



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

# House of Commons Debates

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OFFICIAL REPORT  
(HANSARD)

**Thursday, February 6, 2014**

—

**Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer**

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# HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, February 6, 2014

The House met at 10 a.m.

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*Prayers*

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## ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

•(1005)

[*English*]

### CITIZENSHIP ACT

**Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (for the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration)** moved for leave to introduce Bill C-24, An Act to amend the Citizenship Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts.

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

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]

### COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

#### STATUS OF WOMEN

**Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the second report of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women in relation to the study on sexual harassment in the federal workplace.

Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to this report.

[*English*]

#### FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

**Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the third report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development in relation to Bill C-6, An Act to implement the Convention on Cluster Munitions. The committee has studied the bill and has decided to report the bill back to the House with amendments.

[*Translation*]

### DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS AND GOVERNMENT SERVICES ACT

**Mr. Claude Patry (Jonquière—Alma, BQ)** moved for leave to introduce Bill C-574, An Act to amend the Department of Public Works and Government Services Act (use of wood).

He said: Mr. Speaker, today I am introducing a bill that would amend the Department of Public Works and Government Services Act. This bill requires the federal government to give preference to projects that promote the use of wood in federal buildings.

Our bill will allow us to provide immediate assistance to forestry companies and would also help reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The use of wood in federal buildings will help our businesses develop new secondary and tertiary processing products and find new markets for our products.

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

\* \* \*

[*English*]

### COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

#### PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

**Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP)** moved that the third report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs presented on Monday, December 2, 2013, be concurred in.

Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with my good friend, the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley, who will be speaking in the second half of the debate that starts today on the committee report from the procedure and House affairs committee.

I would like to start by underscoring what is nothing less than a betrayal of the Canadian public by Conservative and Liberal members of that committee.

Members will recall that back in June, the NDP brought forward a motion that was adopted unanimously. Members from all sides of the supported the following motion:

That...in order to bring full transparency and accountability to the House of Commons spending, the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs be instructed to:

- (i) conduct open and public hearings with a view to replace the Board of Internal Economy with an independent oversight body;
- (ii) invite the Auditor General, the Clerk and the Chief Financial Officer of the House of Commons to participate fully in these hearings;

*Routine Proceedings*

(iii) study the practices of provincial and territorial legislatures, as well as other jurisdictions and Westminster-style Parliaments in order to compare and contrast their administrative oversight;

(iv) propose modifications to the Parliament of Canada Act, the Financial Administration Act, the Auditor General Act and any other acts, as deemed necessary;

(v) propose any necessary modifications to the administrative policies and practices of the House of Commons;

The committee was to report its findings to the House no later than December 2, 2013, in order to have any proposed changes to expensed disclosure and reporting in place for the beginning of the next fiscal year.

The intent was very clear. At that time, back in June—members will recall it is the work of the NDP for generations, pushing for more transparency and more disclosure—we finally got members of the government and the other parties to agree to that motion.

What happened?

I will say that the Conservatives kept their word to bring the Auditor General forward. I would like to cite what the Auditor General said at the procedure and House affairs committee when asked the question about doing away with this secretive Board of Internal Economy.

Of course, what Canadians want to see is more transparency around expenses. The NDP offered that, with the motion. What did the Auditor General say? The Auditor General, who I think has the respect of all Canadians, said the following in testimony to the procedure and House affairs committee:

In my opinion, governance can be strengthened by having an independent body that would either advise the Board of Internal Economy or be given the responsibility for all matters related to members' expenses and entitlements. [...] it is important that Canadians are confident that its membership is independent and that the members have been chosen in a non-partisan manner.

The Auditor General could not have been more clear. The Auditor General said that the NDP motion regarding doing away with the secretive Board of Internal Economy and putting in place independent monitoring of MPs' expenses was a good idea.

If we asked Canadians, they would say that the Auditor General makes sense. The Auditor General defends the public interest, often with some difficulty. As we well know, under the current government the Conservatives have hacked and slashed his budget, while they have increased ministerial funding, with their limousines, the Prime Minister flying around the world, and spending a lot of money on their own pet projects. I would mention the \$40 billion that I think they want to spend for the F-35s.

At the same time that they have been spending a lot of money on their pet projects, because Conservatives love being big spenders on themselves, they have been hacking and slashing the Auditor General's department. The Auditor General is still doing tremendous work.

On this side of the House, the NDP supports the work of the Auditor General. An NDP government would fully fund the Auditor General's operations so that Canadians would be confident that money is being spent on the public interest. That is something we have been saying all along.

We have a unanimous adoption of an NDP motion in this House. Following that, we have the Auditor General saying, "Gosh, the NDP is right. The NDP has been right along. We need an independent body. We need to do away with that secretive bureau of Internal economy".

● (1010)

What would one think, then, that the report from the procedure and House affairs committee would say as its first recommendation? What would it say? It should say to do away with this secretive non-transparent Board of Internal Economy. However, tragically, that is not what this report says.

We also had other witnesses, like the Information Commissioner, who said very clearly that MPs' expenses should be subject to the Access to Information Act to enhance public trust. Witnesses coming before the committee said very clearly that the NDP's approach was the right one. Initially, in June at least, Conservative and Liberal members agreed that doing away with the Board of Internal Economy was the right approach.

Now we arrive at the actual report itself, and it basically says to have the status quo, that the status quo is all right, that not having access to information on parliamentary expenses is okay, that having a secretive Board of Internal Economy with no transparency is somehow all right. In fact, if we sum up, the title of the report of the procedure and House affairs committee should be "Business as Usual Say Conservatives and Liberals: we want to keep doing things the old way".

Canadians disagree profoundly with that. They see the old way as leading to this myriad of Senate scandals of Conservative and Liberal senators tied up with illegal spending. They see the old way as involving the RCMP in trying to sort out where these illegal expenses occurred and following up with charges, as we are now starting to see. The old way is the way that Canadians are rejecting. In fact, I recall Conservatives saying, back in 2011, that they reject the old way, that they would make things transparent in Ottawa and would move to do away with the secrecy.

**Ms. Peggy Nash:** Accountability.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Mr. Speaker, yes, to be accountable. We remember that word. The member for Parkdale—High Park is absolutely right. We remember that the Conservatives used to talk about accountability. Conservatives do not talk about accountability anymore. The only party that is talking about accountability in a consistent and forthright way is the NDP. That is part of what we are all about.

*Routine Proceedings*

I know that Conservatives roll their eyes and say we should not believe in accountability and independent monitoring. However, we believe that democracy is enhanced when we have independent bodies in place that monitor what elected officials do. We believe that a system of checks and balances is the only way it works effectively so that public trust is enhanced and maintained, and that no government can go overboard, as with these big-spending Conservatives who just love to spend on themselves like there is no tomorrow. They get their luxury hotel rooms, as they did in London. They get the limousine and these cabinet offices across the country. Big-spending Conservatives just love to spend money on themselves.

What we have been saying all along is that we need that protection. We need the Auditor General's department, the Parliamentary Budget Officer. We need that system of checks and balances. What we have seen from these Conservatives is gutting that system of checks and balances.

We brought forward, for procedure and House affairs, the proposal that parliamentary expenses be subject to the Access to Information Act. We brought forward that we do away with the self-policing and the secretive Board of Internal Economy and establish independent monitoring, as has been done in Manitoba, which has an NDP government, of course, and in places like the United Kingdom. This is to ensure public trust and ensure that we have disclosure of expenses that are uniform, consistent, and approved. We do not want stunts, but rather a fundamental reporting mechanism that would be overseen by an independent, non-partial body and that, at the same, would be subject to the transparency that Canadians expect.

That is what we have put forward. That is what we believe is fundamental to enhancing Canadian democracy. I can tell members right now that New Democrats are going to continue to fight for transparency. We are going to continue to fight to do away with the secretive Board of Internal Economy, and we are going to continue to fight for Canadians' right to know what Parliament is doing and what MPs are doing.

• (1015)

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, when I think of transparency and accountability and affiliate them to the acronym NDP, the first word that comes to my mind is “not”.

I do not know where the member was with regard to the whole process we went through last year. Let me remind the member that it was the leader of the Liberal Party who engaged Canadians by saying Liberals were going to get involved in proactive disclosure. We responded to what Canadians wanted by having proactive disclosure. How did the NDP respond to that, which deals with transparency and accountability? The NDP said no. It denied the opportunity to provide it for all Canadians. It was all about accountability, all about transparency, and the NDP was the furthest political party from it in the chamber; it refused that sort of accountability and transparency.

The question I have for the member is this. What is it that the NDP members of Parliament have to hide? They are hiding something. What are they hiding and—

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

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Mr. Speaker, we certainly do not need a sound system to enhance the member's voice. He comes across loud and clear. He is defending the Conservative government yet again, which Liberals seem to do.

He should be asking the question of his own leader. His own leader, as a member of Parliament, was going to speaking engagements and demanding money in return for them from private organizations and, at the same time, as we found out later on, filing his expense claims for the House of Commons. That is something New Democrats do not do. When we go out, we are speaking as members of Parliament; we are not trying to hit up organizations for money. We believe that the Canadian public is entitled to have us speak for free as members of Parliament. That is something that every single New Democrat member of Parliament believes in.

The real question is why Conservatives and Liberals are defending each other here and in the Senate. Why do they want the status quo? Why do they want to hide the secretive Board of Internal Economy from Canadians? That is a question he has to answer.

• (1020)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to ask my colleague a question. In his presentation he explained how the Conservatives and the Liberals adopt half measures that in reality last only three days. They promise transparency, but it is just a media stunt.

When I went to the Conservatives' and Liberals' websites to see their so-called transparency, I saw nothing more than half measures. They have done a half-baked job. The expenses are practically impossible to follow. It is ridiculous.

It would be good to have an independent body present MPs' expenses to Canadians, as the NDP is proposing. This would also promote public confidence. The public would know that this was done properly and not by Conservative and Liberal MPs who always have partisanship in mind.

**Mr. Peter Julian:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to sincerely thank the hon. member for Sherbrooke. He is young, but he is an extraordinary member of Parliament. He contributes greatly to the debates in the House with persistence and intelligence.

He asked a good question. In June 2013, in the House, there was talk of doing away with self-policing by MPs. The public was on board with the idea. The Conservatives were on board. Even the Liberals, who are outraged by the Senate scandal, said they were on board. They publicly agreed, but during the meeting of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, the Conservatives and the Liberals said no to access to information and doing away with self-policing.

I think that if people want transparency, then they should vote for the NDP in 2015. There is no question.

**Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. friend. I find this very interesting. Canadians have considerable fears about this government. Clearly, our political system as it exists now is broken.

*Routine Proceedings*

That is the report we are talking about right now. I wish the Conservatives would also contribute to this debate, but I doubt they will. This report, prepared by the NDP, outlines a system that would work very well for Canadians. This system would preserve the responsibilities to and the respect for Canadian taxpayers.

[*English*]

As my colleague alluded to, we New Democrats thought—and perhaps naively, I now reflect—somehow when we passed a motion in Canada's Parliament, unanimously, with Conservatives and Liberals voting for that motion to improve things for Canadians, that they actually wanted to do what was in the motion.

There was a plan and an idea in the text of that motion to improve transparency and accountability for all Canadians. One would think that this would be a non-partisan issue, that there is not really a wedge to drive here, that it is not a left versus right, but it is just right versus wrong, and that all parliamentarians would agree that, due to the series of Conservative and Liberal scandals, the only good thing that might come out of it is some true and honest reform of the way we do business in Parliament.

No one has made the case for Senate abolition better than the current Prime Minister with his appointing of the nefarious characters who are now under investigation by the RCMP. No one has made a better case that we need improved systems for accountability at the very highest level than the Prime Minister has, as the RCMP continues to investigate members of his office, his inner sanctum, his most trusted advisors.

For generations now, New Democrats have been making the case for Senate abolition, but it took the Prime Minister and his incredible inability to find talent. One would think that if he had to appoint 59 senators and break his promise to Canadians—the promise he made time and again that he would not appoint unelected senators—that he could have found some better characters to choose from.

I guess Brazeau, Wallin, and Mike Duffy were the best of the Conservative lot. It was thought that these folks would go out and do what was most important for the government, which was raise money for the Conservative Party of Canada. They were good at that, but being accountable and honest with taxpayers, not so much.

For years we have seen the Board of Internal Economy conduct itself entirely behind closed doors. Up until recently I sat on the Board of Internal Economy, and I watched how the system worked and how it did not work. We, as New Democrats, realize that the best disinfectant is sunlight. If we want to really expose what is going on, we have to bring it out into the light of day.

Canadians are properly concerned with the way the Conservatives are handling not just the money they collect from taxpayers but also the various so-called watchdogs that we have instituted over generations to protect the public from power that goes unchecked.

We have the Auditor General, who has done incredible work and who helped expose the Liberal sponsorship scandal, which went to the very heart and top and through the Liberal Party of Canada and showed that corruption was rife. People properly went to jail.

Thank goodness Sheila Fraser was there. If she had not been, would we ever have had exposure of the corruption that had been

going on in the Liberal Party of Canada? It is unlikely. Jean Chrétien was not about to tell us about it. Paul Martin was not about to admit to anything. It took a good Auditor General, digging, finding, and calling people to testify. We have seen the government take the Auditor General's office and cut its ability to do its job on behalf of Canadians.

The Parliamentary Budget Office was a function created by the current government to help bring truth to government. That was the whole reason for the institution, to find out what the actual numbers were for things like expenditures and whether the government was telling the truth about what things actually cost.

As soon as that Parliamentary Budget Officer, Kevin Page, did his work, the government made him an enemy of the state. It threatened his budget, threatened him personally, and attacked his credibility, time and again, and not with facts, of course, because that is not how Conservatives do these things. No, it was all personal.

● (1025)

It was a vendetta against all the poor Conservative victims, again, one of the conspiracy theories that they derive about themselves, that everyone is out to get the poor Conservative Party of Canada. That is what it is. It must be a conspiracy of all these bureaucrats out there trying to do something so awful as to hold them to account.

We have also seen this with Elections Canada. Elections Canada was moving a pilot project forward that would allow Canadians to vote electronically online, which the younger demographic in particular, which has a voting rate south of 40%, was very keen to engage in. This is something other democracies around the world are looking for. That pilot project got cut by Elections Canada, not because it wanted to but because the Conservative government cut its funds. I shy away from conspiracy theories, but that is a direct link. Elections Canada said that is what it wanted to do: engage more young people. Perhaps they would vote Conservative, or perhaps not. One hopes they have not grown that cynical by the age of 25 or 35. The fact is that it would help improve democracy, something the government is obviously not interested in. We see that in its, ironically, cynically entitled new election act with respect to fair voting.

This motion was concrete and specific. It was backed up by the Auditor General. One would think that the Conservatives and Liberals would have listened to what the Auditor General had to say. The fundamental principle that self-policing does not work is one we should all agree with. Self-policing is inherently fraught with problems because inevitably someone will not tell the truth.

I do not accuse the Liberal leader of knowingly lying when he said that he had not taken any money from taxpayers while he was out earning speaking fees. However, the fact was that there was a self-policing and self-reporting procedure that the Liberals had adopted, which proved not to work. What he said was not true. He had taken money and used public money to go and get speaking gigs and fees. That is a problem.

The Conservatives said they would put all of their expenses online to self-report and self-police. When we went through the Conservatives' websites to find the reports, we found there was no information at all. They do not tell us what the trip was for or what they were doing. They do not tell us most of the trips they go on. They do not report their budgets. They pretend they do and hope the media and public take the headline only and ignore what actually goes on.

We need something better. The New Democrats propose that we would not be self-policed. Rather, we would have the Auditor General or an external body make sure that every dollar that members of Parliament spend on their budgets is reported and accounted for properly.

We also said that the very concept of the Board of Internal Economy in 2014, where members of Parliament secretly meet and decide on what is a very large budget that governs all of Parliament, is something from a bygone era. Of course we made conditions that some things need to be taken into camera, such as security measures and the security of the Prime Minister. Any of those sensitive issues would be done in private, as is appropriate and as is done in the public and private sectors. However, let us apply some normal standards and rules, because that is what Canadians expect of us.

The Conservative government came into power essentially based on a previous government scandal. It came into power promising great things around accountability. It must feel some regret with respect to those promises, because they are being shown right now not to have been true.

When it comes to government accountability, the Ethics Commissioner, the Information Commissioner, and the Parliamentary Budget Officer have been unanimous in describing the government as the most secretive in Canadian history. They cannot get basic information to report back to Canadians. I thought those used to be Conservative values. I thought the Conservatives used to talk about those kinds of things and that they would be different. They said they would be different from the Liberals. Then we look at their record.

Therefore, because of the extenuating circumstances the government has put before us, I move:

That the House do now adjourn.

● (1030)

**The Deputy Speaker:** The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Some hon. members:** No.

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

### Routine Proceedings

**Some hon. members:** Yea.

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

**Some hon. members:** Nay.

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

*And five or more members having risen:*

**The Deputy Speaker:** Call in the members.

● (1120)

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

### (Division No. 54)

#### YEAS

##### Members

Allen (Welland)	Angus
Ashton	Atamanenko
Ayala	Bellavance
Benskin	Bevington
Blanchette-Lamothe	Boivin
Borg	Boulerice
Boutin-Sweet	Brahmi
Brousseau	Cash
Charlton	Chicoine
Chisholm	Choquette
Christopherson	Comartin
Cullen	Davies (Vancouver East)
Day	Donnelly
Dubé	Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Dusseau	Fortin
Freeman	Garrison
Genest	Genest-Jourdain
Giguère	Godin
Grogg	Harris (Scarborough Southwest)
Harris (St. John's East)	Hassainia
Hughes	Jacob
Julian	Lapointe
Larose	Latendresse
Laverdière	LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)
Mai	Marston
Martin	Masse
Mathysen	Michaud
Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)	Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)
Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)	Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)
Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)	Mulcair
Nantel	Nash
Nicholls	Nunez-Melo
Patry	Pécelet
Perreault	Pilon
Plamondon	Rankin
Ravignat	Raynault
Rousseau	Scott
Sellah	Sims (Newton—North Delta)
Sitsabaesan	Stewart
Thibeault	Toone — 80

#### NAYS

##### Members

Ablonczy	Adams
Adler	Aglukkaq
Albas	Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Allison	Ambler
Ambrose	Anders
Anderson	Andrews
Armstrong	Ashfield
Aspin	Bateman
Bélangier	Bennett
Benoit	Bergen
Bernier	Bezan
Blaney	Block
Boughen	Braid
Breitkreuz	Brown (Leeds—Grenville)

*Routine Proceedings*

Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)	Brown (Barrie)
Butt	Byrne
Calandra	Calkins
Carmichael	Carrie
Casey	Chisu
Chong	Clarke
Clement	Cotler
Crockatt	Cuzner
Davidson	Dechert
Devolin	Dion
Dreeshen	Dubourg
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Dykstra	Easter
Eyking	Falk
Fantino	Fast
Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)	Flaherty
Fry	Galipeau
Gallant	Gill
Glover	Goguen
Goldring	Goodale
Gourde	Grewal
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)	Hawn
Hayes	Hoback
Holder	Hsu
James	Jones
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Karygiannis
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)	Kent
Kerr	Komarnicki
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Lake
Lamoureux	Lauzon
Leef	Leitch
Lemieux	Leung
Lizon	Lobb
Lukiwski	Lunney
MacAulay	MacKenzie
Maguire	Mayes
McCallum	McColeman
McGuinty	McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
McLeod	Menegakis
Miller	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Murray
Norlock	Obhrai
O'Connor	Oliver
O'Neill Gordon	Opitz
O'Toole	Payne
Poillievre	Preston
Raitt	Rajotte
Regan	Reid
Rempel	Richards
Rickford	Ritz
Saxton	Scarpaleggia
Schellenberger	Seeback
Sgro	Shea
Shipley	Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind- sor)
Sopuck	Sorenson
Stanton	St-Denis
Storseth	Strahl
Sweet	Tilson
Toet	Trost
Trottier	Truppe
Valcourt	Van Kesteren
Van Loan	Vellacott
Wallace	Warkentin
Watson	Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)
Weston (Saint John)	Wilks
Williamson	Wong
Woodworth	Yelich
Young (Oakville)	Young (Vancouver South)
Zimmer — 165	

## PAIRED

Nil

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I have a follow-up question. I find it most ironic that we have the New Democrats on the other hand who are ultimately saying “no” to proactive disclosure.

It is very important to recognize that it was the leader of the Liberal Party who brought to this House the whole idea of proactive disclosure. We have challenged—

**The Speaker:** Order. I hear several members yelling out “debate”. We are not on debate yet; we are on questions and comments to the previous speech. The hon. member for Winnipeg North is asking a question of the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley, and the Chair would like to hear it.

The hon. member for Winnipeg North.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux:** Mr. Speaker, I do not quite understand that particular reaction.

However, the point is that it was the leader of the Liberal Party of Canada who ultimately brought in proactive disclosure. Proactive disclosure makes a difference. I find it ironic that the NDP continues to say “no” to proactive disclosure.

My question to the government—or rather, the NDP—House leader is this: what is it that the NDP members of Parliament have to hide that they do not want to share with Canadians? Why do they oppose sharing transparency and accountability with Canadians?

**Mr. Nathan Cullen:** Mr. Speaker, I am not the government House leader yet. Let us let Canadians vote on that first.

As to the question from my friend, I do not think he actually understands the definition of the word “irony”, in the sense that his leader made grandiose statements about a new ethical standard and all the rest, and swore on a stack of Bibles that he did not take any public money while going to these paid speaking engagements as a member of Parliament.

Again, I do not accuse the Liberal leader of knowingly telling a lie, but in fact that is what ended up happening, because the system in place that my friend thinks is so wonderful and accountable to Canadians, failed. It failed the Liberal leader, actually. That is a shame, because he stood in front of Canadians and said he never took any public money, ever, for these paid public speaking engagements.

One could debate the idea the members of Parliament get paid to speak to the public. I think that is a healthy debate we should have in this place. New Democrats think we are already paid to speak to the public, but that is a different discussion.

More importantly, my point is that our efforts to put through this motion were to have accountability, transparency, and the end of self-policing, which the Liberals are so fond of and which got them in trouble when they ran the sponsorship program. They thought self-policing was enough.

We need good policing. The Auditor General agrees with what the NDP has proposed. I have no idea why the Liberals would rather agree with the Conservative Party than the Auditor General of Canada.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to ask a question of my colleague, who clearly explained the Conservatives' position.



*Routine Proceedings*

In his speech, he showed just how poorly the Conservative government treats Parliament's independent bodies. Just think of the former parliamentary budget officer, Mr. Page, and the vendetta this government pursued against him. I have to wonder if this is also why the government refuses to accept our request to create an independent body to audit MPs' and senators' expenses.

I have a feeling that the Conservatives want to block that proposal because they are against any kind of independent body, such as the Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer. When those kinds of bodies conduct independent audits, the Conservatives oppose them and will even take them to court to avoid giving them certain documents. This just shows how little respect the Conservatives have for Parliament's independent bodies.

I have to wonder if that is why the Conservatives and the Liberals opposed our proposal to create an independent body to review senators' and MPs' expenses.

• (1125)

**Mr. Nathan Cullen:** Mr. Speaker, that is a really good question. It is strange, because the Conservatives and the Liberals voted in favour of this motion. However, when the time comes to do the work, to improve the situation and to put an end to the current system of self-policing in order to set up a good policing system, as proposed by the NDP, the Liberals and the Conservatives agree to say no.

Similarly, the Liberals voted against our motion to put an end to partisanship in the Senate. Then, a few months later, they say that it is impossible and that what the NDP is proposing is ridiculous. However, when the idea comes from the Liberals, it is a very good idea. That is completely different.

In reality, the goal of any party should be to improve the situation. After all these scandals, we should tell Canadians that we have a chance to improve things and allow them to hope that Parliament and its politicians can have a better system.

The Auditor General of Canada says that the NDP's proposal is excellent. I do not understand why the Liberals are asking what the NDP is hiding. I find that strange. Given their party's history, it is interesting to hear the Liberals talk about hidden money and scandals.

The proposal is simple. It is an opportunity for us to improve things. We can finally work together for the benefit of Canadians.

[English]

**The Speaker:** Resuming debate, the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons.

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

**The Speaker:** The hon. member for Chambly—Borduas is rising on a point of order.

**Mr. Matthew Dubé:** Mr. Speaker, when you called resuming debate, I believe I saw my good friend and colleague from Churchill trying to catch your attention. Perhaps she is too close to your chair to get that attention. I do not know how it looks from up there, but I would like to move a motion.

[Translation]

Seconded by my colleague from Saint-Lambert, I would like to move that the hon. member for Churchill be heard now.

[English]

**The Speaker:** As members know, in order for a motion that a member be now heard to be successful, the person who has just been granted the floor must not have started his or her speech. I did hear the hon. parliamentary secretary start speaking before the member for Chambly—Borduas rose.

I see the hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley rising on a point of order.

**Mr. Nathan Cullen:** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I want to clarify the precedents on this issue because we had a previous incident much more in contravention. I watched the two members rise and begin their comments simultaneously, so I am seeking clarification from you, Mr. Speaker.

We had a debate on December 7, 2012, in which the then parliamentary secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage rose in the midst of a speech being given by our MP for Ottawa Centre and applied the same intervention. It was explicitly that the hon. member for Ajax—Pickering be now heard. The Acting Speaker spoke on this point. I will quote from *Hansard* of December 7, 2012, what he declared:

The hon. parliamentary secretary has moved a motion that is non-debatable and as such, other members cannot rise on this point of order until it has been dispensed with.

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

The Acting Speaker then put the motion to the House.

It was clear that a member had actually begun speaking. The Conservative member rose to interject. He felt that the member for Ajax—Pickering should be speaking. The Deputy Speaker at the time then brought that motion forward so that it could be heard and debated on in the House.

We are just trying to understand the precedents in how this works. It was clear that the member for Ottawa Centre was five minutes into his speech, and the Speaker at the time felt that it was a question that needed to be placed before the House.

I think my colleague from Quebec is raising a stronger motion. Two members rose simultaneously. The Speaker identified one member, but there is a question as to who was to be identified next. Based upon what happened in December 2012, we are led to believe, as the Acting Speaker did then, that the motion then had to be debated.

If it grieves my friends across the way that the House of Commons actually has rules that are applied consistently, then I feel for them and their loss of the minute that I have used to speak.

I would suggest that all Canadians who like to do such things as vote are also interested in what takes place in Canada's Parliament today, because the Conservative government treats Canadian voters, particularly the marginalized ones, with complete disdain.

*Routine Proceedings*

● (1130)

**The Speaker:** I will read from *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition, page 597, dealing with this very issue. I will start with the second paragraph:

When two Members rise simultaneously to “catch the Speaker’s eye”, the Speaker will recognize one of them to speak. By rising on a point of order, another Member may move that the Member who had not been recognized be given the floor. The motion “that a Member be now heard” is an exception to the rule that a motion cannot be moved on a point of order. The motion may not be moved if the Member first recognized by the Speaker has already begun to speak.

I will take a look at the reference that the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley has cited and see what the circumstances were around that, as it has just been brought to my attention.

I will give the floor now to the hon. parliamentary secretary to the government House leader.

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Once again, Mr. Speaker, I move:

That the debate be now adjourned.

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

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Some hon. members:** No.

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

**Some hon. members:** Yea.

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

**Some hon. members:** Nay.

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

*And five or more members having risen:*

**The Speaker:** Call in the members.

● (1220)

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

*(Division No. 55)*

**YEAS**

Members

Ablonczy	Adams
Adler	Aglukkaq
Albas	Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Allison	Ambler
Ambrose	Anders
Anderson	Andrews
Armstrong	Ashfield
Aspin	Bateman
Bélangier	Bennett
Benoit	Bergen
Bernier	Bezan
Blaney	Block
Boughen	Braid
Breitkreuz	Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)	Brown (Barrie)
Butt	Calandra
Calkins	Carmichael
Carrie	Casey
Chisu	Chong

Clarke	Clement
Cotler	Crockatt
Cuzner	Davidson
Dechert	Devolin
Dion	Dreeshen
Dubourg	Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Dykstra
Easter	Eyking
Falk	Fantino
Fast	Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)
Flaherty	Fry
Galipeau	Gallant
Gill	Glover
Goguen	Goldring
Goodale	Gourde
Grewal	Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hawn	Hayes
Hoback	Holder
Hsu	James
Jones	Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Karygiannis	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret’s)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Kent
Kerr	Komarnicki
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Lake
Lamoureux	Lauzon
Leaf	Leitch
Lemieux	Leung
Lizon	Lobb
Lukiwski	Lunney
MacAulay	MacKenzie
Maguire	Mayes
McCallum	McColeman
McGuinty	McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
McLeod	Menegakis
Miller	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Murray
Norlock	Obhrai
O’Connor	Oliver
O’Neill Gordon	Opitz
O’Toole	Payne
Poilievre	Preston
Raitt	Rajotte
Regan	Reid
Rempel	Richards
Rickford	Ritz
Saxton	Scarpaleggia
Schellenberger	Seeback
Sgro	Shea
Shipley	Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind-
sor)	
Sopuck	Sorenson
Stanton	St-Denis
Storseth	Strahl
Sweet	Tilson
Toet	Trost
Trottier	Truppe
Valcourt	Van Kesteren
Van Loan	Vellacott
Wallace	Warkentin
Watson	Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to
Sky Country)	
Weston (Saint John)	
Williamson	Wilks
Woodworth	Wong
Young (Oakville)	Yelich
Zimmer — 165	Young (Vancouver South)

**NAYS**

Members

Angus
Ayala
Benskin
Blanchette-Lamothe
Borg
Boutin-Sweet
Brousseau
Charlton
Chisholm
Christopherson
Cullen
Day
Doré Lefebvre

Dubé	Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Dusseauult	Fortin
Freeman	Garrison
Genest	Genest-Jourdain
Giguère	Godin
Groguhé	Harris (Scarborough Southwest)
Harris (St. John's East)	Hughes
Jacob	Julian
Lapointe	Larose
Latendresse	Laverdière
LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)	Mai
Marston	Martin
Masse	Mathysen
Michaud	Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)
Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)	Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)
Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)	Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)
Mourani	Mulcair
Nantel	Nash
Nicholls	Nunez-Melo
Patry	Pécllet
Perreault	Pilon
Plamondon	Rankin
Ravignat	Raynault
Rousseau	Scott
Sellah	Sims (Newton—North Delta)
Sitsabaiesan	Stewart
Sullivan	Toone
Turmel— 81	

PAIRED

Nil

**The Speaker:** I declare the motion carried.

The House will now resume with the remaining business under Routine Proceedings.

\* \* \*

PETITIONS

NAVIGABLE WATERS PROTECTION ACT

**Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I have a petition from several people in my region. They are calling on the government to change the reckless changes it has made to the Navigable Waters Protection Act, because they believe that it is gutting environmental protection for waterways in southern Ontario and right across Canada.

The petitioners ask the House to please pass and enact my private member's Bill C-498, which would amend the Navigable Waters Protection Act to provide heritage protection to the North Thames, the Middle Thames, and the Thames River.

• (1225)

PUBLIC TRANSIT

**Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I have a petition to table. The petitioners are calling for a national public strategy. It is estimated that in the next five years, there will be an \$18-billion gap in infrastructure needs. Canadians are calling for this national strategy for the environment, the economy, and sustainable development. It is important to connect all three pieces. Without a federal pillar for that, we are going to have challenges.

The petitioners want to make sure that the federal government is not staying at the wayside and that it contributes to public transit in the future.

[Translation]

**Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to present a petition in the House today. The

Routine Proceedings

petition calls on Canada to adopt a national transit strategy. Right now, Canada is the only OECD country without a national transit strategy.

The petition also calls on the government to make permanent investments to support public transit and to establish federal funding mechanisms, while working with provincial governments to implement this national strategy.

I hope the government will respond favourably to my constituents.

VIA RAIL

**Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, today I am tabling a petition signed by the people of Madawaska-Restigouche and Acadie—Bathurst, in my area. The petitioners urge the Government of Canada to take all necessary measures to reinstate daily round-trip VIA Rail service between Montreal, Quebec City and Halifax, Nova Scotia, through the city of Campbellton, New Brunswick, Bathurst and Miramichi.

[English]

The petitioners urge the Government of Canada to take all measures to reinstate daily round-trip VIA Rail passenger service between Montreal, Quebec, Halifax, through the city of Campbellton, New Brunswick, Bathurst, Miramichi, Matapédia Valley, Amqui, Rimouski, and Rogersville, most of which are located in the ridings of the Conservative Party.

GENETICALLY MODIFIED ALFALFA

**Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions to present this morning.

The first petition calls for a moratorium on genetically modified alfalfa in order to allow a proper review of its impact on farmers in Canada. This petition contains names of dozens of people from across the province of British Columbia.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

**Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the second petition calls upon the House to provide a permanent investment plan to support public transit, to establish federal funding mechanisms for that purpose, and to work with all levels of government to ensure a sustainable, predictable, and long-term source of funding for such a vital service.

[Translation]

SHERBROOKE AIRPORT

**Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseauult (Sherbrooke, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition today on behalf of the people of Sherbrooke, even though not every single one of them has signed the petition. However, several dozen people did sign the petition regarding the airport in Sherbrooke, which is a very important issue.

*Routine Proceedings*

As we know, Sherbrooke is the sixth-largest city in Quebec and has the largest population in southeastern Quebec. Sherbrooke needs to modernize its airport to sustain the economic development in the Eastern Townships over the long term. This project has the support of all the socio-economic and political stakeholders in the Sherbrooke region.

This petition calls on the government to do what is necessary to make the Sherbrooke airport project possible. I hope the government responds positively to this petition, because the economic development of my region is at stake. I hope that the Conservatives will take this into consideration. Quebec as a whole could benefit from this project because it would have considerable economic impact, especially in the riding of Compton—Stanstead. Furthermore, everything around the airport could develop at lightning speed if this project were to move forward.

That is exactly what the people of Sherbrooke who signed this petition would like to see. I truly hope to get a quick response from the government in support of this petition.

● (1230)

## MINING INDUSTRY

**Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, today I am presenting a petition with over 650 signatures. It is important to note that, because over 75% of the extractive sector companies in the world are Canadian, because of the serious violations uncovered over the past few years, and because Canada is a country that promotes respect for human rights, it is our duty to implement better mechanisms to protect all people from these violations.

This petition calls on the government to create a legislated ombudsman mechanism for Canada's mining sector who would have the power to investigate complaints, assess compliance with international corporate accountability standards, make public its findings, and most importantly, recommend remedial actions for companies that violate basic human rights.

[English]

## PUBLIC TRANSIT

**Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition calling on the Government of Canada to provide long-term, predictable, and non-partisan funding for public transit.

This is a huge issue across the country, but especially in the city of Toronto, where my riding of Parkdale—High Park is located. The GTA loses about \$6 billion a year from lost productivity, with daily commutes averaging about 80 minutes.

It is estimated overall that we have a \$32-billion investment gap in needed transit infrastructure across the country. Transit infrastructure was missing in the 2013 budget and it is hugely felt in the city of Toronto and right across the country. We are in fact the only G8 country that does not have a national transit strategy.

I know that in my community people line up, sometimes for close to an hour, waiting for adequate transit. The transit infrastructure in place in the city of Toronto was established in the 1960s and is certainly much out of date and needs tremendous upgrading and

expansion throughout the city. That is just one part of our national infrastructure.

I would urge all members to support the inclusion of a national transit strategy and funding by our government in its budget.

[Translation]

**Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, great minds must be thinking alike across Canada, because I have petitions to present on the same subject. The Conservative government is the only one that does not seem to understand the importance of creating a national transit strategy, which is extremely important to the people of Gatineau.

We have just inaugurated our new transit service, Rapibus, but there is still a lot to do in terms of transportation and infrastructure. I hope that the government will pay attention to all of these petitions signed by Canadians across the country who see the light. The government is refusing to open its eyes. It cares more about time allocation motions than taking action that would be practical and useful for Canadians from coast to coast to coast. I urge the government to respond swiftly to these petitions signed by Canadians from across the country.

**Mr. Matthew Dubé (Chambly—Borduas, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am presenting a petition in favour of a national public transit strategy, which is very important to my constituents.

Canada is the only G8 country that does not have such a strategy. Our municipalities and provinces are working miracles with the minimal resources they have. It is time for the federal government to show some leadership.

The City of Chambly is currently the only city in Quebec that provides free municipal transit. That is the kind of leadership we expect from our federal government. Unfortunately, it is not meeting our expectations.

The people who signed this petition and all of the petitions presented by my colleagues are calling on the government to take positive steps toward implementing a national public transit strategy. This is essential. It is good for the economy too, which is the only justification the government seems to understand. If the Conservatives came to our ridings and met with the chambers of commerce, they would know that it is a big priority for us.

● (1235)

[English]

## MINING INDUSTRY

**Mr. Peter Braid (Kitchener—Waterloo, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have a petition signed by many of my constituents in my riding of Kitchener—Waterloo.

The petition relates to the issue of the importance of responsible mining overseas.

## ANIMAL WELFARE

**Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I have presented these petitions many times before, so I am pleased to rise today to present about a hundred pages of petitions collected by the Association for the Protection of Fur-Bearing Animals. I would like to thank the organization for the tremendous work it has done across the country, including its volunteers.

Today we have petitions from Vancouver, Prince George, Calgary, Edmonton, Grande Prairie, Peace River, Toronto, and Burnaby, just a whole variety of communities, from people who point out to us that every year hundreds of thousands of dogs and cats are brutally slaughtered for their fur in a number of Asian regions. The petitioners point out that Canada should join the USA, Australia, and the European Union in banning the import and sale of dog and cat fur. They call upon the government to introduce and support legislation, specifically a private member's bill that is before the House, to ensure proper labelling and a ban.

Again, I would like to thank the organization for the tremendous work it does in bringing this to our attention.

I hope I will be presenting more petitions on this in the future, as I am sure other members will, because it is an issue that we need to be aware of and that people in the community are very concerned about animal welfare and want us to take action.

## PUBLIC TRANSIT

**Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I have here a petition about the lack of investment in infrastructure for public transit. I come from a riding where this is a huge issue, and the lack of public of transit and a national strategy is resulting in huge pressure on my community.

The petitioners are calling for additional investment and for the government to develop and implement a national strategy, because it is not just an issue in my riding but one right across the country. Environmentally, it is the right thing to do because we know that it will not only improve the quality of life but also lead to the sustainability of our planet.

## THE ENVIRONMENT

**Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to deposit two petitions. The first is on behalf of many environmental enthusiasts in the community in support this week of celebrating World Wetlands Day.

The petitioners are calling on the federal government to respect a 100 square kilometre public land assembly surrounding the Rouge River and Duffins Creek Watershed in Toronto, Markham, and Pickering. They are saying that publicly owned land, whether federal, municipal, or provincial, is predominantly designated to the provincial greenbelt and natural heritage system. So they are asking the Government of Canada to protect the irreplaceable 100 square kilometres of public land assembly within a healthy and sustainable Rouge national park.

The petitioners are also asking the government to protect and restore the 600-metre-wide wooded main ecological corridor linking Lake Ontario to the Oak Ridges Moraine in the future Rouge

*Privilege*

national park. They are very concerned about the future of this national park.

## PUBLIC TRANSIT

**Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the second petition I am depositing today is on behalf of the residents of Scarborough. Members know that I proudly represent the northeast corner of the city of Toronto and Scarborough, where public transit is a very real concern. We only have buses. There is no LRT and no subway, or any other means of public transportation.

The people of Scarborough deserve a fast, reliable, and affordable public transit system. Wait times of the average commute there are currently over two hours. The petitioners are asking the government for long-term, predictable, and non-partisan funding for public transit now.

\* \* \*

● (1240)

## QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

**Mr. James Bezan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I ask that all question be allowed to stand.

**The Speaker:** Is that agreed?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

## PRIVILEGE

## BILINGUALISM IN CANADA'S LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

**Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, this is the first time that I have risen on a question of privilege, and I am somewhat saddened to have to do so.

I care deeply about official languages. I rise today in the House to follow up on a recent incident by raising a question of privilege that warrants an official response. I believe that the Speaker is best equipped to deal with this matter.

Questions of privilege are of paramount importance to the democratic institution of Parliament, and the Speaker has ruled on these questions many times. I will try to explain what happened last Tuesday. I believe that the delay in raising this question of privilege is reasonable as this incident occurred just recently.

Members and senators were invited to a technical briefing on Bill C-23, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act and other Acts and to make consequential amendments to certain Acts, organized by the Minister of State for Democratic Reform, who is also the member for Nepean—Carleton. As we know, debate on this bill began yesterday and will undoubtedly continue today.

### *Privilege*

I will try to explain what happened last Tuesday and attempt to convince you, Mr. Speaker, that there is a prima facie breach of parliamentary privilege. I am referring to the privilege of receiving, in both official languages, information about bills introduced in the House when they are drafted and debated.

Briefings are crucial. They help members to prepare before debating and voting on a bill as complex as the one in question, which is 242 pages long. It goes without saying that technical briefings are very important for such massive bills that contain so many elements. It is not mandatory that ministers provide these briefings. However, this one was offered, and we noticed many issues with the interpretation during the briefing.

It seems that no one contacted the interpretation service in advance. The interpreter who arrived had not received the documents he needed to do his job. The interpretation was often inadequate, whether it was from English to French or vice versa. The interpretation from English to French was particularly poor. At times, there was little or no interpretation or it was of poor quality.

Many of the issues with the interpretation surfaced when the members were asking questions. Some of my colleagues were there. When members and senators used the microphone in the middle of the room to ask questions, the interpreter could not hear them. Obviously, he was not able to translate the questions.

That said, the Speaker will have to ascertain the facts to determine, based on the information he obtains or he receives from other members, whether there was a prima facie breach of privilege.

I would like to remind everyone of the classic definition of parliamentary privilege. I am sure you know it, Mr. Speaker. However, I will repeat it for the benefit of my colleagues. I am quoting from Erskine May:

Parliamentary privilege is the sum of the peculiar rights enjoyed by each House collectively...and by Members of each House individually, without which they could not discharge their functions.

This is a fundamental principle of our institution, as I mentioned at the start of my speech. The privileges of each individual parliamentarian as well as the collective privileges of the House of Commons must be respected at all times.

● (1245)

Today, the question of privilege is very important because it is entrenched in the Constitution Act, 1867. Section 133 sets out certain legislative guarantees for parliamentarians when it comes to the use of Canada's official languages. These include the right to use either language in legislative debates, the use of both languages in the official records and minutes of Parliament, and the use of English and French in printing and publishing acts.

While departmental briefings are not specifically covered by the Constitution Act, University of Ottawa law professor André Braën notes that the purpose of section 133 is to grant "equal access for anglophones and francophones to the law in their language" and to guarantee "equal participation in the debates and proceedings of Parliament".

This leads me to conclude that this protection of official languages in the House is fundamental to ensure equality among all members.

It means that those who do not understand French or English can be on the same level as other members.

For example, if we give a technical overview of a bill in English to a member who only understands French without providing interpretation, this member is at a disadvantage in the legislative process compared to others who understand English perfectly. He or she is not getting the same quality of information. I think that is a fundamental issue in Canada's legislative process.

Mr. Speaker, I hope you will conclude this is a prima facie violation of privilege. This Latin expression, which means "on the face of it", is of course commonly used.

To summarize the events, members attended a briefing on Tuesday morning, at 10 a.m. The session included paper documents that, I must admit, were properly translated. Members had been promised a briefing session to help them better understand this legislation before debating it here. However, they barely had 24 hours to review 240 pages. That is not a lot of time. However, as I said earlier, there is no requirement to provide such briefings.

The officials from the Privy Council Office who were present acted in good faith. They tried several times to correct the situation and accommodate the participants in both official languages, but they failed to do so. Even my colleague from Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, who could perhaps elaborate on her own experience, had to leave during the information session because there was simply no interpretation service. Accordingly, she did not have the same rights as other MPs who understand English, like myself, since I understand it pretty well. Although there was no interpretation service, I understood what was being said in English. I can understand it pretty well, but not as well as I would have understood the French.

This has been examined in various cases, including *Att. Gen. of Quebec v. Blaikie et al.* Chief Justice Deschênes of the Superior Court of Quebec upheld the obligation to use English and French at the same time throughout the legislative process. Any disruption of that practice violates both the letter and the spirit of section 133. This substantiates my comments.

In October 2013, my hon. colleague from Skeena—Bulkley Valley also raised this question regarding Bill C-4, the budget implementation bill, for which a similar information session was held for the members. Unfortunately, the interpretation services were inadequate. If I remember correctly, there was no interpretation at all. As a result, the meeting was cancelled and held the next day. In that case, the breach of privilege was avoided.

● (1250)

In this particular case, which is very similar, there was a major difference that might prove there was a breach of parliamentary privilege. The meeting continued despite the fact that the interpretation service was having a lot of trouble. As I said earlier, one MP even had to leave because of the poor quality of the service. I am not saying that the people there were not acting in good faith; they tried to make the situation better, but it did not work.

*Privilege*

The bill in question deals with electoral reform, and it is very important to Canadians. The least the government could have done was to provide a technical briefing in both official languages to ensure all the members of the House are on a level playing field when they have to debate the issue. That was obviously not done.

I think a situation like that is unacceptable because it prevents parliamentarians from doing their jobs and fully participating in debate. Mr. Speaker, I would like you to make a ruling confirming that this is in fact a breach of the privileges of members of Parliament.

I would be willing to move an appropriate motion if you ask me to do so. Mr. Speaker, I look forward to your decision on the prima facie breach of parliamentary privilege that may have taken place last Tuesday.

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Sherbrooke for raising this question of privilege, because it is very important. It is not just about being put at a disadvantage; it is about a lack of respect for my rights as an MP, Canada's Constitution and the Official Languages Act.

I want to support the member's question of privilege by adding two or three arguments. First of all, I believe that the Speaker is responsible for ensuring respect for Canada's Constitution, the Official Languages Act, the customs of our country and the decisions of the Supreme Court of Canada, as they apply to Canada's Parliament and the House of Commons.

I would like to speak about something that happened to me last Monday. It was not the first time this has happened, Mr. Speaker, and I have written to you two or three times about this matter.

On Monday, at the end of the day, I was returning here for a vote. The person manning the RCMP post who checked my ID could not speak French. When addressed by the authorities, francophones prefer to be spoken to in our mother tongue. French is my mother tongue. This is the third or fourth time this has happened. It is another breach of my parliamentary privileges to not be served in my mother tongue, an official language that Parliament and the House of Commons must respect and that you, Mr. Speaker, must ensure is respected.

Our colleague has raised a question about a technical briefing on a very important bill. At that session, the information was not provided in a fair and equal manner in both official languages. I believe that this constitutes a question of privilege.

I want to add one more thing. If it is indeed acknowledged that this privilege was not respected, then should that not prevent the government from using a time allocation motion to rush the bill through, when francophone MPs may not have had the chance to get as much technical information as anglophone MPs? This is a very serious issue that cannot be summarily dismissed. This has major repercussions for the entire country.

Mr. Speaker, you may be a bit surprised to see a member from the third party take the floor. I am not here to kill time. I am here because the question raised by the hon. member for Sherbrooke is extremely important. I thought it was important that you take note of that because this is a very serious matter.

● (1255)

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as far as I know, during the briefing sessions, we provided information to the members in English and French. The Privy Council officials came to provide that information in both official languages. I can assure you that some of the officials who were there to provide the information were not only bilingual, but also francophones. They were available to answer all the questions in both official languages and to provide all that information in both official languages. I never received a single complaint from anyone in the House of Commons about that briefing. No one approached me to indicate that they did not receive the information in both official languages.

Now the members are suddenly trying to create a controversy. Nonetheless, if the hon. members want more information, we are prepared to provide it to them in either official language. The officials will be available to provide a briefing in English or French. I have received no such request from the opposition MPs, but if they change their minds and want to have that information in English or French, we will provide it to them.

**Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, on February 4, I went to 2 Rideau St. for the recommended technical briefing that had been set up by the Privy Council. This was not their first time. These are people who are supposed to be well prepared and have a well-equipped translation service. We have it all the time in committee. We should be entitled to it.

Bill C-23 is very important and showed up out of nowhere. It is also very long. I need the technical information in my first language, which is French. When someone recommends that we go to these meetings, they should automatically ensure that there is simultaneous English and French interpretation. We do not want people beside us or at the front to try to translate the information for us.

MPs and senators were invited to this meeting. The briefing was organized by the Minister of State for Democratic Reform, the member for Nepean—Carleton. There were a number of interpretation problems, from the very beginning of the session. Several times, there was no interpretation at all. This is not a criticism of the public servants who were there and who did their best.

As a French-speaking member of Parliament, it is absolutely necessary for me to receive technical information on a bill as important as Bill C-23, the Fair Elections Act in my mother tongue, as this is something that affects every one of our ridings.

As the member for Sherbrooke said, it is very serious when MPs are prevented from doing their job because one of the official languages is treated as a secondary language.

In conclusion, I would like to share a quote from O'Brien and Bosc's *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*. On page 61 of the 2009 edition, they state, "The privileges of Members of the House of Commons provide the absolute immunity they require to perform their parliamentary work..."

*Points of Order*

A technical briefing must be given in both official languages in a way that is not just so-so, but perfect.

[*English*]

**The Speaker:** I have heard several arguments now, so I hope the hon. member for York South—Weston has something pertinent to add to the discussion. I will give him the floor if he feels he has something to add to the points.

•(1300)

**Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP):** I do, Mr. Speaker.

As an anglophone, I too did not receive simultaneous translation of the technical briefing session; so it was not a matter merely of francophone members who have now put the issue squarely before you that they could not understand in their language, but as an anglophone, portions of the technical briefing session were not in my language—

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** If it wasn't in English or in French, then what language was it in?

**Mr. Mike Sullivan:** —in English that is, Mr. Speaker, because there were problems with the interpretation.

I did raise with the officials the problems with the interpretation. I did ask the officials if another briefing session would be held. The officials told me there would be no more briefing sessions. The officials were well aware of the problems with the interpretation.

The government has on a number of occasions said to parliamentarians that, if we wish to ask questions or to enter into a debate, we should attend the technical briefing sessions, which I did in good faith. However, portions of that technical briefing session were not available to me in my mother tongue, and it is a parliamentary right of mine that it should be provided.

[*Translation*]

**The Speaker:** I thank the hon. member for Sherbrooke for raising that issue, and I will get back to the House in due course.

[*English*]

The hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley is rising on a point of order.

\* \* \*

### POINTS OF ORDER

#### FAIR ELECTIONS ACT

**Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, this is on a separate matter but connected also to this very troubled piece of legislation, which has probably had one of the most rocky starts of any government Conservative bill. That is saying something, because it has had some terrible bills, bills it has had to fix, bills it has had to correct. Allow me to address specifically the point, which follows in suit to some rulings you have made in the past about the form of the bill.

Upon reading the legislation as it was tabled by the government yesterday, we found a significant error in the tabling and the drafting of the bill between the French and English. In fact, each says the opposite thing to the other in an important section of the bill. I would

think that the government, when trying to get at something as important as reforming our election laws and trying to keep the scandalous robocalls and corrupt practices that we have seen from some parties across the way, would actually write the legislation properly. It may not be in the correct form, and this is a serious consequence. Speakers in the past have drawn to the attention of the government that when that is the case, the bill cannot be read at second reading.

Let me reference a point of order that was brought to the House previously by the member for Kings—Hants when debating a previous piece of legislation. This was Bill C-38. We remember that old gem, where the government in the production of the bill to Parliament made mistakes in how the bill was actually drafted, so that members following in French had a different version from the one members were following in English. I will point out the section that my colleague from Kings—Hants pointed out. On page 728 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition, it states:

In the past, the Speaker has directed that the order for second reading of certain bills be discharged, when it was discovered that they were not in their final form and were therefore not ready to be introduced.

Let me be specific with the problems that the government has created with its terrible design of the bill. I will not speak to the actual flaws in the ideas that the minister has presented, but rather, just in the actual text as he has given it to Canadians in the official form introduced to Parliament yesterday. The Conservatives did not take long to screw it up. It is on the very second page, in the summary, in (k). I will read the English first, Mr. Speaker, and you will see the significance of why it is different when you move over to the French. It says in (k):

exempts from what constitutes an election expense the commercial value of services provided to a registered party for the purpose of soliciting monetary contributions only from individuals who have made at least one contribution of \$20 or more to the registered party or to one of its registered associations, nomination contestants or candidates in the last five years.

The key to focus in on here is the very beginning, because it says it “exempts from what constitutes an election expense...”. That is key. That is what (k) is for and that is what the government is seeking to introduce to Canadian law to change our electoral act, the act that we govern ourselves by in seeking election to this place.

•(1305)

[*Translation*]

In French, section (k) states:

k) que la valeur commerciale des services fournis à un parti enregistré pour permettre à ce dernier de solliciter des contributions monétaires uniquement auprès de particuliers qui ont apporté au parti ou aux associations enregistrées, aux candidats à l'investiture ou aux candidats du parti au moins une contribution monétaire de 20 \$ ou plus au cours des cinq dernières années.

That is it.



*Points of Order*

[English]

The whole point of (k) is—I assume, but I do not know—to exempt those contributions, which is what I believe it says in the English. I do not know if the drafters or the minister, if he was involved in this section of the summary, meant it to read to exempt these following things, which it then delineates. In the French there is no exemption. It says this seems fine, which is the opposite, which is the point to why legislation must be drafted properly, thoughtfully, and maybe, dare I suggest, in consultation with those who know what they are talking about like, let us say, Elections Canada and maybe even a committee.

We suggested that to the government just this week as a good way to proceed, because reforming the Elections Act should be a non-partisan activity. It is in the interests of all political parties. We suggested that we move this forward before second reading, so it would allow the committee to make corrections like this, to get at the fundamentals, the DNA, of this piece of legislation and correct what is wrong, both philosophically and technically.

The minister did not provide a briefing in both official languages of any coherence to anybody involved and now suggests that, since the bill has been introduced, anyone who wants to organize information can start now. Not only are we likely to see the government move to shut down debate on a bill that is to allow us, supposedly, to improve our democracy—and it is rich with irony to watch the government do this—but the form tabled officially in the House of Commons was an imperfect form.

Previous Speakers, when faced with this predicament not of the opposition's making and certainly not of the Speaker's making, have not allowed bills to go ahead because they are not correct. I found this on page 2. There are 240-odd pages in this bill. Who knows what else is wrong? This is not a typo. This is a fundamental piece of the bill that the government got wrong. There is a way Parliament guides itself. I have in my hand the official copy, as tabled yesterday, which all parliamentarians have read. If members go to the second page and go back and forth between the two versions, they will see that the government has made a fundamental error in the design of this bill.

We have rules that guide us in this place for public bills, in Chapter IX of the Standing Orders of the House of Commons. I will quote Standing Order 68(3), which states, “No bill may be introduced either in blank or in an imperfect shape”. The guidance of that is very important. That asks the government, when tabling public bills, to take them seriously.

This bill, as introduced to parliamentarians, is not in its perfect form, is not in its perfect shape, and is not to be understood by parliamentarians one way or the other. It depends on which version one reads. If francophone members were to read the French version, they would think this is what is being debated and what is going to be voted on, but if only the English version is read, one thinks the exact opposite on an important section of the bill, which I assume is important to the minister and the government because they put it in there, but not important enough to get right.

The Standing Orders that guide us are absolutely clear. The precedent that was raised by the member for Kings—Hants was a

different situation, which we all acknowledged and debated. I would seek your direction in this, Mr. Speaker, because the government has had too many mulligans. A mulligan is when someone is playing golf, screws up, and takes another shot. Some call it cheating, but we are all sympathetic figures here. This is a fundamental mistake. It is a mistake that has made this bill incorrect. We would think the government thought this was important, but obviously not so much.

We seek your direction on this, Mr. Speaker. We have been quite clear on where the problem is. What a start for a bill that is so important to the health of our democracy and this important institution.

• (1310)

**Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I think you would be hard pressed to find a single member of the House who has served on a committee and has not spent time going clause by clause through legislation, working out actual disagreements among people on what the particular clauses mean in French or in English and reworking the translations of them so that they are, indeed, consistent. I think every single one of us who has ever sat on a parliamentary committee has had that experience. That is normal.

With regard to the point of order raised by my friend, he says the bill is not in the proper form. The portion he has quoted is actually not part of the bill. It is part of the summary of the bill.

O'Brien and Bosc, page 733, reads as follows, in reference to explanatory notes:

When the purpose of a bill is to amend an existing Act,—

That is the case with this bill.

—the drafters will insert notes to explain the amendments made....

It goes on to say:

They are not considered to be part of the bill....

I will say that again for the benefit of my friend, “They are not considered to be part of the bill...”. Therefore, he cannot stand in front of you, Mr. Speaker, and then complain about those notes, saying it then means that the bill is not in the proper form, because they are not part of the bill and, in fact, they disappear from subsequent reprints of the bill.

There is simply no merit to the point he has raised, which is a transparent delay tactic, and we will come back to speak to this with some further submissions.

[Translation]

**Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would just like to point out to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons that, whenever I was on a committee studying bills that had French errors, the government party rejected my amendments to correct those errors. What is more, they were anglophone MPs.

My colleague is saying that we can make the corrections, but, in committee, the government rejects even those amendments that deal with language. I find that a little hypocritical.

*Government Orders*

[English]

**Mr. Nathan Cullen:** Mr. Speaker, on my friend's point that there have been subsequent reprints, he absolutely knows full well that is not a condition that gets them off the hook. He knows that the bill as presented to the House of Commons yesterday is the bill that we work with. Correcting it on a website or correcting it in further reprints or in all of that does not actually satisfy the trigger that we have talked about here in this bill.

There are points to the summary and the execution of this bill. First of all, it is up to parliamentarians now to go into a debate on a bill for which briefings happened incorrectly, against the practices of this place, for French and English speakers. Second is to go through a bill that they could not get right in the summary and the main points, in the *Coles Notes*, as my hon. friend has said. I thought the idea of the *Coles Notes* was to clarify, not confuse. I thought we were hoping to improve the election system, not sow confusion among those seeking to enter electoral politics.

He should not aid and abet those parties, of which of course he is a member, that have sought to corrupt to the point of breaking the election laws that guide us. They declared Elections Canada to be “wearing the wrong jersey”, was it? Is Elections Canada the enemy now? It seems to me that the minister would be extremely careful in presenting this piece of legislation, in the main body, in the summary, in the title, and throughout. He could have gotten the title right at least, which he did not do either. However, we will deal with that one in debate.

This is serious. These folks cannot seem to get things right. Competency is not something we are going to easily accuse the Conservatives of, but we will ensure that this place maintains the rules that guide us and allow us to do our work on behalf of Canadians with legislation that is written properly.

Would that not be at least the bare minimum of recommendations and requirements for any government?

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## GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

**FAIR ELECTIONS ACT**

BILL C-23—TIME ALLOCATION MOTION

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

That, in relation to Bill C-23, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act and other Acts and to make consequential amendments to certain Acts, not more than three further sitting days shall be allotted to the consideration at second reading stage of the bill; and

That, 15 minutes before the expiry of the time provided for government orders on the third day allotted to the consideration at 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.

•(1315)

[English]

**The Speaker:** There will now be a 30-minute question period pursuant to Standing Order 67(1), and I would ask members putting

the questions to keep their remarks to about a minute, and the government response to be of a similar length.

The hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley.

**Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, is it not an irony that the Conservatives find that when they are talking about democratic reform and about bringing in an electoral system that Canadians can trust, their natural tendency is to shut down debate in Canada's Parliament in order to do it? That is exactly what was done. This was the plan as of yesterday. This was the Conservatives' plan as they were drafting the bill. They decided, “Here is what we are going to do. We are going to put 242 pages in front of Parliament; we are going to invoke closure and shut down debate about something like our electoral system”.

I will ask the minister this point directly. He is in such a rush for this that one would think he would have at least written the bill properly, and that he would have actually told the truth in consulting with Elections Canada. Now we have a question in front of us. He said that he consulted the Elections Canada officials who are experts in this, which he is not. He may be an expert in other regards to the Elections Act, and his party certainly is with its in-and-out and robocalls scandals; and appointments to the Senate are a whole other story. However, the current government has shown its tendency to anti-democratic behaviour.

Why invoke closure? Why shut down debate on something so important? Why not allow Parliament to deal with the DNA of this bill properly and get it right, and actually truly consult with Canadians instead of marginalizing them from our democracy?

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for his helpful suggestions with regard to the bill.

I look forward to working with him and his colleagues as the bill proceeds to committee. That is where bills receive an opportunity to be heard and viewed by not only parliamentarians but also by expert witnesses.

What they will find when they review the contents of the bill is that the fair elections bill would ensure that everyday Canadians are the players in the game, that special interests are pushed to the sidelines of the game, and that rule-breakers are pushed out of the game altogether.

The bill would make it harder to break the law. It would close big-money loopholes, impose new penalties on political impostors who make rogue calls, and empower law enforcement with sharper teeth, a longer reach, and a freer hand.

**Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, invoking closure on this bill really is the height of hypocrisy.

*Government Orders*

Here we are, talking about a bill on so-called “democratic reform”, and some of the people we are hearing from are clearly thinking of a way to not get us into debating the bill. Some of the designs of this bill—and we know the government does not like Elections Canada, which has investigated them on many fronts—may be to create less pressure on the government in all the other wrongdoings it has done in every election since 2006.

How can the government invoke closure on a bill about democratic reform? This place is supposed to be about debate and good discussion. The minister is shutting that debate down and, I believe, putting democracy at risk.

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** Mr. Speaker, we are having debate and discussion right now, are we not?

We will have more debate when the bill goes to committee after it is voted on in this place, should it pass on second reading. Further, it will have more debate when it returns here after that.

As we debate it, we will see that the fair elections bill would protect voters from robocalls, from rogue calls by political impostors, with a new mandatory public registry for mass calling, prison time for impersonating elections officials, and increased penalties for deceiving people out of their votes. It would give law enforcement, the watchdog of elections law, sharper teeth, a longer reach, and a freer hand. Sharper teeth means allowing the commissioner to seek tougher penalties for existing offences. A longer reach means empowering him with dozens of new offences to crack down on big money, fraudulent voting, and rogue calls. A free hand means making the commissioner independent, with control of his own staff and investigations, and a fixed term so that he cannot be fired without cause.

• (1320)

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am really confused. Often, when the Conservatives moved their time allocation motions, they said it was because the bills had already been debated at length and there had already been numerous studies.

This bill is 242 pages long, and it touches on basic rights such as free expression and the right of constituents in every one of our ridings to vote, yet the government has moved a time allocation motion to limit debate.

The minister has been feeding us all kinds of lines about how great this bill is, but I would like him to explain why he wants to limit debate even though not all members of the House have had a chance to speak. Having the opportunity to express ourselves and share the perspectives of our constituencies is part of the democratic process.

What is the real reason for this time allocation motion to limit debate?

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** Mr. Speaker, we are having a debate now.

I would ask the hon. member to make a suggestion or a substantive argument regarding the bill. In fact, the hon. member talks about all sorts of things, except what is in the legislation. Therefore, I am going to help her with the details of this bill, which addresses electoral fraud by preventing fraudulent votes.

[*English*]

**Mr. Wayne Marston:** Mr. Speaker, I am rising on a point of order.

I find it strange that I am listening to a debate on the bill when we are supposed to be debating the motion on closure. In fact, we would be thrilled to have a full debate on this, spread out over time so that I can confer with the hundred thousand people in my community who are poor and who may be disenfranchised by the bill. However, to have it coming through when we should be debating the motion before us is just strange.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** The hon. member is correct in that this debate is on the motion before the House rather than the bill itself. Obviously, there are times when members asking or answering questions must refer to the contents of the bill, but he is correct; that is the substance.

The hon. minister of state.

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** Mr. Speaker, I am having a lot of difficulty understanding the NDP's position on debate. First New Democrats said they did not need any debate on the fair elections act. Their critic walked right out in front of the media within about five minutes of the bill's introduction, claiming that he did not need to read its 200-plus pages before announcing that he opposed it, so the first position of the New Democrats was that they did not need any debate at all.

Then they said they wanted lots more debate, so we should send it immediately to committee. We said that was great; let us do that. How do we do that? We hold a vote at second reading, and the bill will automatically go there, where opposition MPs and expert witnesses can have their say, amendments can occur, and the fruits of all that labour can be enjoyed by Canadians.

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, there is another way of sending a bill to committee, and the government has chosen never to use that method. It is called “reference to committee before second reading”. After five hours of debate, the bill would have been referred to the appropriate committee for consideration, but with a huge difference, because once we have had second reading, we lock in what the committee can do. If we refer the bill to a committee before second reading, the committee has a much broader scope of work ahead of itself and can amend and correct the bill.

There are good things in the bill. I recognize that, but there are things that are not appropriate as well.

*Government Orders*

However, forcing second reading through time allocation means the committee will not be able to address positively the things that are not accurate and not good in the bill. Why has the government not, for once, considered to rise above its partisanship approach and refer the bill to committee before second reading?

• (1325)

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** Mr. Speaker, first the hon. member wants to change the normal course of how bills are studied by Parliament. The normal practice is for a bill to be considered at second reading in the House of Commons, then go off to committee for study, review, and amendment, and then come back for yet another debate prior to the third and final reading of the bill in the House of Commons. That is the normal practice.

He also said that somehow the committee's work would be constrained by the bill's going to that body after having been voted at second reading. There is no such rule. The basic rule of committees is that they are their own masters. The committees can therefore look at this bill in its entire scope. We will welcome many witnesses, all the witnesses necessary to ensure that it gets a fair review and that the necessary changes and improvements are included. Then the bill, the fair elections act, will go from great to fantastic.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Djaouida Sellah (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I rise in this House whenever the government uses time allocation. That is the case today. Not only does the government introduce bills riddled with flaws, it also prevents us from carrying out the duty for which we were elected by thousands of Canadians, who want to debate issues that affect them directly.

Today, the government is once again using time allocation, long before the end of second reading. I would like to know whether this government wants to muzzle all members and work alone according to its ideology, or whether it wants to work for Canadians.

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has the floor. This shows that people in this country can express their views. Perhaps we could discuss the bill now. I would like to hear substantive arguments regarding this legislation, but I am hearing nothing of the sort.

**Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, once again, the minister responds by accusing those who dare ask him a question on the time allocation motion now before the House. He says we do not want to talk about the substance of the bill while we are debating time allocation.

At some point, he will have to realize that the purpose of those 30 minutes is to understand why the government wants to end a debate on a substantive bill that is 242 pages long. Perhaps the minister should be reminded of the purpose of those 30 minutes and be told to stop saying we do not want to have a debate. That is precisely what we want. We want the 308 members of this House to have the opportunity to express their views in this substantive debate. After these 30 minutes, we do not want them to be stuck with some time allocation to debate this bill.

[English]

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** Once again I would remind all hon. members that all members are to speak to the matter

that is before the House. Having said that, I think it is clearly the precedent in this place that when there are procedural motions before this place that deal with a matter of substance, members who are asking and answering questions have the right to refer to the substance of the initial piece of business.

Having said that, I would again remind all hon. members that the matter before the House is the issue of time allocation on the bill, rather than the bill itself.

I will go back to the minister and ask if he could quickly finish his answer.

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that the opposition is trying to control what other members are allowed to say in this place. I am merely responding to the verbatim of the member across, who brought up the issue of ideology. In fact, the fair elections act is based on evidence-based policy-making.

For example, we have looked at Elections Canada's own reports, which show that there are irregularities 25% of the time that vouching is used to identify a voter. A 25% rate of irregularities is too high. The Supreme Court has recognized that the irregularities are too high, as did the Neufeld report commissioned by Elections Canada. As a result, the fair elections act would protect the integrity of the vote by ending the practice of vouching as a form of identification.

• (1330)

**Ms. Yvonne Jones (Labrador, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I really believe that if the Conservatives wanted to be transparent and sincere in looking at the best interests of Canadians and Parliament, they would be allowing for a full debate on election reform.

However, I think the problem here is that they do not want a full debate on election reform because the reform is coming in as a result of what they have done with robocalls and election fraud. They do not want to be reminded of how they have abused the confidence that Canadians have put in them. That, I suggest to the minister, is the reason the Conservatives do not want to have a full debate on this bill in Parliament.

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, we do want a full debate. That is why we would like to see this bill go to committee, where not only parliamentarians but Canadians from coast to coast can be invited to testify on the substance of the bill. They could testify on issues such as allowing small donations in while keeping big money out.

The bill would keep big money from special interests out of the process by banning the use of loans, unpaid loans, to evade donation limits. At the same time, it would allow parties to better fund their democratic outreach with small increases in spending limits while imposing tougher audits and penalties to enforce those limits. In other words, the bill would let small donors in to contribute more to democracy through the front door and block illegal big money from sneaking in the back door.

*Government Orders*

**Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am always fascinated by the minister of state's defence of time allocation. He tells us what the bill is about and then says that we are debating the bill.

Well, no, we are not. Mr. Speaker, you actually said that we are not. Through you to the minister of state, I say that clearly we cannot debate the bill; we can only debate time allocation.

I find it fascinating that the minister of state is saying that we can debate the bill at committee. I actually do not sit on that committee, and the vast majority of us do not.

Is the minister of state now telling us that he will allow this committee, which has its own rules and is the master of its destiny, to give all of us enough time on that committee to actually have an opportunity to debate, or are there really no teeth in the bill that he is saying has sharper teeth?

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** Order, please. Before I go to the minister, I would like to remind all members that when it is time for a question or comment, at that point the members or ministers can stand. However, while one member is speaking, other members should be in their seats, including the person expecting to answer the question.

Further, members who stand for several minutes hoping to be recognized to ask the next question will not be recognized. When we call for questions and comments, it is at that time that people are to stand. That is a habit that I have seen slipping into this place in the last few days.

The hon. minister of state.

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** Mr. Speaker, I feel that the member has turned on himself. In the very same sentence he asked if the minister would make the committee open its membership up to all parliamentarians; then, in the same breath, he said that the committee is the master of its own rules. If a committee is the master of its own rules, the minister cannot make the committee do anything at all. Therefore, no, I cannot force the committee to change its rules to his liking, or to mine or anyone else's. It will be its own master in studying the bill.

Second, he attacks me for not allowing enough debate on the bill, but then his colleagues raise points of order when I try to debate the bill. I have a hard time following the logic of the NDP, not only on the substance of the bill but also in its procedural response to it.

**Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the member for Nepean—Carleton is as much a fan of history as I am. He should know that for the first 89 years of Confederation, closure was used only two times. However, in the past 58 years, the increasing use of closure has been a nuisance to our democracy, beginning in 1956 with the use of closure by Louis St. Laurent's Liberal government. That government had grown arrogant from being in power for years and years.

Does this member also agree with this use of closure? Has the government become so arrogant that it has broken the rules, given the number of times that closure has been used in this House? Canadians are witness to the use of closure by the current government, and they are not satisfied. I am sure the member's

constituents would be upset to know that we are doing nuisance to our democracy. Does he love closure so much that he is going to trumpet the use of closure for his own bill?

• (1335)

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** Mr. Speaker, the member does correctly point out that I am a lover of history, as is he. Two Christmases ago, he shared with me a terrific book on the 1911 election. I want to thank him for that. It was an excellent read. I hope to commend to him some historical readings as well as we continue our working relationship in the House of Commons.

On the subject of building our parliamentary institutions, the best way that we can study legislation is to have a debate in the House, which we have had, and then send it to committee, and then return it to the House with the recommended changes for yet another extensive debate by all parliamentarians prior to the third and final reading in the House of Commons.

I would remind the member, who is knowledgeable on the subject of parliamentary procedure, that the debate is only now beginning. After the committee has had a chance to review the fair elections act, it will return the bill to the House of Commons, where he and all parliamentarians will have their voices heard not just through speeches but through excellent questions and answers.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the minister talks about being a historian; well, this is one for the history books. There is very little doubt that the current Conservative majority government has implemented more time allocation than any other government in the history of Canada. It is an assault on democracy.

We now have the government bringing in time allocation on a bill that deals with Elections Canada. On the one hand, we have the irresponsible nature of the Conservatives trying to ram it through and limit debate in second reading, which is disgraceful. On the other hand, we have the New Democrats voting slowly. When I watched that slow vote, I had a flashback to when the NDP spoke through an entire budget period, denying any other member of the House an opportunity to stand and speak on the budget.

We need to debate this legislation. The longer it is prolonged, the more the government continues to push time allocation. We are allowing for less and less debate inside the chamber.

Will the minister—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** Order, please.

The hon. minister of state.

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** Mr. Speaker, I think the member has just touched upon two very interesting points. One is free speech; the other is democracy. The fair elections bill deals with these issues.

For example, the Supreme Court has unanimously found that the ban on premature transmission of election results infringes upon freedom of expression. In other words, there is currently a ban on reporting election results from eastern Canada in western Canada before the polls have closed there. I understand the purpose of this original ban, but it is unconstitutional and, in an era of social media, impractical. As a result, the fair elections act would repeal the ban and uphold free speech.

*Government Orders*

It would also ensure that election results are respected.

Right now, when there is a disagreement over a campaign expense return of an MP between that MP and the CEO, the CEO has the ability to ask the Speaker to remove the MP from his seat and from voting in the House of Commons. Let us remember that when we remove a member of Parliament from the House of Commons, we are reversing the decision of tens of thousands of constituents who have voted to elect that individual, so the fair elections act would give the MP the opportunity to present the case before a court in order to secure a very quick judgment from the judiciary before an election result could be overturned.

It is about free speech. It is about democracy.

**Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, when I was in the House yesterday, the first NDP speaker moved a motion that would see the bill moved directly to committee, thereby ending any opportunity for us to speak on the bill and circumventing some of the good speeches that we have heard over the last day and a half in this place and are going to hear over the next little bit.

I wonder if the minister would assure this House and Canadians who are watching that he would be prepared to appear in front of committee, that he is prepared to continue to answer questions, and that the bill would come back before the House after we have heard from Canadians, after we have heard from the committee, and after the opposition and government members have had an opportunity for a full debate at committee, and that the debate would continue in further readings in this House.

• (1340)

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** Mr. Speaker, to answer directly the parliamentary secretary, yes, I would be prepared to appear at committee and answer questions on the fair elections act from all parliamentarians present.

One of the areas that I hope the committee will focus on is how we provide better customer service to voters. The fair elections act would do this by adding an extra voting day.

In the last election, two million Canadians voted in the advance ballot. Often people who work very long hours, students, and others find it difficult to cast their ballot on election day. By allowing an additional day of voting, we could potentially increase voter turnout.

Also included in the fair elections act is a requirement for Elections Canada to inform all Canadians of all of the opportunities for voting, so not only would there be this extra day, but Elections Canada would also have a legal requirement to ensure that voters would know about it.

**Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am really confused by what the minister of state is saying, because we know that the motion before the House right now is yet another time allocation motion and yet another opportunity for the government to stop debate or to attempt to stop it.

The bill was presented very recently. It is over 240 pages long, and we have had less than 48 hours to study it. There have been just two speeches. Two people of the 308 members elected to represent their constituents across the country had an opportunity to speak on

the bill before us, which is 240-something pages long, yet the minister of state wants to shut down debate in the House.

As the representative of almost 140,000 people who live in the community Scarborough—Rouge River, I would have loved the opportunity to participate in the debate. I know the minister of state will say that we can debate it and that we are now doing that. Maybe he does not understand, because he keeps saying that over and over again, but right now we are not debating the bill itself but the fact that he wants to end debate on it.

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, the debate has only begun. This bill will go to committee, and it will be thoroughly studied by members of Parliament after the testimony of expert witnesses from across the country who are invited to participate in the debate. I guarantee the member, and all members of the House, that the expert witnesses will have the full opportunity to speak freely about this bill.

As I said in my earlier answer, one of the areas I hope we will focus on is better customer service for voters. The most important services we can provide are to those who have disabilities. I would like to quote the Canadian National Institute for the Blind. Diane Bergeron, the national director of government relations and advocacy, said:

Voting is a democratic right for all Canadians. We are happy to have the opportunity to work hand in hand with the Government representatives to increase accessibility and awareness of elections amongst the blind and partially sighted community. We need to empower all Canadians to participate in the democratic process and make choices about their leadership so we're pleased to see this dedicated effort to break down barriers among Canadians with disabilities.

**Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I know our time is running short, so I will make this very quick. First of all, for the record, we are disappointed to see this time allocation measure coming in following the third speech.

We were talking back and forth in the debate last night about the fact that we go through the process of debate, second reading, and then committee. I just want a straight up answer, yes or no, as to whether the minister is willing to entertain reasoned amendments to this bill. We think that we have one.

I wonder if he is willing to look at this sincerely, as a way of improving this bill.

• (1345)

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** Mr. Speaker, of course, I would be willing to approach his amendment with an open mind. I have not seen the particular amendment to which he refers, but I invite him to bring it over. We will all have a look at it and consider it with an open mind.

**Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I have been in election campaigns since 1974, and I appreciate the efforts of the minister to try to make change. We do see some positive things within the bill, but the time allocation presents a problem that the member for Welland spoke to a few moments ago.

We have just received this bill. We can do our due diligence. However, Canadian citizens, not customers, are just seeing this bill and learning about it for the first time. They will have their input for us to bring back to this place, but that has been compressed with this time allocation. We find that to be an affront.

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased that the member acknowledges there are some positive aspects to the fair elections act, and I look forward to working with him, or whichever delegates the NDP sends to the committee, to ensure that the fair elections act is even better.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** It is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put every question necessary to dispose of the business 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.

• (1430)

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

*(Division No. 56)*

**YEAS**

Members

Ablonczy	Adams
Adler	Aglukkaq
Albas	Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Allison	Ambler
Ambrose	Anders
Anderson	Armstrong
Ashfield	Aspin
Bateman	Benoit
Bergen	Bernier
Bezan	Blaney
Block	Boughen
Braid	Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)	Brown (Barrie)
Butt	Calandra
Calkins	Carmichael
Carrie	Chisu
Chong	Clarke
Clement	Crockatt
Davidson	Dechert
Devolin	Dreeschen
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	Dykstra
Falk	Fantino
Fast	Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)
Galipeau	Gallant

Gill	Glover
Goguen	Goldring
Gourde	Grewal
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)	Hawn
Hayes	Hoback
Holder	James
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Kent
Kerr	Komarnicki
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Lake
Lauzon	Leaf
Leitch	Lemieux
Leung	Lizon
Lobb	Lukiwski
Lunney	MacKenzie
Maguire	Mayes
McColeman	McLeod
Menegakis	Miller
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	
Moore (Fundy Royal)	
Nicholson	Norlock
Obhrai	O'Connor
Oliver	O'Neill Gordon
Opitz	O'Toole
Payne	Poilievre
Preston	Raiitt
Rajotte	Reid
Rempel	Richards
Rickford	Ritz
Saxton	Schellenberger
Seeback	Shea
Shipley	Sopuck
Sorenson	Stanton
Storseth	Strahl
Sweet	Tilson
Toet	Trost
Trottier	Truppe
Valcourt	Van Kesteren
Van Loan	Wallace
Warkentin	Watson
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)	
Weston (Saint John)	
Wilks	Williamson
Wong	Woodworth
Yelich	Young (Oakville)
Young (Vancouver South)	Zimmer— 136

*Government Orders*

**NAYS**

Members

Allen (Welland)	Andrews
Ashton	Atamanenko
Ayala	Bélanger
Bellavance	Bennett
Benskin	Bevington
Blanchette-Lamothe	Boivin
Borg	Boulerice
Boutin-Sweet	Brahmi
Brosseau	Casey
Cash	Charlton
Chicoine	Chisholm
Choquette	Chow
Christopherson	Cotler
Cullen	Cuzner
Davies (Vancouver East)	Day
Dewar	Dion
Donnelly	Doré Lefebvre
Dubé	Dubourg
Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Dusseault	Easter
Eyking	Fortin
Freeman	Fry
Gameau	Garrison
Genest	Genest-Jourdain
Giguère	Godin
Goodale	Groguhé
Harris (Scarborough Southwest)	Harris (St. John's East)
Hsu	Hughes
Jacob	Jones
Julian	Karygiannis
Lamoureux	Lapointe
Larose	Latendresse
Laverdière	LeBlanc (Beauséjour)

*Oral Questions*

LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)	MacAulay
Mai	Marston
Martin	Masse
Mathysen	McCallum
McGuinty	McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Michaud	Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)
Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)	Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)
Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)	Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)
Mourani	Mulcair
Murray	Nantel
Nash	Nicholls
Nunez-Melo	Patry
Péclet	Perreault
Pilon	Plamondon
Rankin	Ravignat
Regan	Rousseau
Scarpaleggia	Sellah
Sgro	Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind- sor)
Sims (Newton—North Delta)	Sitsabaiesan
St-Denis	Stewart
Stoffer	Sullivan
Thibeault	Toone
Turmel — 111	

## PAIRED

Nil

**The Speaker:** I declare the motion carried.

The Chair is under the impression that there is agreement among members to proceed with a full session of statements and question period. Is that agreed?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Some hon. members:** No.

**The Speaker:** In order to have statements, there must be agreement on when statements would take place. I am hearing some members saying after question period and some saying before. Is there agreement to have them before question period?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Some hon. members:** No.

**The Speaker:** Is there agreement to have them after question period?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Some hon. members:** No.

**The Speaker:** There is no agreement.

Oral Questions. The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

**ORAL QUESTIONS**[*Translation*]**ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS**

**Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the NDP first sounded the alarm a long time ago about the chronic under-funding of schools for first nations kids. Children in these schools receive 30% less funding than other children in Canada.

Will the government close this gap in its 2014 budget and provide equal funding for all first nations kids?

[*English*]

Will the government finally take action to close the education funding gap for first nations kids?

**Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I can confirm that the government remains committed to continuing to work in partnership with first nations to ensure that we can provide first nations students on reserve with an education system that will bring about results.

As I indicated before Christmas, of course funding will not replace reform, but it will accompany it when we have an agreement with first nations as to a legislative framework that can meet both our objectives.

\* \* \*

**PUBLIC SERVICE OF CANADA**

**Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, that was clear.

The President of the Treasury Board has made some alarming claims about rampant abuse of sick days in the public service. The minister has painted the public servants as scammers claiming 20% more sick days than they are allowed. The only problem is, it is not true. The Parliamentary Budget Officer has run the numbers and confirms that the minister misled Canadians and misled the House.

Does the minister have the courage to simply stand in the House and apologize to the thousands of public servants he has smeared?

**Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, what I can tell the member, if he actually reads the report, is that the Parliamentary Budget Officer confirms that when we look at paid plus unpaid sick leave, it is 18.2 days, on average, for the public service, far and away above the absenteeism rate in the private sector, which was my original point.

Indeed, I have another point to make as well. It is that we have to make sure that for new hires of public servants, we have a fair system in place for them as well, which is not currently the case.

The hon. member talks about courage. I have the courage to stand in my place and stand for taxpayers. When will the NDP do the same?

**Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, coming from the minister of gazebos, it is easy to believe that he does not actually know the difference.

● (1435)

[*Translation*]

The President of the Treasury Board made a very serious and false accusation. He said that public servants were abusing their sick leave. He claimed that they took 18 sick days a year, but he was comparing completely different things. It was a fabrication on his part. He was incorrect because he exaggerated and played with the figures, overstating them by almost 50%.

Why did he drag honest public servants through the mud?

[*English*]

**The Speaker:** I would remind all hon. members to refer to one another by our proper titles or ridings.



*Oral Questions*

The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I firmly believe it is important to protect taxpayers. The rate of absenteeism is unacceptable. We must make changes to better protect taxpayers and employees. The system needs to work for both parties.

[*English*]

On our side of the House, we are willing to come up with a system to work with our employees, have a better system for them, and to also protect the taxpayers. The union bosses the NDP deals with, they do not want to meet with me, but I am going to go—

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

\* \* \*

**DEMOCRATIC REFORM**

**Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, section 18 of the Conservatives' so-called fair elections act gives veto power over new voting methods to, wait for it, the Senate—yes, the unelected, unaccountable Conservative and Liberal Senate. Maybe that is why the Liberals were voting with the Conservatives today. Using closure to give a veto power to the unelected Senate: Is that the Conservatives' real idea of a democracy?

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, what the amendments to section 18 actually do is require that before the CEO of Elections Canada experiments with new methods of voting, those methods are approved by Parliament.

One of the methods that has been discussed is online electronic voting. Now, the NDP tried electronic voting at its very convention and could not make it work. So if they could not make it work at their convention, why do they want the CEO to have the ability to do it, without Parliament's approval, for the entire national election?

**Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, here is what does not work in a democracy: an unelected, unaccountable, under-indictment Senate. That is what does not work.

[*Translation*]

The Prime Minister has packed the Senate with defeated candidates, losers in every sense of the term. He is giving them a veto over the elections. Is that the real reason for this bill, to keep Conservative tactics rolling along even after the Conservatives themselves have been kicked out because they do not want to get rid of the senators?

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the provision that the leader of the New Democrats is referring to allows Parliament to consider ideas about new methods of voting before they are put before Canadians. If we want to have electronic voting, Parliament should be able to consider those ideas before they are implemented.

[*English*]

That is the best way to ensure the integrity of our electoral system. We will never apologize for putting Parliament in charge or for protecting the voting system.

[*Translation*]

**THE BUDGET**

**Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg (Bourassa, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, in last year's budget, the Conservatives were priding themselves on their job creation. Today we learn that that was based on two fictitious measures. First, the job grant program has never existed, and second, the Conservatives have reduced the building Canada fund for infrastructure. They have not increased it, they have reduced it by \$1.5 billion for the next two years.

In next week's budget, will they make up for that \$3-billion hole?

[*English*]

**Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Minister of State (Finance), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we have a long-term economic plan that includes helping families save money. We believe in creating a climate where jobs can be created so that every Canadian can have a brighter future right here in Canada.

● (1440)

**Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, here are the facts. To concoct the false illusion of a new build Canada fund for infrastructure, last year's budget bundled together a 10-year period. The program is spent over 10 years, but the money is not. Most of it is back-end loaded, postponed for nearly a decade.

The fund does not recover to even last year's levels until 2019. In the meantime, over \$3 billion is taken from municipalities. Will budget 2014 fill in that multibillion dollar Conservative hole in municipal infrastructure?

**Mr. Peter Braid (Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure and Communities, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the preamble of that member's question is in fact incorrect. It is this Conservative government that has made unprecedented investments in infrastructure, investments that have nearly tripled since 2006. In economic action plan 2013, we announced the longest and the largest infrastructure fund in Canadian history over 10 years.

In November, we provided the gas tax agreements to provinces. We are ready to sign those now. The details on the rest of the plan will be announced soon.

**Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, if job creation is the government's priority, why is its job record the worst since the recession? If economic growth is the priority, why does it have the worst growth record since R.B. Bennett? Why are Australia, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, Mexico, the United States, and 132 other countries doing better? If prosperity is the priority, why do middle-class families have \$1.64 in debt for every \$1 of disposable income? Why are middle-class parents worried that their kids will not do as well as they did?

*Oral Questions*

Will the budget fix any of that?

**Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Minister of State (Finance), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is a little bit rich for this party over here to be criticizing this government on job creation. The Liberals have voted against every job-creation measure our government has put forward, including freezing the EI rates to provide certainty and flexibility for employers and employees, tax cuts to the manufacturing sector so it could bring forward new equipment and expand and perhaps even hire new people, and \$70 billion in job-creating infrastructure.

With a fragile global economy, we must stay the course, and our low-tax plan for growth is the answer.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION**

**Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, Canadian citizenship is something to be proud of and the legislation governing it has to be thought through. On behalf of all Canadians, I am raising some concerns about the reform announced this morning, which, once again, will put even more power into the hands of the minister.

These are the same Conservatives who have bungled the family reunification program, created a fiasco out of the temporary foreign worker program and lost control of the backlog of immigration applications.

Will the minister learn from his past mistakes and work with experts to improve this bill?

[English]

**Mr. Costas Menegakis (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Canadians take pride in their Canadian citizenship. We are taking action to further strengthen that pride and the value of citizenship in this country with the first comprehensive reforms to the Citizenship Act since 1977. The strengthening Canadian citizenship act would deliver on our government's commitment to reduce backlogs and improve processing times, while strengthening the integrity of Canadian citizenship.

Under this Prime Minister and our Conservative government, over 1.4 million people have become Canadian citizens. We want newcomers to be welcomed as full members of the Canadian family, as citizens fully contributing to our economy and—

**The Speaker:** The hon. member for Davenport.

**Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP):** The fact is, Mr. Speaker, that the Conservatives have failed to deal with the long and rising processing times and the massive delays in reuniting families. That is the real problem. What the minister says is, “Just give me more power and trust me”, but that is not going to cut it.

Why will the minister not drop the rhetoric, work with us, listen to immigrant families, and make some meaningful, some real changes to Canada's Citizenship Act?

•(1445)

**Mr. Costas Menegakis (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC):** Mr. Speaker,

by not supporting this bill, the official opposition opposes demanding greater attachment to Canada and cracking down on fraud. It opposes efforts to effectively deal with backlogs. It even opposes efforts to revoke Canadian citizenship for dual nationals who engage in terrorism, espionage, and treason.

The NDP position is shameful. It is patently irresponsible. Sadly, though, it is the type of intellectual incoherence we have come to expect from the NDP on all citizenship and immigration matters.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**DEMOCRATIC REFORM**

**Ms. Nycole Turmel (Hull—Aylmer, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, once again, the Conservatives are trying to stifle the opposition by ending debate on their reform of the Canada Elections Act. They are using the same strategy they use with a partisan, poorly written omnibus budget bill.

The Canada Elections Act, however, should not be dealt with in a partisan way. This is the 46th gag order since May 2011.

Are the Conservatives simply trying to avoid having to deal with the matter of their fraudulent phone calls?

[English]

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the NDP has to make up its mind. First of all, New Democrats did not want any debate at all on the fair elections act. They sent their NDP critic out to declare his opposition to it seconds before he admitted he had not read it. Now they are saying they want more debate, so we are saying, great, let us send it to committee so that it can be debated and studied there, and they are opposed to that, too.

The fair elections act would ensure that our democracy rests in the hands of everyday Canadians by putting special interest groups on the sidelines and rule breakers right out of business.

[Translation]

**Ms. Nycole Turmel (Hull—Aylmer, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, in addition to gagging Parliament, the Conservatives are trying to gag the Chief Electoral Officer by limiting the number of matters on which he can and cannot express an opinion.

The Conservatives are now bringing into Parliament the battle against Elections Canada that they have fought so often before the courts.

Why do the Conservatives want to gag the Chief Electoral Officer?

[English]

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, according to Elections Canada's own data, in 2011, 60% of non-voters cited everyday issues as reasons for not voting. Those included things like not having enough time, being too busy, or being away from home when the election was held.

*Oral Questions*

The way we help them to vote is by providing better customer service. That includes an extra day of voting, less congestion at the voting booth, and getting Elections Canada's advertising back to the basics of where, when, and what ID to bring.

**Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government has decided that Elections Canada should no longer play a role in educating Canadians about voting. The minister pays lip service to democratic reform and increasing voter turnout, but then introduces a law that would do the exact opposite.

Why is the minister blocking Elections Canada from doing outreach and education to increase voter turnout? Why is he afraid of people voting?

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, to the contrary, since Elections Canada began its promotional campaigns, voter turnout has plummeted from 75% to 61%. The reality is that Elections Canada data show that the leading reason young voters do not cast ballots is that they do not have all the necessary information.

For example, half of young people are not aware they can vote in advance by mail, or by special ballot at the Elections Canada office. That means that one in two youth voters who is busy on election day does not have any other option to vote. We want to inform them of those options so they get out and cast their ballots.

**Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the minister is doing his very best to strip the opposition members of our right to fair debate on this bill on behalf of Canadians. Conservatives are rewriting how Elections Canada works and hiding their changes behind closure motions. Yesterday, the minister refused to send the bill to committee for immediate and open study. Today, the Conservatives are shutting down debate. New concerns are being raised daily about this bill.

Will the government accept amendments to fix all of the problems with this bill?

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we have only begun debate. We have already begun with five hours of debate. Then we will send the matter to committee after it is voted on at second reading, at which time members can consider it and send it back for yet more debate in the House of Commons.

I hope the members will consider, for example, the amendments we propose to make to section 18 of the Canada Elections Act to require that Elections Canada inform Canadians of how they can have their names added to the list, how they can vote, which ID they need to take to the polling stations, and the information that is necessary for disabled voters to employ the special tools available to help them vote.

• (1450)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Matthew Dubé (Chambly—Borduas, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the minister no longer wants Elections Canada to interact with young people to encourage them to vote.

In the last election, however, the voter turnout rate for 18- to 24-year-olds was only 38.8%. That is almost half the rate for Canadians 65 and older.

Why should politicians be the only ones to encourage young people to vote? Why not let Elections Canada, an independent, non-partisan entity, do its job?

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member just proved my point.

Elections Canada's efforts are not working. In fact, their own data show that young people are not voting because they do not have the information they need to do so. Half of young people do not even know that they can vote before election day. A quarter of young people who did not vote said it was because they did not know where, when or how to vote.

Our bill will give them that information.

[*English*]

**Mr. Matthew Dubé (Chambly—Borduas, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, if I understand, "it is not working so let us make it worse" is the minister's solution.

While the minister accuses him of wearing a team jersey, the Chief Electoral Officer said, "What I know from this bill is that the referee will no longer be on the ice".

Conservatives are preventing Elections Canada from doing outreach to encourage young people to vote. That is a fact. Young people are more transient and harder to get engaged in the election process. So why is the minister ignoring the problem and attacking Elections Canada's efforts to get more young people to vote? Maybe there is something the Conservatives are afraid of.

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member misunderstands the roles of the various players at Elections Canada.

First, the referee in elections is the Commissioner of Elections Canada. He is the one whose job it is to enforce the law, and he would gain new independence and new powers under the fair elections act.

Second, as for the issue of youth voter turnout, the approach of Elections Canada has not worked. Since it started, youth turnout is vastly down, and we are focusing those promotions on the practical information that young people need to cast their ballots.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain (Manicouagan, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, first nations people sometimes encounter problems when they need to get official government identification cards. Having an acquaintance vouch for them or using the cards sent by Elections Canada is therefore vital. Oddly enough, these two options will disappear in the reform of the Canada Elections Act.

Why are the Conservatives using tactics to suppress the voting rights of first nations communities?

*Oral Questions*

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, 73% of aboriginal young people did not receive the information that would allow them to vote ahead of the election. If those young people are working on election day, are at school or are not available to vote, not having information on voting opportunities was what prevented them from doing so.

The bill before the House will help aboriginal people receive complete information on voting opportunities.

\* \* \*

**THE BUDGET**

**Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, in the last budget, the Conservatives announced a bogus job program that does not exist. They have wasted millions of dollars on pointless ads, slashed services to veterans and increased taxes for the middle class, small businesses and credit unions. They have also increased tariffs on consumer goods. That budget resulted in the worst job creation record since the recession. Economic growth has been slowing down for the past three years.

Will the government take a different approach this time?

[English]

**Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Minister of State (Finance), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, according to the IMF report, “The Canadian economy strengthened in 2013...and economic growth is expected to accelerate...”. The IMF went on to say: “Executive Directors commended the authorities for their continued sound macroeconomic and financial sector management”.

The IMF recognizes it. The OECD recognizes it. Bloomberg says that Canada is the second best place in the world to do business. It is time the Liberals recognized that our plan and strategy is working.

\* \* \*

• (1455)

**NATIONAL DEFENCE**

**Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, Conservatives claim that soldiers' concerns about seeking help for mental injury is all in their heads, but yesterday the military ombudsman testified that most injured members who seek help end up being kicked out of the armed forces. To quote him: “90 per cent are probably going to find themselves on the street”. No wonder soldiers have described the process “as the equivalent of being pushed off a cliff”.

How will budget 2014 fix this mean-spirited and shameful assault on our injured Canadian Forces members?

**Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of National Defence, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, she has it absolutely wrong. There is no government in Canadian history that has invested more in assisting our men and women in uniform, ill and injured. We have increased the health care budget by \$100 million. We have 400 full-time mental health workers and we are going to hire more because this is important to those men and women in uniform. That is why this is a government priority.

**DEMOCRATIC REFORM**

**Mr. Scott Simms (Bonaville—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, today the Chief Electoral Officer did confirm this is indeed an attack on Elections Canada. We already heard the analogy he used about the referee now being taken off the ice altogether, despite whatever jersey they want to talk about him wearing. The commissioner, as he spoke about it earlier, is being removed from Elections Canada, being deprived of the powers he needs, which he has already stated.

I want to ask a very direct question about an amendment that I hope the government will accept, to give the commissioner the power to apply to a judge to compel information from witnesses during an investigation. Yes or no?

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is important for the member to understand what powers the commissioner already has.

One, he can seek a warrant to obtain documents from a judge already. Two, if there are charges, a judge can issue a subpoena to compel testimony in a court. Three, the powers that the commissioner has right now are equal to those a police officer would have in conducting an investigation into the most heinous of crimes.

We are giving the commissioner new power by making it an offence to obstruct his investigations or to lie to one of his investigators. We are giving him sharper teeth, a longer reach, and a freer hand.

\* \* \*

**ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS**

**Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, budgets are about making choices, and for the NDP, first nations' education has long been a priority. I would hope we can all agree that every child deserves an equal chance in life, an equal opportunity to succeed.

To the Minister of Finance, will the upcoming budget finally include investments that close the first nations' education funding gap for our kids?

**Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, maybe the member missed the question of her leader, which was the first question I answered.

As I indicated, we are committed to continuing to work with first nations and their leadership to ensure that we have in place a legislative framework that will produce a system that first nations can control, and to ensure that those gaps in educational attainment in the country are attained.

*Oral Questions*

As I said, reform will not be replaced by investment. It will happen—

**The Speaker:** The hon. member for Parkdale—High Park.

**Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I did not miss the answer; there simply was not one.

[*Translation*]

Funding for first nations education must not come at the expense of other investments. There are urgent needs in education, infrastructure, job training and health care, just to name a few.

Will the minister commit to including the necessary investments for education and these other urgent needs in his budget?

**Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our government remains focused on what matters to Canadians, and that includes aboriginal people across the country. What matters are jobs, economic growth and long-term prosperity.

That is why, since 2006, we have taken a series of actions in partnership with first nations to improve the economic situation in all communities in Canada. This is a long-term undertaking. We are working on this in partnership and we will pursue this course of action.

\* \* \*

• (1500)

#### CANADA-U.S. RELATIONS

**Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday, we found out that the Conservatives have signed an agreement with the Americans that would implement a U.S. law, the Foreign Account Tax Compliance Act.

This will lead to the disclosure of the confidential financial information of thousands of Canadians to the U.S. Internal Revenue Service.

Can the minister tell us why she was unable to ensure the protection of Canadians' privacy?

[*English*]

**Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Minister of State (Finance), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we had the honour yesterday of being able to announce that after lengthy negotiations, we have reached an agreement with the United States in regard to FATCA.

FATCA has raised a number of concerns in Canada, both among dual citizens, Canadian-U.S. citizens, and Canadian financial institutions. The agreement addresses those concerns.

The agreement relies on the existing framework under the Canada-U.S. tax treaty. Under the agreement, Canadian banks will not report information directly to the IRS. In our negotiations, we obtained a number of concessions, including exempting certain accounts like RRSPs, TFSAs, et cetera.

**Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP):** Frankly, Mr. Speaker, the minister failed to mention that this agreement was negotiated entirely in the backrooms with absolutely no transparency.

Conservatives refuse to even listen to the Canadians affected. They have also failed to heed the advice of many constitutional

experts. As a result, what they released yesterday may not stand up to a charter challenge.

Can the minister guarantee that this agreement is even constitutional?

**Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Minister of State (Finance), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, what I can tell the hon. member is that the agreement that was negotiated over a great period of time is much better than having no agreement at all.

To be clear, the agreement will not impose any new or higher taxes, and the CRA will not assist the IRS in the collection of United States' tax penalties.

\* \* \*

#### CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

**Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon (Mississauga East—Cooksville, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Speech from the Throne highlighted that citizenship is not simply a passport of convenience. Citizenship should promote attachment to Canada and Canadian values, as well as a responsibility to participate in the life of our communities and institutions.

Currently, our citizenship program remains vulnerable to fraud, with no authority to revoke the citizenship of dual nationals who become traitors, terrorists, or spies against Canada.

Can the parliamentary secretary inform the House of what our government is doing to strengthen the value of Canadian citizenship?

**Mr. Costas Menegakis (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Canadians take pride in their Canadian citizenship. We are taking action to further strengthen that pride and the value of citizenship in this country with the first comprehensive reforms to the Citizenship Act since 1977. This delivers on our government's commitment to reduce backlogs and improve processing times, while strengthening the integrity of Canadian citizenship.

Under this Prime Minister and our Conservative government, over 1.4 million people have become Canadian citizens. We want newcomers to be welcomed as full members of the Canadian family and as citizens fully contributing to our economy and communities from coast to coast to coast.

We hope the opposition will support us in that and support the strengthening of the Citizenship Act.

\* \* \*

#### AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

**Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, last night, we had an emergency debate on the crisis of grain transportation. There seemed to be a wide consensus that we really need to get tough with railways, but the government's sole suggestion last night was "let us have another study".

### Oral Questions

There is an old story about a donkey, a carrot, and a stick. We can wave the carrot in front of the donkey and see if it moves. If it does not, hit it with the stick. It seems it is time for the minister to get out his big stick.

When are farmers going to see more than a study, and when is the minister going to take action on the crisis for Prairie grain farmers?

**Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we continue to work with Prairie grain farmers on all aspects of the supply chain in working on a way forward to come up with a plan to do just that.

As the member opposite has alluded to, the debate last night was very fulsome. It was great that members had the chance to air a lot of their ideas. We have moved forward on some of those. We will continue to do that. We continue to work with the players and the grain farmers themselves.

• (1505)

**Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, ships sit half empty in Vancouver harbours. Millions of dollars in demurrage fees are being applied. All the government does is talk about studies, yet it continues to loudly howl about delays in getting bitumen to markets. The government is spending literally hundreds of millions of dollars supporting bitumen exports.

When can we expect equal enthusiasm on getting tough with the railways to get Canadian grains to market?

**Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we have been doing exactly that. Of course, through the winter months, the railways shorten their trains due to safety concerns on getting the air brakes to operate that far back. Having said that, they are coming forward in the next couple of weeks with a plan, as are the grain industry and farmers themselves, as to how we work our way through this.

We have got the largest crop in history. We continue to look for efficiencies throughout the whole system, as I have said all along. It will take a holistic approach to do this. The railways play a major part, and we are looking for them to step up their game, as they did last fall. However, they have dropped the ball. Going forward on this, through the winter season, we look to them to take up the slack.

\* \* \*

### NATIONAL DEFENCE

**Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the defence ombudsman's findings on medically released troops are quite alarming. Not only did the military fail to use the \$11 million that was made available to hire more mental health staff to try to get to a 2002 goal, but national defence is so stubborn about keeping universality of services as it is.

He found that thousands of armed forces members are afraid to seek assistance when they are suffering from PTSD or operational stress injury. The question is: When will the government follow the recommendations of the ombudsman and prevent injured veterans from getting fired from the military?

**Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of National Defence, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we created the JPSU, the joint personnel support unit, for the purpose of reaching out to these individuals, making sure they

get the help they need. This government has made unprecedented investments in this area. We have almost 400 full-time mental health professionals, and we are hiring more.

We have made this a priority, and I am proud of that.

[Translation]

**Ms. Éline Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, under the universality of service policy, a soldier must be employable and deployable for general operational duties.

Soldiers with post-traumatic stress refrain from seeking help out of fear of losing their jobs and their pensions. What is more, if they seek help and are sent back to civilian life before completing their 10-year term, they are not entitled to the services provided by Veterans Affairs Canada, which the ombudsman has strongly condemned.

How can the Conservatives justify such a lack of consistency?

[English]

**Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of National Defence, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would also point out that there are now 29 clinics across Canada from Esquimalt to Halifax. These are to support men and women in uniform and veterans. We have made unprecedented investments. Yes, we are hiring more full-time professionals to help our men and women in uniform.

The leadership of the armed forces is reaching out to these individuals to let them know that they are supported. Of course, they have the support of this government.

\* \* \*

### AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

**Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, dairy farmers across this country are concerned about their livelihood. They are concerned about the future of supply management. They feel taken for granted by the Conservative government.

What assurances can the government give to the dairy farmers here today that the government is listening to their concerns and will not undermine their livelihood?

**Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I spent 45 minutes this morning doing just that, directly with the dairy farmers.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the Prairie grain transportation industry is in chaos, and it is the farmers who are paying the costs. There are piles of grain throughout the Prairies and empty ships in the Pacific Ocean. Action is what is needed.

The Fair Rail Freight Service Act needs the following changes: one, create a strong definition of what service levels are; and two, require that railways pay actual damages directly to farmers when services fail.

*Oral Questions*

My question to the minister is this. Will he bring in needed legislative changes today in order to support our Prairie farmers?

**Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, over the last years under my ministry we brought in a number of changes to benefit farmers. Those members voted against every one, so I would not hold my breath on anything moving forward in that regard.

I am not sure that the member from Winnipeg would know a pile of wheat if he stumbled over it.

\* \* \*

• (1510)

**NATURAL RESOURCES**

**Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, a new poll has confirmed what previous polls have said and what those of us who have listened to British Columbians already know, that people in British Columbia do not want the northern gateway pipeline. The risk it poses to our rivers, our lakes, our coast, and our economy is simply too high, and it threatens good jobs that depend on a clean environment.

Therefore, I have to ask this question. What is it about “no” that the government does not understand? Why does the minister want to ram through a project that British Columbians clearly oppose?

**Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as the member opposite should know, the Government of Canada has six months from the time the favourable joint review panel gave its report, and we will not comment until then.

**Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday I had the honour to attend the memorial feast of Chief Gisdá'wa, a first nations leader who fought for the simple recognition of something that we always knew to be true, that first nations rights and title are real, present, and must be accounted for by the government.

When will the government finally listen to the voices of first nations across British Columbia, who have told it no on Enbridge gateway, and stand with the people of British Columbia?

**Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, again, our government cannot comment on this report and will not until we make a final decision.

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**REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

**Mr. Bryan Hayes (Sault Ste. Marie, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to responsible resource development that creates jobs and economic growth in northern Ontario. Can the minister responsible for the Ring of Fire and northern Ontario please update the House on the important work that our government is doing on this file?

**Hon. Greg Rickford (Minister of State (Science and Technology, and Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Sault Ste. Marie for his important work in northern Ontario.

The Ring of Fire is a legacy resource development project with the potential to contribute significantly to the economic future of

northern Ontario. We know that the NDP opposes responsible resource development. We are making progress on what matters to Canadians and northern Ontarians, jobs and economic growth.

We will continue to work collaboratively with first nations, all levels of government, and industry to ensure that the Ring of Fire offers long-term sustainability for communities across our vast and beautiful region of northern Ontario.

\* \* \*

**INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

**Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the government has clearly demonstrated its disdain for development aid and poverty alleviation. Year after year, projects remain in limbo, awaiting approval on the minister's desk.

In 2012, the government cut \$380 million, or 7.5%, from the foreign aid budget and last year let \$300 million lapse. In next week's budget, will the minister commit to protect aid and commit to not cutting it further?

**Ms. Lois Brown (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, here we are three quarters of the way through International Development Week and this is the first question we have had regarding international development. I want to thank my colleague because it gives me the opportunity to be on my feet and to say that this is International Development Week and the theme is “We are Making a Difference”.

Canadians can be very proud of the fact that we are making a difference in the lives of people around the world. We thank the hundreds of Canadians who have dedicated their lives to helping those who are less fortunate. Canada is very proud of them.

\* \* \*

**PUBLIC SAFETY**

**Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the murder rate in Surrey is 300% higher than it is in Vancouver; yet, there are half the number of police officers.

Surrey has one of the highest homicide rates in the province but ranks 31st for police per capita.

The Conservative government promised it would put more police on our streets; yet, it is seven years later and it has failed to deliver.

When will the government finally honour its commitment and put more police on Surrey's streets?

**Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, what would be great is if, when we are implementing our measures and our agenda to make this country safer for Canadians, we could get the support of Canadians. We would be more than happy.

Also, I would be happy to discuss any ways we could increase the safety of this great country.

*Business of the House*

● (1515)

**DEMOCRATIC REFORM**

**Mr. Ted Opitz (Etobicoke Centre, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the fair elections act was introduced two days ago in this House and was widely lauded. It would make it harder to break the law, it would impose new penalties on political impostors who make rogue calls, and it would empower law enforcement with sharper teeth, a longer reach, and a freer hand.

One of the brand new enforcement tools the commissioner would have in the toolbox is the offence of impersonation. As a member of the procedure and House affairs committee, I recall the Elections Canada report of 2013, recommending a prohibition against impersonating an election official.

Would the Minister of State for Democratic Reform please provide the House with more details on this very important new offence that would be created in the fair elections act?

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his excellent question and his work on this file.

Yesterday, the Leader of the Opposition said he did not think a new offence to cover impersonations was even necessary and asked where it even came from. It turns out that it was recommended by the Chief Electoral Officer. We are implementing his recommendation in the bill.

The Chief Electoral Officer is responsible for keeping the score in elections. The commissioner is the referee, and we are making that referee stronger and more independent, with the fair elections act.

\* \* \*

**RAIL TRANSPORTATION**

**Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the member from Sault Ste. Marie is telling people the decision to cut passenger rail funding is justified because the communities along the Algoma Central Railway have "...year-round access to the national transportation system...".

This is not the case for residents of Oba, whose only option would be a private, rough, logging road that is impassable at times.

When ACR service stops March 31, Oba will be stranded. Businesses along the ACR will suffer.

Will the government do the right thing and reverse this mean-hearted cut?

**Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Transport, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the member of Parliament, my colleague from Sault Ste. Marie, has been doing an excellent job—

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

**Hon. Lisa Raitt:** Mr. Speaker, the reality is this was a subsidy that was given to a \$9-billion company: Canadian National Railway. As a result, we indicated that there could be a better use for Canadian taxpayer dollars.

I will be speaking with CN regarding its decision to cut passenger service, in the coming days.

[Translation]

**DEMOCRATIC REFORM**

**Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives seemed to show some common sense when a bill introduced by the Bloc Québécois forced them to speak to the issue and agree that people must show their faces in order to vote. However, the ban on voting while wearing face coverings does not appear anywhere in the Conservatives' electoral reform bill, despite the fact the Prime Minister himself said in 2007 that he completely disagreed with the Chief Electoral Officer's decision to allow people to vote with their faces covered.

Why this change in position? Why did the government not include in its bill the prohibition to vote with a covered face?

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for his suggestion. Obviously, we will continue to study the bill in committee. The fair elections act will protect the integrity of our votes and elections.

\* \* \*

[English]

**PRESENCE IN GALLERY**

**The Speaker:** I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of the Hon. Peter Fassbender, Minister of Education for British Columbia.

**Some hon. members:** Hear, hear!

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**

**Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to rise on behalf of the official opposition to ask the government what it has planned for the House for the remainder of this week and next week.

[English]

The government has shamelessly been putting the boots to fair elections. The homeless, first nations, seniors, and new Canadians, all these groups, will have their ability to vote limited by the government.

We just saw the spectacle of a QP being delayed so the government could procedurally cut off debate in the House.

I have a simple question for the House leader. Does the government House leader have no shame as he steamrolls democracy on all fronts?

**Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, this afternoon we will continue to the second of our four days of second reading debate on Bill C-23. I do want to draw attention that debate is on the fair elections act because that is significantly more than the five hours that the NDP critic yesterday proposed that the House should have as a debate at this stage.



We think that four days is better than five hours. We want more debate. Unfortunately, we did lose the debate this morning because of the delay and obstruction tactics from the opposition. However, we are optimistic that we will be able to proceed and have further debate today.

In fact, we would hope to have it also tomorrow and on Monday. The fair elections act, as we have all heard, will ensure that everyday citizens, everyday Canadians, remain in charge of Canadian democracy. Of course, it has had strong reviews, including an A minus from a former chief electoral officer for Canada.

• (1520)

[Translation]

Tuesday morning will see the ninth day of consideration of Bill C-2, Respect for Communities Act. It has now become painfully clear that the opposition will not agree to these common-sense rules that allow communities to have a say in whether a drug-injection site should be opened in their midst.

[English]

Mr. Speaker, the highlight of next week will be the budget presentation, with the hon. Minister of Finance delivering that in this chamber at 4 p.m. on Tuesday.

Wednesday and Friday of next week will be the first and second days of debate on the budget in the House.

I understand that Bill C-15, Northwest Territories devolution act, will be reported back from committee shortly. We will see that it gets considered at report stage, and hopefully third reading. At the moment, I am setting next Thursday aside for that purpose.

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## PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

### CRIMINAL CODE

(Bill C-526. On the Order: Private Members' Bills:)

Second reading of Bill C-526, An act to amend the Criminal Code (sentencing)—Mr. Brian Jean.

**Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Finally, Mr. Speaker, there have been consultations among the parties on some motions for which I believe you would find unanimous consent. The first of those which I propose:

That, notwithstanding any standing order or usual practice of the House, an order for second reading and reference to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights of Bill C-526, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (sentencing), be discharged and the bill withdrawn from the order paper.

**The Speaker:** Is that agreed?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

(Order discharged and bill withdrawn)

## Government Orders

### CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

**Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we have another motion, and this relates to agreement on a take note debate. I move:

That, notwithstanding any standing order or usual practice of the House, a debate on the subject of the situation in the Central African Republic take place, pursuant to Standing Order 53.1, on Wednesday, February 12, 2014; that during the debate, no quorum calls, requests for unanimous consent or dilatory motions be received by the chair; and that any member rising to speak during debate may indicate to the chair that he or she will be dividing his or her time with another member.

**The Speaker:** Does then hon. government House leader have the unanimous consent of the House to propose this motion?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

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

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

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

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## GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

### FAIR ELECTIONS ACT

The House resumed from February 5 consideration of the motion that Bill C-23, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act and other Acts and to make consequential amendments to certain Acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

**Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour.

I have the honour of rising in the House to represent the people of LaSalle—Émard in the Parliament of Canada and ensure that their voices and objections concerning certain clauses in Bill C-23 are heard.

The government has been attacking Elections Canada for years, and this bill is the final blow in that fight. The minister of Conservative reform, or rather the Minister of State for Democratic Reform, feels that this agency is prejudiced and biased in its criticism of the Conservatives' non-compliance with election laws. This bill is an obvious attack on Elections Canada, as it aims to limit its powers.

Instead of limiting the Chief Electoral Officer's role in implementing public education programs, the government should be working with Elections Canada to develop a strategy to increase voter participation. Fewer and fewer Canadians are voting. In 2011, only 61% of eligible voters participated in the election, which is one of the lowest percentages in our country's history. The lowest participation rate was in 2008, when only 58% of Canadians went to the polls to elect a Conservative minority government. That shows that Canadian voters are not particularly drawn to that party.

*Government Orders*

In most modern democracies, the institution responsible for administering the electoral system is also responsible for promoting public awareness of the importance of voting. Bill C-23 limits the role of the Chief Electoral Officer. From now on, this officer will only be able to discuss certain aspects of the voting process, such as where, when and how to vote.

The Chief Electoral Officer is an expert on democracy. He is independent and non-partisan. He and his team develop campaigns to encourage people to vote. The Chief Electoral Officer does an excellent job promoting awareness and educating the public, which is a very important part of a healthy participatory democracy.

This reform will have a significant impact on educational activities, such as Canada's democracy week, which was organized by Elections Canada, and the civic education program, which aimed to help students learn about the electoral process. All of these initiatives will be eliminated.

Canadians need to understand that this measure is a direct attack on the very foundation of our democracy. It will not increase voter participation, particularly among young people and groups who are less likely to vote.

• (1525)

[English]

Fortunately, the media and society at large are condemning this attack on our institutions. Allow me to quote an article published in *The Globe and Mail* that starts with this:

The Conservative government is stripping Elections Canada of its authority to encourage Canadians to vote in federal ballots [...]

The *Montreal Gazette* qualified this measure as “decidedly self-serving” for the Conservative government.

Canada is a world example on democratic participation and strong democratic institutions, but the Conservative government is working hard to change our values for its own electoral benefit.

How can we go to other countries and guide them on strengthening their democracy when we are not protecting our own institutions? How can our democracy be a model when the government is cancelling the programs aimed at teaching our youth and newcomers about the importance of electoral participation?

[Translation]

The amendments proposed in this bill will have negative consequences for all Canadians because the voting process will be more difficult, especially for vulnerable Canadians. These vulnerable people will be affected by another measure in Bill C-23 that appears to be an attempt to suppress votes from certain segments of the population.

The bill would put an end to the practice of vouching, and if it passes, the voter registration cards sent out to voters will no longer be accepted as proof of registration. These voter identification cards are important to people, like some of my constituents, who have moved or are newcomers and have a hard time providing proof of address when they want to vote. This can also be an issue for others, such as students, seniors and aboriginal people. Elections Canada

uses these cards to validate the information provided by voters through the Canada Revenue Agency or provincial agencies.

At the polling station, voters must present another piece of ID in addition to their voter identification card. My riding of LaSalle—Émard had 57% voter turnout for the May 2011 election. Only 42,500 of the 74,500 eligible voters turned out. Among those who did not vote are the groups that have the most difficulty participating in the voting process.

More than 40% of my constituents are considered to be low-income earners. Furthermore, 50.4% of those 65 and over have an income of less than \$20,000 a year, and 51% of them have no certificates or diplomas. This population is often isolated. I see it when I meet my constituents. They feel isolated, have low incomes and are more likely to move and not to be informed of their obligation to vote. Young people represent 27% of the population, are mobile, and will be affected by this new measure.

In LaSalle—Émard, as well as in other Quebec ridings, many people do not have a driver's licence or another identification card. Quebec's health card does not show the person's address. If Canadians do not receive these voter information cards, and have only a health card as the only valid piece of identification, they may be discouraged from voting because now it will be harder to verify their information.

It is the responsibility of every government to make voting easier for its citizens. They should not be encouraged to refrain from voting. With this measure, the Conservatives are targeting certain demographic groups. Unlike the Conservatives, I represent all the people in LaSalle—Émard. I am not here to defend access to voting only for those who voted for me. I am here to defend all Canadians, no matter their political affiliation. We have been elected to represent all our constituents and not to promote measures that will limit the participation of those opposed to the government, as the Conservatives are doing.

• (1530)

[English]

I would like to conclude on this measure by stating what an editorial in the *Ottawa Citizen* had to say:

One might have thought that when the Conservative government finally got around to reforming election law, it would be to try to prevent the kind of voter suppression and electoral fraud Canada saw in the 2011 election. But when they said they would make it harder to break the rules, it seems they were talking about cracking down on homeless voters, not party bagmen.

Here is another quote. This one is from the *Toronto Star*:

...[this] government is more inclined to see a higher voter turnout as a threat than as an ideal outcome.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, there are a number of issues within this legislation that are positive and there are many that are negative. As we go through it over the next few days, I hope to highlight some of the concerns that we have. I will give members an example of an increase in penalties. In that area, we do see some positives.

*Government Orders*

However, one of the issues that we take great exception to is the whole idea of investigative powers. We have seen it raised by the former electoral officer, Mr. Kingsley, as well as by our current Chief Electoral Officer. When there is a violation of an election law, we would like to think that it is being taken care of in a timely fashion, but that is just not happening today. That is why chief electoral officers, in the past and today, have said they need additional investigative powers and changes that would allow for a more timely consequence to election law violations.

I wonder if the member would join members of our caucus in expressing concern that there is just not enough authority for our Elections Canada officials to resolve things in a more timely fashion.

• (1535)

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Hélène LeBlanc:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Winnipeg North for his question and the very informative lead-up to it.

The purpose of this bill is to remove powers from the Chief Electoral Officer, who has been doing exceptional work since the last election, despite having limited resources. The government is trying to cut him off at the knees.

He should be given the powers he requested to put an end to electoral fraud.

[*English*]

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, one of the provisions in the fair elections bill would protect against voter fraud. Due to enormous volumes of Elections Canada mistakes in the last election, we saw heightened irregularities in the use of vouching.

According to the report commissioned by Elections Canada, there were irregularities in 25% of the cases in which vouching was used. The Supreme Court noted these high levels as well. Both the court and the Elections Canada report concluded that these problems can no longer go on. We have decided to provide a solution, which is to end vouching while requiring in law that Elections Canada communicate to people the types of ID they are required to bring, of which there are 39 options. Those two changes together would ensure that people show up with the proper ID and that we know who they are when they cast their ballot.

Does the hon. member support this policy approach?

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Hélène LeBlanc:** Mr. Speaker, the term “massive” was used to describe electoral fraud. The infamous robocalls are the prime example.

The previous Liberal government eliminated the measure that enabled identification of voters via door-to-door visits. People went to register voters at their homes, which enabled them to check identities on the spot.

Could the Minister of State for Democratic Reform implement a measure to prevent that kind of fraud?

[*English*]

**Mr. Robert Chisholm (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have an opportunity to participate for a few moments in debate on the bill. Like every piece of legislation we have seen from the government since it was elected in 2011, the devil really is in the details. Conservatives introduce legislation, give it a folksy title, and claim it is everything but sliced bread; then, when we start to dig into it and start to pick through it, we see what is really going on.

That is why the move to limit debate is so egregious. It is the question of the government not wanting us to have an opportunity to understand the ramifications of various provisions, to talk with our constituents, or to be able to bring that information back here to the House. However, that is certainly the style of the current government that we have come to know and not like very much. We will do the best we can with it.

The aspect of the bill that I find so troubling, and there are a number of troubling aspects, is that it is going to make it more difficult for Canadians to vote. I have been involved as a politician, an adult educator, and a community activist now for nearly 30 years in working with people in my community and across this country to encourage people to take the opportunity to exercise their right to vote.

I understand that barriers exist. Barriers have existed for different groups for decades, if not hundreds of years. We have had to fight hard to remove the barriers and remove the exclusions so that more Canadians have an opportunity to participate in the electoral process, but it is a tough slog.

Other countries are making it easier. Agencies that are involved in regulating and administering the election process are given more powers and more opportunities to promote opportunities to vote and to make voting easier. Either through polling booths, electronic voting, or other means, they make it easier for people to participate. Voting is an inalienable right in this country and in other democracies around the world. We want to not only protect it but expand it. We want to get it out there to everyone.

It seems what the government values most is someone who owns property, is stable in one location, and receives direct mail from the Conservative Party or, for that matter, from any of the other political parties.

However, only a small fraction of the population is so involved in the political process that they are on mailing lists, contribute to political parties, and receive regular updates about what is going on in the political process and what is going on with elections. There are many people out there who have decided—for reasons I do not necessarily agree with, but reasons they find justifiable—that the electoral process is not for them and that the government does not serve their interests. They are disenchanting and feeling somewhat cynical about the political process. We need to continue to do everything we can to encourage these people.

*Government Orders*

Whatever it is that I or my colleagues or Elections Canada or anybody else says that motivates Canadians to cast their ballots during an election, we need to make sure that they have an opportunity to do so. We have rules to make sure that all the polling stations are completely accessible for people who have physical barriers. We are trying to bring in all kinds of different measures to make sure that people can vote not just on one specific day, but on many specific days.

● (1540)

In this country we are exploring opportunities for electronic voting. Certainly it has been done at the provincial level. We are doing all kinds of things.

There are groups of Canadians who some would suggest are vulnerable Canadians. I do not know if that is necessarily a good word, but they are Canadians nonetheless, and they are on the move. They may be young Canadians at university or people who are looking for jobs or people who are moving around. They may be other types of Canadians who are in that type of mobile environment and living a kind of mobile lifestyle. They need any opportunity. We need to remove all barriers that may exist for them to have the opportunity to cast a ballot.

The rate of participation is in the 60% range. I speak to students in junior high schools, high schools, and universities and try to impress upon them that they have a responsibility as citizens to participate. If they decide during any given election that they are going to participate, we have a responsibility as parliamentarians to make sure that we make it as easy as we possibly can. Whether it is because they do not get mail or they are not paying attention because they are trying to put food on their tables and make sure they have roofs over their heads or they are trying to stay safe, they are not focused on these particular issues. They are not paying attention. This bill would not make it easier on those people, or on any other Canadians, for that matter; it would make it more difficult.

I have gone through the bill. I have already spoken with some of my constituents about it, and they are very worried about the direction the government is going. It is taking away the ability of the CEO of Elections Canada to expand its reach to make sure that Canadians know what is going on and are encouraged at each and every opportunity to participate. It is taking away the powers of the Chief Electoral Officer instead of increasing them.

The CEO appeared before a standing committee this afternoon. Members may have heard the minister, when he introduced this bill, suggest that both the commissioner and Elections Canada wore team jerseys, suggesting that they are partisans. What the Chief Electoral Officer said was that, in fact, he is wearing a striped jersey. In other words, he is the referee, but as a result of this bill, he is going to be completely taken off the ice.

I am going to have to have more conversations with Canadians in Dartmouth—Cole Harbour because I do not want people to become more cynical about the process, but it seems as though this bill has a couple of different intentions. One is that when Elections Canada tried to clean up some election procedures that have been carried out by some members of Parliament on that side, the Conservatives are taking away the powers of Elections Canada to follow through on those issues. They are increasing their ability to raise money in areas

where the Conservative Party has the most reach. When the Conservatives talk about a long reach, that is what they are talking about: the ability of the Conservative Party to get into people's pockets even further.

This bill, erroneously called the fair elections act, would tip the balance to the Conservative Party. It moves away from Canadians being able to participate actively and equally in the political process. I am going to speak to my constituents and come back here to share their concerns with the government.

● (1545)

**Hon. Michelle Rempel (Minister of State (Western Economic Diversification), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I wonder if my colleague opposite could provide the House with some quantitative data as to why young voters in his riding chose not to vote in the last election.

**Mr. Robert Chisholm:** Mr. Speaker, that is a vexing issue.

The question was why more young people do not vote. I take time every year to go out to high schools, junior high schools, and elementary schools, to talk to young people about what prevents them from voting.

These students talk about the cynicism. They talk about the fact that the government does not care about the environment or science, and that all it is doing is promoting the development of oil, as examples.

They do not listen to me, as young people. Other barriers also seem to get in their way. They do not get notice because they are moving around. There are different issues.

What we have to do, and what this bill does not do, is find avenues to make that participation, if they have the will, easier and more effective.

● (1550)

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, one of the things so critically important when we take a look at reforming election laws has to be the timely prosecution of individuals who violate election laws.

We could talk about the Conservative in-and-out scandal. We could talk about the overspending by candidates in the last election, or the robocalls issue. What we would find is that there is a genuine need for Elections Canada to have that investigative power to be able to not only get to the bottom of the issue but also to ensure that there is a timely consequence for those actions. That is what is really missing. The former chief electoral officer and the current Chief Electoral Officer made reference to that.

Would the member not agree that one of the greatest deficiencies in this legislation is that we are not giving our election officials the necessary powers to ensure timely prosecutions of those individuals who violate our election laws?

**Mr. Robert Chisholm:** Mr. Speaker, I would absolutely agree that Elections Canada has to have the powers to investigate in a timely manner. It also needs the resources.

*Government Orders*

We know a number of members on the government benches have been under investigation for a long period of time for breaking the rules. Part of the problem is that Elections Canada has not had the resources. It also has not had the powers to compel people to come forward.

A unanimously passed NDP resolution would have given Elections Canada those powers. This was passed last year. It would have given Elections Canada the powers to compel people to come forward, and it would have given Elections Canada more resources. It was a unanimously passed resolution. It was passed in this House by all parties.

The government completely ignored the resolution. They are ignoring it again in this supposedly “fair elections” bill.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague and congratulate him on his excellent speech. He clearly laid out the main issues and weaknesses in the bill, which seems to be a back-of-the-napkin kind of deal drafted by a single party.

If the government wants to change the Canada Elections Act, which is fundamental to our democratic life, it should keep Elections Canada and the opposition parties in the loop as well as all citizens. That did not happen. This bill to change the Canada Elections Act was produced solely by the Conservative Party.

Can my colleague comment on the importance of broad, open and transparent consultation when proposing changes like this?

[*English*]

**Mr. Robert Chisholm:** Mr. Speaker, that is a great question.

As I tried to lay out, probably inarticulately, this bill seems to balance the playing field very much in the government's favour.

The question was whether the government should have consulted with Canadians. Yes, it should have. It should have consulted with Elections Canada. The minister said that he did. In fact, we know that he did not.

They should have taken some time to make sure the perception that it was just a bill written to protect the backsides of the Conservative Party was, in fact, not the case. Had the government done that, had it gone out and heard expert advice and brought that advice to the House to help put that bill together, we would not be dealing with the mess we are dealing with.

• (1555)

**Hon. Michelle Rempel (Minister of State (Western Economic Diversification), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am excited to speak on this topic today because it is an issue we all wrestle with. I want to spend my time today on a few areas of this bill, such as the voter education component, the vouching issue, access to voting facilities, and some of the measures set out for money and corporate donations, as well as some of the robocall issues in here.

I will start with the education component because it has come up in question period and in debate quite a bit. We should all be concerned with this, as parliamentarians, in a good way.

I asked my colleague opposite why young voters in his riding do not vote and why he had a low turnout. Did members notice that he could not answer? I have asked myself this question for the last three years I have been in my first term of Parliament. I have asked myself this in areas where I have seen lower voter turnout as I analyze the election results. How can I get out and encourage people to vote in this area? I see that as my responsibility as an elected official. I am certain that other people and other parties should be asking the same question.

Moreover, it is not just our job as someone running in a campaign; it is our job as parliamentarians. If we are not asking what issues motivate people to vote, we are not doing our job. Therefore, to make the argument that a government institution is responsible for finding out why people vote is an abdication of our responsibilities as parliamentarians. I cannot believe we are having the argument that we should be somehow divesting that voter persuasion, that issue engagement, and that policy engagement to a government entity. It is false logic. It degrades the democracy we are built upon.

Every day we should be talking to our constituents and asking them what issues motivate them, what makes them want to vote, what they care about, and where they want our party to be on an issue if they care about it so much. Not only is that the policy development process, that is what voter engagement is.

We can talk about social media and websites. I love the Apathy is Boring campaign. Members have talked about using art in terms of encouraging people to vote. Those are tools. That is the how people vote. It is not the why. We cannot shift the responsibility for an inquiry into why people vote to Elections Canada. That is our job. Therefore, every time I hear that come up in question period or whatnot, I want people to look inward and ask themselves why the youth in their riding are not voting.

Moreover, when we talk about why people do not vote, there is an issues component, but sometimes it comes down to a traffic jam, a school dance recital, a lack of child care coverage or transportation to the polls, or a big snowstorm.

I have talked to friends in data visualization. When they look at emergency response around an accident, for example, they look at how people move. It is a behavioural choice to make a decision to go somewhere or do something. Voting is going somewhere and doing something. As parliamentarians and candidates, we also have to look at what behavioural choices people make to go out and vote. That is not a static thing. When we are talking about why people vote, the issues change and what motivates someone changes, so we have to be on top of that. However, we also have to look at what behavioural impacts affect a person to vote on that night and at that time, which is why I find this bill so cool. I will get to that in a minute.

*Government Orders*

In researching and preparing for this speech, I looked at a paper prepared for Elections Canada in January 2011 entitled “Youth Electoral Engagement in Canada”. It is a fairly robust paper. I note that line one of the executive summary of this report states:

Youth electoral engagement in Canada is declining. Despite this, we do not know much about the causes of this decline.

It is a fascinating paper. It talks about many different reasons that could potentially have an impact on why people do or do not vote. At the end of the day, it talks about the possibility that we may need more data. To say that why people vote could be somehow impacted by a static snapshot in time is a bit of false logic too.

●(1600)

Therefore, when we are looking at who is best positioned to educate voters, it is not just a government department. Should we be entrusting voter persuasion to a government department? I am not sure. I think that is dangerous territory. What we should be asking is how do each of us here better reach out to different demographics in our riding. Do we understand what those demographics are? Do we understand what they care about and why? How do those issues change over time? How does the policy change over time?

On election day, I have to persuade people to go out to the polls, based on the job that I have done and the stands that my party has taken on these issues. Voter persuasion is not an election campaign issue. Elections Canada cannot just go out and persuade people to go vote. It is a term of office. It is a constant thing. Now, all of a sudden we are making an argument that a government institution should be taking the role of a parliamentarian, an NGO, or an educational institution. No, that is wrong. That is the sort of debate that allows us to considerably reduce the efficacy of our democracy in Canada, and I am strongly opposed to it.

I mentioned tools. What do we need to get people to go vote? How do they go out and vote? Let us educate people on where they vote. Let us look at some of those behavioural issues I talked about, like the snow storm, the traffic jams, the school recital. Let us give them more options on when and where they can vote. No one likes to stand in a long line. I know I do not. As my friends know, I am a very impatient person. As my staff members are watching this, they know that as well.

Therefore, for impatient people, how do we reduce the congestion in voting stations? That is what Bill C-23 does. It offers more advance polling days. It offers solutions around staffing, such as in areas of congestion, we would be able to reduce that. We should be tasking an administrative department with the how, with the tools. I really think that by legislating and enshrining that, in a very focused and specific mandate within the bill, we would be doing a great service to Canadians. However, we are not doing a service if we abdicate our responsibility as parliamentarians for understanding why people vote.

My colleague could not answer that. He could not understand why people do not vote in his riding. That is something we should all be concerned about. I am sure that if we got into a debate about how this group or that group feels about an issue, that would be interesting. I could not answer all of that, but I have some data. I have a good sense, based on the survey mechanisms I use in my riding. I do telephone town halls, town hall meetings, surveys, and

social media. I try to communicate as many ways and with as many tools as I can, but at the end of the day, identifying what is going to persuade people to vote is my job. It is not Elections Canada's job.

On the vouching issue, I have been involved in politics for over a decade. I feel old saying that, but I spent much of my teen years and 20s spending vacation time learning how to campaign and doing something called “scrutineering”. That is watching people come to the polls and making sure there are no irregularities. I have seen irregularities happen. One just knows when something is happening. I have to think that the ability to identify someone, to take on the privilege of voting in our country, is something that we should not take lightly. Bill C-23 strikes the right balance.

Bill C-23 is saying that one should have the responsibility to identify oneself, but that let us try to provide as many forms of identification as possible to make that easy to do. For those who have been following this line of question in question period and in the House, I encourage them to go to the Elections Canada website, look at option 2 for what voter pieces of information are eligible, and read the list of eligible pieces of ID.

We talked about transient populations, aboriginal people, students who might be in homes, and seniors. Here are some things they can use as ID: attestation of residence issued by the responsible authority of a first nations band or reserve; one of the following, issued by a responsible authority of a shelter, soup kitchen, student or senior residence, or a long-term care facility; an attestation of residence, letter of stay, admission form, or statement of benefits; correspondence issued by a school, college, or university.

●(1605)

We are adding extra voting days through the advance polling days. We are saying there are a lot of different identification components in here. I see it as my job now to go out and make sure that people know this list exists. I had to do a little bit of Internet searching to find this. It is not front and centre.

I do not necessarily agree with all of her opinions, but I respect the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands, who has been a very active voice on this file. In the press release her party issued on February 4 when we released this bill, she said, “To improve voter turnout, we should repeal all the changes, including the photo ID requirement, that make it harder for young people...to vote.”

*Government Orders*

Right now people do not actually have to present photo ID. They can have two pieces of ID on the list I just went through, and that was not exhaustive. I did not read it all. I believe there are 30-plus different forms of identification that are still valid. If someone as educated and civically engaged as the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands does not know that we do not just have a photo identification requirement, maybe a lot of Canadians do not know what they can bring to the polls. That is the education component that we need. What the bill would do is to make it crystal clear in Elections Canada's mandate that it has to provide that service. It needs to educate voters on what they need to bring to the polls.

There should also be a component in there to make sure that political parties are educating people on what they need to bring. It is my job as a candidate to tell people what they need to bring to the polls in order to exercise their franchise. I do not see that as disenfranchisement. I see it as a collective responsibility to educate people on what they need to bring to the polls to exercise their right to vote.

I think this can be overcome. The research that my colleague, the Minister of State for Democratic Reform, has cited about irregularities relating to vouching provides a good impetus for us to address the issue in the bill. If the data were showing there were zero irregularities with this, we would be having a different debate, but the fact is that it is not. We would be remiss as parliamentarians if we did not even talk about the issue and that there is perhaps a problem here.

I was reading some of the background research that was provided on the bill and I believe that it has been shown that even with increased training for Elections Canada staff, there was still about the same level of irregularities related to vouching. This is a positive step, but having that education mandate focused on Elections Canada to tell people what identification they need to bring, having it front and centre on its website and in its communications, would be a very good and positive thing for the Canadian democratic process.

One thing in the bill that I think everyone will agree on is repeal of the ban on premature transmission of elections results. I was reading my Twitter feed when the bill came out and someone jokingly said that Canadian democracy has entered the age of the telephone. So it goes without saying that given the way that we now consume information as a country, the repeal of the ban speaks to the fact that we are acknowledging free speech rules and that this is just common sense. I am not sure if that has been talked about in debate, but it really is important and should be highlighted in the coverage of the bill.

The other very positive aspects are the rules to be in place around the public registry for mass calling, the prison time for impersonating elections officials, and the increased penalties for deceiving people out of their vote. Some of the measures we are putting in place are very positive for protecting electors when it comes to the information they are receiving about the election, including the creation of a registry of new voter contact services by telephone, and requiring registration with the CRTC of telephone service providers engaging in voter contact and any person or group engaging in the use of telephone service providers for voter contact purposes.

● (1610)

I encourage people to go to the democratic reform website of the government, as this particular component, as well as all of the other components of the bill, are clearly outlined there. It is very important for voters to know what the bill would do in strengthening the rules around robocalls. As well, the fact that we have to keep scripts and a record of how we have communicated to voters is a very good thing.

Another great thing is the increased disclosure requirements for political parties, candidates, and electoral associations, with a specific disclosure line in the election return for expenses incurred under the voter contact purposes by telephone.

The last component I want to speak on today is the financing component.

I often get asked, as we all do, why I ran for office. We always have issues or personal motivation, but part of why I ran was because I could.

When we compare the Canadian political system with the American system, where I believe there was over \$6 billion spent on its last presidential campaign, we have a really good system that limits the amount of influence that corporations, NGOs, and any individual can have on our policy deliberations. Everyone in this room has the ability to spend time on policy without being subject to undue influence, because we are not beholden to people beyond a level of materiality that we have legislated in the House. Some of the things that we have talked about in the bill, including closing the political loans loophole, I think are very good for accessibility.

When we look at barriers to women running for office, the ability to raise funds is often something that comes up. Anything we can do to level the playing field and entry barriers for different demographics, who perhaps do not normally participate in the political process at a candidate level, I think is a very good thing. However, I have not heard anyone talk about that today. I have not heard anyone talk about how it is a very positive thing to make sure that people are on the same playing field as others who have access to a wealthy benefactor or lender. We should celebrate this measure.

I also look at the tougher penalties we are putting in place for people who are not in compliance with some of these rules. My colleague, the Minister of State for Democratic Reform, talks about sharper teeth, which are so important. When people break our democratic rules there should be penalties for that. When we look at the elements in the bill to address that, they are a very positive thing.

*Government Orders*

Also, the clarification of the rules of interpretation of the Canada Elections Act is a good thing for all of us who stand here. We all believe in a system where one is innocent until proven guilty. Knowing what the procedures would be around an Elections Canada ruling and having the ability to sit in this place while those occur is something we have a responsibility for back to our voters. People put us in this place based on exercising their franchise, which has been talked about so much in other components of this debate. To remove someone without concrete cause, I think, is something that we should be very concerned about. It could happen to any one of us here in any party. We are not condoning bad behaviour; far from it. We are saying that the rules associated with the Canada Elections Act need to be stated in a very clear and public way and applied equally in a non-partisan way. I think that is a very positive thing.

One of my purported constituents said, “Stand up for your constituents...and tell [the Minister of State for Democratic Reform] to think hard about what democratic reform really looks like...”

I think he did. I think it is in this bill, and I commend him for all his work.

• (1615)

**Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I listened to my colleague's speech, which covered a lot of terrain. One of the things she was concerned about was young people voting.

Having just had a youth forum in my constituency, one of the things that came up was that they wanted to be able to access their franchise through enumeration.

In parliament in 2006-08, Bill C-31 came forward. The member would remember that it was the bill where the government wanted to put birth dates on the register. That was incredible, and I do not have to tell the member that we opposed that, but that the Conservatives were supportive of it. We finally got the Privacy Commissioner to get rid of it, and I am sure she applauded us for doing so.

My question is this. To get more people to vote, we have a very simple solution. I put it to the minister and he nodded just minutes ago and said it was a good idea. Why do we not have universal enumeration for universal suffrage? It is something we have proposed. I wonder if the member would support that.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** That is a great point, Mr. Speaker, and why it is important to get this bill to the committee stage. In my experience, there is good discussion at committee, and I certainly hope that suggestion is put forward at committee.

The member brought up the issue of birth dates being put on polling records. I believe the bill specifies that it is just the birth years required. That is another thing this bill would do that actually hones in on that particular issue.

**Mr. Scott Andrews (Avalon, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I enjoyed the member's speech very much. She is very genuine in her analysis of the bill.

I want to talk about the vouching issue for a second. I respect her opinion on other voters vouching for other voters. I will put that to the side. The concern I have is about election officials, poll clerks, and returning officers at polling stations vouching for individuals. Here is the context I would like to put it in.

Each of us has about 210 polling stations in our ridings, some of which are very small in rural ridings. I am talking about 300 or 400 individuals and about 200 people voting. The poll clerks and returning officers at these stations know their community, they know the voters and their neighbours, and they have been doing this at polling stations for years. If two ladies are out for a walk and decide to go to a polling station to vote and realize they have forgotten their IDs, the poll clerk will say, “I know you are my neighbours and that you live down the street, but unless you show me a piece of ID, I can't allow you to vote”.

Would the Conservatives be open to allowing trained poll clerks and polling officials to vouch for individuals as they come in? It would help encourage people to vote, because if people have to go home to get their IDs, they will not vote. I think it is a reasonable suggestion for polling officials to be able to allow people they know to vote.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Mr. Speaker, when I travel abroad, I have been asked if I know Bill Smith in Toronto. While I think there is an assumption that everyone in Canada knows everyone else, without being glib, that is not the case. When we are looking at putting together a national policy on this in the bill, obviously what will work at one poll in one area of the country might not work in downtown Toronto, let us say. We have to be cognizant of the fact that there are regional differences and differences in who knows whom in different areas of the country.

That said, we want people to vote. That is the goal of this bill. As for the situation my colleague mentioned of people going to a polling station and forgetting their IDs, I believe that adding extra time for the advance polling period would be a very positive thing, because it would give people more options on when to vote. Adding the education component to Elections Canada with a very tight and rigorous mandate to tell people when they can vote, how they can vote, and what ID they need is also going to help rectify that situation.

**Mr. Brad Butt (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I want to talk a bit about this vouching system again. I know the minister represents an urban city. I am from a semi-urban area of Mississauga, where there are many high-rise apartment buildings. On mail delivery day when the voter cards are delivered to community mailboxes in apartment buildings, many of them are discarded in the garbage can or the blue box. I have actually witnessed other people picking up the voter cards, going to the campaign office of whatever candidate they support and handing out these voter cards to other individuals, who then walk into voting stations with friends who vouch for them with no ID.

Does the minister not believe this kind of thing will get cleaned up properly with this bill?



*Government Orders*

• (1620)

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Mr. Speaker, what we need to focus on in this bill is the fact that there are so many different forms of ID people can use to vote. There are over 30. I think there are 39. I encourage people to have a look at that. Once Elections Canada starts promoting that vigorously, people are going to understand that this is a positive thing that unifies what it means to exercise the ability to vote and that there is a responsibility there. We have made it easy for people to do that.

On this note, there is one thing I want to add, especially on getting young people to come out and vote. I looked at an article written in the *Winnipeg Free Press* on June 11, 2012. The article stated:

The youth voting lobby group Apathy is Boring has research showing young people are the group least likely to actually be contacted by politicians or political parties during an election. Politicians and political parties have to get over themselves and start reaching out to youth directly, rather than thinking that they aren't a priority simply because they don't vote.

I hope that when we talk about this bill and our responsibilities as politicians, we are looking inwards and asking what we are doing personally to reach out to people to get them to vote.

**Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it is ironic that this bill is called the fair elections act, because in actual fact, it would impact hundreds of thousands of people in a very negative way. I too would like to speak about the vouching and the fact that it would be eliminated under this bill.

In my community, particularly in the Downtown Eastside, there are many people who do not have ID. They may be homeless. They may be transient. I can tell members that the vouching system has been a very important tool to allow people to use their right to vote. To simply eliminate that because of alleged wrongdoing is like taking a sledgehammer to a fly. It is like eliminating a whole class of people.

I think this is a very class-oriented bill. It does not say anything about enumeration. It does not bring back proper enumeration. If people are property owners, then they are fine and are probably on the voters' list, and everything is okay. However, this is a bill that would hammer low-income people, homeless people, and people who are marginalized in our society. They have as much right to vote as anybody else.

I would like the minister to respond to that.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Mr. Speaker, I completely agree. The ability to vote is something we should all carry close to our hearts and fight for with all the people we represent.

To my colleague's point, she made an assumption that there are not forms of identification that can be used for those groups, and that is not true. There is an attestation of residence issued by the responsible authority or first nations band or reserve or a letter from a public curator, public guardian, or public trustee. One of the following can be issued by a responsible authority of a shelter, soup kitchen, students' or seniors' residence, or long-term care facility: an attestation of residence, a letter of stay, an admission form, or a statement of benefits.

What we all need to do is ask how, within our own campaigns, we educate people and encourage them to go out and seek those forms

of identification, given that we have now increased the time during which people are allowed to vote during a writ period.

[*Translation*]

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Malpeque, Employment Insurance; and the hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst, Rail Transportation.

**Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the fine member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie.

I would have liked to see the minister who just spoke answer the following question, which is perhaps more appropriate: How can a government become a majority government with barely 39% of the votes of the 61% of Canadians who voted? Clearly, there is a serious problem with the way we do things.

I agree with the minister that members of Parliament should not be the only ones wondering what is really happening with the elections process and democracy in our great and beautiful country. That also concerns me.

Furthermore, I am proud to say that, with 62% of the votes in my riding, I felt I was in the driver's seat. I felt I was representing my people. However, I am not proud that only 63% of the people of Gatineau exercised their right to vote. That means that 37% of the population chose to stay home rather than to exercise a fundamental right.

In some countries, people kill each other for the right to vote. They make huge sacrifices for this fundamental right.

We have a rather worrisome problem on our hands and it is not improving. With a bill like this, it is quite cynical to say that we are debating it. As my colleague from Vancouver East said, the title of the bill is the Fair Elections Act fair elections act. In French, it is *theloi sur l'intégrité des élections*. The intent is to make people believe that it will solve a lot of voter participation problems.

I think the message that the government is sending to Canadians and voters is a message of sheer mistrust.

In their speeches, the Conservatives make much of the fact that people cheat at election time. We heard that a few minutes ago right from the mouth of the minister of state. People are fraudulently vouching for people who have no identification. That fact alone is justification for disenfranchising masses of people who may have no easy access to pieces of identification, with due respect to the minister and all her lists.

It is already complicated enough for Canadians to understand the system and to find out where they have to go to vote. Some people have voted in the same place all their lives and then, suddenly, the polling station is not there any more.

*Government Orders*

Everyone who has been part of an election day knows what I am talking about. They know just how many questions they are asked that day. It does not matter that people have received their voter card or that they have seen newspaper ads about the date of the election and where they have to go to vote. Our volunteers get a lot of calls. We have a problem getting information to people.

What is the government's solution? It is to take away one of the ways people had to become informed and that was working very well. The Chief Electoral Officer and the institution we call Elections Canada are neutral and non-partisan, with all respect to our friends opposite. The institution is all about exercising democracy.

I remember sitting on the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs in 2004 and meeting Jean-Pierre Kingsley, the chief electoral officer at the time. Members of Parliament were very proud to see the respect given to the chief electoral officer and the institution we call Elections Canada. For several years, there has been a kind of incredible tug-of-war going on under the noses of all Canadians concerning actions and investigations linked to the Conservative government.

• (1625)

Suddenly Elections Canada is biased. The chief electoral officer the Conservatives appointed is wearing a uniform, but not in their team's colours. Therefore, the Conservatives are responding with this bill.

We cannot help but be cynical when once again we are up against time allocation. We keep being told to read the bill and that it is not complicated, but it is 244 pages long. I started reading it carefully and realized that some parts of it are very technical. There is no logic to it; it is a mishmash. It is not entirely clear. Given the motion of the House Leader of the Official Opposition, not only did I look at the French, but I also checked whether the English said the same thing because I now have some doubts about that.

I see there is a discrepancy between the two titles: *Loi sur l'intégrité des élections* in French, and fair election act in English. Perhaps my English is not the best, but in my mind "fair" in English would be "*juste*" in French. Next, the French word "*intégrité*" would be "integrity", which relates to honesty. There are also mistakes in the summary. It is a bit worrisome, just as it is to impose time allocation to debate a bill that affects a fundamental right to vote, namely, how to get it and how to access it. Many of my colleagues have asked questions, which the government members have done an incredible job of evading.

I am old enough to remember the good old days when people knocked on your door to find out how many voters lived in your house. The people asked you questions and wrote down the answers on the voters list. Next, they did the enumeration and revision of the lists in order to make sure that all the names were written down correctly. That method was eliminated, as though democracy had a price and the government wanted to show how good it is at managing public funds. It is particularly shameful to cut things that affect democracy.

This creates huge problems. I understand my colleagues who are from large rural ridings, especially my friends from Beauce and other areas in the interior of Quebec and Canada's far north. They have to

cover huge territories over which small pockets of people are spread. Their situation is certainly different than that of a large city like Gatineau, the fourth largest city in Quebec. In Gatineau, the problems have more to do with the number of new developments. There are people who are not on our voters lists at all and are difficult to track down.

I will refrain from characterizing the comments made by the minister of state, who said to just do the work. I would love to take my scooter or my car and drive through all the streets, which I do anyway in an election campaign, but it is a bit much to suggest that we go and knock on all the doors and count everyone.

I am not saying that we should not do so; on the contrary. I think everyone in the House would do well to encourage their constituents to vote. Besides, no one is more active than I am on Facebook. While I was debating, I was communicating with the people of Gatineau on Facebook to hear what they think of the bill. The Conservatives might not be so happy to hear some of the comments I am receiving. However, that is normal, because they are probably from party supporters.

Am I the right person to encourage all voters in my riding and to do the work of the Chief Electoral Officer? I really like myself and I am confident that I can be impartial, up to a point. However, I have to admit that I do not know who I would encourage to vote if I had to choose between someone who would vote for me and someone who would not vote for me. I do not think that a Conservative would encourage an NDP supporter to go and vote.

The major fault of this bill is the lack of balance. For those listening, I repeat that this bill is 244 pages long. It is not simple. We have to really digest it. It is in the Conservatives' interest to broaden the debate as much as possible.

• (1635)

[English]

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I want to touch base on the process. When we think of process and the fact that we are talking about Elections Canada and reforming our election laws, this law, more than many other laws that have come before the House, shows that the government has a responsibility to work with the different stakeholders in advance of bringing forward legislation.

I was a member of the Manitoba legislature for many years and had a relationship with Elections Manitoba. There was a sense of co-operation with Elections Manitoba when it came to changing legislation. It seems that there is a vacuum with respect to that here at the national level.

One would have thought that the government, working with opposition parties, would have generated a number of things that need to be changed, while working with Elections Canada. That does not exist and that is a problem.

Could the member provide comment on that and maybe provide further comment with regard to the likelihood of amendments, which is another issue I will talk about a bit later?

*Government Orders*

[Translation]

**Ms. Françoise Boivin:** Mr. Speaker, consultation is always preferable. It seems that this government is at war with every democratic institution. It is also at war with the Supreme Court of Canada. It is jeopardizing the Supreme Court's impartiality and reputation with its stupid stunts. The same can be said for its vision of the courts in general and the Chief Electoral Officer.

It is really not surprising that the Conservatives did not consult anyone. Their idea of consultation is to invite someone to their office to say what they have to say. They believe that is what consultation is all about.

I consult with my election workers, my people and my team to find out what problems they saw and what happened. Then we give the information to our returning officer, who forwards it to the Chief Electoral Officer. The latter can speak to the Minister of State for Democratic Reform. Listening to the people would result in much more intelligent legislation. We might get good suggestions.

This work is ongoing, but I am not very optimistic that this government is serious about it.

[English]

**Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the reason for the rainbow tie and pocket kerchief is to add solidarity to our friends in the LGBT community, particularly in Russia as the Olympics begin.

The minister has on several occasions suggested that 25% of the people who are vouching are not eligible to be vouched for, and that is not the case. That is not what the court said. The court said very clearly that there was no evidence of fraud whatsoever. The clerks in the polling stations were not sufficiently trained to do the paperwork properly. That is what happened.

Instead of urging Elections Canada to fix that problem, to better train and supervise the clerks, the government is throwing out one of two ways for people to get on the election list. It is both that are the problem. There is only a small percentage of people who are being vouched for, but there are almost one million people who go to the polls without being properly on the list and who have to prove their identity some other way. They have to be allowed to vote based on information not on the list and information having to be done.

Would the member like to comment on these inaccurate comments made by the minister?

[Translation]

**Ms. Françoise Boivin:** Mr. Speaker, that is an excellent point. It brings us back to what I was saying at the start. My impression is that by introducing Bill C-23, the Conservative government is basically saying that Canadians are criminals and that they are the ones breaking the law. That is part of the Conservatives' strategy. They will never admit that they made a mistake, that they were in the wrong or that one of their own could have broken the law. They always shift the blame to someone else because diversion works so well.

It is kind of sad. As the member for Vancouver East said, it is like taking a sledgehammer to a fly. Many people are being denied their

right to vote. It is unfortunate, it sends a bad signal and it provides no hope at all for seeing an improvement in this country's democracy.

• (1640)

**Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, my colleague mentioned some important amendments that should be made to this bill. The government omitted a few things. This may be an oxymoron, but I believe that they were voluntary omissions. This bill is quite broad in that it touches on just about everything, but it does not mention the issue of voting while wearing a veil.

Keep in mind that in 2007 the Bloc Québécois was the first party to introduce a bill requiring voters to show their faces when voting. The Conservatives went along with that and all of the parties voted in favour of the bill at second reading. Since the minister seemed open to this during question period, I would like to ask the member if she and her party would be willing to support a Bloc Québécois amendment in relation to requiring voters to show their faces when voting.

**Ms. Françoise Boivin:** Mr. Speaker, I was not in the House when the debate took place, but I followed it from a distance. Wherever I went in Quebec, I asked that question to the people working the voting rooms at various polling stations. What has always fascinated me about this whole debate is that this is not really a problem at all, because few people come to vote with their faces covered.

According to what the returning officers told me, they go somewhere private so that the person can remove the face covering and show that they really are who they say they are. I can make no assumptions about what could happen if an amendment to this effect were presented. I would point out that all parties supported the Bloc Québécois motion at second reading. However, I just suggest a little caution, somewhat along the lines of what is going on in Quebec with the secular charter. We have to be careful before suggesting that there is a problem, when no actual problem exists.

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak to Bill C-23, dealing with the reform of the Canada Elections Act.

First, I would like to congratulate my colleague, the hon. member from Gatineau for her excellent remarks and for so kindly sharing her time with me, which allows me to contribute as well. She is really considerate.

In terms of democracy, however, the Conservatives are less considerate. I cannot help but start with the reminder that we are now under the 46th gag order from this Conservative majority government. It is really incredible. After one hour of debate, the Conservatives announced their intention to prevent members of Parliament from talking about the reform of the Canada Elections Act. After one hour!

That was enough for them. They did not want to hear from us any more. I am sorry, but, outside this House, we are going to continue to talk to Canadians and to Quebeckers and to tell them that there are dangers in Bill C-23 that this government is presenting to us and—

*Government Orders*

[English]

**Mr. Jeff Watson:** Mr. Speaker, I think the time for debating the closure motion was earlier. He might want to actually debate the bill in front of us.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** The parliamentary secretary is correct. The matter before the House now is the bill itself.

The hon. member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice:** Mr. Speaker, it is important to remind people of the context of this debate.

I will address matters as they stand. We are dealing with a bill that has dragged on, but instead of taking the time to work on it intelligently, meeting with people and discussing it with them, the Conservatives worked on this in secret behind closed doors. This is not a unifying bill. On the contrary, it is divisive.

With this approach, the government is changing the rules of the game of our democratic system. It is the law that governs how we regulate elections, election campaigns and the voting process. This should be completely impartial, objective and neutral. There should have been vast public consultations and a broad discussion within our society to determine the problems, the best solutions and what changes are necessary. No, the government did this behind closed doors, in secret. This is not a federal government bill. This is a Conservative Party bill. This is disgraceful and the NDP is taking a stand against it.

The government did not even have any serious discussions with Elections Canada over this. That is the first thing it should have done, but no. The government did not give Elections Canada any advance notice of the legislative changes it was going to make. They were left in the dark. The minister finally admitted that he had a roughly hour-long meeting the Chief Electoral Officer. It was an hour or so. Is he serious? We think that is a joke.

The opposition parties were not consulted and neither was civil society or the citizens of this country. It is outrageous that this bill is being introduced by the party responsible for the in and out scheme. That same party lost a minister, Mr. Penashue, because he broke election rules. That same party's parliamentary secretary to the Prime Minister had to be kicked out of the Conservative caucus for breaking electoral spending rules. That is the party, alone in its corner, that is going to reform electoral legislation? Forgive us if we have any legitimate concern over the changes that will be made and how they will play out.

This bill opens the door to a doctrine from the George W. Bush era in the United States known as vote suppression. It works by effectively ensuring that some people are denied the opportunity to exercise their right to vote and have their say in our democracy. In the last election, 100,000 Canadians exercised their right to vote without having to present photo identification because they did not have any. They were able to have a vouching elector, someone who attested that Mr. or Ms. X was who he or she claimed to be and was entitled to vote.

An example might be a parent who arrives at the polling station with a child who has just turned 18 and may not have the necessary documents yet. The parent is able to say that the child is his or her son or daughter, is 18 years of age, and can swear an oath and vote.

Who are the people without the identification required? Mainly aboriginals, young people and students, but also those with mental health issues or people who are homeless. These are the people the Conservatives do not want to see vote anymore.

This will make it more difficult for at least 100,000 people to exercise their right to vote. That is not trivial. It is extremely serious.

We think and hope that the Conservative government will listen to reason and change these rules. However, we do not have a lot of hope because they have not discussed it with anyone since this whole process began.

Another serious concern to us as progressive people and New Democrats is the fact that Elections Canada's powers are being subtly attacked, which is not very surprising because almost anyone in this country who dares criticize or challenge a decision by the Conservatives is considered a political foe. This is true for the unions, women's groups, environmental groups, international co-operation groups, and the list goes on. This is also true for the Chief Electoral Officer.

We are sort of seeing the same philosophy here. Anyone who speaks against them, anyone who stands in their way and somehow impedes the great march of the Conservative Party will be attacked and stripped of their powers.

●(1645)

It is mind-boggling. The Conservatives are the ones who created the position of parliamentary budget officer, and now this person is forced to go to court and make access to information requests to get the information he needs to do his job. While Elections Canada is investigating members of this caucus, the government is taking away its investigative powers. The government wants to separate the commissioner and the Chief Electoral Officer, so that the chief electoral officer no longer has the investigative powers he previously had to enforce the law.

The government is telling us that this is to make him more independent. Yeah, right. That is not true. Elections Canada is already independent enough from the government. That is what bothers the Conservatives. If the agency is independent from the Chief Electoral Officer, I am not sure that he will be independent from the Conservative government. It is very worrisome that the Chief Electoral Officer will no longer have investigative powers to enforce the law, when that is the very essence of his mandate.

Furthermore, I hope to get some answers from the other side of the House about something rather ridiculous that I still do not understand. I read a comment by the Minister of State for Democratic Reform on the Radio-Canada website that the Conservatives' bill will keep big money out of politics.

Then I looked at the bill and wondered what the minister meant. In the bill, he is increasing the contribution limit from \$1,200 to \$1,500, which he says would keep big money out of politics. That makes absolutely no sense.

*Government Orders*

My doubts may be unfounded, but I get the impression that the Liberal Party and the Conservative Party have lots of friends who can contribute \$1,500 per year. The NDP might have fewer such friends because it represents ordinary people, people who work for minimum wage, bus drivers and blue collar workers.

The Conservatives will also take away the money Elections Canada uses to encourage people to vote. From now on, only information about polling stations will be given out. Elections Canada will no longer have a mandate to encourage people to vote and to tell them that it is a basic right they should exercise.

That is not important to the Conservatives, and I think I know why: because 62% of Canadians and Quebecers did not vote for this government. Getting people to vote in the next election is not in the Conservatives' best interest because they would lose power.

• (1650)

[*English*]

**Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the member's ridiculous speech almost speaks for itself, to be honest.

It is quite clear that the member has not read the bill. He talked about the fundraising limits, and of course that is an upper limit. If the member cannot find people in his riding to give him \$10, \$20, \$30, that speaks more to his inability to represent his constituents than it does to the limits in this bill.

Moreover, he did find many opportunities to donate to a party that was interested in breaking up the country, the Québec solidaire, in fact 29 different times. I guess we know where his head is at.

The member talked a lot about identification. Let me just go over some of the things that are available to Canadians. There is the driver's licence; health card; passport; utility bill; bank card; bank card statement; vehicle ownership; correspondence from a school, college, or university; insurance papers; library card; fishing or trapping licence; and the list goes on and on. It includes a hospital bracelet, if it is worn by a resident of a long-term care facility.

Moreover, page 25, subclause 48(4) says:

(3.1) If the address contained in the piece or pieces of identification provided under subsection (2) does not prove the elector's residence but is consistent with information related to the elector that appears on the list of electors, the elector's residence is deemed to have been proven.

I wonder if the member could comment on how that keeps people from voting.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his advice and his comments. On the subject of the people of Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, I would like to provide him with immediate reassurance.

I am very pleased to have received the support of 51% of them, while the Conservative Party received just 3.8% of the votes. My relationship with my constituents is excellent.

Let us talk more about how the Conservative Party is trying to suppress votes. The voting system was working well. It enabled people who might not have had their ID on them to go vote. Now the

Conservatives want to change things so that those people will not be able to vote in the next election even though the option to take an oath and have someone vouch worked well and was not causing a problem.

Unfortunately, the Conservatives do not understand the concept of "If it ain't broke, don't fix it".

[*English*]

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I have a question that I would like to ask the member. However, prior to getting to the question, I would challenge him on his comment with respect to everyday Canadians who donate. If we look at what Elections Canada has to say, and these are published numbers, we find that there are more people contributing to the Liberal Party, and the types and sizes of donations are no greater than the New Democratic Party's for a majority of those donations. There are more people than ever contributing to the Liberal Party because I think they see us as the party potentially in waiting. That might be one of the reasons. I do not know. That is speculation. However, there is a bit of a question on that aspect.

The question I have for the member is with respect to the issue of enforcement. Enforcement is a serious deficiency in our current legislation. It is demonstrated when we see issues such as the robocall scandal, the in-and-out scandal, and members of Parliament or candidates who overspend on their budgets or campaign expenditures.

My question to the member is this. Does he believe, like we believe, that the government should have and could have done more in regard to the whole enforcement aspect of the legislation?

• (1655)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his comments, although his introduction seemed a little far off topic. There was a lot of speculation.

More seriously, we in the NDP believe that people should have the maximum opportunity to vote, to participate in civic matters, to take part in an election campaign and perhaps even to donate to the political party they support. These are all things that we would like to see further action on. We want voter turnout to go back up. We do not believe that this bill takes us in the right direction.

However, one of the good points in Bill C-23 is to create a registry that would contain all the information on robocalls. Perhaps that would prevent the Conservative Party and the Liberal Party from misusing such calls in the future.

[*English*]

**Mr. Brad Butt (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise and speak today to Bill C-23, the fair elections act, which has been introduced by the Minister of State for Democratic Reform.

*Government Orders*

The fair elections act would ensure that everyday citizens are in charge of democracy by putting special interests on the sidelines and rule breakers out of business. The bill also makes it harder to break the elections law. It closes loopholes to big money. It imposes new penalties on political impostors who make rogue calls, and empowers law enforcement with sharper teeth, a longer reach, and a freer hand.

The fair elections act would protect voters from rogue calls, with a mandatory public registry for mass calling, prison time for impersonating elections officials, and increased penalties. It would give more independence to the Commissioner of Canada Elections, allowing her or him to have control over their staff and investigations, empowering the officer to seek tougher penalties for existing electoral offences, and providing more than a dozen new offences to combat big money, rogue calls, and fraudulent voting.

It would crack down on voter fraud by prohibiting vouching or voter information cards as the only acceptable forms of ID. It would make the rules for elections clear, predictable, and easier to follow. It would ban the use of loans which are often used to evade donation rules. It would repeal the ban on premature transmission of election results, upholding free speech and the realities of technology and communications in the 21st century. It would provide better customer service to voters and establish an extra day of polling.

In the case of disagreements over election expenses, it would allow a member of Parliament to present the disputed case in the courts and to have judges quickly rule on it, before the Chief Electoral Officer seeks the MP's suspension.

What I want to focus on today is something that I know my colleagues in the House are concerned about. We have all seen how big money can influence elections in other countries, and that is something that our government, this government, is committed to preventing in Canada.

Our government is pursuing a principled agenda to strengthen accountability and democracy in Canada. It was our Conservative government that instituted a ban on union and corporate donations to political parties, and this total ban will remain.

The fair elections act would reduce undue influence, both real and apparent, of wealthy interests in the political process. The current rules on political loans do not meet the high standards of accountability, transparency, and integrity that is expected by Canadians.

With the introduction of the fair elections act, we are building on our flagship Federal Accountability Act by bringing greater accountability and transparency to political loans. Everyday Canadians are expected to pay back their loans under strict rules, and the same should apply to politicians. Big money from special interests can drown out the voice of everyday citizens. That is why Canada's laws strive to keep it out.

● (1700)

The fair elections act would ban the use of loans to evade donation rules. It would allow political parties to fund democratic outreach with small increases in the current spending limits, while imposing tougher audits and penalties to enforce those limits. It would also make it easier for small donors to contribute more to democracy

through the front door and harder for illegal big money to sneak in through the back door.

Some have used loans that are never repaid to get around the donations limit. If adopted, the fair elections act would put a stop to that by banning the use of loans to get around donation rules. It would do this by requiring uniform and transparent reporting for all political loans. This includes having to disclose the terms of the loan and the identity of the lender. It would bring the practice of issuing loans to political candidates and to parties out into the light. It would make the limit for total loans, loan guarantees, and contributions by individuals equal to the annual contribution limit.

A person with deeper pockets cannot get around the contribution limit by making a loan that they never intend to have paid back to them. It will ensure that if a candidate needs a bigger loan than the individual annual contribution limit, that candidate will have to go to a financial institution or political entity, not just a friend with money. The loan that they receive will have to be at a fair market rate of interest. There will be no more favours in the form of sub-market loans from political friends. That day is over.

It would tighten up the rules on unpaid loans. Candidates will not simply be able to walk away from loans that they have not repaid, which in reality turns that loan into a donation after the fact. If a candidate's loan is written off by the lender, the riding association or the party of that candidate will be held responsible for the unpaid loan. It would also put the political financing rules for party leadership contestants on the same footing as for other political entities.

The current timeframe, which is pre-event, would be changed to a per calendar year basis.

In addition to closing political loans loopholes, the bill would also make sure that political parties are being diligent about ensuring they comply with the law for political financing. The filings that parties have to make regarding their financial affairs should go farther than simply giving the appearance that a party is in compliance with the rules. Canadians should know that the information is accurate and reliable. An auditor should confirm that this is the case.

These audits are important, as some electoral expenses by parties can be reimbursed, but Canadians should have better assurances that taxpayer money to support our democratic system is only being spent under the right circumstances, and only when the expenses are in full compliance with our electoral laws.

*Government Orders*

The bill would increase the responsibility of the external auditors of political parties. It would require that they also conduct a compliance audit to assess the party's compliance with the political financing rules. The Chief Electoral Officer would have to consider the auditor's assessment of whether a party has complied with the political financing rules in the Elections Act before he or she could certify that the party's election expenses are eligible for reimbursement.

Canadians should also know what their political parties and candidates are spending money on, particularly when they are using voter contact services. The bill would create an obligation for political parties, registered associations, and candidates to identify any expenses in their returns for voter contact services.

Finally, the bill includes a strong financial deterrent to prevent political parties and candidates from exceeding the expense limits.

● (1705)

The potential reimbursement would be reduced for every dollar they overspend by \$1 for every \$1 that exceeds the maximum amount by less than 5%; \$2 for every \$1 that exceeds the maximum amount by 5% or more, but less than 10%; \$3 for every \$1 that exceeds the maximum amount by 10% or more, but less than 12.5%; and \$4 for every \$1 that exceeds the maximum amount of 12.5%.

I expect that colleagues in all parties can agree that penalties based on the idea that the more one overspends, the more it could cost in the end would indeed be an even greater incentive to ensure that the rules were followed.

I have just spent a fair bit of time outlining the bill and how it would crack down on illegitimate election spending and close financial loopholes, but the fact of the matter is that campaigning in an election does take money. I know that. We all know that. My colleagues in this place certainly know that.

This bill would ensure that money comes from the right place: from individual Canadians. It would help parties and candidates to fund their campaigns by appealing to Canadian voters. Increasing the annual contribution limit for individuals to \$1,500 would also make it easier for small donors to contribute more to democracy through the front door.

The bill would also increase the overall spending limit for national and local campaigns by 5% each.

In conclusion, this bill is about ensuring that the interests of Canadian citizens are at the forefront of our election rules. That means not only ensuring fair access to the electoral system and ensuring fraudsters and tricksters are caught, but also that there is no place for big money to exercise undue influence. It means ensuring that political parties and candidates are complying with the political financing rules. It also means making it easier for Canadians who want to contribute financially to our democratic system to do so. This bill puts Canadian voters first.

As we are at second reading of the bill, I encourage members to support the bill at second reading to get the bill before the procedure and House affairs committee, of which I am pleased and honoured to be a member.

I suspect many organizations and individuals will come forward to speak to the bill. I look forward to their input. I look forward to their ideas and suggestions. I look forward to ensuring that when we pass the final version of the fair elections act, it will stand up for fairness and transparency and it will be a great act to ensure that the voting rights and the democratic rights of each and every Canadian are respected.

● (1710)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Pierre Jacob (Brome—Missisquoi, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, in 2000, the Prime Minister referred to Elections Canada officials as imbeciles. Recently, the minister responsible for democratic reform suggested that Elections Canada officials were being partisan.

I would like my colleague opposite to explain this gratuitous accusation. Why would they say that?

[*English*]

**Mr. Brad Butt:** Mr. Speaker, Elections Canada is an independent agency. The officials there operate independently. I certainly have respect for the work that they do.

I certainly know, from my own election campaign in Mississauga—Streetsville, that our local returning officer and his team were absolutely professional to work with. I respect the work of the paid individuals in election campaigns, as well as those in the polling stations, the local returning officers in the schools and churches, who are there welcoming voters and encouraging them to vote.

Elections Canada will continue to play that very important role for Canadians in administering elections fairly and properly for the benefit of all.

**Mr. Scott Andrews (Avalon, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, everyday citizens want to know how Bill C-23 is going to crack down on, for example, the member for Peterborough over-contributing to his campaign and accepting illegal donations from his brother. Everyday citizens want to know how the bill is going to crack down on the former member from Labrador, Peter Penashue, who accepted corporate contributions and over-contributed to his campaign, then quit, and then was allowed to run again. Everyday citizens want to know exactly how the in-and-out scandal that the Conservatives did in the 2006 election would be penalized through this piece of legislation. Those are the questions everyday citizens want answers to.

Perhaps the member could elaborate on how the bill would crack down on that kind of behaviour.

**Mr. Brad Butt:** Mr. Speaker, what I can let the member know is that Liberal leadership candidates would not be able to rack up large political loans that they never pay back, as happened with the former member for York Centre, who was quoted in the paper as saying he has no intention of paying that money back.

That is the kind of stuff that the bill would crack down on. People would not be able to go and get a loan from a buddy to run in a leadership campaign and then not pay it back. That is what Canadians find disgraceful.

*Government Orders*

**Mr. Jeff Watson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for zeroing in particularly on the issue of political loans. I hope the current member for Westmount—Ville-Marie is not only listening but will also be supporting the bill precisely because it will address this particular issue.

To the question of enforcement that came up earlier, we do not let Parliament act as the enforcement mechanism for law. We do not let it do the investigation. We have the RCMP for that. We have courts for that. Therefore, is it not consistent that investigative functions and administrative functions with respect to Elections Canada are separated, first of all, and that the sensible place to put a truly independent election commissioner, one who investigates, is with the office of the department of public prosecutions?

**Mr. Brad Butt:** Mr. Speaker, one of the key cornerstones of the bill is the fact that the investigator is going to be completely separate from the main function of Elections Canada, which is to administer elections.

• (1715)

**Mr. Kevin Sorenson:** He'll buy you dinner when everyone pays them back.

**An hon. member:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Kevin Sorenson:** I'll buy you dinner when all of you pay it back.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** Order.

**Mr. Brad Butt:** Mr. Speaker, we need to have a commissioner who is going to do investigations. We need to have that person completely independent and separate—

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

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** Order, please. Will the hon. minister of state and the parliamentary secretary come to order, please? If members would like to have a conversation with their colleagues, they can do that outside the chamber, not while one of their other colleagues has the floor.

Could the hon. member for Mississauga—Streetsville please wrap up?

**Mr. Brad Butt:** Mr. Speaker, it is the enthusiasm in this place over this wonderful bill that keeps everyone chattering, I'm sure.

However, the cornerstone of the legislation, in my opinion, is that for the first time we would have a completely independent complaints division, separate from the general administration of Elections Canada, that people would have faith in and could rely on because it would be completely neutral and independent from the ongoing day-to-day work that Elections Canada does.

**Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it is absolutely astounding. Listen to this language: "truly independent", "clearly independent". This is nothing more than a smear undermining Elections Canada.

I take it, then, that the member is suggesting that the CEO and Elections Canada are not independent and do not have the trust of the Canadian people. The fact is, Elections Canada is highly regarded worldwide. I just find it extremely offensive that the

Conservatives set up these completely false narratives and bring in legislation that really is addressing a problem that does not exist.

The bill applies to a fundamental right of Canadians, the right to vote, yet there was no public consultation. One would think that with something as important as this bill there would be public hearings and we would go out into our ridings. I know he is going to say it is going to go to committee and we are going to hear witnesses. Perhaps they will hear 15 or 20 witnesses at best. For legislation that is so important, even from their point of view, why was there no consultation and why was the CEO of Elections Canada himself not even consulted?

**Mr. Brad Butt:** Mr. Speaker, I will correct the first thing. The minister indicated he met with the CEO of Elections Canada. They met. I was not privy to the conversation, but they certainly did meet, so let us get that off the table to start with.

The other issue the member raised is that she obviously does not agree that there should be a separate independent investigation branch. That would be like saying there should not be an SIU overseeing investigations of the police. Of course there have to be two independent bodies. The Chief Electoral Officer runs elections; the independent investigations officer investigates. That is why the bill is structured the way it is: to make sure both agencies can do their independent work effectively.

**Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I want to come back to the notion of proof of identity and vouching. The minister is suggesting that there is rampant fraud, when in fact with something like 25% of the people who had to have their identity proven, Elections Canada officials failed to fill in the paperwork properly. There was no fraud, according to the court.

In fact, the report the minister is using to justify these massive changes recommends widening the use of the voter information card as a valid piece of identification for all voters. Instead, the government is eliminating it. There is no recommendation in here whatsoever concerning eliminating vouching. It actually suggests that the use of vouching be reduced. It is a necessary part of elections, but the report suggests that it be reduced by an improvement to the voters list, and there is nothing in this bill to improve the voters list.

**Mr. Brad Butt:** Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is that there are 30-plus documents that individuals can bring with them when they want to vote that will verify that they are, indeed, the persons they are.

Earlier this afternoon I asked the Minister of State for Western Economic Diversification a question. I think my friend from York South—Weston will appreciate this because, just like the riding I represent, there are a lot of apartment buildings in his riding. I will relate to him something I have actually seen. On the mail delivery day when voter cards are put in mailboxes, residents come home, pick them out of their boxes, and throw them in the garbage can. I have seen campaign workers follow, pick up a dozen of them afterward, and walk out. Why are they doing that? They are doing it so they can hand those cards to other people, who will then be vouched for at a voting booth and vote illegally. That is going to stop.



*Government Orders*

• (1720)

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP)**

Mr. Speaker, I would first like to say that, fortunately, being ridiculous is not a contagious disease; if it were, the Conservative Party would have been decimated at an alarming rate.

I would also like to say that I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Ottawa Centre.

Why is this ridiculous? Because we have here a bill that, among other things, targets our democratic system, our electoral system. I think that deserves careful attention, especially with the scandals we have recently experienced.

With such an important bill before us, what does the government do? It introduces a closure motion to prevent us from discussing it. Right from the start, the way in which the Conservatives are acting is totally ridiculous.

I would like to take some time to remind my colleagues of some statistics about voter participation. At the 34th general election in 1988, the turnout rate was 75.3%. A few years later, in 2000, it was 64.1%. At the last election in 2011, only 61.1% of the population voted. So it is not hard to understand that the problem with voting is not that people are voting when they have no real right to do so. The problem is that people with the right to vote are not doing so.

At the last election, out of thin air, people in ridings that were considered tight for the Conservative Party received calls telling them that polling stations had been changed, among other things. That turned out not to be true. Therefore there were people who had the right to vote but could not do so. In the last election, the problem was that people were prevented from voting; it was not that people were voting without the right to do so. That was absolutely not the case. It is quite simple to understand. Unfortunately, with this bill, the Conservative Party seems not to have understood.

Courts have handed down major decisions involving Elections Canada, such as, for example, *Hughes v. Elections Canada*. In February 2010, the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal ordered a series of measures to improve accessibility at polling stations. One of those measures was to allow the voter identification card as proof of identity and address for groups of voters who were likely to have difficulty providing the necessary proof.

Bill C-23 makes it clear that the government is going against the recommendations set out in the Report of the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada on the 41st general election of May 2, 2011.

It is completely ridiculous to tell aboriginal communities, young people and seniors—who often do not have many pieces of identification—that we are going to make their lives more complicated and that they can only vote with a voter identification card or with someone who takes an oath.

In my riding, there are small communities with 300 people, where everyone knows everyone. If John Doe goes to vote and does not have any acceptable pieces of ID or there is no one to take an oath, he cannot vote. However, everyone working in the office, living in the town or standing in the room has known him for 40 or 45 years. They know exactly who he is. We can see how ridiculous this is.

Another major flaw in this bill is that the Chief Electoral Officer is prohibited from encouraging people to vote. All he can do now is say where, how and when to vote.

When I go to my riding and ask people why they did not vote, they say, “Why would I go vote?” We try to convince them that it is worthwhile. There is no lack of technical information.

• (1725)

If you think voting is worth it, you will go vote. In any event, people already receive the technical information. We need to convince people who are not voting to do so by explaining why it is useful to vote.

It is also important to ensure that it is not too complicated. Because of address changes, young people living in student residences often get discouraged and are not on the voters' list for the first time. They need to understand why voting is important. Now, unfortunately, this power will be taken away from the Chief Electoral Officer. We are setting aside the opportunity to increase voter participation.

Provincial legislation covers this aspect as well. There are a number of ways of approaching it. It is not obvious, but we need to keep fighting to increase voter participation. It is the very basis of our democracy. Someone had the power to do so, but that is now being taken away, which is completely ridiculous.

The government says it wants to use this bill to prevent big donors who have some control in the elections, but in perspective that makes no sense. In fact, this bill will increase the maximum threshold for individual donations from \$1,200 to \$1,500. That makes absolutely no sense. The Conservative Party knows very well that this will help it, meaning this is a bill made by the Conservatives, for the Conservatives, that gives them the means to get a head start in future elections.

While a serious problem with election fraud and problems in our electoral process need to be fixed, the government is only offering a partisan response that only the government will benefit from. It makes absolutely no sense.

The thorny issue of contributions to parties was addressed recently in Quebec. After some thought and consultations, it was decided that contributions would be significantly reduced. As a result, the practice of funnelling money through straw men is now practically ineffective because it takes too many people to generate a significant donation.

If the amount donated per person is \$1500 and you find 10 people who want to be straw men, you are already up to \$15,000. If you find 20 people, you are at \$30,000. However, if contributions were limited to \$200 or \$300 per person, things would be much more complicated. You would need to find a lot more people to fill a party's coffers.

This line of thought was not pursued in the consideration of the bill. In fact, the minister said that he had met with the Chief Electoral Officer, which is absolutely not true. We have no idea why they came up with this bill, other than the fact that they just wanted to find a way to have a head start in the next federal election.

*Government Orders*

I am extremely disappointed, especially since the NDP had a motion passed unanimously, calling for action within six months. The only thing the government was able to produce in six months is this. It makes no sense that the government took so long to come up with a bill that will overwhelmingly favour the Conservative Party. This bill does not even honour the principle of improving our electoral system. That is a real shame.

We could have done a lot better. Canada routinely monitors the elections of foreign countries to ensure that the democratic process is followed. However, when the time comes to improve our electoral process, the government tries to come up with bills filled with flim-flam to favour the party in power. That is unacceptable. The attitude of the Minister of State for Democratic Reform is irresponsible and quite ridiculous.

• (1730)

[English]

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, one of the issues we have always found with the Conservative government since it achieved its majority is that it seems to want to do things its way or no way.

In terms of amendments, we have the fair elections act coming before the House, and there is a great deal of concern about the need to bring forward amendments to make it better legislation. Our critic responsible for the act has already directly asked the minister about accepting amendments. It is a concern we have within the Liberal Party.

Amendments will be brought forward, and we are appealing to the government to seriously look at accepting amendments. This is not something it has done in the past.

I wonder if the member might want to add her comments in regard to the need to improve the legislation through amendments and any concerns she might have regarding the amendments her party might be bringing forward.

[Translation]

**Ms. Christine Moore:** Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to point out that I made a small mistake. I will be sharing my time with the member for Vancouver East.

In response to my colleague's question, we have before us a bill introduced by the Minister of State for Democratic Reform. The least he could do is to be willing to accept a democratic process in committee and to accept amendments.

Since being elected, I have seen that the Conservatives are unable to accept a single amendment from the opposition, even if it is reasonable, well founded and based on a number of solid arguments. They cannot do it. They even refuse amendments to correct French language errors in bills. Of course, the members who refuse these amendments only speak English and say that they do not agree with correcting a French language error.

They will not even agree to improving the language errors in a bill. I am truly afraid of what will happen in committee. I hope that the Conservatives will not have the hypocrisy of not even accepting a little democracy in their study of this bill, which was introduced by the Minister of State for Democratic Reform.

[English]

**Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we keep coming back to a certain area of the discussion with respect to identification. We have gone over it a number of times. A number of pieces of identification would be eligible to be used to prove a person's identity. The bill would also allow for interpretation and would allow the Chief Electoral Officer to add pieces of ID.

We keep coming back to page 25. I will do my best to read it in French, and I apologize.

[Translation]

(3.1) If the address contained in the piece or pieces of identification provided under subsection (2) does not prove the elector's residence but is consistent with information related to the elector that appears on the list of electors, the elector's residence is deemed to have been proven.

[English]

What that would do is give the polling clerk the opportunity to make the determination that even if people did not have the full identification required to prove their residence, they would still be eligible to vote.

How would that not improve the voting system and allow people the opportunity to vote while at the same guaranteeing Canadians that the vote being cast was being cast by the right person?

• (1735)

[Translation]

**Ms. Christine Moore:** Mr. Speaker, during the last election, people were thrilled to be able to vote with their voter identification cards. It really simplified things.

I am a nurse and I sometimes work with seniors. It is surprising, but some of them have no identification whatsoever. They expire over time, and some people never bother replacing them. It is impossible for them to prove their identity with any documentation. Now they are going to be told that they cannot vote, even if they were made to swear an oath, for instance.

It makes absolutely no sense to make it harder for people to vote, especially since that is not the problem. The problem right now is not that we have ineligible voters trying to vote. The problem is when the Conservative Party sends people to vote somewhere that is not where they were actually supposed to vote. They are prevented from voting. That is the problem.

[English]

**Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today determined to outline our party's perspective on the difference between making changes to the Canada Elections Act to allow more people to vote and increasing the franchise for people.

Bill C-23 is really about the Conservative Party and about the problems it has had over the last number of years. We outlined some of them earlier.

I want to speak about our vision of a fair voting system and how we could improve voter turnout, not just for young people but for those individuals who find it difficult to vote. I want to speak about how we might do a better job.

*Government Orders*

I have previously quoted Alfred E. Smith, a former well-known governor of New York and a populist. He was a reformer in the area of child labour. He believed deeply in the idea of democratic development and was very passionate about it. He was a passionate advocate for the poor. He pushed for more democracy. One of my favourite quotes is, "All the ills of democracy can be cured by more democracy". I believe in that.

We feel that we can address these issues in a better way than what we see in this legislation. The bill contains layer upon layer of technical aspects.

The Conservatives had a lot of problems. I will not go over all of them, because they are well known.

We hear from the government that this would open up opportunities for more people to vote. It would increase voter turnout. The problem is that the legislation would take away the very powers required by Elections Canada and its agents to encourage more people to vote.

In 2006-07, I was the NDP critic for democratic reform. I was responsible for providing our party's critique on Bill C-31. That was the last time we looked at changing some of the provisions in the Canada Elections Act. Photo ID was one of the provisions.

One of the provisions in that bill at the time, which we fought vehemently, was the addition to the voters list of birth dates. My colleagues and I had to enlist the support of the Privacy Commissioner to kill that provision. The other parties thought it was a great idea. They thought it was okay to have one's date of birth on the voters list. At the time, I called it a voter ID theft kit, brought to Canadians by their government. As we know, all that is needed for fraud is having someone's date of birth, address, and some other information. That is what the government wanted to provide. Thankfully, that was taken out of the bill after a lot of persuasion.

Another part of that bill was also interesting to me. When we were pushing the government on the issue of the introduction of photo ID, it had to acknowledge that many people do not have access to that kind of information. There was a huge hue and cry from people on low incomes, from seniors, and from transient people.

The government suggested that the provisions being put forward would be okay. One of those provisions was on vouching. The government changed the vouching system so that not just anyone could vouch for someone. It would have to be someone within the riding, and only one person could vouch. We came up with a suggestion we thought made sense. We suggested having a vouching system whereby the citizen could vouch for who he or she was and the ballot would be put aside if there was any concern and could be tracked.

The most disconcerting part of that legislation was that the Conservatives decided to continue what the Liberals had done in 1997, and that was to end universal enumeration.

• (1740)

I have listened carefully to the speeches. There is a lot of rhetoric from the other side about young people who are not voting. They said that with this legislation and by promoting the idea of voting,

and the minister talked about telling people where to vote and how to vote, they will vote.

All of that has been done in the past. We have seen it. What has not been done and has not been acknowledged by the government, and which the minister and one of his colleagues acknowledged was a good idea, is having universal enumeration, meaning going out and making sure that every single person who is eligible to vote in every election is given that opportunity. We do not have that anymore.

Growing up, Mr. Speaker, you and I looked forward to when we would turn 18. A person would come to our door and enumerate us for the election. Our names would go on the voters list. We would know for certain that our names would be on the voters list, because we were enumerated.

We are asking that this provision be brought in. Let us go over what the government has said this bill will do. It has said that it will bring more people to the voting stations, because they will know where the voting stations are, and that more people, such as young people and others who are typically under-represented, will participate because of more publicity.

One thing is missing in that equation, and that is giving people the opportunity to vote because they have actually been enumerated. The sad thing is we put that idea forward previously, when I was the critic in 2006-07 when we debated Bill C-31, and the government rejected it.

Everyday people, as the government likes to call citizens, think it is common sense. It makes sense for everyone to have the opportunity to have his or her name on the voters list. What would that do for people who are students? I have a couple of universities in my riding. In the last election, they were caught between voting here, where they were at school, or where they reside in the summer. Their names did not show up on either list. If we had a dedicated process for universal enumeration, and not just in certain areas, as we do now, we would actually deal with that.

Seniors who might be moving from their residences into care homes or who have been in the hospital and have moved back home are another huge demographic that is left off the voters list.

For first nations, what we found out last time was that the requirement to have a photo ID also meant that people had to have an address. Well, when we look at addresses for people living on some of the reserves and in first nations communities, that was not the case. They did not have the address provisions. Tweaking was needed there. If people were there to do the actual enumeration, that would take care of it.

Those are what I would call common sense ideas, along with doing some other things that we have seen the Government of Manitoba do. It provides voting in places where we see actual activity, such as having young people voting in shopping malls. I think that makes sense. We could extend the opportunity to vote by extending the number of days for early balloting.

*Points of Order*

If we did those things, we could also promote. However, what the government has done in this bill is say that it would take the tools and the power away from Elections Canada. The idea of putting it in the Office of the Prosecutor is an interesting parlour trick. We saw what the government did with the Parliamentary Budget Officer. The government tried to put the Parliamentary Budget Officer away so that no one could actually get the accountability we needed. Despite that, the PBO was able to do the job.

The government would try to shut those things down. Make no mistake, at the end of the day, this bill is not about opening the franchise to more people or increasing the opportunity for more people to vote. In fact, what this bill is about is the Conservative Party trying to deal with all of the challenges it has had in the last number of years. I will not go through the list with the in-and-out and the other issues around how its databases were abused for nefarious purposes.

● (1745)

At the end of the day, the NDP is saying a couple of clear things: Give Elections Canada the power it needs; give Elections Canada the resources it needs; and, finally, let us make sure every single Canadian who is eligible to vote has an opportunity to vote by bringing in and re-establishing universal enumeration for all Canadians.

**Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I know the hon. member will undoubtedly bring his suggestion forward to committee with respect to enumeration. There are a few things in the bill that he did not like. I wonder if he might identify a couple of things in the bill that might actually improve on the process of voting.

I wonder if he also might comment with respect to some of the provisions in the bill that add, in particular, an extra day of advance polling, and that limit the amount of polls that can happen in any polling station to 10. We hear from people that when they come home after work the polling station is too busy and that is one of the reasons they do not go out to vote the next time.

The bill would provide more resources to the polling officers to make the function of the election easier and better, and make it easier for people who are disabled to access a polling station. These are all things that are in the bill.

On page 25, new subsection 143(3) would identify how people who might not necessarily meet all of the criteria with respect to the burden of proof regarding their address would still be able to vote. I wonder if that does not solve the problem that he brings forward with respect to vouching. All of the members who have brought forward vouching have refused to answer that question. I wonder if the member could talk about those two things.

**Mr. Paul Dewar:** Mr. Speaker, we put the ideas forward about increasing the number of days of advance voting, as I mentioned in my comments, so clearly I agree with myself.

We also wanted to see Elections Canada be given the tools to promote engagement. If it had more resources, it could better situate polling stations. All of us have had those challenges, particularly for disabled people. We still have voting stations that are inaccessible.

With respect to limiting the number, that is fine. It could do that without this legislation, frankly, through a directive to Elections Canada.

Finally, to address page 25 of the legislation, if we were to have universal enumeration, then we would not have this dilemma. I would go back to whether the government is willing to adopt this, yes or no? It was not before; if it has changed its mind, that is great.

**Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, this is important legislation. Others talked about the closure earlier. I believe that in doing a bill about our democracy and elections and ensuring they are fair, the government has started off on the wrong foot, without any real consultations with Elections Canada. They talked way back when. I just saw the head of Elections Canada on TV a minute ago, complaining about many sections of the bill.

I would ask the member a broad question. When we cut to the chase, is the government not really splitting the commissioner and Elections Canada in such a way as to make it more difficult, maybe even having the commissioner under the thumb of the government, fearful for his job, rather than out there looking at some of the things that have gone wrong in past elections? The government has a record of wrongdoing when it comes to elections.

Does the member think in the next election that we may even have to call in the United Nations as observers to an election in Canada?

● (1750)

**Mr. Paul Dewar:** Mr. Speaker, we might come to that. I think voter suppression is the key aspect of the bill. Bill C-31 started that, and we saw that in the United States. People were joking about voter suppression. I pointed out that it started here, when they were referencing some of the United States in the last election where voter suppression methods were used. We just had to look here where we are restricting people's access to their franchise.

Again, if the government really believes in universal suffrage, then universal enumeration should follow. I have to say that curtailing the Chief Electoral Officer is clearly a play to suppress elections, generally, by the government, to have more control. I know the government does not like it, and it is a matter fact. If we do not give resources and powers to the Chief Electoral Officer, then the government is being very transparent in one way, that is, it wants to, and is trying to, suppress votes even more.

\* \* \*

**POINTS OF ORDER**

FAIR ELECTIONS ACT

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** I see the hon. government House leader is rising on a point of order.

**Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am rising to provide further supplementary submissions to those I made earlier, as I indicated I would, on the point of order raised this afternoon by the hon. House leader for the official opposition.

I have had a chance to consult the cases that were cited in footnote 99 associated with the passage from which the hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley quoted on page 728 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition.

*Points of Order*

In one of those cases, on May 16, 1978, at page 5461 of the *Debates*, Mr. Speaker Jerome directed that a bill be withdrawn after introduction because, "...while the document in respect to the motion was prepared, the bill itself had not been finalized and therefore is not ready for introduction".

Second, in another case on December 15, 1980, at page 5746 of the *Debates*, Madam Speaker Sauvé directed that a bill be withdrawn on the same basis. Indeed, the bill in that case had not yet even been drafted.

These are in very stark contrast to the situation at hand.

Unlike those cases, we do have a bill. We have been hearing about it in the House all week long. The hon. House leader of the official opposition even quoted, from the summary of the bill, an explanatory text accompanying the clauses of the bill. Of course, we have had many people in the debates today and yesterday referring to parts of the bill.

In my earlier submissions, I spoke to the relationship between an explanatory note and a bill. Members will recall that the House leader was saying the difficulty was with the explanatory note, that there was a difference in the translation between the French and the English, and therefore the bill was not in its proper form.

I will add to my earlier citation by quoting from the treatment O'Brien and Bosc give to bill summaries at page 733.

The purpose of the summary is to contribute to a better understanding of the contents of the bill, of which it is not a part. For this reason, it appears separately at the beginning of the bill.

Once again, there is another citation that demonstrates that the summary, which is what the member was referring to, is not part of the bill. Even if there were an error in the summary that was grievous, that is not a reason to say the bill is not in its proper form. It is not part of the bill.

I do have a few other precedents that I would like to offer in relation to these supplementary texts of an explanatory nature, which get appended to bills.

I will start with a ruling of June 14, 1938, at page 450 of the *Journals* from Mr. Speaker Casgrain. He said:

The explanatory notes do not form part of the bill proper and they do not have to be approved by the House. They are only given as reasons for the text and to facilitate discussion.

That was a long time ago; 75 years ago or more.

Next, I have Mr. Speaker Beaudoin's ruling, which is much more recent, May 17, 1956, an interesting time, at page 568 of the *Journals*.

...explanatory notes are not part of the bill nor are the marginal notes....The bill consists of the various clauses that are there. In order to judge whether a bill is blank or in an imperfect shape, it had to have blanks when it was introduced and given first reading.

Later, he said in relation to what is now Standing Order 68(3): "No bill may be introduced either in blank or in imperfect shape".

He continues:

Therefore at that moment the hon. Member cannot raise the point of order because he does not have a copy of the bill. The bill has not been printed. It is my duty, however, to satisfy myself. He was referring to his role as Speaker.

Mr. Speaker Beaudoin's ruling was sustained at the time upon appeal by a vote of 152 to 57.

On March 29, 1972, at page 1268 of the *Debates*, Mr. Speaker Lamoureux also confirmed the courtesy nature of the supplementary content that gets printed with bills.

As the hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley pointed out, there was a translation error in the text from which he quoted. That text was prepared by the Department of Justice and bore on its cover the following note: "Advance copy to be formatted and reprinted by Parliament".

The proviso was added to the courtesy copies of the government bills that were provided to MPs following the point of order by the hon. member for Kings—Hants, which was also cited today, and I think some of us remember that debate.

● (1755)

The official version of Bill C-23 of which the House is seized was ordered by the House on Tuesday to be printed. That motion is recorded at page 493 of the *Journals*. That copy of the bill, the official copy printed by order of the House and as published under the purview of our law clerk, can be viewed on the Internet, and there the House can see the corrected text in the bill's summary.

In conclusion, I will briefly recap my arguments. First, the test for the application of Standing Order 68(3) takes place prior to introduction under the authority of the Chair, not at this stage. Second, explanatory notes and summaries do not even form any part of the bill; it is simply a courtesy measure to assist hon. members in performing their jobs. Finally, the wording issue of which the NDP has complained is not even in the version of Bill C-23 before this House.

I think we can see that there is no merit to the point raised.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** I thank the hon. government House leader for his supplementary intervention on the point of order raised earlier today by the hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley.

There remain approximately three minutes. We will resume debate with the hon. member for London West. I will give him the call, of course. He will have his remaining time when the House next resumes.

Is the hon. member for Saint-Lambert rising on a point of order?  
[Translation]

**Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, what I have to say is in response to what the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons said. I would simply like to point out that our parliamentary leader is not available at this time. However, after reading the government's response, he will be pleased to reply. He will do so tomorrow.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** I thank the hon. member for Saint-Lambert for her comments. Of course, the hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley will have another opportunity to comment on the point of order.

*Private Members' Business*

[English]

**FAIR ELECTIONS ACT**

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-23, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act and other Acts and to make consequential amendments to certain Acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

**Mr. Ed Holder (London West, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would ask you to let me know when I am down to my last 19 seconds, since my time seems to be eaten away by the moment.

Today had to be one of the most bizarre days I have seen in the House of Commons. I say this because, as all members of this House who know me relatively well know, when I make comments, I speak from my heart and I speak with passionate conviction about doing the right thing.

Today we did not have an opportunity to give our statements in the House because of what I would respectfully call “nonsense”. We had slow votes on the other side, and somehow that was going to progress and would give us an opportunity to have more democracy in this House.

I would suggest that was one of the most embarrassing things I have witnessed. I think colleagues around this whole House must have been embarrassed, including some of the members who participated, because we did not have an opportunity, with all of these slow votes, to give our statements in the House.

We did not get unanimous consent, and I did not get the opportunity today to honour a great Londoner, a 93-year-young veteran who was, in 1948, a member of the Canadian Olympic hockey team. His name is Andy Gilpin.

These last few seconds give me the chance to at least mention his name and to suggest that all members of the House, if we have any respect for what we are trying to do as members of Parliament, stop this nonsense and not embarrass ourselves in this House. I would ask all of our colleagues to be respectful parliamentarians.

● (1800)

[Translation]

**Ms. Françoise Boivin:** Mr. Speaker, I certainly will not let my colleague, for whom I have the utmost respect, judge how we vote, especially given that a 46th time allocation motion was moved today. It flies in the face of our democratic rights. I doubt that any of my NDP colleagues would tolerate a lesson in democracy from the government.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** It is not a point of order, but rather a debate about the facts presented by the hon. member for London West.

[English]

I will let the hon. member for London West know that he will have approximately eighteen and a half minutes remaining in his time when the House next resumes debate, and of course the usual 10 minutes for questions and comments.

It being 6:02 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

**PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS**

[English]

**MANDATORY DISCLOSURE OF DRUG SHORTAGES ACT**

The House resumed from November 19, 2013, consideration of the motion that Bill C-523, An Act to amend the Department of Health Act (disclosure of drug shortages), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

**Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, indeed, I am pleased to speak on Bill C-523, presented as a private member's bill from the NDP. The Liberals have actually been calling for the Conservative government to implement mandatory reporting of drug shortages since 2011, and with luck, we will finally see this move forward.

This legislation is quite simple in that it mandates that a supplier, be it a manufacturer, wholesaler, distributor, or importer of drugs, notify the Minister of Health of any planned interruption of the production, distribution, or importation of a drug at least six months in advance. Failure to do this would be punishable via summary conviction and a fine of not more than \$1.8 million. Any unexpected interruption would have to be reported to the minister as soon as possible or the supplier would face a summary conviction and fine of not more than \$10,000 per day from the day the offence is committed, up to a maximum of \$1.8 million.

Moreover, under the terms of this legislation, if a supplier is planning to cease production, distribution, or importation, the minister must be informed at least 12 months in advance or face a summary conviction and fine of not more than \$1.8 million.

The minister must develop a plan—and this is important—in conjunction with the provinces and territories to prevent and address drug shortages, inform patients and health care providers, and prepare and implement any emergency response plan to address any shortage of a drug. I said that is important because the record of the government, in terms of doing anything in a co-operative way with the provinces, is that this seems almost foreign to it. This might all sound complicated, but in reality, the bill is simply calling on industry to keep government informed when a specific drug might become scarce, so appropriate planning can be undertaken.

*Private Members' Business*

Why was the bill proposed in the first place? Simply put, it was proposed in response to the ongoing shortage of medically necessary drugs across Canada. In the past, the Conservatives have asked drug companies to collect and post information regarding pending shortages on public websites to help health care professionals adjust treatment plans in a timely fashion. However, this is a voluntary reporting system and does not compel drug companies to disclose any information. As the case last year with Sandoz Canada has shown us, this can lead to significant harm to the health of Canadians who depend on necessary medication. We need to address this to prevent problems in the future. Many MPs in their own constituencies have had constituents come in to talk about shortages of drugs, which may have affected their health.

In the fall of 2011, following the Liberal round table on drug shortages, we recommended that Health Canada should establish a team within Health Canada to anticipate, identify, and manage drug shortages, similar to the 11-person team established by U.S. President Obama at the U.S. FDA. The government has not shown any such leadership, however.

Canada's government must institute a mandatory drug shortage reporting system, which would require manufacturers to list unavailable medications and to develop early warning systems that could highlight potential drug shortages, so health ministers, medical professionals, and patients would be notified as soon as possible. It is the responsible and prudent thing to do. Ensuring a safe supply of essential drugs is a key responsibility of the federal government, but it is a responsibility that the Conservative government has not taken seriously.

• (1805)

Shortages of essential drugs needed for common health issues and procedures are not a new problem, nor is the problem limited to Canada. It is a global problem that demands real action. For nearly three years, community hospitals, clinics, and pharmacies across Canada have been experiencing serious shortages in common medications, including those used for cancer care, heart problems, epilepsy, pain control, and surgical procedures. The federal government has had plenty of warning about the situation but has consistently failed to take action.

Members do not have to take my word for it. The Canadian Pharmacists Association sounded the alarm on shortages three years ago. It noted that 90% of pharmacists face drug shortages each week when filling prescriptions and that these shortages have become worse over time. The Canadian Pharmacists Association asked for the health committee to study the issue urgently and to ensure that this issue is on the agenda of the World Health Assembly meeting in May.

For our part, on two separate occasions at the health committee, August 2011 and again in November, the Liberals demanded that an investigation be launched into the shortages. However, all of these warnings yielded nothing but silence from the government. Members know how these committees work. They go in camera, they are basically shut down, government members vote against the motion, and the public does not know what happened.

As I have already mentioned, in the fall of 2011, the Liberals held a round table on drug shortages with drug experts from across the

country. The recommendations that emerged from this were clear. Strong federal action was required to address current and future drug shortages.

In the face of these concerns, the Conservatives have done next to nothing. Their wilful disengagement and abandonment of meaningful responsibility for the shortages has worsened the problem. Rather than real action, the Conservatives brought in a toothless, voluntary drug shortage reporting system, which does not force pharmaceutical companies to report drug shortages, as is required in countries like France and the United States. In its first test case with Sandoz Canada, the voluntary system utterly failed to provide provincial health authorities with advance warning of a shortage. The company's drug production problems were known months before, but provinces were only notified in late February, leaving the provinces no time to create contingency plans. The previous minister of health herself admitted that the voluntary reporting system was a flop.

The Liberals believe that a mandatory national drug shortage reporting system is required, and today we are backing up that belief with our votes. This reporting system should require drug manufacturers to list unavailable medications and to develop early warning systems that could highlight potential drug shortages, so that health ministers, medical professionals, and patients are notified as soon as possible. The provinces are asking for this and health stakeholders are asking for this, yet the Conservatives ignore their calls and continue to support a failed system that is putting Canadian lives at risk.

I call on members opposite. The backbench members opposite are not members of the executive council. They can act independently, on their own. They do not need to take direction from the departments and from cabinet. They can stand up for citizens on their own. I hold those backbench members responsible for the fact that some of my constituents are seeing drug shortages. It is because the government failed to act and the backbenchers failed to stand up in their own right for their constituents.

In conclusion, the government's approach has clearly been reckless and shortsighted. However, hope is not lost. If members would stand up and do the right thing and support Bill C-523, we would at least have somewhat of a start in dealing with this problem.

• (1810)

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to speak to Bill C-523, which was moved by my colleague, the hon. member for Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert. This bill would reform the Department of Health Act to deal more effectively with drug shortages.

I would like to mention that I am a nurse by training and that in order to maintain my credentials, I work approximately twice a month in an emergency room and intensive care ward. Critical specialized drugs are used in those places to keep people alive, and that is why I feel it is crucial that we deal more effectively with the issue of drug shortages. Shortages do a lot to complicate matters in a hospital.

*Private Members' Business*

Hospitals are already grappling with many issues, such as the fact that there are not enough beds or staff. They are dealing with many problems. Combine those problems with drug shortages and it becomes much more complicated to administer care. This can even lead to operations being cancelled.

Recently, there was a shortage of injection drugs. As a result, non-urgent surgeries were cancelled so as not to deplete supplies of drugs used for those operations in case there were truly urgent cases in which lives depended on those drugs.

The federal government's failure to take action on this issue is having a direct impact on people. People are not getting their surgeries, they are having problems, and their treatment can be out of whack if they change drugs while waiting for a shortage to end.

For example, treating people with psychiatric and mental health conditions is a delicate balancing act, and there is an art to finding the right combination of different classes of drugs to help them and prevent their psychiatric symptoms from recurring. If one of those drugs is taken out of the equation or a substitute is introduced, that can throw off the balance. It can even trigger a psychotic episode. The government needs to understand the critical impact that drug shortages can have on the overall health of patients.

The federal government's failure to act on this matter has forced the provinces to manage it in the end. It becomes very complicated.

This reform is based on two main features: the mandatory disclosure by suppliers of a planned or foreseeable drug shortage and the implementation of an emergency response plan to address shortages.

Drug shortages are a public health issue. Furthermore, this problem is not limited to Canada. It is a global problem. When a company experiences a shortage, its impact will be felt around the world.

In practical terms, the United States has adopted mandatory reporting of drug shortages. That is what this bill calls for. This legislative framework has produced clear results: 195 shortages were avoided in 2011 and 2012 alone. The Food and Drug Administration, or FDA, centralizes the information going around about drug shortages and develops an action plan accordingly. It is ready to take action. Ever since the FDA imposed that requirement, the number of shortages that have been avoided rose constantly between 2005 and 2010. Every year, the number of shortages that have been avoided has gone up. Over those five years, approximately 100 drug shortages were avoided. As I just said, in 2011-12, 195 were avoided.

●(1815)

It is incredible how what is basically simple legislation can actually solve or avoid problems that could be critical for people's health.

Many countries have plans and have tackled the problem of dealing with drug shortages. Health Canada should make changes to its regulations based on U.S. and European practices in order to take effective action to deal with the causes and consequences of drug shortages.

By examining the current Department of Health Act, we see that it is the cause of two failures. First of all, it is a public health problem in that patients do not have access to the drugs they need for their treatment. That manifests itself in different ways, as I noted earlier with the psychiatry example.

A more expensive alternative drug can be purchased. It may have a financial impact on patients. It can worsen their health if their symptoms can no longer be managed. In some cases and with certain drugs, it can unfortunately result in the patient's death.

Accordingly, the minister's inaction on preventing drug shortages and the consequences that entails, can cause death. That is something quite tangible and we cannot stand idly by. We cannot ignore this problem.

What is more, this creates budgetary problems. A drug shortage creates extra costs for our health care system. The supplier network has to be changed and the patients have to be contacted again to be given new treatments, for instance. Switching a person to a new drug sometimes requires extra monitoring or blood samples to be taken in order to adjust the treatment. If a patient is denied an antihypertensive and a substitute has to be found because of the shortage, then his blood pressure needs to be taken. He will need to be monitored by a nurse for a certain period of time to ensure that the substitute drugs truly suit him and are treating the symptoms.

We go from having a patient whose condition was under control because he was taking drugs, to having patients who need to be monitored to ensure that their conditions are still under control. This creates rather significant extra costs to the health care system. Most of the cost created by the shortage is borne by the provinces.

Bill C-523 recognizes this doubly dysfunctional system and aims to provide a solution to the problem of drug shortages. It would legally require suppliers to disclose any planned or foreseeable drug shortages, as I mentioned earlier. That is not too complicated for a company to do. It knows when it could end up with a drug shortage because demand has increased or because there are problems with its production line. Therefore, it is not too complicated for companies to inform the government. It would not be a heavy administrative burden. It is rather simple. Health Canada would then quickly pass along the information to hospitals and the provinces, so that they can take appropriate action.

The bill also calls for an action plan. We know how serious the consequences can be for patients. Having an action plan is a priority. We cannot remain silent.

Lastly, we had an emergency debate about the last drug shortage because the government did not have an action plan. It is not prepared for these situations. It is unacceptable that it is not prepared to take action for our health care system or to combat drug shortages. It shows a lack of concern for the health of all Canadians.



*Private Members' Business*

• (1820)

That is why it is very important for us to address this issue and pass this bill, so that we can take action for the sake of patients and Canadians.

**Mr. François Pilon (Laval—Les Îles, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank you for allowing me to speak to Bill C-523, An Act to amend the Department of Health Act (disclosure of drug shortages). Before I begin, I want to thank and congratulate my colleague from Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert for her hard work and her excellent bill.

This bill amends the Department of Health Act to oblige drug suppliers to advise the minister of any interruption or cessation of the production, distribution or importation of drugs. It also obliges the minister to prepare and implement an emergency response plan to address shortages of drugs.

Drug shortages in Canada are a major public health problem and the federal government has a role to play in this. The drug shortage phenomenon is nothing new. This has been a recurring problem since the 1970s and there have been successive shortages under Liberal and Conservative governments without either taking action to solve this problem. Nonetheless, it is important to note that these shortages have increased in number and duration over the past few years.

The crisis in 2012, caused by the temporary shutdown of the Sandoz plant, one of the largest manufacturers of injectable drugs for hospitals, clearly showed the scale of this issue. The NDP actually used an opposition day at the time, March 14, 2012, and secured unanimous passage of a motion to resolve the issue. However, as on so many occasions before and since with this government, we have seen a lack of leadership and of will.

Just as with rail safety, air safety, the oil industry and the environment, this government has once again asked industry to regulate itself. We need only mention the many oil pipeline spills, the many railway accidents and the tainted meat scandal to demonstrate the ineffectiveness of industry self-regulation.

In fact, the only effective aspect of industry self-regulation is the effectiveness with which former Conservative members of Parliament have obtained jobs in sectors for which the Conservative government is promoting self-regulation. That could be the topic of another debate all by itself.

Let us return to the subject of the bill, drug shortages. Another reason why it is absolutely necessary to have legislation in this area, possibly the most important reason of all, is the safety of patients.

Drug shortages put patients at risk; they also require doctors, pharmacists and nurses to do extra work and ultimately lead to additional costs for all of us.

According to a survey by the Canadian Pharmacists Association, 91% of pharmacists stated that patients have been affected by drug shortages, either because of delays in treatment or because treatment was stopped, or because of the extra cost to purchase medication, extended hospital stays, procedures being delayed or cancelled, or because the original condition worsened.

In some cases, the impact may be minimal overall. However, in a number of cases, shortages can be catastrophic because the cost associated with medication can skyrocket and become too expensive for individuals who need to be on the drug.

Take a concrete case like epilepsy, where stopping medication sometimes has disastrous consequences. When someone stops taking antiepileptics or the medication is or must be changed suddenly, recurrent seizures can become more serious and longer than before. Prolonged attacks that last more than five minutes require emergency medical care and can even be fatal.

How does that tie in to the debate? Between 2009 and 2012, we experienced shortages of at least five different antiepileptic drugs. Some of them were made by a single pharmaceutical company.

• (1825)

These shortages have forced some people to use a different preparation, if available, or to switch medications without any transition, thus putting at risk the lives of all these people.

A government must protect its citizens. What did the government do? Once again, it shirked its responsibilities and blamed the provinces, its second favourite target after the official opposition. Indeed, the government said that, in its opinion, the provinces were responsible for changing their procurement policies.

However, that is not the opinion of the Quebec Minister of Health, Dr. Réjean Hébert, who unequivocally said the following, in the May 10, 2013, edition of *L'actualité*:

It is also Health Canada's responsibility to manage drug shortages. If the federal government was doing a better job, there would be fewer drug shortages.

It is high time that the federal government take responsibility. It can do so by voting for the bill we are debating today.

First and foremost, we are asking the government to adopt a system for the mandatory disclosure of drug shortages, as called for by the vast majority of patient and health professional groups. Canadians and their health professionals are entitled to have access to information that is crucial for public health.

That system is used in the United States, the European Union and New Zealand. France also adopted a system in the early 1990s and saw a significant drop in the number of shortages.

We are also urging the government to stop being so confrontational with the provinces and territories. We are asking it to work with them and with stakeholders to find a solution that will decrease the number of shortages and reduce their impact on patients and on our health care system.

*Private Members' Business*

According to statistics from the Régie de l'assurance maladie du Québec, the number of drug shortages rose from 33 in 2006 to 207 in 2010. That is unacceptable, dangerous and outrageous. It must be fixed right away. That is why we are asking everyone in the House to support the bill that was introduced by the hon. member for Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert.

I would like to conclude with a message for Canadians. The NDP believes that the health of Canadians is more important than profits for pharmaceutical companies. With this bill, we are taking the appropriate steps to ensure that Canadians will have access to the drugs they need, when they need them.

When it comes time to vote on this bill, we hope that the Conservative government, for once, will also put the interests of Canadians ahead of those of pharmaceutical companies.

• (1830)

**Ms. Éline Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to rise in the House today to support my colleague's bill, Bill C-523, An Act to amend the Department of Health Act (disclosure of drug shortages).

Before I begin, I would like to commend the initiative shown by the hon. member for Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert in tackling a public health problem that is very troubling and unfortunately has very serious consequences, namely, drug shortages. I also wish to congratulate her on her thoughtful work and consultations, and on everything she has done to prepare this bill. Given that she is a doctor, she is very familiar with and knowledgeable of the subject matter. She has introduced a bill that really tackles something that should be a priority for all governments, including the federal government and provincial governments.

My colleague's bill aims to amend the Department of Health Act in order to oblige drug suppliers to advise the minister of any interruption or cessation of the production, distribution or importation of drugs. If it passes, Bill C-523 will also oblige the minister to prepare and implement an emergency response plan to address shortages.

Drug shortages have been a problem in Canada for a long time. For over 40 years, drug shortages have been a growing and recurrent problem. In January 2012, the Sandoz plant closed temporarily, and the company had supply problems again in November of last year. That is a striking example of the disastrous consequences that a drug shortage can have for Canadian citizens.

When a major pharmaceutical manufacturer like Sandoz is having a hard time producing 36 drugs, 16 of which are completely out of stock, that obviously has a direct impact on people's quality of life and health. In fact, 91% of pharmacists report that their patients have been affected at some time by drug shortages. In light of these overwhelming statistics, the NDP believes that this is a very serious problem.

Drug shortages may require pharmacists to resort to alternative treatments or to delay providing a treatment to a patient because there is no pharmaceutical substitute. Sometimes, patients have adverse reactions to ingredients in what was supposed to be a similar drug. This is about chemicals that have a direct impact on how the body works. You cannot just substitute one drug for another and

expect any consequences. Consider drugs used to treat depression, anxiety and psychological conditions. It can take months or even years to find the right dosage or the right drug to treat various illnesses. If there is a shortage and one antidepressant has to be substituted for another, that can have a disastrous effect on people's health and their quality of life.

The NDP thinks these situations are totally unacceptable. Before being elected to the House of Commons, I used to work at the Régie de l'assurance maladie du Québec as an information officer. One of my main duties was to answer calls when people had questions about the public health insurance plan or even the public drug insurance plan that we are lucky to have in Quebec. The questions were on the cost of the drugs, their billing, or their insurance. Almost every day, I received calls from patients, often seniors unfortunately, who were dealing with a drug shortage. They had to try to find a substitute. Quite often, they had to pay extra money to find a drug that could give them temporary relief, with the risk of suffering side effects. Sometimes, there simply were no drugs available. People had to wait, sometimes at great risk to their lives.

In Quebec, we are quite lucky. The public drug insurance plan covers most of the prescription costs for people who do not have access to private insurance. When a person has to take a brand name drug instead of a generic drug, the extra cost is not covered by the public drug insurance plan. These extra charges come directly out of the pockets of people who have no other choice but to take the brand name drug. They have to rework their budget.

• (1835)

We are talking about seniors on the guaranteed income supplement who are barely making ends meet. They have to deal with drug shortages and maybe pay \$50 or \$60 more every month. This can easily total up to \$100 for some medications.

I cannot imagine people in this same situation outside of Quebec. Some people have no drug coverage and have to pay the entire cost. It is a huge expense and the result of poor planning. No matter the reasons for drug shortages, the fact remains that people do not have any information or only have the information that the pharmaceutical company wants to give them. They are not able to predict them. Pharmacists, doctors and everyone working in the health system are directly affected by the shortages.

I will give another example. I spoke earlier about people with psychological or psychiatric problems. My colleague from Laval—Les Îles talked about people with epilepsy. That is another illness that is difficult to manage. It takes several attempts to find the right medication and the right dosage. If the patient has to skip a dose or change medications, the effects can be terrible. Someone who suffers from grand mal seizures has difficulty coping with the convulsions. If they change medications, the seizures can be more severe, more frequent and more violent. A seizure that lasts more than five minutes requires immediate hospitalization and can even result in death.

We really are talking about the tragic consequences of a lack of medication, even for a day. People who, like me, do not suffer from chronic conditions of that kind, cannot imagine the consequences. But my brother has epilepsy. I have seen the effect of the seizures, even with his medication. He has not had to deal with a drug shortage. I cannot imagine the impact on his daily life, and on my parents, if my family no longer had access to the medications he needs. That is so difficult to live with.

A government has a responsibility to act. We cannot just sweep this into the provinces' backyards, as the Conservative government is doing constantly. We have to take action. We have to do more than simply trust the pharmaceutical industry.

Have I heard anything more ridiculous than that? Not often, but it does not matter. They say that they have established a voluntary disclosure protocol. Wonderful. What additional information have we had since the protocol was established? Not a lot.

It makes absolutely no sense to entrust the lives of millions of Canadians to the good will of the pharmaceutical industry. This is the time for action.

My colleague is proposing to put a stop to the industry's dilly-dallying in disclosing drug shortages. The minister has to stop blaming the provinces for her own inaction and to shoulder her responsibilities for once. The voluntary disclosure protocol that the Conservatives have put in place does not require manufacturers to provide accurate information in a timely manner. They can provide information whenever they choose. No one has been identified to guarantee compliance with the protocol. Therefore we have to wonder what is the use of the protocol, other than providing more paperwork. For a government that does not like red tape, there seems to be a lot of it in their various initiatives, but unfortunately with no concrete results.

The first step in managing a problem like drug shortages would be to show some transparency, so that everyone concerned has a true picture of the situation. That is what my colleague's bill proposes and I congratulate her for her initiative.

Canadians need to have all the necessary information on drug shortages. We strongly believe that the public needs and has a right to all this information. Health care experts also have a right to that information. Pharmacists have a right to have the information as well, because they have to advise their customers. Some patients would like to have generic drugs and some would prefer something else. Pharmacists need to have up-to-date information to be able to advise the people who come to them with a real need.

### *Private Members' Business*

We could look at what is being done elsewhere. In the United States, New Zealand and the European Union, they have all developed a mandatory disclosure system and have proven that system regulation can be a good thing. France did the same thing in the 1990s, and they have experienced fewer shortages than other western countries since that protocol took effect.

The Association des pharmaciens des établissements de santé du Québec, the Canadian Medical Association and the Cancer Society are all important health care agencies that have expressed their support for my colleague's Bill C-523.

• (1840)

I hope that all members of the House, regardless of their party, will support it as well.

**Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP):** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I am pleased to speak to this issue and defend the proposal put forward by the member for Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert in Bill C-523, which addresses preventive disclosure of drug shortages by pharmaceutical companies.

This is an important public health issue that affects Canadians from all regions and all walks of life. This is also an opportunity to assert that the health of Canadians is not a free commodity and that public interest takes precedence over free enterprise in the drug industry.

We need to legislate this because, true to form, the Conservative government is watching the problem worsen, is saying it is acting in the interests of Canadians and is making a lot of noise. It gets riled up and then nothing happens. However, the statistics on drug shortages in Canada are stunning.

The working group on drug shortages found that the number of registered drug shortages rose from 92 in 2005 to 310 in 2010. That is an increase of over 300%. It is equivalent to six registered drug shortages per week.

In 2011, 250 drugs were on back order, representing a 40% increase over the previous year. It is clear that supply disruptions are on the rise and that more drugs are being affected.

Here is an analogy. This kind of problem in another industry would have no real impact on the lives of Canadians. If a person wants to buy a new car, but the dealer cannot deliver it on time, that person just goes and buys another make of car. That does not work for the drug industry.

According to the report of the working group on drug shortages that I quoted, drugs that are subject to shortages are essential, which means that they are used to treat or prevent serious health conditions and there are no substitutes. In other words, unlike dissatisfied customers, sick people cannot simply find substitutes for the drugs they need. That happens often, too often.

From January 2010 to August 2011, 93% of the 127 unforeseen shortages involved essential drugs and 41% were both essential and produced by a single manufacturer. This kind of breakdown in the supply chain has a significant impact on the health of all Canadians.

*Private Members' Business*

In 2012, the injection drug shortage caused at least 65 surgeries to be delayed. Doctors surveyed by the Canadian Medical Association, the Canadian Pharmacists Association and the hospital pharmacists association confirmed that drug shortages affected their patients' health.

It is important to understand that illnesses do not wait for the drugs that treat them to become available. When there is a shortage, illnesses continue to flourish, worsen and spread. No one is immune: rich or poor, young or old, Canadian or not. Illnesses spread if they are not treated, and that is that.

These interruptions in the supply chain also have an economic impact, first of all, because they drive up the cost of the health care system. A delay in treatment or surgical intervention causes the patient's condition to deteriorate. The longer we wait to treat that person, the harder and more costly it is. Some 91% of hospital physicians agree. These delays also cause an increase in the workload of health care providers.

All of these disruptions wind up being more costly for our health care system, and therefore our economy. Let us not forget that healthy employees are essential to keeping our businesses running smoothly.

• (1845)

A 2011 labour force survey conducted by Statistics Canada ranks health problems as the number one cause of absenteeism at work, apart from vacation. In 2011, every full-time employee lost on average eight working days because of sickness. That is a total of 105 million work days lost annually.

Canada is experiencing a labour shortage in certain sectors, which is threatening our competitiveness and our growth. Our businesses even have to call upon temporary foreign workers at times in order to meet their labour needs. Thus, it is important to tackle this public health problem immediately in order to improve the health of our workers and reduce absenteeism.

Has the government taken any sensible action to address the shortcomings in the drug supply chain? Absolutely not. It is hiding behind its usual ideology: the free market. Let it go; leave it alone; the market will take care of itself.

With that approach, it is putting the health of Canadians in the hands of pharmaceutical industries. It is forgetting that it alone has the possibility of anticipating the needs, and knowing the state of the supply and the capacity of the pharmaceutical industries to meet demand. The government refuses to ask them whether they will have the capacity to meet demand in the short, medium and long terms so that it can adjust. It prefers to rely on the goodwill of the industry. The Conservatives keep extolling the virtues of business, but here, they are not acting as good managers.

The NDP is a responsible party that understands the realities and challenges of public health. That is why we have developed a constructive approach. It is based on the need to inform and to anticipate the need for drugs in the country.

It is simple. We must introduce a mandatory reporting system that requires pharmaceutical companies to inform Health Canada of any

potential shortage, as the College of Family Physicians of Canada is calling for.

The NDP wants to ensure that the health care professionals have access to the necessary information to take care of their patients and to make their work more efficient. For that, we must oblige the pharmaceutical industries to report any drug shortages. We must not rely on their goodwill.

Other developed countries do it and it works very well. In the United States, for example, Barack Obama's administration issued an executive order last October requiring all manufacturers to report shortages to the Food and Drug Administration.

It is time for the federal government to do its job and look after public health. Canadians' health is more important than the profits of the pharmaceutical industry. We must take appropriate action to guarantee that everyone has access to health care and medication. That is why I support the bill before us today.

• (1850)

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** Before I recognize the hon. member for Honoré-Mercier, I must inform her that I will have to interrupt her at 6:57 p.m. to allow time for the right of reply. The normal time for a speech is 10 minutes, but in this case, she will have about 7 minutes.

The hon. member for Honoré-Mercier.

**Ms. Paulina Ayala (Honoré-Mercier, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, everyone knows that the serious drug shortages Canada is facing are jeopardizing our health care. Health Canada issues notices and warnings about medications.

Obviously, when health care is affected, our economy is as well. We can all agree that sick people and people who are not working cost a lot of money. A mom or dad who has to stay home when their child needs treatment because they could not get the right medication also costs a lot of money. Hospital costs are also affected. It is not good for anyone.

Who has to find the solution? Since health care is a provincial jurisdiction, some say that it should be up to them. That is not how it works. It is not that easy. It is true that provincial governments share part of the responsibility, especially with respect to supplies. When pharmaceutical companies are getting virtually exclusive contracts, competitors have less interest in manufacturing drugs, which therefore limits the choice of drugs.

However, the federal government must shoulder some responsibility too. Drug shortage problems have been growing since the mid-2000s. They affect both generic drugs and innovative drugs, which are more expensive and are not necessarily Canadian drugs. Those are drugs imported from pharmaceutical companies abroad. They are more expensive, of course.

*Private Members' Business*

That is why a number of countries, such as France and the United States, have introduced policies to reduce and control the magnitude of those shortages. There are many reasons for the shortages. It is not just because not enough drugs were produced. For instance, there have been cases where the raw materials went bad because the facilities of a pharmaceutical company were in bad shape. The drugs that were subsequently produced were not of good quality; they were actually dangerous. Therefore there can be many causes and quality control is very important.

In the past, we knew where the drugs came from. They often came from certain European countries. Now they can also come from emerging economies, where quality control is less rigorous than in North America or Europe. We must be careful. That is the federal government's responsibility. Emerging economies have supply problems. As a result, there is a significant increase in demand. Our population is aging and therefore needs more and more drugs. For some diseases, we can now find drugs that we did not have before, so demand has gone up. However, the main reason is that the population is increasingly aging. We must look after our seniors who have worked for us to be where we are today.

While demand has gone up, production has remained the same. Clearly, private companies want to make a profit. We all agree that they are not there as a charity.

Finally, since major patents have expired, pharmaceutical companies are focusing on producing new drugs that are more expensive instead of producing existing drugs that are just as effective and cheaper. That is also something to keep an eye on.

In 2011, the United States tried to find a solution to this problem. They required that all companies disclose all shortages. They also encouraged them to report any slowdown in production because these situations can be prevented.

It is up to the provincial governments and especially to us, federally elected members, to find a solution. I would like to address my colleagues now. It is up to us, as legislators, to pass the right laws. The health of Canadians is also our responsibility.

Clearly, I will be supporting my colleague's bill, Bill C-523, An Act to amend the Department of Health Act concerning the disclosure of drug shortages, which would oblige drug suppliers to advise the minister of any interruption or cessation of the production, distribution, or importation of drugs and oblige the minister to prepare and implement an emergency response plan to address drug shortages.

• (1855)

**Mrs. Djaouida Sellah (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind members that drug shortages are a major public health problem in which the federal government has a role to play.

This bill would give Canadians access to the same information that Europeans and Americans already have in terms of care. Drug shortages put patients at risk. They create more work for doctors, pharmacists and nurses in our healthcare system, and result in additional costs.

We need to switch to solution mode. In a letter to the industry, the Minister of Health has asked the industry to regulate itself. A new website is also available for voluntary reporting. These initiatives do not really help with planning, however, since the information is not always updated during a shortage.

Professor Jean-François Bussi eres looked at the drug shortages reported on the [vendredipm.ca](http://vendredipm.ca) website—these are shortages from the Sigma purchasing group, which makes mandatory reporting of shortages part of its supply contracts. His study showed that 20% of all drug shortages reported on [vendredipm.ca](http://vendredipm.ca) are not reported on the government's drug shortages website. This is ironic.

Having the industry require its suppliers to disclose any supply shortage to protect its production capacity seems normal to the Conservative government. It does not seem so keen to apply the same logic to pharmaceutical companies by requiring them to disclose drug shortages.

The minister spoke during the first part of the debate on my bill and said that it did not amend the right law. I would like to say something. The health of Canadians is more important to me than pharmaceutical companies' profits. It is the Minister of Health's responsibility to guarantee that Canadians have access to drugs at all times. Unless I am mistaken, the Department of Health Act, which I seek to amend, sets out the minister's prerogatives. That is why I am asking the minister to coordinate efforts to prevent any drug shortage, remedy it and develop and implement more emergency measures to address these shortages.

The federal government, which is content to deregulate a number of public safety measures, claims that the voluntary approach in this area is working. However, the facts tell another story. Drug shortages are not reported within a reasonable amount of time to allow for a transition period. The Conservatives pushed with all their might for a voluntary approach that has not worked in a number of sectors. The [penuriesdemedicament.ca](http://penuriesdemedicament.ca) website and the protocol for the notification and communication of drug shortages include many aspects of my bill, including the disclosure of drug shortages, but not the legal obligation to do so.

There is a reason why a number of groups of health professionals, including the Ordre des pharmaciens du Qu ebec, the College of Family Physicians of Canada and the Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions, are calling for this mandatory approach. We are behind here in Canada, because the United States and Europe, our largest economic partners, have already passed similar bills.

• (1900)

In closing, I call on the Conservative government to accept its responsibility to protect public health and to pass my bill concerning the disclosure of drug shortages.

I urge my Conservative colleagues not to vote against common sense.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Some hon. members:** No.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

**Some hon. members:** Yea.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** All those opposed will please say nay.

**Some hon. members:** Nay.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** In my opinion, the nays have it.

*And five or more members having risen:*

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** Pursuant to Standing Order 93, a recorded division stands deferred until Wednesday, February 12, 2014, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

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## ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

[*English*]

### EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

**Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I raised a question on the consequences of the government's attack on EI, which, when it was raised on November 27, had already seen some 1,100 islanders leave the province. I asked the minister why she, as the regional minister and Minister for Fisheries and Oceans, thought it was okay for P.E.I. to lose its youth and split families asunder, and why she has minister has championed policies that have forced islanders to leave.

The Minister of Employment and Social Development responded, but clearly his response shows that he does not understand a seasonal economy in any way, shape, or fashion. He said, "Not one person has to leave P.E.I. in order to search for available work to qualify for EI". That was not the question. We are not talking about qualifying for EI; the question was about the ability to qualify for EI in the future, not the ability to move. The question then was about the consequences of the EI changes, which are forcing many islanders to leave.

It is not only about those who leave, but also about those who, as a result of the changes in the system, are left poorer as a result. The economy in Prince Edward Island, and indeed the Maritimes, has been suffering as well. The impact has been so profound that the Council of Atlantic Premiers has been holding hearings on the issue of employment insurance. It has come out very strenuously against the federal government and these employment insurance changes.

In the hearings, one of the concerns was that too few people were coming forward. Why? They are fearful that if they come out and tell about the situation they are faced with as a result, they will be targeted by the government, audited, and hassled. I know the members opposite are shaking their heads, saying that would not happen. Well, I saw on TV a few minutes ago what happened to the environmental charities. Any of them who have spoken out against the federal government are already being targeted and audited. That is the way the government works; it operates on fear. These people are worried, and they have reason to worry.

Secondly, businesses themselves are not able to obtain workers for part-time work because 50¢ on the dollar is being clawed back. Maybe I can sum it up best with a letter that someone sent to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans. This person said that he had moved to P.E.I. from Ottawa in 1986 and had run a successful business from 1988 to 2004. Since then he has been working with various seasonal businesses and most recently with one that shows terrific potential. The changes to the EI guidelines, however, have required him to work for 50¢ on the dollar while drawing EI.

Not only that, in so doing he bears the employment related expenses, such as child care, travel, meals and so on. By his estimation, this results in him working for roughly 35¢ on the dollar.

He asks, "Please tell me how this is helping me, the economy, or anybody else? It's certainly hurting my family and offers no hope of a better future unless I move away", which is not an option for him.

That is his question.

• (1905)

**Mr. Jeff Watson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am happy to speak today to correct the misinformation the member for Malpeque has been speaking about regarding the employment insurance program. In fact, I think if he checks the blues from just a few minutes ago, the member said that it was not about qualifying for EI then turned around and said that it was about qualifying for EI.

As the Minister of Employment and Social Development has pointed out, the accusation that the government is forcing islanders to move is clearly false. Not one individual, no matter what the age or situation, in P.E.I. or anywhere else in Canada, has had to leave the province to look for work in order to qualify for EI. In fact, the overall unemployment rate for workers of all ages in P.E.I. is improving as our economic recovery is continuing.

The reality is that across Canada, far fewer than 1% of people were disqualified because they failed to search for work or refused to accept suitable work. In fact, 80% of the increase in disentanglements in 2013 was because the claimants were out of the country.

Contrary to the claim of the member opposite, our recent changes do not require individuals to take any job that is available to them. Rather, available work is only considered suitable if the recipient would be better off accepting new employment than receiving EI benefits. Most importantly for P.E.I., while those who cannot find work during periods of seasonal unemployment are expected to look for work, they are not forced to move or forced to accept work that pays less than their EI benefits, nor are they forced to take jobs for which they are not suited or that are not suitable because of their own personal circumstances.

Issues such as child care and access to transportation are taken into account when determining the suitability of a particular job for a particular individual. The whole idea behind these changes is to make EI more responsive, fair, and flexible. It also helps address labour shortages, which are happening even in regions of high unemployment. I know that is the case in my constituency.

Further, net migration numbers in P.E.I. fluctuate annually. This has nothing to do with the EI program. For example, for those between 25 and 29 years of age, the ages when many islanders are beginning their careers, unlike the member opposite, there have been some years of in-migration mixed with equal numbers of out-migration. It is unfortunate that opposition politicians, the member for Malpeque, and activists continue to irresponsibly mislead Canadians about the facts and to instill fear where none need exist.

Canadians would benefit from a dialogue on this issue based on accurate facts and not on false examples so they can decide for themselves the merit of the changes.

● (1910)

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** If we want to talk about irresponsibility, Mr. Speaker, it is over on that side of the House. Conservatives do not understand the seasonal economy and how it works.

Let me give another example. A farmer came into my office. He pays an employee \$16 an hour. The individual has been with him 18 years. The farmer asked me if he would get in trouble if he paid this person cash. I said that of course he would and asked why he would want to pay him cash. The farmer's response was that he works with the farmer full-time from April 1 to November 30, and the rest of the season he is needed only a day and a half a week. When he works that day and a half a week, the individual is paid \$16 an hour, and EI claws \$8 off of his employment insurance. If he takes the deductions off, the man is working for about \$5.50 an hour.

The consequences are these: the individual is poor, the farmer has trouble getting helpers, and it contributes to an underground economy. Everybody loses, and it is the result of the government's lack of understanding of seasonal industries and how they work. They need skilled workers too, and the government is driving them away from Atlantic Canada.

**Mr. Jeff Watson:** Mr. Speaker, the member, of course, neglected to say that in that same example, the person still gets his EI benefit as well.

Again, not one single person in Prince Edward Island has had to move out of the province to qualify for employment insurance. Claimants are only expected to look for work within their own communities.

### *Adjournment Proceedings*

Once again, the rules around applying for and qualifying for EI have not changed. Existing rules were only clarified, such as the responsibility of EI claimants to actively look for work while receiving benefits. Employment insurance continues to be there for Canadians who have paid into the system and have lost their jobs through no fault of their own, including in areas where jobs simply do not exist outside seasonal or specialized industries.

[*Translation*]

#### RAIL TRANSPORTATION

**Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I asked a brief question in the House. It was about the presence of Via Rail in the Atlantic provinces.

To put this in context, CN announced that it would invest \$30 million in the railway between Moncton and Miramichi and from Bathurst to Campbellton. That leaves the section from Miramichi to Bathurst between the two.

The provincial government of one of the poorest provinces in Canada invested \$25 million in the railway. It is not pleasant to admit that we are one of the poorest provinces but, as everyone knows, ours is a small province with just 750,000 people.

We need \$10 million to keep Via Rail healthy so that the train continues to run from Halifax to Vancouver via northeastern New Brunswick and eastern Quebec.

That means it leaves Moncton, goes through Miramichi and Bathurst, Campbellton, the Matapédia valley, Amqui and then on to Rivière-du-Loup.

The Conservatives said they had no intention of investing in the railway that connects Bathurst to Miramichi, the one that allows VIA Rail to bring passengers to Acadia.

The Conservatives are in the process of killing VIA Rail service in eastern New Brunswick and eastern Canada.

The Conservative members for Madawaska, Restigouche and Miramichi are keeping mum. This railway goes through the riding of Miramichi and the Restigouche region. Will the Conservative MPs from New Brunswick have the guts to oppose their government's decision?

New Brunswick has eight Conservative MPs. Can you imagine? Eight out of ten MPs are Conservative. The question is whether they will have the guts to fight to keep VIA Rail in the region.

We are talking about a train that goes from coast to coast. If we lose the section between Miramichi and Bathurst, that means we are losing eastern New Brunswick and part of Quebec, an area with a population of roughly 350,000 to 400,000 people.

The government just told us that VIA Rail may have another option. It will go from Moncton to Edmundston, but then we will have a passenger train going through the woods.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

VIA Rail has already reduced service from six to three days a week. What do they need? They need to lose 50% of passengers to justify eliminating VIA Rail service from Halifax to Quebec City. They are abandoning passenger service from coast to coast.

I have to wonder what is going on with the eight Conservative members from New Brunswick. What are they doing to try to save the railway? Are they letting the Prime Minister make these decisions all by himself? Are they letting the Prime Minister hurt Atlantic Canada, as we see day in and day out?

The Conservative members from New Brunswick have a duty to tell their Prime Minister, since they are on the government side, that they will not accept the loss of the rail line in eastern New Brunswick or anywhere in eastern or Atlantic Canada.

I want to hear the government's response. They are familiar with the problem, and for \$10 million, they are prepared to abandon VIA Rail in eastern Canada.

● (1915)

[*English*]

**Mr. Jeff Watson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our government makes significant investments in VIA Rail from Atlantic Canada, right across to western Canada, and the member consistently votes against them. The Government of Canada provides VIA Rail, a crown corporation that operates independent of the government, with significant funding to provide passenger rail services to Canadians. In 2012-13, the funding provided to VIA Rail for operating and maintaining its network was \$275 million. This significant subsidy from Canadian taxpayers enables VIA Rail to operate its network of services throughout the country.

In addition to providing annual funding, the government has provided nearly \$1 billion in capital funding since 2007 for VIA Rail to upgrade track and signalling infrastructure, modernize stations, improve accessibility, and refurbish rail cars.

While the government has made significant investments in VIA Rail's infrastructure, it is not in the business of buying rail lines.

Instead, the federal government's role is to provide a legislative framework under the Canada Transportation Act that encourages stakeholders to seek commercial solutions to issues such as the discontinuance of rail service. As such, the line transfer and discontinuance provisions in the Canada Transportation Act are aimed at encouraging the retention of rail lines where it makes sense to do so, by giving railway operators and other interested parties the opportunity to acquire rail lines for continued operation before they are discontinued. Other interested parties include the provincial and municipal governments and urban transit authorities, in addition to other railway companies.

With regard to the section of CN track in northern New Brunswick, CN has followed the discontinuance process in indicating that it plans to advertise it for sale. This process requires a railway to notify governments and urban transit authorities when a rail line is identified for discontinuance in its three-year plan. The government does not own freight rail infrastructure and has no intention of buying this section of CN track.

In the meantime, CN will continue to be responsible for maintaining the rail line during the discontinuance process to ensure that service is not disrupted. VIA Rail service on its *Ocean* line between Montreal and Halifax continues as per its planned schedule.

VIA Rail's objectives are to provide safe and efficient passenger rail service. In this regard, VIA regularly assesses its operations to decide how best it can achieve these objectives. As a crown corporation, VIA Rail will ultimately be responsible for making decisions about its passenger rail services in New Brunswick and will assess alternatives to ensure there will be no service interruptions.

I would like to remind my colleague that this was a business decision made by a private company. There is a regulatory process in place, which the company is following, and while the discontinuance process is under way, CN is responsible for maintaining its track infrastructure.

Finally, our government supports a passenger rail network that meets the needs of today's travellers while supporting the efficient use of taxpayer dollars.

● (1920)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Mr. Speaker, I cannot believe what comes out of this government's mouth. The Conservatives are saying that they have invested in VIA Rail and the railway. Meanwhile, they stopped the train that went to the Gaspé.

Right now, there is about 5,000 km of track from Halifax to Vancouver, and they plan on cutting 70 km between Miramichi and Bathurst. These communities and municipalities will no longer have passenger train service.

What is the alternative? I would like to hear from the government. What is the alternative? They say that they will not abandon VIA Rail. But what then is the alternative? Is it going through Edmundston? If so, since there is no station, they will have to buy land, and it is assessed at about \$50 million compared to \$10 million.

Perhaps the government wants to have the train go through the town where the aboriginal affairs minister lives. Maybe that is it; I do not know. However, there is only forest between Moncton and Edmundston. There are no communities. That is the ideal recipe for losing VIA Rail in eastern Canada, and the Conservative government is contributing to that. Furthermore VIA Rail does own railway lines. It owns part of the line between Ottawa and Montreal. It also owns part of the line on the way to Toronto. It is not true that VIA Rail does not own railway lines.

We are asking the Conservative government to spend \$10 million to save eastern Canada's railway.



*Adjournment Proceedings*

[English]

**Mr. Jeff Watson:** Mr. Speaker, there is so much misinformation and so little time to correct it. Suffice it to say, contrary to what the member said, the government does not cut any track. He should ask VIA who will assess it and make its independent decisions on this matter.

While we are at it, the government has invested heavily in passenger rail in recent years, including providing \$275 million in 2012-13 for VIA Rail to operate its network, and nearly \$1 billion in capital funding since 2007. The member voted against it each and every time, and now he is asking for what?

The government has no plans to buy track in New Brunswick from CN. That is clear. If CN does not complete the discontinuance

process for this portion of track, VIA Rail, as an independent crown corporation, will also make its own operational decisions on the routing and schedule of the Ocean. As this process unfolds, CN will continue to be responsible for maintaining the rail line to ensure that service is not disrupted.

[Translation]

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

(The House adjourned at 7:24 p.m.)

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