Nova Scotia recognizes this and the Mi'kmaq have expressed the same satisfaction, will protect now and forever the onshore development of unacceptable industrial or human presence. Any visits to the island will be very controlled by Parks Canada as they are in other sensitive areas.

● (2145)

Ms. Joan Crockatt (Calgary Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as we know, this is very important legislation, watershed legislation, that I think all Canadians will celebrate. One of the things we love about our national parks is they give us places to go, where we can sort of transcend our daily lives and really enjoy nature and expand our own horizons.

I would like the minister to address this issue and give Canadians a sense of what they are getting. This government, I understand, has protected more natural parkland than any government in Canadian history. We should be celebrating that and I would like to hear about that from the minister.

Hon. Peter Kent: Mr. Speaker, in my previous assignment with Foreign Affairs, travelling the world and visiting a number of very exotic places, it was remarkable how often those entrusted with the protection and conservation of special places in those countries remarked that many of their practices had been modelled on the work of Parks Canada over the past century and a quarter. Banff National Park was created just over a century and a quarter ago. The National Parks Act dates back just over a century.

I thank my colleague for the opportunity to remark on the accomplishments of the past seven years. Nahanni, which I spoke to in my remarks, and Nááts'ihch'oh on the northern boundary of Nahanni have been created. However, more important, I am encouraged and delighted by the ambition of some of our environmental non-governmental organizations that want us to press on, perhaps faster than we have the capacity to achieve.

With regard to our national marine-protected areas, the major areas already protected by Parks Canada are the Haida reserve, Gwaii Haanas, Lake Superior, the largest freshwater protected space in the world, Saguenay-St. Lawrence in the St. Lawrence River and Tobermory's famous Fathom Five. We are working on three new marine-protected areas at the moment in the south Georgia Strait, the Îles de la Madeleine and Lancaster Sound in the High Arctic.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to say that I will be sharing my time with my very esteemed colleague, the member for Nanaimo—Cowichan.

How could I not begin by speaking out against the 42nd time allocation motion imposed by the Conservative government? It is truly shameful because we agree with the overall intention of this bill.

I will focus mainly on the case of Sable Island and on giving it national park status. That is basically a very good idea, but since the devil is in the details, with all due respect to our Conservative colleagues, we would like to work with them as equals to examine these details and find common ground.

Unfortunately, our time will be limited, which is truly a shame. Clearly, we will not use our parliamentary privilege to talk our colleagues' ears off. All we are asking is that the Conservatives listen to our legitimate concerns, our proposals and any other reasonable issue that deserves to be debated in the House. Unfortunately, we will have to make do with what we have.

The Conservatives have a majority in the House. Good for them. Although they may abuse their power, we will continue to work and, more importantly, we will get behind a bill that has a number of positive aspects.

As a proud Canadian who was born in Quebec and still lives there today, I will talk about Sable Island, which is a rather mythical place in the minds of all Canadians. Who has not heard of Sable Island, this thin and fragile strip of sand off the coast of Nova Scotia? The island is home to many animals, including the mythical herd of wild horses. It is an idyllic place. It is also a national treasure whose reputation extends far beyond our borders.

I repeat: it is a wonderful idea to make Sable Island a national park and to provide it with the protection that comes with that status.

However, the hon. member for Halifax, a strong advocate for this issue, has pointed out a serious problem. Unfortunately, major environmental protections at the federal level have been weakened and even gutted, which is a great cause for concern and which undermines national park status.

I will not talk about that because it has been debated. I am certain that some of my colleagues will want to expand on that.

I will talk instead about the national park status. With that status, Sable Island will become the responsibility of Parks Canada, which will supervise and operate it. I will also talk about the lack of funding. No matter the value that we place on this bill, the lack of funding ultimately makes it a hollow bill, unless we at least restore some means to ensure that the island is protected and studied in order to acquire the knowledge we need about this magnificent natural place.

To illustrate this point, I will talk about my riding, Beauport—Limoilou. It is home to an important element of our history that is the responsibility of Parks Canada. I am referring to Cartier-Brébeuf Park, which history and archeology have identified as the first spot where Jacques Cartier wintered back in the 16th century.

● (2150)

Cartier-Brébeuf Park, which is now located in downtown Quebec City, on the shore of the St. Charles River, is a place that I remember well. When I was in high school, I went there on a school trip. I also visited it with my son after settling in Limoilou. In the winter, I think we enjoyed drinking a cedar bark brew. I do not remember it well because it was about 20 years ago. My son was a young boy at the time. It was an aboriginal recipe that helped Jacques Cartier and his crew survive the terrible Canadian winters and the ravages of scurvy, among other things.

It is very important that we preserve such an asset because it is a source of pride, not to mention knowledge. When we know where we come from, we have a greater understanding of ourselves and we have certain basic tools to guide us. The historical perspective is key. It is very easy to lose track of the past, of artifacts and material aspects of our history, which are fragile and few. These objects are part of our heritage.

This year, there will be no more interpretive guides at Cartier-Brébeuf park. Everything will be done with interpretive signs or audio-guides. People will go around with their earphones. It is an appealing method, from a technical standpoint. It is a very interesting innovation, but ultimately, nothing can replace a human being or the interaction that can mean so much to both the visitors and the interpretive guides. I can say that based on my experience at a heritage site in Lotbinière.

Nothing can replace that interaction between the visitors and the interpretive guides, who can offer so much more to the visitors. They can answer questions, or if they are asked a question that they cannot answer, they can expand their knowledge and come back with even more information to share with visitors. It is really dismaying to see this place—one of the spots where the French presence was first felt in Canada—being abandoned like this.

At the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, I have often asked what the point is of passing a bill if we do not have the means to put it into effect and ensure that it will be fairly and thoroughly implemented.

It is true that Bill S-15 could be very promising. However, biodiversity in Canada is on the decline, particularly marine biodiversity, and in the case of Sable Island specifically, if we do not have the means to fulfill this bill's ambitions, it will all be for naught. It will be a disgrace for us because we are passing this legacy on to future generations, and it is a rich, fragile legacy.

I also wanted to talk about the drop in visitors to our national parks. I used to be the proud critic for small business and tourism, a position that is now held by my nearby colleague. We have both noticed a dramatic drop in the number of foreign tourists. We can draw the same conclusion, be it regarding Parks Canada or foreign tourists: unfortunately, we are not doing what it takes to spark people's interest, draw them in, welcome them and help them enjoy a one-of-a-kind experience.

At the same time, we agree with the purpose of Bill S-15 and we agree to support it at second reading, but will the means follow? Can the government reassure us that they will? I have serious doubts.

● (2155)

Mr. Chris Alexander (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Beauport—Limoilou for his speech. I hope he took some comfort from the parliamentary secretary's very detailed speech. We all agree that the heritage value of Sable Island is absolutely unique, especially for the French fact in North America and in Canada.

I would like to ask my colleague a simple question. How can he claim that the government is neglecting Sable Island when the government is giving it its full attention? This evening the minister also focused on it at length, through the bill. Moreover, his colleague from Halifax also appreciates what we are undertaking here. Perhaps we should set aside our partisan agendas in this case.

● (2200)

Mr. Raymond Côté: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. I must admit to a personal interest in the subject. Parks Canada represents not just our national parks, but also our archaeological and historical heritage. I trained as an archivist, and I worked as one for about two years in the 1990s, when the situation was quite terrible. I can see the devastation caused by the closure of centres and the job cuts to archaeologists, archivists and all kinds of specialists at Parks Canada in Quebec.

I am sorry to say I have no confidence in the government, especially after seeing the results of the indirect damage these measures have wreaked in Quebec. In Quebec City, where I live, the archives and private historical societies that benefited so much from the expertise of Parks Canada have all been affected. I do not feel confident. In addition, approximately 600 biologist and tour guide positions were eliminated nationwide at Parks Canada. I stand by what I said. Obviously, the money is not coming.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech. My question is about Bill S-15. I am very worried about the fact that the bill, which would create a new national park on Nova Scotia's Sable Island, is a real threat.

[*English*]

The more I think about it, I think the perfect analogy is that this is a Trojan Horse. It is as though we are getting a new gift, a new national park, and we should all be very happy to see it. While I am happy to see a large wooden horse coming into the courtyard, I suspect that the regulatory authorities that will remain with the Canada-Nova Scotia Offshore Petroleum Board will amount to a surging army that undoes the protection of other national parks across Canada.

I would like my hon. colleague's comments.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raymond Côté: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Saanich—Gulf Islands for her question and comments. We have to wonder whether this is a rearguard fight. Are we taking a step backwards by making some seemingly limited concessions in the hopes of making progress in certain areas?

I will focus only on the issue of the low-impact development that would be authorized. One of the problems with the bill is that this expression has not been defined. What does “low impact” mean? There is no shortage of possibilities. The bill is far too vague.

[*English*]

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Beauport—Limoilou for sharing his time with me and for ably outlining both his support for the bill and his concerns.

Others have mentioned it, but just to put it in context, New Democrats will support the bill at second reading. However, as the member for Halifax outlined, we have a number of concerns. What we are talking about is the fact that the bill, which proposes making Sable Island Canada's 43rd national park, has the support of national and local environmental groups. However, there are a number of concerns with respect to drafting. It requires study at committee.

The bill would ban drilling within one nautical mile of the island as well as drilling on the surface of the island. Unusually, exploration activities would be allowed on the island, a first for a national park. These exploration activities would be limited to those that are low impact. However, this term is currently undefined.

Parks Canada would also have to be consulted by the Canada-Nova Scotia Offshore Petroleum Board before permits for petroleum-related activities could be issued. The board would be given the discretion to include conditions for mitigation or remedial measures for the company to address with respect to the impact of the proposed project on the park.

It is not just New Democrats who are raising concerns that need to be considered at committee. CPAWS testified at the Senate committee, but it also issued a press release, which stated:

> In our view, it is unacceptable to allow oil and gas exploration inside a national park.... Even low-impact activities can be detrimental to such a sensitive ecosystem, and we need to take all necessary precautions to ensure that the ecological integrity of the island is the management priority.
>
> To ensure that conservation remains the top priority for the management of the island, CPAWS continues to advocate for developing off-site visitor experiences, limits to visitor numbers, continued scientific research on the island, and restrictions on oil and gas development.

I am going to turn to the west coast, because although we have very different ecosystems, there are some commonalities that are important to highlight in the context of talking about Sable Island. I want to start by pointing to a report by the Royal Society of Canada in 2009. CBC reported on this in 2012, with the headline "Canada failing its oceans, biodiversity panel finds". It went on to say:

> An expert panel investigating the state of Canadian marine biodiversity has accused the government of failing to protect the country's oceans, leaving marine life threatened and the nation's ocean species at risk.

It is talking about risk to Chinook salmon, which, of course, are iconic on the west coast. It is related to national parks, because these protected areas provide avenues for biodiversity to flourish, and when we do not do a good job of protecting them, and we talk about things like potential exploratory drilling for oil and gas, we start to wonder whether the priority is the protection of the environment. The story went on to say:

> "It leaves huge discretionary powers to the minister of Fisheries and Oceans, who is given no science-based guidelines, targets or principles," the report said. "The panel found not lack of knowledge or lack of sound policy, but a consistent, disheartening lack of action on well-established knowledge and best-practice and policies, some of which have been around for years".

It goes on to say that among the species the panel listed at being at risk of extinction is the Chinook salmon.

When we are talking about protected areas and national parks, I want to give a couple of examples from my area of the country. They are instructive in terms of both the actions that have been taken to protect these areas and the continuing risks. These are in the context of what we need to consider with regard to Sable Island.

I want to start with the southern Strait of Georgia. This is from a report called "How Deep Did Canada Dare?" One of the interesting things they did was rate these protected areas. In the particular case of the Southern Strait of Georgia, the report says that progress has been significant but conservation measures remain uncertain.

That is part of the concern that has been raised with regard to Sable Island. What will those conservation measures look like? Will there be enough resources put in place? Will Parks Canada, Environment Canada and Fisheries and Oceans do their part to ensure the ongoing protection of this very special area? I think most Canadians have heard of Sable Island

● (2205)

With regard to the southern Strait of Georgia, I want to point out a couple of important facts. CPAWS says:

> Although Parks Canada and the BC government have been working on the feasibility study for over 10 years, it is still not completed. In the meantime, the Southern Strait of Georgia is open to intensive shipping and heavy recreational fishing use. While the Canadian and BC governments have agreed to proceed with the NMCA [the National Marine Conservation Area], no specific protection measures have yet been outlined. We are also concerned that a vaguely defined and "phased approach" to establishment may be used, which would leave much of the area unprotected for years to come.

I come back to some of the language around low impact on Sable Island. The same kind of concerns are being raised. Low impact has not been defined, and we have the same kinds of issues around a vaguely defined phased approach.

These are questions that need to be asked at committee about more definition, more targets and more timelines.

What is at stake when we are talking about the southern Strait of Georgia?

> [T]his body of water between the southern BC mainland and Vancouver Island has long been revered for its role in nurturing both human and natural ecosystems. It includes critical habitat of the federally endangered southern resident killer whale and many fish species, including rock fish, lingcod and herring.
>
> Approximately two million shorebirds and seabirds use the region's estuaries, tidal flats and coastal waters as summering, staging and wintering grounds. Harbour seals are year-round residents. Steller and California sea lions are present during the winter months. Many "world giants" make their home here, such as the world's largest octopus, sea urchin, nudibranch, anemone, intertidal clam, sea star, scallop and barnacle.

CPAWS goes on in the article to talk about the human threat to this very important ecosystem. One of them, aside from urbanization and increased shipping, is the threat of increased oil tanker traffic through the area.

The sad thing about this is that in 1971, the federal government reported that "the Gulf Islands and the Saanich Inlet area should become a National Marine Park. The area is in the process of rapid development, so prompt action is required if its natural charm is to be preserved".

Then for 25 years, there was no progress. It was only because of organizations like CPAWS, which spearheaded the development of the southern Strait of Georgia marine conservation network, that it brought together a coalition to work on this special area. Of course, part of this is on the boundary of my riding of Nanaimo—Cowichan. The people where I live really care about the health of the waters around our area and are concerned about making sure that we all take seriously our responsibility for protection and preservation.

I want to touch on another special area outside of my riding called the Hecate Strait glass sponge reefs. These are special reefs. The goal of CPAWS and others is "full legal, long-term protection as an Oceans Act Marine Protected Area and designated by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site for the Glass Sponge Reefs in Hecate Strait and Queen Charlotte Sound".

The reason I raise this is because this is such a unique area. CPAWS talks about the uniqueness of it in this report. It says:

> These unique marine animals were first discovered off the coast of BC in the 1980s and are the only known living glass sponge reefs of this size anywhere in the world.

We have something so special in British Columbia. The Hecate Strait glass sponge reefs are estimated to be 9,000 years old and reach 25 metres in height, the size of an eight-storey building.

The reason I bring this up in the context of Sable Island is because we know what is damaging these fragile ecosystems, the glass sponge reefs. Some steps have been taken. The bottom trawling that was seriously damaging these reefs was finally halted, but it has not stopped some of the sedimentation and some of the trawling that is impacting on this fragile area outside of the protected zone.

When people are looking at Sable Island and the protection zone around it of one nautical mile, they need to carefully think about whether activities just outside of that one-nautical-mile zone are going to impact on the health and well-being of Sable Island.

I am pleased to be able to bring these facts forward for consideration in the House. I hope that there is a full debate at committee. I hope we will hear from witnesses at committee so as to consider some of these implications.

● (2210)

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am going to ask the member a question. So far tonight, I have asked the parliamentary secretary a question, I have raised my concerns with the member for Halifax and I have asked the minister a question and spoken to him.

My concern is regarding a slippery slope.

Sable Island is being created in the middle of oil and gas exploration. I want to be assured that this is not setting a precedent or creating an opening or a foot in the door that will result in development in future parks.

I wonder what my colleague thinks about this.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, I am going to use the glass sponge reef again. A very similar concern has been raised.

CPAWS raised the issue that if the moratorium on oil and gas exploration and development off the B.C. coast is lifted, offshore oil and gas activities surrounding the reefs could threaten their future health as these activities would increase the shipping of oil. That could lead to spills, which would threaten the reef's long-term survival.

The member is absolutely right to raise that issue. We are facing that issue in many cases off the coast of British Columbia, where we have, for example, a proposed northern gateway pipeline that is under review. That will increase oil tanker traffic. We have also had the commissioner for sustainability and the environment raise serious concerns about our ability to contain oil spills. Once that oil is in the environment, we know from the experiences with the *Exxon Valdez* that it is not an easy matter to clean these spills up. The long-term impacts on such fragile ecosystems is unimaginable.

It is very important that those factors be considered at committee.

● (2215)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nycole Turmel (Hull—Aylmer, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I understand the concerns my two colleagues have about maintenance, oversight and the resources that are required for creating a park, in light of what has happened in a number of parks across Canada.

I would like my colleague to share her impressions of my bill, which would protect Gatineau Park, a park that many people know and use in the national capital region. I would like her to talk about how much people love this park, which is truly in an urban setting.

I heard the Minister of the Environment say that it was wonderful to have a park in an urban area. We have this wonderful opportunity to have one very close to us.

Can my colleague share her opinion on this?

[*English*]

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, one of the things about Canada is that we are so blessed to have these incredible spaces that are readily available. They are not only out in the wild. In British Columbia we have some incredible, beautiful, remote places, but we are lucky to have urban parks as well. These urban parks mean that citizens or residents do not have to travel for hours and have pots of money to be able to do those kinds of things.

It is very important to protect the parks that are closer to urban centres. They give us an opportunity to connect young people with the importance of protecting these areas so that they can experience them and see them first-hand. Hopefully, they will also take up the cause as they grow older, in terms of advocating for protection and the appropriate resources to look after the parks and facilities available to us.

I would absolutely agree with the member for Hull—Aylmer that it is very important to designate not only the beautiful places like Sable Island but some of the urban park areas as well.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth (Kitchener Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is indeed my privilege today to rise in this House for the purpose of expressing my support for Bill S-15 and, in particular, for taking the action necessary to protect Sable Island as a national park reserve under the Canada National Parks Act.

Throughout this debate and subsequent examination of Bill S-15 by a committee of the House, we are being asked to preside over an historic event: the creation of a new national park.

This is a unique opportunity for all the members of this House. In effect, we are being asked to make a clear and conscious decision to protect Sable Island for all time. We are being handed the opportunity to pass on to future generations this iconic island with its famed wild horses and important wildlife habitat. We are providing to our children a legacy of a natural area and all its inherent stories for them to enjoy and to pass on to the next generation.

It might seem at first glance that this is a rather short and inconspicuous piece of legislation, but in reality this is the key to ensuring that Sable Island will, as the dedication clause in the Canada National Parks Act states, be dedicated to the people of Canada for their benefit, education and enjoyment and be maintained and made use of so as to leave it unimpaired for the enjoyment of many future generations.

I stand in this House in support of making that decision by speaking in favour of Bill S-15.

I can only imagine standing on the beaches of Sable Island, wondering how this island came to be. I can imagine asking how it is that in the midst of the Atlantic Ocean, perched on a lonely outcrop of the continental shelf, this sandbar survives all the ocean can pound it with.

How is it that so many ships came to their last port of call on Sable Island as one of hundreds of shipwrecks? How is it that horses and endangered birds survive on this desolate outpost of dunes and sparse vegetation? What sheer idealism moves some of the current residents to spend months out here, guarding this island on behalf of all Canadians?

I look forward to the initiatives that Parks Canada is going to undertake to share the rich story of Sable Island and to answer these and other questions.

Perhaps a more direct question to consider this evening as we debate the proposal to protect Sable Island under the Canada National Parks Act is how we got to the point of designating Sable Island as a national park forever.

Early conservation efforts regarding Sable Island were merely targeted and reactive. As we have heard, the government passed regulations as long ago as 1961 to protect the horses of Sable Island from being removed from the island. These were called the Sable Island Regulations, and they specifically protected the island through restrictions aimed at controlling access and controlling certain types of activities.

In the late 1960s, the Department of Transport put an end to plans to remove mineral-rich sands from the surface of this island, even after the entire island had already been staked.

The story goes on. A more forward-looking conservation approach to Sable Island was first adopted in 1977, when Sable Island was designated as a migratory bird sanctuary under the Migratory Bird Convention Act. The purpose of this designation was to protect migratory birds, including their nests and eggs, a very important thing to do.

However, a migratory bird sanctuary in itself does not protect the other wildlife species or their habitat on Sable Island. In addition, the regulations only apply when migratory birds are actually nesting, so they are not an effective conservation tool for the rest of the year.

Things continued to develop and, more recently, specific areas of the island have also been designated as "critical habitat" for the endangered roseate tern under the Species at Risk Act.

● (2220)

Then, in 1998, working with the Province of Nova Scotia and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, Environment Canada's Canadian Wildlife Service prepared a key document entitled "Conservation Strategy for Sable Island". The overall goal was to set a framework for the preservation of the physical integrity and biological diversity of Sable Island. I note that it was initiated under a former government.

It was observed that the island had been used by humans for over 400 years and that this use had in fact changed the island, permanently altering its pre-contact ecosystem, yet it was time to develop a conservation strategy to define the environmental limits within which future activities should proceed.

In brief, the essence of the strategy was to protect the existing terrain from human-induced destabilization and to conserve the island's flora and fauna. That was 1998.

Of particular interest to our debate tonight is the part of the strategy dealing with the legal designation of Sable Island. The authors of the document observed that while the application of the Sable Island Regulations and the Migratory Birds Convention Act,

> ...have been relatively effective in protecting Sable Island, there are many parts of the island's natural environment which, at present, do not receive adequate protection under the law.

As a result, the strategy wisely recommended that enhanced legal protection should be sought that provides more comprehensive protection to the island's natural value. That is what we have been moving toward all of these years.

Finally, in June 2008, under the present government, work to designate Sable Island as a federal protected area was first announced by the hon. member for Ottawa West—Nepean. At that time, he announced funding under the health of the oceans initiative to maintain a year-round weather station on Sable Island.

I believe it is worth recounting the words of the hon. member from that day. This is what he said:

> We believe that it is in the best interest of Canadians to ensure that Sable Island is preserved for generations to come.... Today's announcement is further proof of our Government's commitment to protecting and preserving our environment in Atlantic Canada.

These were prescient words, because with that announcement the journey to this very evening and to Bill S-15 was under way.

It was in 2009, as the Government of Canada and the Province of Nova Scotia were discussing progress on the protection of Sable Island, that the idea of protecting the island as a national park was first introduced.

In January 2010, the two governments signed a memorandum of understanding, an MOU, respecting the establishment of a federal protected area on Sable Island in the province of Nova Scotia. Finally, after all those years, a government was willing to move.

Recognizing that Sable Island possesses national significance, the two governments agreed to work together to determine if Sable Island should be protected as a national wildlife area under the Canada Wildlife Act or as a national park under the Canada National Parks Act.

By the terms of the agreement, the governments appointed a task force for the purpose of recommending which type of federally protected area should be embraced. This was going to be a well-thought-out process.

It is important to note that from day one of the process, the MOU between the two governments was clear that:

> ...no recommendation regarding the potential designation or creation of a federal protected area for Sable Island will have an adverse impact on Canada's or Nova Scotia's interest in offshore petroleum resources including those in the Sable Island area....

● (2225)

It was clear from the start that, no matter what type of protected area was recommended, it had to take into account the existence of the Canada-Nova Scotia Offshore Petroleum Resource Accord Implementation Act, a mouthful, but really something that took precedence over all other federal legislation in this region, previously negotiated with the province, and of course it had to also take into account the role of the offshore petroleum board itself.

What came next in this rather fascinating history of development? It was on Earth Day, April 22, 2010, that the Canada-Nova Scotia Sable Island Task Force recommended to the Government of Canada and the province of Nova Scotia that Sable Island should be designated as a national park under the Canada National Parks Act. In comparing the two types of federal protected areas, the task force concluded that the national park designation would convey a number of additional public benefits.

First, as a national park, Sable Island would be protected and presented within a national network of national parks and would be recognized as one of Canada's premier natural and cultural icons.

Second, while petroleum resources would remain available to industry offshore, a national park places a stronger emphasis on the protection from exploitation and development of non-petroleum resources found in the subsurface of Sable Island.

Next, as a national park, the designation brings a stronger emphasis to the conservation and preservation of archeological and cultural resources, also an important factor.

Finally, the diversity of program objectives required in a national park, which include protection, visitor experience and engagement with stakeholders, would better serve to maintain a year-round human presence on the island.

In its conclusion, the task force noted something that many associated with Sable Island have come to learn, and that is the strong appreciation and passion and depth of interest that citizens share for the future of Sable Island. It was also clear through the work of the task force that all the sectors were committed to achieve a renewed future for Sable Island.

Perhaps that speaks to what we are trying to accomplish with Bill S-15, and that is a renewed future for Sable Island.

In May 2010, the two governments announced their decision to undertake consultations and to negotiate an agreement for the designation and protection of Sable Island under the Canada National Parks Act.

We might ask what the public thought of this idea, turning Sable Island into a national park. This is quite an important consideration as we consider the merits of Bill S-15. During the summer of 2010, Parks Canada held three open houses in Halifax, where more than 200 people attended. Many took the time to have in-depth discussions with Parks Canada staff and to submit written submissions, online submissions, emails, letters and telephone messages in response to Parks Canada's web page, newsletter and advertisements.

Members will be astounded to learn that Parks Canada received more than 2,800 responses, including 235 detailed submissions. As Parks Canada observed in its report on these consultations, the volume and quality of responses Parks Canada received are testament to the strong link that many Nova Scotians and Canadians across this country feel for this very special place. Furthermore, the agency noted, “Sable Island and its isolated sand dunes hold a special place in the hearts and minds of Canadians”.

Nova Scotians, among whom I have my roots, feel a particular tie to Sable, as it figures prominently in their history and looms large in their imagination.

● (2230)

The passion and great interest Canadians have in Sable Island was evident in the submissions Parks Canada received from across Canada and even from abroad expressing support and highlighting ideas, concerns and vision for the future of Sable Island as a national park.

What were the views of Canadians on the idea of designating Sable Island a national park? What did they have to say?

Well, in general, Parks Canada reported that Canadians support the proposed national park designation. They feel it is important to maintain the ecological integrity and protect the cultural resources of Sable. They are interested in visitor experience opportunities on the island that, however, are limited in scope and scale and well managed. They want off-island experiences and educational opportunities. Canadians are also seeking careful management of natural resources, including petroleum. Last but certainly not least, they are concerned about wildlife management.

Buoyed by the strong support that the consultations revealed for protecting Sable Island as a national park, officials moved to complete the negotiation of a memorandum of agreement for a national park at Sable Island. The next step in this great story is that on October 17, 2011, our Minister of the Environment and the minister responsible for Parks Canada joined with the hon. Darrell Dexter, Premier of Nova Scotia, in signing the national park establishment agreement.

Bill S-15 seeks to put into legislation many of the elements of that 2011 national park establishment agreement, including some very important things, which I will mention.

First of all, there would be a ban on drilling from the surface of Sable Island out to one nautical mile. Second, there would be a restriction of surface access rights for petroleum-related activities to only four very limited and very specific activities. Finally, there would be a requirement for the offshore petroleum board to consult Parks Canada should it consider authorizing even any of those four very limited activities.

In recognition of the Province of Nova Scotia's ongoing interest in the future of Sable Island, the establishment agreement also provides for a Canada-Nova Scotia committee to enable the province to provide input and advice respecting the operation of the national park reserve. In addition, subject to reasonable conditions, Parks Canada would permit Nova Scotia to continue to carry out environmental, climate change, weather and air monitoring programs on Sable Island as well as scientific research.

As we bring to a close this first part of the journey to renew the future of Sable Island, it is important not to forget those whose personal and professional dedication to this island has left us with this marvellous opportunity.

I am thinking of those officials at the Canadian Coast Guard, the Meteorological Service of Canada and the Canadian Wildlife Service, who for decades watched over Sable Island for the rest of us.

I am also thinking of those individuals and organizations, such as long-time resident and volunteer guardian, Zoe Lucas, as well as the Green Horse Society and the Sable Island Preservation Trust.

I am thinking of the Province of Nova Scotia and companies like Exxon Mobil, which have acted in the public good by always keeping conservation of Sable Island in the forefront of their actions in this region.

I call on this chamber to thank the Province of Nova Scotia, which on May 10 of this year gave royal assent to its bill amending the legislation to put into place the legislated ban against drilling. It now rests with this chamber to complete our work so that both governments would be able to give effect to their respective acts, thereby finally protecting Sable Island in law under the National Parks Act.

I also want to mention that Parks Canada will continue its work with the Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia.

● (2235)

In conclusion, I am very proud to have had the opportunity to speak in favour of Bill S-15 and to put on record my support for renewing the future of Sable Island as a national park reserve under the Canada National Parks Act.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Giguère (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today, we are getting a national park. My goodness, that is always nice and this one is especially great.

I have been off the coast of Nova Scotia, where the waters can sometimes sway us to and fro. It is always so nice. We have a beautiful country. Now, in this House, we are going to collectively guarantee that there will be an extra little slice just for us and ensure that we leave behind a little more than we received. At least, we are going to figure out how to leave behind at least as much as we received, not less.

Unfortunately, the problem is that this government's record when it comes to the environment is not up to snuff. Sometimes the Conservatives rush through things.

I would like my distinguished colleague to say that I am right to be enthusiastic, that we are getting a nice park and it will never be threatened.

● (2240)

[*English*]

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Mr. Speaker, in some respects my colleague's question could be considered a lobbed question. I appreciate it because it gives me the opportunity to reassure him, based on the government's record. Since 2006, Parks Canada has realized an astounding number of environmental achievements, and these include the sixfold expansion of the boundary of Nahanni National Park Reserve to more than 30,000 square kilometres. Parks Canada was awarded the Royal Canadian Geographic Society gold medal, the highest honour of that society, for this achievement.

There has also been the creation of the Gwaii Haanas National Marine Conservation Area and Haida Heritage Site; the creation of Lake Superior National Marine Conservation Area at more than 10,000 square kilometres including lakebed islands and north shore lands, the largest freshwater marine protected area in the world; the successful reintroduction of plains bison and the black-footed ferret, an animal once thought to be extinct; the establishment of the Sahoyúé-§ehdacho National Historic Site over the last five years; actions on the ground and projects restoring forest health in Gros Morne National Park; restoring stream connectivity in Atlantic national parks; dune ecosystem restoration of Pacific Rim National Park Reserve; Little Port Joli Estuary restoration in Kejimkujik.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it was important to lay out the history of the park. I have a question regarding clause 7. What would be the new mechanism for coordination and co-operation between Parks Canada and the offshore petroleum board? This is key, as in the amendments to the Canada-Nova Scotia Offshore Petroleum Resources Accord Implementation Act, it states: “Before deciding whether to issue the authorization, the Board shall consider any advice...”.

That is, the offshore board is not bound to the recommendations of Parks Canada. Who is looking after the interests of the environment on Sable Island if the offshore board is not bound by the decision?

I also understand from Parks Canada that the MOU defining the rules of the relationship will be put in place after the park is established.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my friend's question, which is important and to the point. My colleague from across the way is well familiar with the variety of mechanisms that are in place whenever an undertaking of the nature she describes is begun in Canada and, among other things, whether it is the offshore petroleum board or any other agency that is engaged in approving of such projects, there is an assessment that is done, which is quite strenuous, generally speaking, and would be performed in such a case.

I do not have any reason to doubt that the assessments performed by the offshore petroleum board would be any less stringent than any of the others we conduct on an almost daily basis right across this country. Of course, those would also be subject to the limitations in this amendment to the act, which require no drilling within one nautical mile of the island and also very strict conditions for necessary limited activities on the island.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his more than enthusiastic speech. It was a pleasure for me to serve alongside him on the environment committee for a long time. He is an excellent examiner on that committee, gets to the root of the matter very quickly, separates the wheat from the chaff, as we like to say on the Prairies, and always gets to the heart of the matter.

He spoke in his speech quite extensively about the protections that would be afforded by being part of a national parks system under the National Parks Act and the park reserve status. I am wondering if he could elaborate and tell us what the difference is. He mentioned the protection under the Migratory Birds Convention Act and some of the other protections that were in place. I would ask him to expand on the difference in the levels of protection and what is going to happen insofar as not only this park but all of the other parks and protected areas that this government has created with regard to the long-term preservation of species, our ecosystem, and the biological and genetic integrity of all of the wildlife in Canada.

● (2245)

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my colleague's kind comments. The respect I have for him is such that I take it as very high praise, indeed, when he says such kind things about me because he himself is well accomplished in this place, particularly in areas of environmental management.

Indeed, that is where I will pick up. As a national park, the area in question, Sable Island, as well as any national park, is subject to management and careful husbandry and protection of habitat and species and controlled access by the public. It would defeat the point of national parks if there were no access by the public, but the usage of a park is regulated and managed in a way that will in fact maximize the natural biodiversity. That is the kind of approach that I expect will be taken with this park.

In addition, may I say that our national parks are a way of connecting Canadians to nature and getting people to care about our natural environment. It is often said that is the mark of a true Canadian, the love for the outdoor natural environment, and our national parks very much contribute to that.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I agree that my hon. friend from Kitchener Centre probably has no reason to doubt that the Canada-Nova Scotia Offshore Petroleum Board could do a decent and adequate rigorous environmental assessment. Unfortunately, I have personal experience that leads me to know that it does not do any such thing. It is, in a word, slipshod, incompetent, and a very poor board to have any jurisdiction over a national park.

Nature Canada's website describes this approach of allowing the Canada-Nova Scotia Offshore Petroleum Board to have regulation of a national park as a "dangerous precedent". The Canada-Nova Scotia Offshore Petroleum Board ignored expert advice and approved seismic testing during the migration of blue whales through the Gulf of St. Lawrence. This board misrepresented a multi-stakeholder group, which I was part of, that worked for two years to come up with recommendations for the Gulf of St. Lawrence. It absolutely misrepresented our results in its press release.

There is a technical term for this board. It is called Mickey Mouse. This is a dangerous precedent. This clause must be removed.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Mr. Speaker, let me say that I always find it regrettable when an opposition member stands in the House and maligns ordinary Canadians who have been given a job to do in the interests of all of us and public service. It is all too easy for members, like the one who just spoke, to stand up and insult people publicly in the chamber, where they have immunity. I find it regrettable and, if I may say in a final nod to the member, I find it somewhat out of character for her to so malign individuals who are really putting themselves in a position of public trust.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, I would just like to reassure the member for Kitchener Centre that everything I just said in this House I have said previously on the CBC.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): That is not a point of order. It is a point of debate.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Sackville—Eastern Shore.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to advise the previous speaker that the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands, herself a proud Nova Scotian, did not malign any one individual. She mentioned the very serious concerns about the Canada-Nova Scotia Offshore Petroleum Board, which I myself have very serious concerns about as well.

I want to start off today by thanking the government for entering into discussions to ensure that Sable Island possibly could be a preservation site and conservation site for as long as this planet exists.

I just want to understand a couple of things. This is the same government that had massive cuts to Parks Canada. This is the same government that we hear speech after speech from the Conservatives talking about how great this legislation is, how great it would be for Sable Island, yet what do they do? They invoke time allocation on this debate. Sable Island was there long before any of us were here. Hopefully, Sable Island will be there for many years after we are gone. Therefore, moving time allocation on important legislation like this is unconscionable. I would truly love for someone over there to explain to the Canadian people why they felt it necessary to invoke time allocation, unless they plan to prorogue Parliament very soon and thus they know that this bill would end up dead.

I am in favour of turning Sable Island into a national park reserve. However, like my hon. colleague for Halifax, I have some concerns that need to be addressed. That is why the NDP will be supporting that this legislation go to committee. We do not have much trust in that side, but we hope and trust that my colleague from Halifax will be able to invite any and all witnesses that her party wishes to bring forward, that the Liberal Party would be able to do the same, and that the Green Party could make submissions as well, to ensure that every single person who has reason to be concerned about Sable Island in the future would have the right to say so. We are talking about the Mi'kmaq, the first nations, the provinces, the oil and gas sector, the conservationists and the fishermen. All these people need to be heard.

It is too bad the Conservatives could not make a national park out of the Senate. That would be great. Lots of people could go and visit that room and the $92 million that is spent on the Senate could go to preserve Sable Island and all of the other parks we have in Canada and maybe even create a few more. Then those senators could be added to the Species at Risk Act. That would be a wonderful thing.

Here is the problem. I have heard these great Conservatives say time and time again that Sable Island would be preserved for future generations to come. That is wrong. I wish the Conservatives would get that out of their heads. Sable Island is not for human beings. It is not for people.

Farley Mowat, who is a great World War II veteran, a conservationist and a fantastic author, said time and time again, and my colleague, the member from the Green Party knows this well because we were together when he said it, “We, as humans, have an obligation to ensure to protect our environment. We have an obligation to protect 'the others'.” What he meant by “the others” were things like bugs, snakes, horses, plants, birds and seals. The other species that inhabit this earth deserve to have their place as well.

Sable Island is not like Banff National Park. It is not like Kluane in the Yukon. It is not like South Moresby. It is not like Nahanni. It is not like Kejimkujik. It is not like any other park out there where humans can go and interact and have fun and enjoy the beautiful parts of Canada that are absolutely gorgeous. Sable Island is so fragile and so special that we should limit, with the most extreme caution, the number of people who actually go to that island.

My colleague from South Shore—St. Margaret's bragged about the fact he has been there dozens of times. He has been there two dozen times and I say he has been there 23 times too often. I have had the opportunity to go to Sable Island. I can assure members that it is a spiritual experience. It is beautiful. However, I felt guilty being there. I felt that I should not have been there. The reality is that with those horses, the plants and the birds, it is absolutely outstanding.

● (2250)

There are reasons why some people are very concerned about the bill and are very concerned about the Canada-Nova Scotia Offshore Petroleum Board.

I remember very clearly, as a private citizen, in 1995, attending a meeting at the Waverley fire hall in Waverley, Nova Scotia, which is now in my riding. The Sable gas people were there and the petroleum boards were all there. They had maps of the ocean, which had a dark black mark on Sable Island. It was blacked out. The first question I asked was why it was blacked out. They said, “That's Sable Island. We have no intention of touching it, ever. We are leaving it alone. It's too fragile”.

I understand the need for oil and gas exploration. I drive a car, I have a house that burns oil and I fly back and forth all the time. I understand that. I was so proud of the fact that these experts were saying that Sable Island was going to be left alone, with a mile buffer around it. I felt really good about that.

However, we were betrayed by the gas and oil sector. We were betrayed by other people. In fact, they did do seismic testing on that island. I remember it very well how—I cannot say what I want to say—upset I was that we were lied to at these meetings. These were professional people, and they lied to us. They said they would never do seismic testing on Sable Island, and they did.

My very serious concern is that if we do not do this bill right, if we do not put in the concrete measures to ensure we never allow seismic testing on the island ever again, I will not have a good night's sleep, assured that those horses, those birds, those plants and other species that inhabit that island are able to do what they do in God's wonder, to do what they have done for hundreds of years and, hopefully, for hundreds years more.

That island is not for people. The island is for the others. I wish everyone in this Parliament and across Canada would get that into their heads. This is too fragile an ecosystem and it needs to be, as best we can, left alone.

I appreciate the Minister of the Environment and the parliamentary secretary indicating that, yes, in some certain cases, in emergencies, oil and gas workers or people who find themselves in serious trouble could go to the island for rescue, because it is the graveyard of the Atlantic. I understand that, and under strict controls and under strict protocols that is something I think we can all accept. I appreciate that fact.

However, we need assurances from the Minister of the Environment and the government that when this bill gets second reading there will be no shenanigans at that committee, that there will be no time allocation, that there will be no rushing into in camera, as every committee here in this House does. We need to ensure that this is a public forum for all Canadians who are concerned about this precious jewel in the Atlantic and ensure that we do exactly what we are saying here today; that is that we protect the integrity of Sable Island for many years to come.

At the same time, the government has made massive cuts to Parks Canada. We have never heard anything, yet, about funding this. We would like to see where the dollars are going to come from, where the money is coming from. One of the ideas the member for Halifax indicated, and the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment also indicated, is a historical and interpretive centre in Halifax. Who is going to pay for that? Where is the money going to come from? What is it going to look like? We cannot have everybody going out to Sable Island to see it. It would be much better to have that interpretive centre in the community of Halifax or another community; I am not really particularly concerned about that. I just want to ensure that the dollars will be there to ensure that all Canadians, in fact, all world visitors who come to the area, will get to know that 290 kilometres from the east coast lies one of the most beautiful places on the planet.

It is important that we get it right. That is why the NDP, led by our critic from Halifax, has indicated our support for this legislation to second reading.

However, if we see a lot of games being played there, there is no guarantee that support will come afterwards. My colleague from Halifax has said very clearly that she so desperately wants to work with the parliamentary secretary, so desperately wants to work with the Minister of the Environment, and with the Conservative government, in order to ensure we get the legislation right.

● (2255)

That is uncommon in this place. Normally, anything the Conservatives do would just shut it down. Anything we say, they shut us down. This is an opportunity, in a bi-partisan manner, to work co-operatively together and get it right. I am not sure why the Minister of the Environment or the Prime Minister would not want to pursue that and show Canadians that, yes, Parliament can work together as it has on many other issues.

I was here when the protection of the Sable Island gully was there. In fact, I was quite proud of that because that was where the northern bottlenose whale lived. They offered limited protection to that area. It is a beautiful gully just off of Sable Island. It is absolutely gorgeous. I have never been to the bottom of it, but everything I have seen of it and the species that live under those waters is unbelievable. The Liberal government at the time worked co-operatively to get that done.

We need to ensure that the resources for our Coast Guard, Parks Canada and Environment Canada are there to ensure the integrity of this legislation is matched not only in words but in dollars as well. That is what we need to discuss at the committee stage as well.

We have been betrayed before. Not by the Conservative government, though, I will give it credit for that. It was not in power. We were betrayed by the provincial and federal governments at that time.

I can assure the House that there are a lot of environmental groups out there. I know the Ecology Action Centre and Mr. Mark Butler, one of the great environmentalists we have on the east coast, are very concerned about this legislation. Our colleague from Saanich—Gulf Islands indicated the concerns of allowing the Canada-Nova Scotia Offshore Petroleum Board any kind of management say on anything regarding this Island.

Those are serious questions that need to be asked. I am not saying that someone is right or someone is wrong, but let us get the experts in. Let us get the people in at the committee stage in an unhurried manner, where we can take our time and do it right. If we do that, we can truly leave a legacy not just for people, but for the others with which we share this beautiful planet. That is the beauty of Parliament, when we can work together and achieve something that is greater than ourselves.

I will give the government credit. I used to live in Yukon near Nahanni, which is absolutely gorgeous. When that size increased, I was shouting from the rooftops. I thought that was absolutely wonderful. I remember our colleague, Svend Robinson, was arrested defending South Moresby. Look at it now. It is one of the most beautiful and enchanting areas on the planet on the Queen Charlotte Islands. He risked everything to ensure that happened.

We want to ensure that people do not have to protest in the streets of Halifax to ensure the protection of Sable Island. It simply does not have to happen. We can work in a co-operative manner and get it done.

I will offer some advice for the minister, though. There are a lot more protected marine areas that we need to have in our country and I am proud to hear him say Lancaster Sound. I am proud to see the areas of the Bay St. Lawrence and also on the west coast. I have had the opportunity to live in British Columbia and Yukon and now in Nova Scotia.

This is truly an absolutely gorgeous country. When we are connected in this regard, it is amazing what terrestrial and aquatic areas we have to enjoy in many cases. However, there are certain areas of the country which, in my personal view, should be left alone. Sable Island is one of them.

I give top credit to Zoe Lucas. She is only about 5'2" or 5'3", but she is dynamite. She knows more about Sable than the House collectively will ever get to learn. She is amazing, but she is one person. We need to ensure that it is not just her, because one day she may not be with us. She has worked in the preservation, acknowledgement and awareness of Sable Island. She has brought that to many people in Canada and around the world to ensure the integrity of that beautiful island.

The minister knows as he has been there. He understands the spiritual nature of that place. The last thing we need to see is hundreds of people showing up, taking pictures of horses and running around trying to pet them, stepping on their grounds and grass and everything else.

I have another concern. When I was on the fisheries committee for many years, we had a very serious issue with grey seals. Sable Island is the home of many grey seals. Their population has exploded.

● (2300)

One thing that we in the NDP will never accept is the cull of a wild species, where people shoot and kill the animals and they sink to the bottom and become crab or lobster bait. That is unacceptable. However, we will support a harvest of seals as long as the seals are utilized, whether turned into animal feed or other product. We would not allow an opportunity to go and kill 20,000 or 30,000 seals and then let them sink to the bottom. That does not make this country look very good internationally. However, if we utilize that seal product in a proper humane harvest, that would be good husbandry of the species, and would also protect the integrity of the island.

The minister probably knows that when that many seals congregate on a shifting sandbar like that, it can cause havoc and a lot of damage. We want to ensure that the grey seals do not overrun the island and cause even greater damage. We want to control the species in a manner that is not only humane but offers economic opportunities for some fishermen, and utilizes the seal to its maximum potential. To just go out and kill a whole bunch of them and let them sink to the bottom is not the proper thing to do, and it is also very un-Canadian.

Therefore, we need to know this from the minister, and hopefully we will learn this at committee: If indeed there is a time to harvest some of these seals to reduce the numbers, would the Sable Island park reserve allow limited hunting of those seals in that particular area? If it does, would it be done from the land or from boats? Having that many fishermen tramping all over the island could not be a good thing.

These are the types of things, in terms of strict protocols, that we would need to address to ensure that this legislation is done correctly. We are very proud of the fact that the federal government and the great Province of Nova Scotia and its wonderful NDP government are working collaboratively on many of these issues. However, we still do not have all the answers we are looking for. My colleague from Halifax has done yeoman's work in this regard. I can assure members that when this gets to committee, she will be like a pit bull on a bone to ensure that this legislation is exactly what it should be.

The reality is that she is the only member of Parliament of the 308 of us who has Sable Island in her riding, and that is a wonderful thing. Not many people get to say that. I know I do not. I am surprised she has not changed the name of her riding to Halifax—Sable Island. I do have McNabs Island, by the way. If members ever get a chance they should come down and see McNabs Island. It is absolutely beautiful. It is the same with Lawlor Island, but people are not allowed to go on that one.

The reality is that these are jewels in the Halifax area and off the coast of Nova Scotia that are absolutely gorgeous. I invite my colleague over there from Kitchener to come on down and I will give him a personal tour of McNabs Island and the other island. However, I will not give him a tour of Sable Island. I would encourage him to leave it alone. We will have an interpretive centre, which hopefully the federal government will pay for, and we will walk him through that. In fact, my colleague from Halifax will walk him through it as well, and tell him all that he needs to know. However, we just encourage him with the greatest of respect not to go on the island, because that many people on the island, even if it is strictly controlled, could have unforeseen consequences.

We want to ensure that the bill is done correctly. We want to work in a co-operative manner with the government. We do not like time allocation on this bill, and I would hope that maybe the Minister of the Environment could stand in his place and ask why the Conservatives moved time allocation on this very sensitive legislation.

I hope that, with our colleague from Halifax and the great NDP working with the Conservatives and our Liberal colleagues and Green Party colleagues, we will ensure that we get the right legislation to ensure perpetuity for Sable Island park reserve now and in the future.

● (2305)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The Chair appreciates that the member has respected his time allocation this evening.

Questions and comments. The hon. member for Fort McMurray—Athabasca.

Mr. Brian Jean (Fort McMurray—Athabasca, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a pit bull on a bone: I have never thought of the member in those conditions before, but it is quite vivid indeed.

I appreciate the member's complimenting this government on Nahanni and Sable Island park. The Prime Minister has set aside more land for parks in this country than any prime minister in our history, I believe.

I appreciated all of the speeches I heard tonight. It became apparent that the NDP has a real lack of trust in relation to this issue. All I heard in their speeches was, “Congratulations, great job, but we do not trust you”. The Liberals said that they would have done it if they had just had another 13 or 14 years, and of course the Green Party member mentioned that we will not get it right no matter what we do.

I do appreciate all of the members' speeches and the fact that they have complimented this government on yet another great initiative.

After hearing the speech by the member opposite, I can tell for certain that there is nothing else to be said that has not already been said. I am wondering if the member would try to persuade other members of his caucus to allow this matter to go to committee as soon as possible, and possibly agree to do so in a timely fashion so that we could go to sleep sometime before midnight tonight, or at least have it passed before today's hour passes.

● (2310)

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my good friend from Fort McMurray—Athabasca, a beautiful place in Alberta. I want to compliment one of the finest mothers of all time, Frances Jean. That member is lucky to have one of the finest mothers of all time. I would even say that about my own mother, who is one of the best. His mother is also one of the best. I would like him to let her know that we will always have Paris, but that is another side story.

My colleague talked about trust. The question of trust arises out of the government moving time allocation on this legislation. The Conservatives have not answered that question yet. Why did they move time allocation on it?

I understand moving time allocation on budgets and stuff of that nature, but I do not understand it on this legislation. That is where the trust has become broken, plus the fact that we have certain concerns with the bill that have not been properly addressed. Even though my colleague from Halifax has asked those questions, we have still not received answers.

My colleague can rest assured that we in the NDP, under the great leadership of our member from Outremont, will fully support this legislation going to committee. At committee stage we will determine if that trust can be regained.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, obviously it takes someone from Nova Scotia to know the island. We debated this issue last Friday and we heard a few speeches. I spoke on the issue myself. We brought up some points, and it appears that the government is open to amendments.

The member brought up a good point about the money. Will there be money following once this is designated as a national park? I would like the member to comment. Once this legislation goes to committee, does he think the money will follow? At what point is the member going to ask for the money? Is it going to be at committee, after committee, or should we be asking for a certain amount of money while we are debating the bill, provided we have enough time? As well, I am not sure that we have enough time.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Mr. Speaker, the member asked an important question. These are fine words we are all talking about. There are words in the legislation, but there are no dollar figures around it. There are no financial estimates around it. What is it going to cost? Who is going to pay what, and from what department? What role would the province play in all of this?

There are other questions as well. We simply do not know. Hopefully those questions will be answered. We are not getting the answers here during the debate; hopefully we will get them during the committee process.

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his excellent speech. It was riveting. Mine was not so riveting; it was more the fine details.

Our Conservative colleague talked about trust and asked why we are putting up speakers to debate the bill and not just going home. He should talk to his leadership and not my colleague from Sackville—Eastern Shore. We actually had a deal with the Conservatives to do this in an expedited manner, and they betrayed us. Now here we are in time allocation, debating this bill when we actually had a deal to do things differently.

My question for my colleague from Sackville—Eastern Shore is about this trust issue. We were not only stabbed in the back here in the House, but the Conservatives also told us not to worry about the cuts they are doing to Parks Canada because they will not actually affect services.

However, as my colleague well knows, Kejimkujik National Park in Nova Scotia does not open in the winter anymore. People went winter camping there. People love that park, and they would love to be able to use it all season.

I would ask my colleague what his level of trust is, based on the Conservatives' track record.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Mr. Speaker, individuals in my riding who worked for Parks Canada were laid off. Not just that, they were bumped by other people in the seniority system and had to compete for jobs because of the severe cuts to Parks Canada.

My colleague is right about Kejimkujik National Park. Something I would advise all of us to do would be to go winter camping in that area. It is a tremendous experience. However, we cannot do that anymore because of the cuts.

If the government is making cuts to these areas, what might happen to Sable Island in the future? That is why we are concerned. We are hearing these platitudes about the work being done, but then behind the scenes, it is making cuts to Parks Canada and laying off some great people.

What the Conservatives did to my colleague, the member for Halifax, in reversing a co-operative opportunity that it had, was simply unconscionable.

The NDP likes to give people the benefit of the doubt and the opportunity to regain trust, but twice today the Conservatives betrayed that trust. I can assure members that my colleague from Halifax will not let it happen a third time.

● (2315)

Mr. Chris Alexander (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member's speech was stimulating.

He spoke about our co-operation with the Government of Nova Scotia. We also appreciate that co-operation. He mentioned it was an NDP government, but then went on to talk about endangered species. I wanted to confirm that he was not making a connection between those two.

The question I have for the member is the following. On the time allocation, we regret it on this side as much as those on the other side. If we could focus on the substance of these bills and move them through in a timely fashion, we would not have to resort to that parliamentary technique as often as we are.

Would the member not agree, from everything he said about the urgency of protecting this fragile asset off the coast of his province, that passing this bill quickly is the best thing we can do for Sable Island? Yes, it requires consideration in committee and yes, it requires consideration in this place. However, if we hold it up for days and days and do not finish it in this session, we are not meeting any of the imperatives that the member identified in his speech.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Mr. Speaker, if the member wants to read the speech again tomorrow when it comes out, that is not what I said.

I said that we had to ensure we got it right. We have to ensure that every witness, who has a concern about Sable, is offered the opportunity to come to Ottawa and debate this very serious issue. There is no rush to invoke time allocation.

While he did say that, my colleague from Halifax was working with the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment on an arrangement to do just that, to get it to the committee. Unfortunately, the Conservatives betrayed that trust and moved time allocation. They did not have to do that.

If I could ask him a question, it would be this. Why did the Conservatives move time allocation on this? Why did they have to do that?

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton—Leduc, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it has been a fascinating debate here tonight, and I want to thank all the members who have taken part during speeches and questions and comments. I have to preface my remarks by saying that the previous speaker was riveting, as I think the member for Halifax and the Parliamentary Secretary said. I will be more focused on the details and the technical substance of the bill, plus I have never been accused of being riveting.

I am very pleased today to speak to the second part of Bill S-15 dealing with the establishment of Sable Island national park. It deals with three distinct matters: the amendment of section 4 of the Canada National Parks Act and amendments to sections 4 and 5 of that act. I will deal with each of these amendments in turn, found in clauses 13, 14 and 15 of the bill.

First, clause 13 of the bill proposes amendments to address concerns of the Standing Joint Committee of the Scrutiny of Regulations regarding section 4 of the Canada National Parks Act. Section 4 is one of the cornerstones of the act. It dedicates national parks to the people of Canada for their benefit, education and enjoyment, subject to the act and the regulations, and provides that the parks are to be maintained and made use of so as to leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.

This wording has remained virtually unchanged for over eight decades and has served to guide the Parks Canada agency and its predecessor institutions in the establishment and operation of a system of national parks that is truly the pride of Canadians and the envy of the world. The amendments proposed in the bill do not change this intent. In fact, they leave this wording untouched.

The bill makes two amendments to section 4. It fixes the discrepancy between the English and the French versions, a change that does not alter the meaning of this clause.

The bill also adds a new subsection 4.(1.1) to clarify the authority of the minister of the environment to use sections 23 or 24 of the Parks Canada Agency Act to set fees in national parks. The wording of this clause in the bill was improved through an amendment made by the Senate. The current wording effectively avoids any misinterpretation of the intent of the proposed changes.

Clauses 14 and 15 of the bill deal with matters affecting particular national parks in western Canada. We have heard a very interesting debate from people, especially from Nova Scotia, debating Sable Island and the establishment of that national park. I would like to now describe how they address specifically the needs of two of Canada's oldest national parks in western Canada, Yoho National Park of Canada and Jasper National Park of Canada.

Clause 14 of the bill amends the descriptions of the commercial zones for the community of Field, British Columbia, located within Yoho National Park of Canada. I remind the House that the Canada National Parks Act requires all communities within a national park to have a community plan that sets out a vision, management principles and design parameters. The community plans also identify the zoning regime, including commercial zones and associated growth limits.

Since 2004, development in the communities must be consistent with the commercial zones as well as with the maximum commercial floor area as set out under schedule 4 of the Canada National Parks Act. A legislative amendment is required to make any changes in these provisions.

The first community plan for Field was prepared by Parks Canada in 1999 and led to the description of commercial zones and the commercial floor area growth limit, which are currently found in schedule 4 of the Canada National Parks Act.

In 2006, Parks Canada assessed the ecological, social and economic health of Field and released its findings in a state of the community report. The report noted that zoning was restricting the range of services visitors had come to expect in a national park, the community's economic viability and affordability for community residents. Many of the report's recommendations have been implemented, but those associated with changing commercial zones require an amendment to schedule 4 of the CNPA.

Bill S-15 proposes three minor zoning changes to schedule 4 for certain properties in Field.

When commercial zones in national park communities were introduced into the Canada National Parks Act, the bunkhouse property owned by the Canadian Pacific Railway had been developed as a restaurant, and a description of the property was included in schedule 4. It was also expected that CPR's former railway station would be redeveloped as a commercial land use, and it too was included in schedule 4. Since then, the restaurant has ceased operations, and no commercial developments for the railway station have been proposed. CPR requires both properties for its operations and has requested a zoning change from commercial to railway and utilities.

● (2320)

Another site on the outskirts of Field, including property occupied by a gas station, had been zoned as institutional in anticipation of a museum that has never been built. The zoning would be changed to commercial to accommodate the gas station that currently exists on the site and serves the needs of both the community and its visitors.

The site of the former Royal Canadian Mounted Police office and barracks was originally zoned residential, with a notation in the original plan that it would be changed at a later date to commercial zoning to accommodate a bed and breakfast and a gift shop. As these developments have occurred, the change to commercial would reflect the current reality.

These zoning modifications are not controversial. They are supported by the community and they are well within the commercial growth limit already established in schedule 4. They would help support services required by park visitors and the town's businesses and residents. They are important to the economic viability of the community of Field and meet the intent of the community plan objectives. They would have no impact on the ecological integrity of Yoho National Park of Canada.

I would now like to turn to the amendments in clause 15 of the bill that would affect Jasper National Park of Canada. They involve the ski resort at Marmot Basin, which is located just 20 minutes from the town of Jasper within the boundaries of the park itself.

The ski hill has been in operation since 1961, and since then has provided exceptional skiing experiences to hundreds of thousands of visitors, including you, I believe, Mr. Speaker.

Before getting into the details of the amendments proposed by clause 15, which would bring positive benefits to both Jasper National Park and the ski hill operator, I wish to first describe the legislative and policy controls that Parks Canada has put in place with respect to ski hill development and the management of national parks in general. This will allow me to squarely address concerns raised previously in this House regarding the nature of the analysis brought to bear on the proposals relating to Marmot Basin ski area and on the opportunities for public input into these proposals.

The 1998 provisions were introduced in the Canada National Parks Act requiring that the boundary and size of each ski area be set out in schedule 5 of the act. Any change to those boundaries requires a legislative amendment. The bill is the vehicle for an amendment to the Marmot Basin ski area boundaries, as currently set out in schedule 5 of the act.

In addition to the legislative controls set out under the Canada National Parks Act, Parks Canada has, since 2000, established a series of policies that guide the management of ski areas in national parks. The Parks Canada ski area management guidelines outline a broad management approach for ski areas.

Parks Canada consulted with ski areas, communities, non-governmental organizations and tourism industry representatives in 2006 to get their feedback about potential refinements to the ski area management guidelines. Adjustments were made to the guidelines based on the feedback they received. These guidelines are supplemented by site-specific guidelines for each ski area to establish permanent growth limits and set out site-specific direction for development and use.

The final element of control is a requirement for ski areas to develop long-range plans and to carry out detailed impact analysis for project proposals that the ski area wishes to advance in a 5- to 15-year time frame.

These policies provide a comprehensive and tightly controlled framework for the management of ski hill operations in national parks that provides long-term land use certainty for the ski hill area operators, for the Canadian public and for Parks Canada.

This framework respects the Parks Canada mandate of maintaining or restoring ecological integrity while fostering a connection to place through the memorable visitor experiences and educational opportunities. It also provides ski area operators with clear parameters for business planning in support of viable financial operations.

In the case of Marmot Basin ski area, its site guidelines for development and use were approved by Parks Canada in 2008. They outline what development and use may be considered in the future, and establish growth limits, ecological management parameters and approaches to ski area operation.

The site guidelines were prepared in collaboration with Marmot Basin, and included a comprehensive public participation program and completion of a strategic environmental assessment.

A long-range plan and its associated environmental assessment for the Marmot Basin ski area in Jasper National Park are under development currently. In fact, Marmot Basin has recently posted on its website notice of its intention to have public consultations on its long-range plans, starting this fall.

● (2325)

The process put in place by Parks Canada clearly requires that there be a thorough environmental analysis and that the public be engaged. In fact, the public has been consulted every step of the way, from the development of the agency ski area of management guidelines, with its input leading to modification of these guidelines in 2006, to the 2008 Marmot Basin site specific guidelines for development and use and, finally, now at the stage of the development of the ski area's long-range plan. There are plans for engaging the public this fall. This answers the concerns raised regarding proper analysis and the participation of Canadians who are concerned in the project review process.

One example of the detailed analysis is the collaboration between Parks Canada and Marmot Basin on two wildlife studies that will shed new light on habitat features and local movements by mountain goats and caribou. These studies will be used in the long-range planning process under the Marmot Basin site guidelines.

Information on the research findings will be publicly available and this information will contribute to future decision making by Parks Canada about the ski area and managing the adjacent wilderness in the area being considered for the amendments to schedule 5 of the Canada National Parks Act. No decisions will be made until these studies are completed.

The House heard concerns raised about the caribou found in Jasper National Park. In fact, one of the studies, referred to above, is a caribou risk assessment led by Dr. Fiona Schmiegelow at the University of Alberta. Parks Canada has also developed its own conservation strategy for southern mountain caribou in Canada's national parks.

Turning now to the situation which gave rise to the proposed amendments, the operator of the Marmot Basin ski area wishes to improve the ski experience in Marmot Basin to remain competitive with other new and expanded ski operations in the region and stay financially viable.

The growth limits and the site guidelines for the Marmot Basin ski area are based on a design capacity of 6,500 skiers per day. Currently, the ski hill frequentation averages a little over 4,000 skiers per day. The existing commercial space can serve less than 3,300 skiers. There is a need for additional facilities and services and room for them to be developed in a manner to achieve an exceptional skiing experience, while respecting conservation imperatives.

The ski area management guidelines will only allow ski areas to add new ski terrain through an exchange that results in a substantial environmental gain to the ecological integrity of the park, which brings us to the bill before us.

The operator for the Marmot Basin ski area has proposed a solution through a reduction of its leasehold boundary that will result in a substantial environmental gain, the ecological integrity of Jasper National Park. The Marmot Basin ski area has offered to remove from its lease and return to the park 118 hectares of ecologically-sensitive land in the Whistlers Creek valley. This is undeveloped terrain that is important habitat for many wildlife species, including woodland caribou, a threatened species under the Species At Risk Act, as well as for grizzly bears and mountain goats. In exchange, 60 hectares of land in a less ecologically-sensitive area will be made available to the ski area operator to develop beginner ski terrain and cross-country ski trails.

The land to be exchanged was carefully selected to avoid caribou habitat and other important wildlife habitats, including potential grizzly bear denning sites, none of which have been identified in the area. Before any development would be authorized, further environmental evaluation of the area would be conducted in the context of the long-range planning process the Marmot Basin has announced recently and to which I referred just a few minutes ago.

The proposed removal of the 188 hectares from the ski area leasehold is considered a substantial environmental gain for several reasons.

First, the reconfiguration of the lease represents an 18% reduction in the leasehold, which is a major reduction in size.

Second, the lease reduction establishes long-term certainty in approved protection for sensitive and important mountain caribou and goat habitat, including caribou food sources and a goat mineral lick.

Third, the area would be added to an existing declared wilderness area that would have a greater degree of protection than is currently the case. Uses would be carefully managed to protect the wilderness character of the area.

● (2330)

Next, the lease reduction is a positive contribution of Parks Canada's participation in current and future broad-scale ecosystem management initiatives to better protect caribou habitat. The lease reduction protects broad ecological values for multiple species associated with the Whistlers Creek valley, including habitat security for other valley and sensitive species, such as grizzly bear, wolverine and lynx.

This proposal fits squarely within the parameters of the Parks Canada policy regime for ski area management. The 2006 ski area management guidelines, Parks Canada's overarching policy document for ski area management, specifically allow for the potential to make modifications proposed where there is a substantial environmental gain. This applies in situations where there is a leasehold reduction or a reconfiguration that results in better protection of sensitive areas in exchange for development of less sensitive areas.

The bill would improve the protection of sensitive ecosystems in Jasper National Park while creating greater certainty in land use. It would maintain Park Canada's authority to carry out its mandate while giving the ski area operator the possibility to make business decisions with certainty and confidence.

As I have pointed out, the proposed changes to the Marmot Basin ski area leasehold set out in schedule 5 of the Canada National Parks Act give us a win-win situation. It would be a win for the ski hill operator who could take steps to enhance its competitive position by following the strict rules set out in the Parks Canada legislation and policy. Most of all, it would be a win for Jasper National Park of Canada, which would benefit from a reduction in the ski area leasehold boundary and be able to provide enhanced protection to habitat for a variety of wildlife, including the threatened caribou.

In closing, I would like to reiterate that part 2 of Bill S-15 would bring very positive benefits for Parks Canada and all Canadians. It would effect minor amendments to section 4 of the Canada National Parks Act that maintain the strength and purpose of the dedication clause while clarifying the administrative ability of the minister to set fees in national parks under related legislation. It would make minor but important amendments that would benefit the community of Field, a town site in Yoho National Park of Canada. It would provide for a substantial environmental gain for wildlife habitat in Jasper National Park of Canada.

Above all, this bill is evidence of this government's commitment to ensuring that Canada's national parks offer visitors inspiring experiences and meaningful opportunities to connect to these places while ensuring their protection for future generations. I urge all members on both sides of the House to support this bill going to committee and moving this initiative forward.

● (2335)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the chair of my committee, the Standing Committee on Finance, for his speech. He is a man for whom I have a great deal of respect, and I hope the feeling is mutual. He can tell you if that is the case.

Naturally, I would like to thank him for his speech in which he described a whole range of measures. His speech covered a lot of things. Unfortunately, what he failed to mention were all the shortcomings or things that might be missing.

Of course, I spoke about Cartier-Brébeuf Park, which is located in my riding of Beauport—Limoilou, an important place in our history. It is a key place for the entire country in terms of the French presence here in Canada. While I was listening to my colleague talk about winter sports, among other things, I could not help but think about the plight of Forillon Park, which has not lived up to its potential. Unfortunately, major cuts are being made to this park, which is a natural wonder and a cultural treasure.

I would like my colleague to explain how Forillon Park could benefit from the measures set out in the bill.

[*English*]

Mr. James Rajotte: Mr. Speaker, I can assure my colleague that I certainly share his level of respect across the aisle and appreciate all of his good work on the finance committee with all of the members there.

With respect to how this impacts a particular park, I would encourage the member to work with the Minister of the Environment and the minister responsible for Parks Canada with respect to heritage sites or parks.

I had the opportunity, as a Canadian of Irish heritage, to work with a former member of Parliament from the area responsible for Grosse-Îles as well as with the minister of the environment at the time, Mr. Jim Prentice, to increase the resources to that area and ensure that it had the services needed to show what is, in my view, an international treasure. It is a place where over 5,000 people of Irish descent came to Canada and, unfortunately, passed away, including many French Canadians who welcomed these people and cared for them. Many of them died in the process. It is a very moving site. It shows what Parks Canada can do when it combines a national historic site with a national park. It is just an amazing experience.

With respect to this bill, it actually deals with the Sable Island national park reserve. It deals with Yoho National Park and Jasper National Park. With respect to the specific park he raised, I encourage him to work directly with the Minister of the Environment.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, most of Bill S-15 that concerns me relates to Sable Island.

I look at what is being proposed for Marmot Basin and recognize that a tremendous amount of work has been done. When it was first being proposed, there was a real paucity of scientific data and a real lack of understanding of what needed to be done to protect the caribou. These management plans have come a long way. They will take careful monitoring, because, as the hon. member knows, there is always a tension in our national parks system between the overriding goal, which is to maintain the ecological integrity of these parks, and the flip side of human enjoyment, which includes things such as ski hills and tourism.

Would my hon. friend agree with me that we must ensure that our national parks system is not eroded by allowing industrial activity to encroach on national parks? They have always maintained the highest level of protection, the gold standard, the highest International Union for Conservation of Nature, IUCN, qualifications, which really mandate that ecological integrity is job one. Would the hon. member agree?

● (2340)

Mr. James Rajotte: Mr. Speaker, I certainly share the view of the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands in the sense that within our national parks, there is obviously a tension between any development that may occur to ensure that people have the opportunity to enjoy these parks and ensuring that the ecologically sensitive areas and the natural state people want to go there to enjoy is actually preserved.

In this case, with respect to Marmot Basin, the ski area has offered to remove from its lease and return to the park 118 hectares of ecologically sensitive land. In exchange, 60 hectares of land in a less ecologically sensitive area will be made available to that operator. I think this is, frankly, a very good solution going forward.

I go to Elk Island National Park on a regular basis, just outside the city of Edmonton. I love going there. I love hiking through the park, but I realize that every time I go there, I am, to some extent, as a human being, disturbing that natural area. We have to stick to the paths and recognize that we are in the beauty of a national park, but we have to very much recognize the human impact. It is very much a balance, and the government, in this case, has actually found that balance very well.

Ms. Joan Crockatt (Calgary Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my colleague's speech tonight and his conjuring the idea of inspiring experiences, because that is what all of us remember. These are the kinds of things we are able to enjoy in our national parks in Canada.

I really appreciated, being an Albertan, his discussion of the Jasper National Park and how the bill meets the objectives of protecting the natural environment while providing enjoyment for Canadians with a national park experience. As a skier, I am also quite gratified to note, as will be thousands of other skiers, that there is an opportunity for Marmot Basin to continue to provide that skiing experience while protecting 118 hectares of ecologically sensitive land.

I would like to hear the member speak about how our government is working to ensure that parks are protected at the same time as people, humans, are encouraged to enjoy those inspiring experiences.

Mr. James Rajotte: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague, the member for Calgary Centre for talking about her experiences at the Jasper National Park.

This is a park that I first visited when I was two years old. I used to go back every summer. I spent a lot of summers with my family there, hiking, and then obviously enjoying the ski hill there as well.

The member points to a theme, that the human enjoyment can be balanced with the protection of the environment. In this case, the exchange of the 118 hectares, which would be returned to ecologically sensitive land, with the 60 hectares, which could be used for development, would be a very good exchange for both, frankly, in terms of development and certainty for the ski hill operator and skiers who want to enjoy that area, and also for Parks Canada and people who want to preserve that wilderness going forward, for any of the species in the area. I mentioned the caribou. The exchange taking place is very sensitive to the caribou in the area.

I think it is a fantastic initiative. I applaud the Minister of the Environment for bringing this forward. I look forward to the bill passing at second reading and hopefully through committee so we can actually implement this legislation.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the hon. member. We sat together on the finance committee.

I know he is a member from Alberta, and Alberta is known for its national parks. Normally we look at our national parks, and we can see that there is a temptation to maybe commercialize them.

In this respect, we have commercial activity, potential petroleum fields or oil that is underneath this national park. I am wondering if we are going to take these commercial activities and actually turn them into a national park? It seems like a similar type of endeavour, but it is actually not the same type of a conversion because of the dissimilarity.

Is the member willing to comment?

● (2345)

Mr. James Rajotte: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member opposite. He is a former chair of the finance committee, and I certainly enjoyed serving with him on that committee.

With respect to Sable Island, that was a very active debate. I did not mention it specifically in my speech. However, with respect to the establishment of the park there, the companies have actually given up their leases for development. I know there will be an active debate at committee with respect to the seismic activity.

I think we should recognize the efforts of the minister in terms of establishing this park, this preserve, and actually getting industry to sort of move back from it, to step back from it. This is very similar to what is happening in the Jasper situation, where the ski area operator is actually removing himself from a sizeable area of land in exchange for development in a smaller area of land.

It is a very good exchange for both. I look forward to a good debate at committee with respect to any seismic activity that may occur near the Sable Island preserve.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise tonight to speak to Bill S-15, which would amend the Canada National Parks Act to create the Sable Island national park reserve of Canada, the conclusion of 50 years of work to protect Sable Island's distinctive nature.

The BBC describes Sable Island as being:

> ...for the Canadians what the Galapagos are for the people of Ecuador, or Easter Island for Chileans. It is important scientifically and historically, but more than this it is important culturally, as part of their identity...

Sable Island is world-renowned both for its biodiversity and its shipwrecks. It is home to tremendous biodiversity, including 375 wild horses, 350 species of birds, 190 plant species and the largest colony of grey seals in the world.

Since 1583, there have been more than 350 recorded shipwrecks on or near the island, earning it the title "Graveyard of the Atlantic".

Let me briefly describe the history of the creation of Sable Island national park reserve.

Given the exceptional ecosystems found on the island, the federal and Nova Scotia governments concluded in 2004:

> ...that it would be in the public interest to use a federal protected area designation to achieve conservation objectives for Sable Island.

Eventually the consultations recommended that Sable Island be designated a national park, and on October 17, 2011, the Governments of Canada and Nova Scotia signed a memorandum of understanding to establish a national park on Sable Island.

The island would be designated as a national park reserve in recognition of the fact that it is subject to the claim of the Mi'kmaq. The Mi'kmaq and the Governments of Canada and Nova Scotia are currently negotiating this claim. The designation as a national park reserve allows the governments to continue these land claim negotiations.

Conserving Sable Island poses a challenge owing to the wealth of resources in and around the island and the legislative framework under which the reserve was developed, which was that there can be no adverse impacts on petroleum activities.

Parks Canada has explained to me that this is the first time a reserve has ever been created in an area of oil and gas activities. Over the last 50 years, the Canada-Nova Scotia Offshore Petroleum Board has made 23 significant discovery declarations in offshore Nova Scotia.

Bill S-15 would put into law an existing prohibition against drilling on Sable Island. Importantly, five oil companies that have been granted exploration licenses for on-island drilling have voluntarily agreed to relinquish these rights.

The Liberal Party strongly supports the establishment of Sable Island national park reserve. However, we would like this legislation to proceed to committee for a thorough review to ensure that this national treasure is properly protected. We want to ensure that rigorous environmental protections and safeguards are maintained for this national park reserve, for all our national parks and for future parks. As well, we must ensure that any concerns by the Mi'kmaq with regard to the legislation have the opportunity to be addressed.

One concern is with regard to the extent and oversight of natural resource development that Bill S-15 would authorize. These include petroleum exploration activities, which might include seismic, geological or geophysical programs on Sable Island. Additionally, what other activities might fall under the term “low impact” petroleum exploration? What does the government define as “low impact”?

At a departmental briefing, officials explained to me that "There are no exact details, no discussion of when low impact becomes high impact". In fact, when I asked about the availability of studies looking at possible impacts, I was told Parks Canada had only one.

● (2350)

Moreover, the official repeatedly used the words “as presented to us” to describe the evidence they did have, which is evidence from only industry. The lack of definition requires further clarification.

Parks Canada explained that if it was developing a marine protected area the department might have taken a different approach. Should a reserve have less protection? This is an issue that should be examined at committee. Low-impact activities must be defined for parliamentarians when this is reviewed at committee.

The Liberal Party is in favour of responsible and sustainable resource development. However, we believe that development projects must adhere to the most stringent environmental assessments. We must ensure that Sable Island is environmentally protected and that the ecosystems are not detrimentally affected. We understand the economic value that developing the oil and gas resources in and around Sable Island would provide Nova Scotia and that it is legislatively protected. However, Sable Island is a particularly sensitive ecosystem.

We would like a review of Clause 3 and an exception to the application of the Canada National Parks Act with regard to existing leases, easements and licences of occupation and work on Sable Island.

Regarding clause 7, what would be the new mechanism for coordination and co-operation between Parks Canada and the Canada-Nova Scotia Offshore Petroleum Board? This is key, as in the amendments to the Canada-Nova Scotia Offshore Petroleum Resources Accord Implementation Act it states, “before deciding whether to issue the authorization, the Board shall consider any advice”. In other words, the offshore board is not bound by the recommendations of Parks Canada. Who is looking after the interests of the environment and Sable Island if the offshore board is not bound by the decision? I understand from Parks Canada that the MOU defining the rules of this relationship would be put in place after the park is established. The act contains changes to land borders in Jasper National Park. Would the exchange of land between Parks Canada and the operators of Marmot Basin have a detrimental impact on the species in the area?

Regarding clause 15, with respect to Jasper National Park, with the exchange of land and the new development, are there any areas of concern with regard to the environment and species at risk in this new area that would be developed?

Last week I had a conference call with the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, which focuses on protecting many important areas of Canada's wilderness. The call was to find out whether it was indeed comfortable with the fast-tracking of this bill and the fact that even if the bill went to committee, amendments may not be accepted. I was informed that it wants Sable Island protected and that this bill is an important first step.

I ask that the government not use this bill as a precedent to allow exploration in other national parks. I am assured by officials that future parks are legislatively protected from this. Having said that, I have asked the parliamentary secretary and the minister and have still not been given that assurance on the record tonight. I would like the government's word that the integrity of Canada's national parks would not be undermined but instead protected, and that creating a national park among oil and gas exploration is not a foot in the door, an opening or setting a precedent to allow development in our treasured national parks.

I look forward to these issues being addressed at committee.

In closing, I would like to say that the government says it is a conservation government, but its actions paint a different picture.

● (2355)

Both with proposed national parks and protected areas such as the Rouge, as well as Sable Island, there are concerns regarding ecological integrity of the parks that cannot be overlooked, yet government members continually brush aside.

Moreover, I am concerned about the government's environmental track record that we have seen play out again and again over the past year, whether it be through Bill C-38 that gutted environmental legislation, that repealed the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, that repealed the Kyoto Protocol Implementation Act, or Bill C-45 that dramatically reduced environmental protection of our waterways.

These are not the actions of a conservationist government. These are not the actions of a government that seeks to protect our national habitat.

Mr. Brian Jean (Fort McMurray—Athabasca, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I always find it interesting to hear the Liberals talk about the environment, especially given their track record of inconsistencies.

However, I notice the member is passionate about the environment and I respect that very much.

We heard earlier that the NDP members wanted to have parks so nobody could see them, enjoy them or step foot on them.

Does the member not see the opportunities for Canadians to share with the world the great ecological steps that we have taken to protect huge swaths of land in our country and does she not see there can be a true balance in the best interests of Canadians and wildlife and the general economic and ecological environment of the country?

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Mr. Speaker, we always want a balance. We want Canadians to experience our wonderful heritage. However, we also have to protect the environment.

In terms of protecting, we were to have 10% protected. In terms of marine protected areas, we have 1%. I would like to stress that Australia has 33%.

I would like to raise something that has not been raised tonight regarding the Mi'kmaq. Gerard Julian the co-chair and chief of a first nation group. He said that his people were not consulted on the legislation, as required by the Constitution, and were concerned that the government would fail to adequately study the historic Mi'kmaq presence on the island. He said that Parks Canada should fund the Mi'kmaq to do this archeological work, which previously was impossible because of visitation restrictions.

He told a Senate committee studying Bill S-15:

> Our nation's desire and perspective is grounded in concepts that have been passed down from generation to generation, concepts of respect, integrity and environmental safeguards.

He questioned:

> How can any government department make decisions on the lands and waters of our traditional territories without including the Mi'kmaq in these conversations?

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): It being midnight, pursuant to order made Wednesday, May 22, 2013, this House stands adjourned until later this day at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 12 a.m.)

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