



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

# House of Commons Debates

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OFFICIAL REPORT  
(HANSARD)

**Tuesday, March 25, 2014**

—

**Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer**

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# HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, March 25, 2014

The House met at 10 a.m.

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*Prayers*

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## ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

●(1005)

[*English*]

### PRIVACY COMMISSIONER

**The Speaker:** I have the honour to lay upon the table a special report of the Privacy Commissioner entitled, “Investigation into the loss of a hard drive at Employment and Social Development Canada”.

[*Translation*]

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

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### TAKING THE PRIVACY OF CANADIANS SERIOUSLY ACT

**Ms. Charmaine Borg (Terrebonne—Blainville, NDP)** moved for leave to introduce Bill C-580, An Act to amend the Privacy Act (personal information—loss or unauthorized access or disclosure).

She said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to introduce my bill to update the Privacy Act, which dates back to 1985. This is the second bill I have introduced to strengthen our outdated privacy laws.

This time my focus is the public sector. I am proposing two measures: develop a mechanism to require mandatory disclosure within a reasonable period of time when information is lost or compromised, and give the commissioner the power to order government agencies to comply with her recommendations.

In December 2012, under the Conservative government, the Department of Employment and Social Development lost information pertaining to half a million Canadians. Between 2002 and 2012, there were more than 3,000 violations. The problem was not fixed, and instead it got worse. We now hear that in 2013 alone, there were over 3,800 violations or breaches of personal information at Canadian agencies, and only 170 of those were reported to the commissioner.

The government is dragging its feet and refuses to update laws, and Canadians are the ones suffering the consequences. The NDP is fighting to make suggestions and propose meaningful measures to ensure that safeguards reflect current challenges. A look at our government agencies is long overdue, but the government does not take the privacy of the people it is supposed to protect seriously.

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

\* \* \*

[*English*]

## PETITIONS

CANADA POST

**Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, having just spent two weeks in my riding, I have come back to Ottawa yet again with 21 more petitions with thousands of names in support of saving Canada Post. The petitioners are upset about the elimination of home delivery, the increase in postal rates at a time when services are being cut, and the continuing attacks on public services. But above else, the petitioners with whom I spoke objected most vehemently to the job losses that will impact between 6,000 to 8,000 workers. Our community simply cannot afford to lose more decent-paying, family-sustaining jobs.

As a result, the petitioners call on the government to reverse the cuts to services recently announced by Canada Post and to look instead for ways to modernize operations. While I know the rules of the House do not allow members to endorse a petition, let me say that I am delighted to present these documents on behalf of the thousands of petitioners who have signed them.

PUBLIC TRANSIT OPERATORS

**Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a number of petitions, all on the same subject, signed by thousands, perhaps even tens of thousands, of Canadians concerned about the violence toward transit operators. It deals with a bill that I have put forward, and the petitioners call on the government to enact the bill to ensure that we do all we can to protect transit operators from coast to coast to coast.

*Routine Proceedings*

## CEREBRAL PALSY

**Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, every year roughly 800 children are born with cerebral palsy in Canada, meaning that 50,000 Canadians currently live with CP. Canadians with CP often need special resources to maintain their productivity, including special education, aids, and environmental adaptations. The average lifetime costs for each Canadian with CP are conservatively estimated to be \$1.5 million for medication, therapy, adaptations, and equipment. The petitioners call upon the government to work with the provincial and territorial health ministers and all stakeholders to develop a comprehensive pan-Canadian strategy for CP, including better diagnosis, treatment and support, and a national awareness day.

## NATIONAL DAY OF THE MIDWIFE

**Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition supported by Canadians across the country, calling on Parliament to designate May 5 as the national day of the midwife. Midwives provide essential care during pregnancy, for the newborn, and throughout an infant's life. They definitely decrease infant mortality and morbidity across Canada, including in rural and remote communities. It is a very cost-effective way to provide this kind of essential care. A national day of the midwife would increase public awareness of the contribution of midwives to maternal, newborn, and infant care and welfare. Therefore, I am pleased to present this petition calling for Parliament to designate May 5 as the national day of the midwife.

## TRANSPORTATION SAFETY

**Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present this petition on transportation and long-haul carriage. Drivers are at risk because of the many hours they are putting in on the road. One can imagine at Lac-Mégantic we lost close to 50 people. One bus in a serious accident could match that.

I am very pleased to support this petition and to support the hon. member for Thunder Bay—Rainy River with his bill.

[*Translation*]

## GRENVILLE CANAL

**Ms. Mylène Freeman (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, today, I am very proud to present a petition on behalf of my constituents. They are calling on the Government of Canada to help the municipality of Grenville restore the Grenville Canal. This canal has a lot of economic potential for the region. It is also a very important heritage area for the region, Quebec and Canada.

\* \* \*

•(1010)

[*English*]

## QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the following question will be answered today: Question No. 298.

[*Text*]

Question No. 298—**Mr. Philip Toone:**

With regard to the wharf at Port Daniel—Gascon to be built in conjunction with a planned cement factory in Port Daniel—Gascon: (a) what studies have been conducted; (b) which fisheries will be protected in relation to the wharf planned for Port Daniel—Gascon, both during and after the project; (c) which fisheries will not be protected in relation to the building of the wharf, both during and after the project; (d) which fisheries will be at risk, both during and after the project; (e) what conditions will be imposed on McInnis Cement to protect the fishing industry, fishers and fish; (f) how does Fisheries and Oceans Canada intend to protect the fishing industry, fishers and fish; (g) what future steps will be taken to protect the fishing industry, fishers and fish; (h) will fishers be compensated for any negative impacts incurred by them or by the fishing industry or fish; (i) which fishers' associations did Fisheries and Oceans Canada consult; (j) with which fishers' associations has Fisheries and Oceans Canada negotiated, is negotiating or will negotiate; and (k) what steps has Fisheries and Oceans Canada taken to protect the fish habitat at Port Daniel—Gascon and what remedial measures have been anticipated to compensate for the loss of fish habitat?

**Hon. Gail Shea (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC):**

Mr. Speaker, with regard to (a), on January 20, 2014, the fisheries protection program—regulatory reviews, a division of Fisheries and Oceans Canada, received details of the proposed marine terminal project, which, overall, remains the same as the one submitted in 1996. A comprehensive level environmental assessment was conducted in 1996 and concluded that the project would not cause significant effects. After consultation with the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency, it was determined that CEAA 2012 does not apply to the current proposal. See the letter to the proponent dated December 12, 2013.

The Fisheries Act requires that projects avoid causing serious harm to fish unless authorized by the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans Canada. This applies to work being conducted in or near water bodies that support fish that are part of or support a commercial, recreational, or aboriginal fishery. As a result, the proponent will submit an application for authorization under the Fisheries Act, and Fisheries and Oceans Canada will conduct a review to determine whether there is likely to be serious harm to fish and to determine measures to mitigate, avoid, or offset serious harm.

With regard to (b), the Fisheries Act applies to all water bodies in Canada with a focus on protecting commercial, recreational, and aboriginal fisheries, and fish that support those fisheries.

With regard to (c), standard, best management practices to protect fish and fish habitat are applicable to all fisheries, and DFO will ensure that these are considered throughout the project life.

*Government Orders*

With regard to (d), the project proposal is currently being reviewed by departmental officials and it is likely that lobster and crab species are present in the project area. Further assessment is required.

With regard to (e), the conditions imposed on McInnis Cement will be determined upon completion the Fisheries Act review and will focus on avoiding and/or mitigating impacts to fish or fish habitat that are part of or support commercial, recreational, or aboriginal fisheries. Officials of Fisheries and Oceans Canada will use the Fisheries Protection Policy Statement, found at <http://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/pnw-ppe/pol/index-eng.html>, as guidance when administering the fisheries protection provisions of the Fisheries Act.

With regard to (f), depending on the outcome of a Fisheries Act review, the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans may issue an authorization with terms and conditions in relation to a proposed work, undertaking, or activity that may result in serious harm to fish. The conditions could include mitigation, offsetting, and monitoring measures.

With regard to (g), in line with the Fisheries Act and with guidance from the Fisheries Protection Policy Statement of 2013, DFO's approach to fisheries protection will ensure that these valuable commercial, recreational, and aboriginal fisheries thrive.

With regard to (h), should any negative impacts be identified during the department's review, the proponent will be required to ensure that measures to avoid, mitigate, or offset these negative impacts are put in place.

With regard to (i), in relation to the currently submitted project, no fishers' associations have been consulted. However, based on proposed compensation by the proponent, which could include lobster reefs, there is potential for consultation to occur with the Regroupement des pêcheurs professionnels du sud de la Gaspésie fishers' association.

With regard to (j), the analysis is conducted with the proponent and direct negotiations do not occur between Fisheries and Oceans Canada and fishers. The proponent remains in continuous contact with the above-mentioned fishers' association.

With regard to (k), the review is currently in progress, and details on measures to avoid, reduce, and offset serious harm to fish and fish habitat have not yet been determined. Should offsetting compensation be required as a condition in a Fisheries Act authorization for this project, DFO will work with the proponent in order to ensure that a suitable offsetting plan has been developed.

\* \* \*

[English]

#### QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, if Question 297 could be made an order for return, this return would be tabled immediately.

**The Speaker:** Is that agreed?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

[Text]

Question No. 297—**Mr. Philip Toone:**

With regard to government funding, how much funding did the government provide from the 1993-1994 fiscal year to the 2010-2011 fiscal year, and from the 2012-2013 fiscal year to the present, in the ridings of Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine and Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, broken down by year, riding, department or agency, initiative and amount?

(Return tabled)

[English]

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

**The Speaker:** Is that agreed?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

## GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

### ENERGY SAFETY AND SECURITY ACT

**Hon. Greg Rickford (Minister of Natural Resources and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC)** moved that Bill C-22, An Act respecting Canada's offshore oil and gas operations, enacting the Nuclear Liability and Compensation Act, repealing the Nuclear Liability Act and making consequential amendments to other Acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I want to take this opportunity to thank my constituents from the great Kenora riding for their support over the past almost six years and in this capacity to serve them as the minister responsible for natural resources.

I want to take this opportunity today to highlight our government's action on energy safety and security in Canada's offshore and nuclear energy industries.

[Translation]

Our government is determined to maintain a world-class liability regime in Canada's offshore and nuclear energy industries.

We are responsible for ensuring the safety and protection of Canadians and our environment. We are committed to authorizing only development that can be done safely.

[English]

One of the key elements of the legislation would raise the absolute liability limits in both the offshore and nuclear sectors to \$1 billion. These changes would bring Canada's offshore and nuclear liability limits in line with the international community. This important measure would be proactive action to ensure that if there were an accident, taxpayers would not be on the hook.

For oil spills, these changes would help further strengthen safety and security to prevent incidents and ensure a quick response in the unlikely event of a spill.

*Government Orders*

In our Speech from the Throne, we were clear. We will enshrine the polluter pays principle in law. We also committed to increasing the required liability insurance and setting higher safety standards for companies operating offshore.

Bill C-22 would achieve these goals.

Regarding the management of Canada's offshore oil and gas industry; as we know, Canada's booming offshore oil and gas industry has transformed the economy of Atlantic Canada. The offshore industry has pumped billions of dollars into Canada's economy and provided thousands of employment opportunities. Offshore development is currently one of the fastest-growing sectors in Canada. Right now, there are five major projects currently producing in the Atlantic offshore.

As my hon. colleagues know, Canada's environmental record in the Atlantic offshore is already very strong.

[*Translation*]

Our responsible development plan strengthens environmental protection by focusing resources on reviews of major projects.

[*English*]

Our government has put forward new fines to punish those who would break Canada's rigorous environmental protections. We have also increased the number of inspections and comprehensive audits of federally regulated pipelines. What is more, we are bringing in tough new measures for oil tankers, to ensure the safe transport of our energy resources through our waterways. These measures include the introduction of the safeguarding Canada's seas and skies act and the formation of an expert review panel to examine Canada's current tanker safety regime and propose ways to strengthen it. Building on these measures, our government is taking important, tangible steps today to make our already-robust offshore liability regime even stronger.

As many of my Atlantic Canadian colleagues know well, the Government of Canada shares the management of the Newfoundland and Labrador offshore area and the Nova Scotia offshore area with both of the respective provincial governments. Offshore oil and gas projects, therefore, are regulated by either the Canada–Nova Scotia Offshore Petroleum Board or the Canada–Newfoundland and Labrador Offshore Petroleum Board. Each board ensures that operators exercise due diligence to prevent spills from occurring in Canada's offshore. With this in mind, we have worked closely with these two provinces to update and expand legislation to ensure that Canada's offshore rules remain world-class.

Regarding the key changes to offshore liability, this legislation would ensure that the liability limits reflect modern standards. The current offshore petroleum regime specifies that operators have an absolute liability for up to \$30 million. Given the value of the resource and the capacity of those who develop it, all members can agree that this amount needs to be raised. That is why we would increase the benchmark by 33 times its current level to an absolute liability limit of \$1 billion. Doing so would bring Canada in line with similar regimes in Norway, Denmark, and the United Kingdom.

We also need to ensure that companies operating in the offshore have the financial capacity to meet these and their obligations.

Before any offshore drilling or production activity can take place, companies must prove that they can cover the financial liabilities that may result from a spill. Typically, the financial capacity requirements can range from \$250 million to \$500 million, with \$30 million to be held as a deposit to work in the Atlantic offshore and \$40 million to work in the Arctic. This deposit is held in trust by the offshore regulator as a letter of credit, guarantee, or bond.

With these legislative amendments, the minimum financial capacity would be raised to \$1 billion, in line with operator's absolute liability. Regulators may require higher amounts if deemed necessary and, in addition, we would increase the amount of funds to which operators have unfettered access to \$100 million per operator. Industry would also have the option of setting up a minimum \$250 million pooled fund, and operators could choose to use membership in such a fund to serve as their financial responsibility. We would also establish a cost-recovery regime for regulatory services provided by the offshore boards. I am pleased to say that the companies operating in Canada's Atlantic and Arctic offshore would be subject to one of the highest absolute liability standards in the world.

Regarding the nuclear industry, the second important part of this legislation focuses on updating the absolute liabilities for nuclear energy. In fact, it is one of the main reasons that our electricity supply is one of the cleanest in the world; 77% of Canada's electricity mix is non-emitting. Our government recognizes the importance of the industry to the Canadian economy. The industry generates nearly \$5 billion a year in revenues and provides jobs for more than 30,000 Canadians. This is the number of jobs that the New Democrats want to destroy with their anti-nuclear position. We know that nuclear energy can be generated safely. In fact, Canada's nuclear safety record is exemplary and there has never been a claim under Canada's Nuclear Liability Act.

●(1015)

[*Translation*]

Our nuclear industry has sound technology, a qualified workforce and stringent regulatory requirements. However, as a responsible government, we must ensure that our security system is up to date and able to respond to any incidents that may occur.

[*English*]

The responsibility for providing a liability and compensation regime, a solid framework to protect Canadians and provide stability to this important industry, falls under federal jurisdiction. The Government of Canada, then, has a duty to all Canadians to assume its responsibilities in this area, and we are committed to doing so.

*Government Orders*

Although the basic principles underlying Canada's nuclear liability legislation remain valid, the Nuclear Liability Act is nearly 40 years old. It needs updating to address issues that have arisen over the years and to keep pace with international developments. Bill C-22 serves to strengthen and modernize Canada's nuclear liability regime. The proposed legislation is a major step forward in modernizing this act. It puts Canada in line with internationally accepted compensation levels and clarifies the definition for compensation, spelling out exactly what is covered and the process for claiming compensation.

This bill is the culmination of many years of consultations involving extensive discussions with major stakeholders, including Canada's nuclear utilities, the governments of nuclear power generating provinces, and the Nuclear Insurance Association of Canada. This is the fifth time that this nuclear legislation has been introduced, and I hope my hon. colleagues recognize the critical need for finally passing this legislation in a timely manner.

Let me be clear. If it had not been for the past filibustering by the NDP, the nuclear liability limits would already have been updated. It is my sincere hope that New Democrats will have a more reasonable approach this time around to modernizing nuclear liability. Bill C-22 significantly improves the claims compensation process, increases the financial liability of nuclear operators for damages, and provides greater legal certainty for the nuclear industry in Canada.

• (1020)

[*Translation*]

Like the offshore sector, under Bill C-22, the nuclear industry will also see an increase in the amount of operator liability, which would go from \$75 million to \$1 billion.

[*English*]

A liability of \$1 billion balances the need for operators to provide compensation without burdening them with exorbitant costs for unrealistic insurance amounts, amounts for events that are highly unlikely to occur in this country. It is critical to remember that liability must be within the capacity of insurers, otherwise taxpayers would be held accountable for the cost. The \$1 billion strikes that balance between protecting ratepayers and holding companies to account in the event of an accident.

Let me assure all hon. members that the new legislation will maintain the key strengths of the existing legislation. Most importantly, it will mean that the liability of the operator will be absolute and exclusive. There would be no need to prove fault, and nobody else would be held liable. Our government would also provide increased coverage for lower-risk nuclear facilities, such as small research reactors at Canadian universities.

Bill C-22 also features other key improvements.

[*Translation*]

First, Bill C-22 will broaden the definition of compensable damage in order to include physical injury, economic loss, preventive measures and environmental damage.

[*English*]

Second, it would extend the limitation period for submitting compensation claims. The limitation period for bodily injury claims, for example, would be expanded from 10 to 30 years. This would help to address latent illnesses that may be detected many years after an accident or incident. This is another way that our government is continuing to protect Canadians.

[*Translation*]

Finally, Bill C-22 will establish the authority to implement a simplified process for dealing with claims that can replace the regular court proceedings if necessary. This would allow Canadians to submit their claims more quickly and effectively.

[*English*]

Our government is taking concrete steps to address important issues for the nuclear sector. This includes responsible management of legacy waste; restructuring of Atomic Energy of Canada Limited, AECL; and promoting international trade.

When it comes to nuclear power, we are talking about a global issue that knows no borders. I am very proud to announce that Bill C-22 will also serve to implement the provisions of the International Atomic Energy Agency's Convention on Supplementary Compensation for Nuclear Damage.

My colleague signed the convention and tabled it in Parliament in December. The convention is an international instrument to address nuclear civil liability in the unlikely event of a nuclear incident.

[*Translation*]

By adhering to this convention, Canada will bolster its domestic compensation regime by up to \$450 million by bringing in significant new funding. This would bring the total potential compensation in Canada up to \$1.45 billion.

• (1025)

[*English*]

Joining this convention also reinforces our commitment to building a strong global nuclear liability regime. It is important that Canada's legislation is consistent with international conventions, not only financial issues, but also in regard to what constitutes a nuclear incident, what qualifies for compensation and other matters.

These changes will help establish a level playing field for Canadian nuclear supply companies, which welcome the certainty of providing their services in a country that is a member of the convention.

[*Translation*]

Given that our closest neighbour, the United States, is already a member of the convention, our membership will allow the two countries to establish civil liability treaty relations.

*Government Orders*

[English]

Korea and Japan have also signalled their intention to sign the convention. Once Canada becomes a member, the convention will be one step closer to becoming a reality.

In conclusion, these are just some of the ways that our government is ensuring that Canada is amongst the strongest liability regimes in the world. Bill C-22 provides a solid framework to regulate the offshore and nuclear liability regimes in Canada.

[Translation]

Although an offshore or nuclear incident is highly unlikely, we have to be prepared to deal with such incidents, which could result in cleanup, liability or other costs. Bill C-22 seeks to help prepare for that possibility. Its legislative provisions focus on the responsible promotion and development of our offshore and nuclear industries, which are essential.

[English]

In closing, I urge all honourable members to support this important piece of legislation.

**Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, let me begin by congratulating the member for Kenora for becoming the Minister of Natural Resources. I certainly look forward to working with him, not just on Bill C-22, but on all of the files in the portfolio.

I do regret that the minister started his new career by pointing fingers at the NDP for ostensibly holding up bills in the past, in particular this bill on nuclear liability, when in fact that is a bit of revisionist history. I would remind the member that the truth is that the Prime Minister killed his own legislation, in 2008, when he ignored his own fixed election date, and, in 2009, when he prorogued Parliament. He let Bill C-15, the predecessor of Bill C-22, sit around for a year, until the 2011 election.

Let me move on to a question this morning. I am pleased to see that while we have been revisiting this bill for the fifth time, the government has actually increased the liability limit from \$650 million to \$1 billion. However, there are a number of countries that believe there ought not to be a cap on liability at all. Some of those countries include Germany, Japan, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Austria, and Switzerland, all of which have unlimited liability when it comes to nuclear power plants.

I believe, and I think my NDP colleagues all believe as well, that liability has to be strong enough so that a nuclear or offshore disaster never happens and that operators put the best safety measures into place.

I wonder whether the minister would, first of all, comment on why the government chose to limit liability at just \$1 billion and, second, whether he would be agreeable in committee to looking at expanding that liability limit to be more in line with other international standards.

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the kind words of my colleague. I look forward to working with her in her new role as the critic for this portfolio.

With respect to the liability question, obviously it would be fairly predictable for the NDP to use words like “no liability”, meaning no limits of money. That is not true. We should not expect that from our taxpayers. We have to be fair and reasonable to the industry.

A liability limit of \$1 billion would mean Canada has among the highest limits in the world. There are countries who are doing this with certain success and Canada wants to be atop that, not just because we want to set an international standard with partner countries, but for the protection of Canadians as well.

• (1030)

[Translation]

**Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member opposite for such an interesting speech. This is a first step, and it is time something was done to make up for time lost in recent years. However, like my colleague and our critic stated, I do not accept his claim that we on this side are responsible for the delays.

The member spoke about taxpayers. As Canadians, we are all taxpayers who participate in the Canadian economy. There is a \$1-billion cap. According to several experts, this is really just another subsidy for oil and gas companies that are already benefiting from billions of dollars in subsidies.

Does the member not think, as we in the NDP do, that the most extreme form of the polluter pays principle should apply here, meaning that there should be no cap and the polluter should be the one to pay? If the polluter is unable to pay, it should not be conducting oil exploration in the gulf, for example.

[English]

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** Mr. Speaker, Canada's current absolute liability limits have not been updated since the 1980s. This bill will ensure that Canada's offshore regime for oil and gas, specifically for which the hon. member put the question, remains world class. A \$1 billion absolute liability would place Canada's regime squarely among those of its peer countries.

In cases of fault or negligence, liability remains unlimited.

**Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, in Canada we often benchmark ourselves with the United States, which is our major trading partner. We share many common regulations and standards. We often partner with it in terms of research on public safety.

Many of our international partners have much better protection when it comes to nuclear liability than what the Conservatives are proposing. The U.S. has an absolute liability regime of \$12.6 billion U.S.

My question is, why would the Conservatives not want at least the level of liability that the Americans have in this field? Why would we have such a puny liability level compared with our major trading partner?

*Government Orders*

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** Mr. Speaker, it is not correct to say that the liability limit is \$12 billion in the United States, as its system is different from that of other countries. The operators' liability insurance is capped at \$375 million. In the event of an accident resulting in damages exceeding the operators' liability insurance, all U.S. operators, 104 reactors, would also contribute up to \$125 million for each reactor that they operate. That would make available a compensation pool of a maximum of \$13 billion, should it be required.

I can say to the member that this type of pooling system would not be feasible in Canada, given that we have far fewer nuclear reactors. We have 19, as compared to 104 in the United States.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, to begin, I would like to congratulate my colleague on his new role. I hope that bringing new blood to cabinet might result in a new approach.

I would like to hear the minister's thoughts on one point. We know that many of the government bills stealthily confer additional discretionary powers on various ministers.

The same thing is being done with Bill C-22. In fact, the bill provides for ministerial discretion to reduce absolute liability levels to below \$1 billion. The level is being increased from \$75 million to \$1 billion, so it seems like a tremendous step in the right direction. However, a few lines later, we note that the minister can make changes at his discretion.

What does the minister think of that measure, which allows him to rule unchecked?

• (1035)

[*English*]

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** Mr. Speaker, I think the intention here is to modernize. This bill would reflect the realities both for the protection of Canadians and for the industry itself, and move Canada as a leader with other countries to a place, through international conventions, that would in fact modernize this. Therefore, any of the changes, specific or broadly speaking, reflected in this bill is an effort to make sure Canadians have the best protection available under the law and continue to respect the economic benefits of offshore activities and the nuclear sector.

**Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the minister can tell us today what the actual cost to a nuclear power plant operator would be when the liability limit increases to \$1 billion. Could he also give us an idea of what the phase-in period is for that?

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** Mr. Speaker, under the proposed changes, before any offshore drilling or production activity can take place and during any activity, the proponent must provide evidence that it can actually cover the minimum \$1 billion financial liability. The expectation is that the proof of financial resources would at least be equal to the absolute liability limit. Of course, there would be a range of options for proving financial resources, including cash on hand, credit bonds, fixed assets, and insurance. Also, the financial resource requirements would be an ongoing condition of a licence.

**Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today as the newly appointed NDP critic for

energy and natural resources to lead off our caucus' participation in the debate on Bill C-22, which has the less than pithy title of an act respecting Canada's offshore oil and gas operations, enacting the nuclear liability and compensation act, repealing the Nuclear Liability Act, and making consequential amendments to other acts.

I would be remiss if I did not say a few words first about my predecessor in this portfolio, the member for Burnaby—New Westminister. I owe him and his staff a huge debt of gratitude for their incredible work on the full range of files that fall under the rubric of energy and natural resources. I stand on their shoulders as we move forward on the important questions of resource management and energy security in our country. I wish the government House leader the best of luck in dealing with the member for Burnaby—New Westminister in his new capacity as NDP House leader.

The government House leader and I were elected at the same time, and I know we both fondly remember the MP for Burnaby—New Westminister's time as our trade critic. We will both remember his tenacious fight against the Panama free trade agreement, which he successfully prevented from being passed on a number of occasions. Without telling tales out of school, I can say he always reminded us in caucus meetings that the bill was a bill that we had to "go to the wall on", even if it meant sitting past the regular adjournment dates of the House. In each of those instances, he had the full support of our caucus.

Now he is our House leader. I imagine there will be many more instances where he will exhort us to go to the wall. We will follow his lead as unconditionally now as we have in the past. I bet the government House leader is as excited as I am about that. Yikes, I can see him scurrying off now to draft more pre-emptive time allocation motions.

Oh well, those are strategic battles for the days ahead. For now, I am pleased to say that on Bill C-22, the government will have our support at second reading, so that at least we can get the bill to committee and pursue expanded liability there.

However, let me not get ahead of myself. I should first lay out, for those people who may be watching this debate on television today, what this bill is all about. As it stands now, if there is a significant oil spill or nuclear accident, the federal government could be left responsible for damages and cleanup costs in the billions of dollars because there are caps on the liability of reactor operators and companies operating offshore. Increasing those caps would reduce the federal government's exposure and therefore protect Canadian taxpayers. That is what Bill C-22 attempts to do.

*Government Orders*

It must be noted at the outset that we are only dealing here with costs to the government. The bill does nothing to address the prevention of spills or nuclear accidents, and therefore, both communities and the environment remain highly vulnerable in case of an accident.

Let us look instead at what the bill does address, beginning with the sections that deal with offshore oil and gas liability. Currently, the government and taxpayers are exposed to the financial downside of a catastrophic offshore oil spill by weak liability regimes that cap operator absolute liability at \$40 million. Distinct liability regimes govern different aspects of oil and gas development, from pipelines, to rail transport, to offshore drilling. Each regime is in need of fundamental reform.

The oil spill liability reforms in Bill C-22 are limited only to the offshore industry. The government's proposed \$1 billion cap for offshore drilling would apply to no-fault liability, while operators would continue to face unlimited liability should they be found to be at fault or negligent. Companies would also be required to demonstrate to the regulators their financial capacity to cover \$1 billion in cleanup costs, should they become necessary. Additionally, the bill increases coverage for exploratory drilling operations offshore, production operations, the loading of tankers for transport, and undersea pipelines, such as a natural gas line from Sable Island to the mainland in Atlantic Canada.

However, here is one of the kickers in the bill. It provides for ministerial discretion to reduce absolute liability levels to below even the paltry legislated level of \$1 billion. This discretionary provision could undercut the advantages of the legislated increase in the absolute liability limit contained in Bill C-22. It would leave the door wide open for the reduction of absolute liability levels for certain projects as a form of economic incentive for oil and gas development that the government wishes to encourage. Given the Conservative's poor track record in protecting Canada's public interest, this aspect causes us grave concern.

Before my colleagues across the way accuse me of fearmongering, let me just point out that many industry observers adopt the position that operators should face unlimited absolute financial liability for oil spills, as is the case in some other countries, including Norway and Greenland.

• (1040)

Let me just remind members that the offshore BP Gulf oil spill of 2010 is expected to cost as much as \$42 billion for total cleanup. That is right. Given the liability limit of \$1 billion, that spill alone would leave the government, and therefore taxpayers, on the hook for \$41 billion.

Does the government really believe that Canadians should hold the risk for these private companies? If asked, I suspect it would respond with a resounding no.

As this bill proceeds through the legislative process, we might want to reflect on the fact that a German bank, for example, has completely stopped financing offshore oil projects in the Arctic. A spokesperson said:

The further you get into the icy regions, the more expensive everything gets and there are risks that are almost impossible to manage.

Remediation of any spills would cost a fortune.

In part, of course, that is because there is no oil spill response capacity to address a sizeable well blowout or a large scale spill in Arctic waters.

As Martin von Mirbach from the World Wildlife Fund put it:

...there is currently insufficient knowledge and inadequate technology and infrastructure to safely carry out drilling in Canadian Arctic waters. More time is required to address these gaps....

He concludes on a more optimistic note by suggesting that:

...this necessity can become a virtue if at the same time we collectively invest in the research, planning, infrastructure, and dialogue that are the key characteristics of responsible stewardship.

Truthfully, I am not holding my breath. I do not think there are very many Canadians who believe that responsible stewardship ever has been or will be a priority for the Conservative government, but I would love to be surprised. Regardless, the questions raised by Mr. von Mirbach must be explored further with both him and other stakeholders when Bill C-22 finally gets to committee. Not to follow up on those questions would be extremely irresponsible.

Let us leave that for the next stage of the legislative process. For now, let me move on to highlighting the nuclear liability piece of the bill. Here, the impetus for legislating a change lies in the fact that the existing liability limit of \$75 million was created to support the industry in the 1950s. It is so low that international courts simply would not recognize it. Therefore, to boost foreign investment in nuclear power in Canada, a legislative change was needed. That process began in 2008, and this is now the fifth time that the Conservatives have brought in a bill to try to deal with its woefully inadequate liability scheme.

To its credit, this bill does propose to increase the maximum liability for operators of nuclear installations for damage resulting from a nuclear accident. It proposes to increase it by more than the earlier iterations of this bill. Whereas the Conservatives once thought that an increase from \$75 million to \$650 million per nuclear installation would suffice, Bill C-22 would raise it to \$1 billion. That is certainly a step in the right direction, but even this limit seems shamefully low when we consider the consequences of a nuclear accident.

As Greenpeace bluntly points out:

...the current nuclear liability conventions are intended to protect the nuclear industry, and do not offer sufficient compensation to victims.

From the beginning of the use of nuclear power to produce electricity 60 years ago, the nuclear industry has been protected from paying the full cost of its failures.

Governments have created a system that protects the benefits of companies, while those who suffer from nuclear disasters end up paying the costs.

It is for precisely that reason that even the Fraser Institute, which no one would accuse of being a left wing think tank, is arguing for more draconian action. Joel Wood, senior research economist at the Fraser Institute, had this to say on nuclear liability gaps:

*Government Orders*

Increasing the cap only decreases the subsidy; it does not eliminate it. The government of Canada should proceed with legislation that removes the liability cap entirely rather than legislation that maintains it, or increases it to be harmonious with other jurisdictions.

In other words, both Greenpeace and the Fraser Institute agree that the bill before us today continues with the tradition of protecting corporations, rather than protecting Canadian citizens.

Let us look at the liability caps and evaluate them. It seems obvious that the total liability would not be able to cover a medium-sized accident, never mind a catastrophic one. A nuclear accident would cause billions of dollars in damage in personal injuries, death, and contamination of the surrounding areas.

The Japanese government is now saying that the cost of the nuclear disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi plant will be over \$250 billion.

• (1045)

According to the director of environmental governance for the Pembina Institute, a major accident at the Darlington, Ontario nuclear plant east of Toronto, near my riding of Hamilton Mountain, could cause damage in the range of an estimated \$1 trillion. One billion dollars does not even come close to being adequate, and taxpayers will be on the hook for the difference. The U.S. on the other hand has a cap of \$10 billion. Germany, which has experienced the fallout of the Chernobyl meltdown, has an unlimited amount. Many other countries are also moving in that direction of an unlimited amount of liability.

Does the government really believe that Canadian lives, properties, and communities are worth less than those of our U.S. and European counterparts? Judging by this legislation, one would think the answer is yes.

Perhaps more than anything else this legislation and the debate around it highlight the outrageous costs and potentially devastating risks of nuclear energy, particularly when we compare it to greener, more sustainable alternatives. For example, the Three Mile Island incident outside Harrisburg, Pennsylvania in 1979 was a relatively minor nuclear accident, but cost an estimated \$975 million for the cleanup and investigation. To put the absolute enormity of these costs into context, for the cost of cleaning up Three Mile Island, 1,147,058 100-watt solar panels could have been bought and assembled.

The total subsidies for Canada's pseudo nuclear company, AECL, from 1952 to 2000 were approximately \$16 billion. This money could be spent investigating safer methods of energy.

But the enormous costs do not just apply when things go bad. The planned construction of the Fermi 3 plant in Michigan will cost an estimated \$10 billion U.S. and take approximately six years to complete. The price of wind power on the other hand is dropping fast and can even be had for as low as 11¢ per kilowatt hour right now. Imagine the cost savings to taxpayers and the lower electricity bills for seniors and hard-working families if we could shift to cheaper, safer, and more sustainable power. On top of the financial expenses, nuclear energy in general is extremely unsafe both for the environment and human life.

There can be no doubt that Canada needs a greener approach to power. In fact, statistics show that Canada ranks 11th in a poll measuring wind power capacity. If Canada expects to be seen as a leader in the world, we need to compete in the field of clean renewable energy.

That is a topic I would love to go on about at some length, but with only a few minutes more available to me here in this debate, I will return to the text of the bill before us today and highlight a few other changes the bill entails.

If the bill passes this time, Bill C-22 would allow Canada to ratify the convention it signed in December 2013 called the International Convention on Supplementary Compensation for Nuclear Damage. That convention would establish nuclear civil liability treaty relations with the U.S., which is already a party to the convention. Important here is that this provides access to supplemental compensation from an international pool of up to \$500 million, if that were ever needed by convention participants.

Domestically, the bill would expand the range of damages that could be claimed, and it would triple to 30 years the length of time a person can wait to make a claim for latent illnesses. While this is an improvement, it is clearly not enough.

The Chernobyl disaster is already more than 25 years in the past, and the other report on Chernobyl done by two British scientists in 2006 predicted there would be between 30,000 and 60,000 excess cancer deaths, while the International Physicians for Prevention of Nuclear Warfare estimates that more than 50,000 cases of thyroid cancer are still to be expected. Obviously, in light of this evidence, the 30-year statute of limitations is something that we on this side of the House would want to examine more closely in committee.

A few other points about Bill C-22 are also of note.

First, I would point to a provision that is missing entirely from this legislation. Bill C-22 does not cover any accidents outside of the nuclear plant setting. Oil and mining companies and medical facilities use radioactive materials as well, but they are not liable for any accidents related to their use or disposal. That is a gaping hole in this legislation, a hole that we must try to fill at committee. Either we are serious about protecting Canadians or we are not. I certainly know whose side I am on.

While I am on the topic of reviewing the bill in committee, let me remind my colleagues on the government side of the House that the Canadian Environmental Law Association had requested the federal government to undertake a meaningful public consultation on how the Nuclear Liability Act should be modernized to acknowledge lessons from the Fukushima disaster. Instead, Natural Resources Canada has been privately consulting Canadian nuclear operators on how to revise the NLA. This behind-closed-doors consultation with industry is completely unacceptable. The NLA transfers the financial risk for reactor operations from industry to Canadians. It is imperative, therefore, that Canadians be consulted.

*Government Orders*

• (1050)

The former minister of natural resources, who now serves as the Minister of Finance, did promise that there would be plenty of time for consultation with the public. He said:

Once a new bill is introduced, members of Parliament will have the opportunity to call witnesses before committee to provide comment and debate the legislation line-by-line.

I trust that the new Minister of Natural Resources will honour his colleague's commitment and will not cave in to his House leader's draconian predisposition to shut down all debate. But as always, the proof will be in the pudding, and I do not expect we will get a clear answer on that here today.

Returning to the bill itself, I do want to point out a few other provisions. The bill does set up a quasi-judicial claims tribunal, which, if needed, will handle damage claims in the event of an accident.

Second, the bill stipulates that only half of the \$1 billion liability coverage for nuclear operators will have to be covered using traditional insurance. Operators will be allowed to put up other forms of financial security for the remaining \$500 million.

Third, it is the Government of Canada that will provide some of the coverage for lower risk nuclear facilities, such as smaller research reactors.

Last, it bears pointing out that the bill mandates a review of liability amounts at least once every five years. While the five-year review is certainly an important safety valve giving Parliament the opportunity to re-evaluate the adequacy of the \$1 billion liability limit down the road, I think it is important that we do our level best to get it right the first time. It is our job as legislators to protect the interests of Canadian.

Frankly, if the government is so convinced that nuclear power is a mature industry, then it is an industry that can and must pay for itself. Instead, the bill is just one more corporate handout by making taxpayers liable for nuclear risk. Taxpayers should not be on the hook for subsidies to nuclear energy over other renewable power sources. Other countries certainly seem to agree with me on that and have decided that their citizens deserve much higher protection in the event of a nuclear accident. Why will the Conservatives not offer Canadians that same protection?

I will wrap up by reiterating my bottom line on the bill. First, if the government truly believes in the polluter pays principle, then taxpayers should not hold the risk for these energy projects.

Second, if we measure risk correctly and assign liability, then industry will improve its safety practices, reducing the likelihood of catastrophic accidents.

Third, we have to study global best practices and ensure that the federal government puts Canadians first.

Fourth, the Canadian government should prepare a comprehensive assessment of the risks posed by nuclear power plant operations in Canada, and the opportunities for reducing that risk and the accompanying risk costs and risk reduction costs.

Fifth, we must engage publicly with a wide range of stakeholders to discuss risks and options to improve nuclear liability in Canada. We must have comprehensive public hearings on the bill.

Sixth, we must review the liability regime regularly moving forward to make sure that our laws are up to date. It is completely unacceptable that successive Conservative and Liberal governments have waited decades to address this. Canadians deserve so much better than that.

I would just conclude by saying that while the bill before us today talks about who will clean up after an accident, what Canadians really deserve is a government that puts their interests first. That means a government that understands that what we need is an offshore and nuclear liability regime that focuses on ensuring that these kinds of disasters never happen in the first place. That is real leadership and the kind of leadership Canadians can expect when they elect an NDP government in 2015.

• (1055)

**Hon. Greg Rickford (Minister of Natural Resources and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's intervention. I am just wondering how realistic the New Democrats think their plan is to make liability limits unlimited. Have they actually looked into the impact their plan would have on families who rely on nuclear power for electricity?

For our part, we have done our research. Our legislation raises the limit to an amount that is fair and reasonable, and that protects Canadians in the event of an incident and protects ratepayers from exorbitant costs.

What would the costs be to consumers under the plan the NDP are proposing?

**Ms. Chris Charlton:** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to see that the minister, uniquely on that side of the House, cares so passionately about workers in this country. He is quite right. There are 30,000 people who are currently employed in the nuclear industry, but my goodness, is it not the health and safety of those workers as well that is at stake here? Frankly, these 30,000 workers are taxpayers as well. So if the government essentially has to pick up all of the costs of a \$1 billion nuclear accident, it is those 30,000 employees as well who will be on the hook for those costs.

I would suggest to the government that raising the liability limit is something we cannot afford not to do. We have to raise that limit precisely to protect taxpayers, to protect workers, to protect hardworking families in this country. For the minister to suggest that this cannot be done is clearly wrong in the face of the evidence, because countries like Germany, Japan, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Austria, and Switzerland have all done it. I think it is a false argument to suggest that all of those jurisdictions are doing it in a way that is harmful to employees.

*Government Orders*

**Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, on several occasions my colleague from the NDP alluded to the NDP's position on nuclear power. I am sure she would agree that nuclear power as a form of electricity generation and power going forward is going to be part of our energy mix for the foreseeable future. But I take it from her comments that the NDP is officially opposed to nuclear power. Some 60% of Ontario's power is now nuclear. California is expanding its examination of the use of nuclear for many other reasons.

I want to get a better sense of what the official NDP policy is with respect to nuclear power. If it is against nuclear power, how quickly would it phase it out in Canada?

• (1100)

**Ms. Chris Charlton:** Mr. Speaker, I feel a bit bad that what I said in my speech was not clear to the member. I suggested quite clearly that we have to start focusing on renewable sources of energy, that we need to invest in green and clean technologies. That is the focus of our party and where we want to go with respect to energy generation. That is something that all members on all sides of House ought to be able to support, so I am sorry if the member misunderstood that part of my speech, but I would be delighted to talk to him in private about this again after we finish this debate.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Jean Rousseau (Compton—Stanstead, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague from Hamilton Mountain on her excellent speech. Once again, she illustrated the Conservatives' poor management. They are shifting the burden to taxpayers, effectively making them pay more taxes and cover the cost of cleaning up messes made by proponents who want to develop nuclear energy and oil and gas resources.

The government could invest those hundreds of billions of dollars in supporting renewable energy, cleaning up the environment and creating well-paying jobs. Once again, the government is indirectly telling Canadians that they will have to foot the bill for messes made by multinationals developing Canadian resources. That is an unacceptable way to manage Canada. The NDP wants to manage the environment and energy sustainably.

I would like my colleague to comment further on companies' and proponents' responsibility to develop resources sustainably and reasonably without placing the burden on Canadians who have to put up with the government's shenanigans.

[*English*]

**Ms. Chris Charlton:** Mr. Speaker, I really appreciate my colleague's question and his passion for this issue. He is absolutely right: we ought to be debating in the House measures to enhance sustainable development in this country. One of the things that is woefully lacking in the bill is any language about the things that we need to do to prevent nuclear accidents and offshore oil accidents from happening in the first place. We are not talking about that in the House—not now, frankly, and never. We are simply talking about how much liability companies will have in the case of accidents. That is not a conversation that is in the best interests of Canadians if we do not put it into the fuller context of how we stop those accidents in the first place.

I want to commend my colleague for bringing that to the floor of the House and I look forward to his intervention on the bill, where I am sure he will elaborate further.

**Mrs. Kelly Block (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my colleague whether she and her party continue to agree with her leader's comments when he said, "I want to be very clear. The NDP is opposed to any new nuclear infrastructure in Canada".

**Ms. Chris Charlton:** Mr. Speaker, first, let me say that I look forward to working with the parliamentary secretary on the natural resources committee. I am sure that we are going to have many lively debates in the House.

I have been a member in this House since 2006. One of the things I learned, probably within the first week of being in this House, was that the most foolish thing any MP could do is actually speak on behalf of his or her leader.

I suspect that there will be many opportunities when the parliamentary secretary could put that question directly to the member for Outremont. I look forward to hearing that exchange.

**Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, to the member for Hamilton Mountain, when we start talking about liability, we can look at the fact that Japan has gone through an experience like no other country on earth, practically, when we look at the damage done there.

Our friends from the Liberal Party were asking questions about certain situations, but they left out the gas plants that were cancelled in a provincial election and the liability that suddenly hit Canadians in Ontario on their hydro bills because of that. There was no cap on liability, so the people are absorbing that cost. That is minuscule compared to the risks we would have. If we are capped at a billion dollars, it just does not make any sense.

• (1105)

**Ms. Chris Charlton:** Mr. Speaker, some would suggest, though, that the experience of Ontario with respect to the gas plants the member mentioned was hardly an accident. Rather, it was a very calculated, politically motivated cancellation of those plants. However, I certainly take his point.

Yes, he is absolutely right. Taxpayers are again on the hook, quite substantially, because of an action the Liberal government in Ontario took simply in an effort to try to save some seats. That, of course, will be an issue that will be at the forefront of the upcoming provincial election in Ontario, and I suspect that there will be a huge political price to pay by the Liberal government.

**Hon. Greg Rickford:** Mr. Speaker, the problem I have with the narrative of the member opposite is not just the failure or the inability to take a clear position on the nuclear sector, particularly for Ontario. The tendency there is to shag the industry but say that we are standing up for the workers. They are against pipelines, but the multitudes of trades that are involved in working on them, well, they stand up for them.

*Government Orders*

You do not get to have that hypocrisy in the official opposition. When you come forward with a plan like you were suggesting in your lengthy speech today, it is about your notions of liability. We know how much our plan would cost the ratepayer. It would be approximately \$2.00 per year.

The question is put to you, because money does not grow on trees. I know that is your forestry policy—

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

**The Deputy Speaker:** Order, please.

The minister has been here long enough to know that the questions are to be directed to the Chair rather than to a member directly.

The member for Hamilton Mountain has very little time left.

**Ms. Chris Charlton:** That is all right, Mr. Speaker. I do not need very much time, because clearly the minister is confusing us with the Liberals. It was the Liberal leader who said that budgets balance themselves. I do not think I will be taking any lessons from him on that.

With respect to his suggestion that we are standing up for workers, I make no apologies for that either. In fact, the one thing the bill would do would be to say to the industry that this government will always be there to protect the interests of the Canadian nuclear industry at the expense of Canadian taxpayers.

We will stand up for hard-working families. We will stand up for taxpayers and make sure that they are not on the hook for accidents caused by an industry whose behaviour may put Canadians on the hook to the tune of hundreds of billions of dollars.

**Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by congratulating my colleague on his recent appointment as Minister of Natural Resources. I know that he brings to it thoughtfulness and sincerity and that he will be a pleasure to work with.

This is an important bill, because it deals with important issues that are sometimes difficult for average working Canadians to understand. Therefore, it is important for us to keep it simple. In my remarks this morning, I am going to try to explain to Canadians why this is so very important in the architecture of energy for Canada going forward, a theme I am going to return to in a few moments.

First, we know that this bill would update the safety and security regimes for Canada's offshore and nuclear energy industries. How would it do that? It would expressly include the polluter pays principle, a notion perfected in the 1980s that is now increasingly finding implementation in Canada and around the world. It is the notion that the entity that generates the pollution is responsible for its cleanup and is responsible for liability as a result of the pollution. That is an important and positive thing to be including in the bill.

It would also increase liability limits to \$1 billion, and it would do so without proof of fault or negligence, or as we say in the legal profession, strict liability. The polluter would be held strictly liable for whatever occurred on its watch with respect to pollution of that kind. That is a very big step for Canada to be taking and is one that we will be exploring, I know, in greater detail in committee.

Part 1 would amend the offshore petroleum regime. That is the exploitation of oil and gas in our waterways, off Canadian soil. It would try to enhance incident prevention, our response capacity to problems, and of course, liability and compensation. It would primarily update and strengthen the liability regime applicable to spills and debris in offshore areas. This is very important. This question of response capacity and incident prevention, we now know, is extraordinarily important. We have seen two recent examples in the last several decades that have, frankly, focused the minds of Canadians and citizens all over the world who have watched them.

One, of course, was the terrible tragedy of the *Exxon Valdez*, how that occurred, and the remedies that flowed from that major oil spill along the coast of Alaska, the effects of which are still being felt and the cleanup of which is still being executed. As our American friends like to say, there have been “learnings”, things we have learned from that tragedy that have led to improvements, such as the widespread use of double-hulled ships for oil and petroleum products.

The second, more recent incident was the terrible spill in the Gulf of Mexico at the BP wellhead. For Canadians who were watching or reading, this was so significant that we now know that with prosecutions, fines, settlements, and compensation, the costs for the Gulf of Mexico incident are now well over \$42 billion and counting. This is a very significant amount of money for the corporation involved. There are long-term effects. There are long-term human effects, long-term economic effects, and I would argue, perhaps longer-term ecological effects. We are entering uncharted territory in many regards, because the science does not always exist to confirm just how long term that ecological damage is. Therefore, it is important for us to examine this question of response capacity and incident prevention in committee.

● (1110)

It does, however, raise the question of why the Conservative government has rushed through Beaufort Sea exploration licences. Why is it, in full knowledge of the fact that we do not have the technology to deal with a spill in the Beaufort, that the government has rushed these licences through? It has been forewarned both by industry and by third parties. It has been raised on the floor of this House and raised in committee repeatedly.

The Arctic Ocean is a very shallow ocean. It is also an extremely rough body of water, and there is no known booming system to contain an oil spill should it occur during this phase of exploration and, ultimately, during exploitation. I do not know why the government is allowing the licences to go forward. In fact, it was fast-tracking them several years ago, and now, several years later, it is trying to take corrective action to enhance response capacity. We will have to look at that at committee, particularly, as I say, since there is no known response capacity for a spill in those waters.

*Government Orders*

The second thing this bill would do, in part 2, is amend the nuclear regime, the way we oversee our nuclear energy sector. It would establish greater legal certainty and enhance liability and compensation in the event of a nuclear accident. Many speakers here have raised the spectre of a nuclear accident. Of course, this is very worrisome. Of course, this is something we need to learn from internationally. The bill would provide for the establishment, in certain circumstances, of an administrative tribunal to hear and decide claims. It would implement certain provisions of an international treaty, the Convention on Supplementary Compensation for Nuclear Damage.

Here I would like to stop and speak about this question of our nuclear regime in Canada and what has been happening around nuclear power in Canada over the last eight years, since the arrival of the Conservative government.

For about 57 years, Canada led the world, through Atomic Energy of Canada Limited, in the production of nuclear power capacity, the export of that capacity, and the physics underpinning that technology. It was a world leader, not only in the generation of power but also, linked to it, in the production of medical isotopes. This is extremely important going forward, and this bill would have a bearing.

There was a time when Canada supplied 65% of all the medical isotopes in the United States. It furnished our own medical isotopes here in Canada and exported widely around the world. Why is that so important? It is because medical experts tell us that the future of medicine is in what they call personalized medicine. Personalized medicine is going to require the significant, expanded use of nuclear medicine, without which we will not be able to take our medicine and our treatment as human beings to the next iteration, the next level. Isotope production is going to be critical for Canadians. It is also going to be critical for the rest of the world.

As China, India, and other parts of the world become more affluent, there is no doubt in our collective minds, I am sure, that those parts of the world are also going to require greater access to nuclear medicine. What has Canada done with that opportunity and that knowledge in front of it?

Several years ago, the Prime Minister's director of communications was involved in a well-orchestrated rollout with respect to the future of Atomic Energy of Canada Limited. It was the same individual who now heads up Sun TV for Mr. Péladeau, the separatist owner of a major news network. As an aside, I would love to hear from the Sun journalists who for years have been attacking all sorts of different folks with respect to their views, but I have not seen a single commentary from these leaders of the Sun regime on the majority shareholder of their corporation.

• (1115)

We had that same person, the former director of communications, come out in the hall here and run down the asset, Atomic Energy of Canada Limited. I remember the words and I remember the day, because I was so absolutely stunned when he came out and said that Atomic Energy of Canada is a \$12 billion sinkhole.

That was, of course, deliberate, because it is a Conservative strategy to run down a state-owned asset that they want to dispose of.

Lo and behold, the vast majority of AECL was dumped in a fireside sale of \$100 million to SNC-Lavalin in Montreal, thereby compromising Canada's future, in my view, with respect to nuclear power plants and with respect to producing medical isotopes and obtaining a certain share of that marketplace.

Today, as we speak, there are over 120 requests for proposals being considered worldwide for new nuclear power plant installations. That is the reality. Is Canada prepared? Is AECL actively bidding? Are we ready to conquer some of those markets?

I would say no, not when the Prime Minister's director of communications is dispatched to describe our state-owned nuclear energy company as a \$12 billion sinkhole.

Furthermore, as I just put to my colleague from the NDP, in committee we will have to look at the energy mix going forward. We will have to look at how nuclear power will fit with renewable power and other forms of power, for example geothermal, which in my view is an energy source we have barely begun to tap, particularly in a northern Canadian context. It is highly economic to be using geothermal in our north, but we are not investing very much at all.

Here I would agree with my NDP colleague: we are not putting the needed resources into public research and development in our energy future, whatever that mix is going to be.

Finally, on the nuclear regime side, it is important for all members to understand that very unfortunately, given the global consumption of water, 70% of the world's fresh water is used today in agricultural production. It is the same statistic in the United States. As American northeastern cities drop in population and as the United States builds ever-larger cities in its dry southwest, we will see even more pressure on fresh water, which of course is giving rise to all kinds of new economic opportunities, unfortunately, in the desalination of water.

The only form of energy we know thus far that is economic in desalination is nuclear. Are we going to tell the world that it cannot have access to water? I do not think so, not given the pressures that we know are coming and knowing what we know now about climate change. We will come to the place of climate change in an energy discussion in a second.

It is very important for us to examine this question of the nuclear regime in a broader context. This is not just a technical amendment bill; it has to be examined in the context of both the Canadian situation and the international markets that I alluded to just a moment ago.

For example, we know that the liability cap in the nuclear sector is going to go from \$75 million to \$1 billion. That is a very significant jump. This brings Canada in line with the promises it made when we signed the international Convention on Supplementary Compensation for Nuclear Damage in December 2013. In a sense, we are simply moving to ratify what we signed on an international level.

*Government Orders*

In the offshore oil and gas sector, the absolute liability for companies operating in the Atlantic offshore will increase from \$30 million to \$1 billion, and in the Arctic from \$40 million to \$1 billion. Operators will have to earmark \$100 million specifically for spill response. That is a quantum, a number that I think deserves to be examined much more closely.

It is \$100 million earmarked for spill response if, as I said earlier with respect to the Beaufort, that technology actually exists, which we know it does not in that context. It is \$100 million when the BP spill in the Gulf of Mexico is \$42 billion and counting. I do not think that is a serious number.

• (1120)

On this question of satisfactory protection, we will have to hear from experts. It is linked, of course, to the insurability of some of these actions and whether or not there is insurance to be drawn down on top of the \$100 million specifically earmarked.

There are other questions that have to be asked, as the proposed legislation raises several issues.

For example, would the bill make it far more expensive for offshore energy companies to operate off the Atlantic and Arctic coasts by raising their financial liability, by forcing them to have more money on hand, by increasing the funds they must have on hand for disaster response specifically? In that case, by how much would the cost be increased? What do the corporations have to say about that? I think it is important for us to hear the answer.

Is \$1 billion adequate in the Arctic, where environmental conditions make spill response efforts very challenging? Is \$1 billion realistic, as we rush through these exploration licences, as has been done by the government?

Here is another question. Why does the bill provide for ministerial discretion to reduce absolute liability levels to below the legislative level of \$1 billion? Why would we do this? What would be the implications of this provision?

In fairness, there has been a trend since the Conservatives came to power eight years ago of vesting more and more power in ministers or in the cabinet. Nowhere has that been more egregious than in the case of decisions rendered by the impartial, arm's-length National Energy Board. Now, all of a sudden, as a result of the government's power grab, a decision rendered by a third party, outside-of-government group of experts with quasi-judicial processes and expert evidence is not good enough, because if it is not in line with the government's views or the Conservatives' priorities, they can undermine the entire process with a stroke of a pen. In fact, they can overrule the entire process. This is unusual, but it has been happening over and over for eight years in different sectors.

Here, again, we see it slipped into the bill. I think the government has to explain to Canadians why that is. Why would the minister have the power to say that it is not \$1 billion but \$229, or zero, or there is a delay in payment? What are the implications of this provision as we go forward with another concentration of power in a single minister?

We know that the bill is the culmination of many years of discussion with respect to operator liability that, objectively, started

under the previous Liberal government. For that, I want to commend all of those departmental officials who have been involved in helping to craft the bill and who helped to lead those discussions and reconcile competing views. They should be congratulated for their hard work. We are only as good in this place as the work provided by those officials. In many respects, we stand on their shoulders.

The second thing the bill does is address recommendations to raise liability limits from the 2012 report of the Commissioner of Environment and Sustainable Development. Need I remind the House that this is another office created by the Liberal government?

There are some very positive changes in the bill. We look forward to seeing it get to committee. We are looking forward to hearing from the experts on many important questions.

Bill C-22 is a good building block in what I hope will become an adult conversation on Canada's energy future, because in eight years we have not had an adult conversation. We have been fixating on a single pipeline or some other construction project, as opposed to examining what our energy future looks like, what the mix looks like, the extent to which we are integrated in the North American context, and where we are going with greenhouse gases, a term I have not heard uttered here today. To talk about energy, which the bill addresses, without talking about greenhouse gases is irresponsible.

In closing, I am looking forward to seeing Bill C-22 in committee and getting more information and more evidence with a view to improve it.

• (1125)

**Hon. Greg Rickford (Minister of Natural Resources and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his intervention. The discipline and rigour that he brings not only to his presentation but also to his questions with particular regard to some of the work I have done with him in the past are very much appreciated.

I share his concerns about the broader questions around energy, in particular about where the nuclear sector fits in. I too have been concerned. An example is the green pulp and paper transformation program to reduce the environmental footprint and significant costs of the pulp mill in Dryden, which went from 85% to 112%. Unfortunately, the priorities of the provincial government at that time, just a couple of years ago, did not provide for that extra energy, which, at no cost to the environment and at great benefit to the high ratepayers in northwestern Ontario, could have gone onto the grid line.

*Government Orders*

That is a subject for another discussion, but it does raise an important point when the member talks about the mix. I appreciate the consideration of water and nuclear medicine. Having just been the minister responsible for science and technology, I may take some opposition to his sense that good research is not being done in those areas.

The first concern I have is with the failure of the NDP to take a stand on the nuclear sector. The second is to understand, in the broader context, the important contributions it makes, in particular to nuclear medicine and isotopes. We are making some great strides in these areas in Thunder Bay.

I wonder if the member could comment broadly and perhaps more specifically on his concern about the cost structure under the scenario for liability that the NDP is proposing. Although he may have some exceptions and concerns around our liability regime, it is taking us one more important step forward toward a reasonable balance between liability and ratepayers.

● (1130)

**Mr. David McGuinty:** Mr. Speaker, it is not within me to divine the thinking of the NDP in this area. I am not surprised that its members are not in a position to talk about the implications of unlimited liability. It is interesting to call for that and have an aspirational goal. When my kids were very young, while tucking them into bed I would tell them about the way the world ought to be, and in the morning I would get up and deal with the way the world is. The New Democrats do need to deal with the way the world is, although I do commend them for their aspirational views on unlimited liability. I would like to hear from the experts at committee what the ramifications and the distributive effects of this approach would be.

Going back to the energy mix that my colleague alluded to, it is fair to point out that in the last eight years most, if not all, of the fiscal incentives and programmatic expenditures that were in place to help us move to a greater renewable portfolio have all been eliminated. We have lost the renewable power production incentive and the wind power production incentive. We have eliminated the ecoENERGY program for people's homes, which was an attempt to encourage average citizens to retrofit the homes where they live to make a contribution to energy efficiency. This is unfortunate, because Canada should be retooling our economy to become the cleanest, most energy-efficient, most materials-efficient, and most water-efficient economy in the world. I think the minister ought to go back and take a look at some of those issues and cuts and look at reinstating them.

**Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his excellent presentation today. I also want to take the opportunity to congratulate the new minister on his appointment. I am looking forward to working with him.

There are a number of issues with this bill that we have to study at the natural resources committee, of which I am the vice-chair. Among those is the question of what impact this bill would have on the operating costs of offshore energy companies operating off the Atlantic coast or in the Arctic.

In terms of the Arctic, my hon. colleague from Ottawa South spoke eloquently about the challenges there. There is the question of

whether \$1 billion is adequate in the Arctic, given the kinds of environmental concerns that a spill there could raise, such as the difficulties of a spill response, especially in deep water and under ice. Those are big concerns. Why the bill provides for ministerial discretion to reduce the liability limit below \$1 billion is not clear to me.

I would ask my hon. colleague if he has any comments on these issues.

**Mr. David McGuinty:** Mr. Speaker, my first comment is how confident I am in my colleague from Halifax West, who will be stickhandling this debate at committee. He is going to be asking the very tough questions that he has just raised on the floor of the House. I am very confident, and his constituents and the House should be very confident, that he is going to be there, that he is going to make those contributions and elicit the important evidence and testimony that we need to improve the bill.

A theme that I picked up on earlier, which I commend to my colleague from Halifax West, is that when it comes to energy, much of the last two years has been fixated on a single pipeline. When the north-south pipeline issue is resolved, everyone will feel either happy or unhappy about the outcome. However, meanwhile we are not having an adult conversation about energy in Canada and energy in the United States. We are not having an adult conversation about Canada's, the United States' and Mexico's integrated North American energy market, especially as Mexico now looks to inculcate private investment in its energy holdings. That is an important question for Canada's energy future.

Instead of focusing on headline-grabbing comments around one particular pipeline, it is unfortunate that the House has not been seized with—as I have personally been calling for over eight years, and other voices have as well—having an adult conversation about what our energy future looks like and to what extent we could use fiscal incentives and disincentives to improve our performance.

How is this linked to our greenhouse gas reduction targets? We are not having a conversation about that here. Every time we do, the Prime Minister shuts it down, which frankly is irresponsible.

Therefore, I am happy that my colleague from Halifax West will be stickhandling this through committee. I have every confidence that he will be raising these tough questions.

● (1135)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Jean Rousseau (Compton—Stanstead, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Ottawa South for his excellent speech.

He touched on the extremely important issue of how to manage water, a resource that is essential to human life and that the oil and nuclear industries use in massive quantities. From the start, the Conservatives have been ignoring environmental protection rules, including rules to protect water. If the oil and nuclear industries are to be made accountable, there has to be a water management plan.

*Government Orders*

The Fukushima incident in Japan, for example, contaminated water for miles around, affecting hundreds of thousands of people.

Can my colleague comment on the importance of managing water and the need to make the oil and nuclear industries that use this resource more accountable?

**Mr. David McGuinty:** Mr. Speaker, my colleague is absolutely right; it is a question of accountability. Water management plans should be mandatory and more prevalent in these economic sectors.

However, we must not forget the incredible opportunities that exist for Canada when it comes to the future use of water, especially drinking water, around the world. Canada is well positioned, since we have one of the world's largest supplies of water. People regard Canada as an efficient country in that area, but we are much less efficient than we should be.

The opportunities around the globe are incredible. Over the next 20, 30 or 50 years, the world will need all kinds of new technologies, so we will have to start using water, energy and materials more efficiently. Canada could be a world leader in these areas.

[English]

**Mrs. Kelly Block (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to have the opportunity to debate Bill C-22, the energy safety and security act, and to share my time with the hon. member for Saskatoon—Humboldt.

This bill would modernize and increase accountability in Canada's offshore and nuclear industries. As hon. members know, it is no exaggeration to say that the offshore petroleum industry has literally transformed economies in Atlantic Canada. Over the past few years, this vital industry has created thousands of high-paying jobs and spinoff industries. It has also generated billions in revenues for provincial governments to invest in social programs that are essential to Canadians.

Over the past 15 years, Nova Scotia offshore production has generated over \$2.3 billion in government revenues. Today, the industry generates close to \$190 million of expenditures and supports approximately 770 direct jobs. On an annual basis, over the period between 2003 and 2007, the offshore petroleum sector's contribution to Nova Scotia's GDP was 3%.

In Newfoundland and Labrador, over the same 15-year period, offshore production has generated over \$9.2 billion in government revenues. Today, the offshore oil and gas industry in Newfoundland and Labrador contributes approximately 28% of the provincial GDP, spending over \$3.2 billion annually and providing 7,374 direct jobs. In 2010, through direct and indirect and spinoff effects, the industry accounted for over 12,800 jobs. That is 5.8% of provincial employment through responsible offshore resource development.

It is clear that exploration and development of the offshore is translating into tangible benefits for the people of these provinces, and these benefits will continue to grow.

Our regulatory and safety regime in the Atlantic offshore area is already strong. Over the past year, our Conservative government has introduced a number of measures to ensure the safe development of our natural resources under our responsible resource development

plan. We have initiated new enforcement mechanisms, which include fines for non-compliance, with stated environmental requirements. This includes inspections for oil and gas pipelines, which have been increased by 50% annually. We have also doubled the number of comprehensive audits of pipelines.

Another example is the new mandated measures for oil tankers, which will ensure the safe transportation of energy resources through our waterways. These measures include the safeguarding Canada's seas and skies act, as well as the creation of an expert panel to review Canada's current tanker safety regime, which will propose ways to improve safe transportation.

Building on these measures, our Conservative government is taking steps today to strengthen its robust offshore liability regime and make it even stronger. As I have said many times, our Conservative government will ensure that no development proceeds unless it is safe for Canadians and safe for the environment. We have been working closely with the Governments of Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador to update and expand both accord acts to ensure that Canada's offshore regime for oil and gas exploration remains world class.

Companies operating in Canada's offshore have an excellent track record. Every stage of offshore petroleum activity, from exploration to production, is subject to stringent regulatory obligations and oversight by either the Canada-Nova Scotia Offshore Petroleum Board or the Canada-Newfoundland and Labrador Offshore Petroleum Board. Companies must have regulator approved safety, emergency response and contingency plans, and regulators will not allow any offshore activity unless they have determined that the environment and the safety of workers will be protected.

Bill C-22 focuses on protecting the environment and taxpayers in the highly unlikely event of a spill.

● (1140)

The Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development has found that the offshore boards are operating with due diligence. However, he has recommended enhanced financial assurance for environmental risk. Our government has committed to study his report and make the necessary changes. The changes contained within Bill C-22 build on the commissioner's advice as well as lessons from international best practices. Our overall objective is to have a world-class offshore regime.

As the House knows, Canada's liability regime is founded on the polluter pays principle.

First, we are proposing to enshrine the polluter pays principle in legislation and to maintain unlimited liability when an operator is found to be at fault.

*Government Orders*

Second, our government will also increase the absolute liability to \$1 billion, from \$30 million in the Atlantic offshore and \$40 million in the Arctic offshore. This means that fault or negligence does not have to be proven for that amount.

Third, we will require that operators demonstrate at least a \$1 billion financial capacity to ensure they have sufficient funds if an incident were to occur. Currently the regulators require proof of an operator's financial capacity in an amount between \$250 million and \$500 million. We intend to raise the minimum financial capacity to \$1 billion, in line with operators' absolute liability. Regulators may require higher amounts if deemed necessary. This increase will bring our country in line with comparable regimes, such as Norway, Denmark, the U.S., and the UK. We are ensuring that companies have the financial wherewithal to meet their liabilities if needed.

Finally, we will require that operators provide regulators with rapid and unfettered access to at least \$100 million that may be used if needed.

These are just some of the ways we are ensuring Canada is among the strongest liability regimes in the world.

We are also creating the ability for regulators to impose administrative and monetary fines as an additional tool in ensuring industry's compliance.

We are increasing transparency by allowing the boards to make emergency environmental and other documents public.

We are creating the ability to use spill-treating agents.

We are creating the basis for boards to recover costs from industry.

Our government is committed to ensuring the safe extraction of Canada's offshore resources, while at the same time protecting our environment. Raising the absolute liability for companies operating in the offshore will go a long way towards achieving that goal.

As the offshore industry continues to grow and develop, we must ensure it is done in a responsible manner. That is why I urge all hon. members in the House to support Bill C-22.

• (1145)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to my hon. colleague's speech.

It is all a matter of perspective when it comes to the numbers. One billion is a huge number that really hits home. However, the Fukushima decontamination has cost \$250 billion so far, and the cleanup in the Gulf of Mexico has cost over \$40 billion. If companies have a limit of \$1 billion, this means that 34 million Canadians would have to absorb the other \$41 billion in the case of a spill similar to the one in the Gulf of Mexico, or the other \$249 billion.

Before we talk about that, could my colleague tell us about any measures in the bill that would allow us to be proactive and avoid such a disaster? We have heard only about the compensation companies would have to pay after the fact, after the disaster has happened.

[*English*]

**Mrs. Kelly Block:** Mr. Speaker, our government, as I said, is committed to protecting the safety of Canadians and the safety of our environment. We already have a robust marine oil spill preparedness and response regime. Regulators, such as the offshore boards, the NEB, and Transport Canada, inspect the pollution response capability of oil handling facilities, and the government reviews the plans and equipment through exercises.

Raising the minimum financial requirements to \$1 billion and the authority of regulators to levy administrative and monetary penalties would incentivize companies to further improve their preventative safety measures.

These proposed amendments would also increase transparency, giving Canadians a better understanding of how these companies are performing in the offshore.

**Mr. Scott Andrews (Avalon, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, coming from an oil-producing province as I do, we know full well when tragedy strikes in the offshore oil and gas field. We need look no further than the Cougar flight of a few years ago, just shortly after I was elected.

When is the government going to fully implement all the recommendations of Justice Wells' inquiry into the offshore oil; in particular, recommendation 29, which calls for an independent safety review board that would oversee the offshore oil, and other recommendations like the run-dry on helicopters? This was a serious inquiry, it had a number of recommendations, and it is time that government implements all the recommendations in the Wells Inquiry.

• (1150)

**Mrs. Kelly Block:** Mr. Speaker, as my hon. colleague may well know, we just finished a study and are now looking at Bill C-4, which is the offshore health and safety act. We certainly did hear from Mr. Wells, and our government takes the recommendations of the Wells Inquiry very seriously. We are satisfied with the improvements to offshore helicopter safety made by the C-NLOPB since the accident occurred. We continue to work with the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador to ensure the offshore area is as safe as possible.

When Commissioner Wells appeared at the Standing Committee on Natural Resources in December, he was clear when he said he was pleased with our offshore health and safety legislation. He was also very clear that good has come out of the government's adoption of his recommendations.

I would advise my colleague opposite to read the transcript of the meeting and inform himself of Commissioner Wells' position on what our government has done in dealing with the recommendations he made.

*Government Orders*

**Mr. Brad Trost (Saskatoon—Humboldt, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to be here today to deal with legislation that is affecting the natural resources committee.

When approaching this legislation—and in Natural Resources we do not often get to quote Yogi Berra, the Yankees' catcher who was known for his pithy summaries of situations—a certain portion of it is déjà vu all over again.

I have been on the natural resources committee for a considerable number of years, and the portion of this legislation that deals with nuclear liability has been before this committee before. As my friend, the member for Ottawa South, pointed out earlier in his remarks, the Liberal government, going back now eight, nine years, the era of the Martin administration, was beginning to deal with the issue of nuclear liability.

While the bill has one basic purpose, it has two different emphases: One, as was predominantly dealt with by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, deals with the liability for offshore, oil rigs, gas, industrial complexes such as those. As we saw in the issue of the Gulf of Mexico and BP and the disaster it had down there, this is something that needs to be looked at in Canada.

The second emphasis of the bill deals with the nuclear industry, and that is where I will concentrate my remarks today. It is very important that we deal with this. It has taken a long time. It has, in some ways, not been the most urgent piece of legislation, but that is largely because, in many ways, we have if not the safest, one of the safest nuclear industries in the world.

The history of nuclear energy in Canada dates back some 75 years, and for many decades it has been a part of our energy mix, more so in some areas of the country than in others. Western Canada, where I am from, there is not so much. Here in Ontario, it is a considerable part of the electricity generating capacity and, in fact, now generates 15% of all electricity in Canada. It brings forth both economic and environmental benefits.

Our nuclear power industry is an engine of economic growth. It generates \$5 billion a year in revenues and provides jobs for more than 30,000 Canadians.

We need to deal with this industry to make sure the regulatory and legislative elements are in place, to make sure it can prosper, people can be secure, and that it continues to generate jobs.

One reason why the government has introduced this legislation is that the industry is asking for certainty. While not having this legislation in place will not stop all nuclear development in the country, the industry has been calling for it so they know both what they are required to spend on their yearly insurance costs and what the legal framework would be should there be an accident. Thankfully, there has not been an accident in Canada to this point. Without this certainty, insurers would not provide coverage to nuclear facilities and no one would, to some degree, participate in further nuclear development.

The federal government has responsibilities, and as I said, our safety record is second to none, but we always want to make it better.

We have a robust technology, a well-trained workforce, and stringent and increasingly clear regulatory requirements.

At this time, the Nuclear Safety and Control Act and the Nuclear Fuel Waste Act are the two pieces of legislation that provide a basis for regulating the industry. However, we must be ready for the possibility of an incident that could result in civil damages.

The responsibility for providing an insurance framework, one that protects all Canadians, is a federal responsibility. Therefore, the government has a duty to assume its responsibilities in this area, and the government takes this seriously.

• (1155)

The original act was first introduced in 1976. It needs to be modernized.

The particular thing that I think is going to stick with most people in the public when they read this debate or when they see a news story is the difference in liability in the 1976 legislation as compared with what the government is currently proposing. When we think that as drivers nowadays, it is not uncommon to have \$1 million or \$2 million liability insurance on our cars, to have only \$75 million or \$76 million insurance for a nuclear power plant seems a bit strange. That is why we are moving ahead to update the legislation that is nearly 40 years old.

The legislation would increase the amount of compensation to address civil damages from \$75 million to \$1 billion. This new liability amount would be in line with current international standards.

Let me take a small detour from my speech to remind colleagues who are listening and the general public that they are going to sometimes hear comparisons between what different countries have for their liability requirements. Be careful when using those numbers. Different countries have different legal setups and different mechanisms, so it is very difficult to directly compare country to country.

However, the government, and I know this from when we have previously looked at this legislation, has consulted and looked around to find out roughly what is in the international standard, roughly what is approximately redone in other parts of the world, both to have adequate coverage and, of course, to be competitive industry-wise.

The legislation would maintain the existing strengths of the old legislation in that it would maintain the key principle of absolute liability. This would make the operator of a nuclear facility responsible for any civil injury or damage, whether or not the operator was at fault.

I think that is very important to understand: whether or not the operator was at fault.

This would mean that even if an incident is the result of vandalism or negligence on the part of a supplier, the operator remains exclusively liable for compensating civil damages.

*Government Orders*

What has been said in previous legislation and is being restated in this legislation is that because this technology has such a large potential hazard dealing with it, owner/operators are required not only to provide basic safety standards, not only to be responsible for their actions, but also they need to think ahead and to do things that would cause their reactor, their nuclear facility, to be safe from the actions of others. These can be actions of nature or actions by people who seek to cause them harm. It is a very important point to think of because when we have car insurance, we are not always concerned about other people's actions when they damage our car. We do not get sued and are not held liable for someone who crashes into our car because of their reckless driving.

This is somewhat different.

These principles are common to nuclear legislation in other countries, such as the United States, France, and the United Kingdom, and these principles would be enshrined in this legislation.

To summarize, this legislation is necessary because the old legislation is outdated and the limits for liability are too low. We need to update the legislation to move the absolute liability from \$75 million to \$1 billion for a couple of reasons: first, to protect the public, to ensure funds are available and in place to provide in the event of an incident—and it does not have to be a Chernobyl incident; it can be a much smaller incident; and, second, to provide the industry with certainty.

This is an industry that wants to grow, that wants to develop in Canada, that wants to provide good high-tech jobs for Canadians from all across the country.

Therefore, for both the economic benefits and because of our duty to protect the safety of Canadians, we need to pass this legislation as soon as possible.

• (1200)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his speech. I would also like to thank him for pointing out that this legislation is more than necessary and long overdue. This is a step in the right direction, but it is not enough.

Does my colleague believe, as the NDP does, in the polluter pays principle? If so, we must ensure that companies that pollute pay a defined amount in compensation for the pollution. Some risks are associated with certain businesses and others are associated with oil exploration. We have to implement environmental protection measures. Unfortunately, as my colleague opposite knows full well, the government has gutted environmental safeguards such as the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act. That is his problem.

Does my colleague believe in the polluter pays principle or does he want taxpayers to pick up the tab for the oil companies that cause the spills? Does he believe in this principle?

[*English*]

**Mr. Brad Trost:** Mr. Speaker, I think I can agree with the hon. member's statements. In fact, the parliamentary secretary stated that the polluter pay principle is embedded in this legislation. That is one reason that we are asking that all hon. members support this

legislation. While they may not think it is perfect, it is better than what is currently in place. It would provide more protection and certainty.

I would again say to the hon. member that, yes, we support that principle, and it is embedded in the legislation; and yes, this legislation needs to be better, even if members do not think it is the perfect piece of legislation to deal with all of the issues of these industries.

**Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I have a question for my former colleague on the natural resources committee, where we worked together for several years.

I want to get a better sense, as I mentioned earlier, of where Atomic Energy of Canada Limited is now with respect to its opportunities internationally. I mentioned that there are some 120-plus requests for proposal right now for nuclear power plants. That would be number one. Where are we in terms of access or bidding for that market?

Number two, what is the status of AECL in terms of its next generation of CANDU technology? The government has oft repeated that there is a university somewhere that is picking up a lot of the slack on isotope production, but that is not at all what we are talking about in terms of the international marketplace for nuclear power.

**Mr. Brad Trost:** Mr. Speaker, since I have not been following AECL closely, I will not deal directly with what specifically it is bidding on. However, I can respond more generally to what the member is asking about.

I had some meetings a few weeks ago with other contractors who deal with AECL and who are looking at partnering with it in some of their facilities here in eastern Ontario. They were quite optimistic about where they see themselves going business-wise in Canada and where they see AECL fitting into the world. As has been noted, AECL has to adapt and make some changes as it is being reorganized and going through a new process.

The gentlemen I spoke with were very optimistic that AECL would grow and were looking to do business with it. This is a company that they were looking to do business with for the long term and thought that they could partner with, make a profit, and grow the Canadian economy.

• (1205)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, before beginning my speech, I would like to mention that I will be sharing my time with the excellent member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot.

I will address a number of issues in my speech. First, I will summarize the legislation. Those who have been listening to CPAC for a few minutes or a few hours already have a general idea of Bill C-22, which we are debating at present.

This bill proposes a more thorough review of nuclear liability and liability in offshore oil and gas exploration. The amount of absolute liability must increase from \$75 million to \$1 billion for the nuclear sector and from \$40 million to \$1 billion for the offshore oil and gas sector.

*Government Orders*

It is a step in the right direction and a good start. We will obviously support this bill at second reading so that it can be referred to committee, where we can make some improvements to it. I was pleased to hear my colleague who spoke before me say that this bill is not perfect. At least he agrees with me and there will be improvements to make in committee. What is more, I hope he will sit on the committee and make some improvements. It would be truly appreciated. He seems to be very familiar with this issue. If he does not sit on the committee, perhaps he could give his colleagues a short briefing on this.

The first thing people need to realize is that we would not have such a problem with this bill if the Conservatives had passed the sustainable development bill introduced by my hon. colleague from Brome—Missisquoi. I do not know what the Conservatives have against sustainable development, but they voted against the excellent bill introduced by the member for Brome—Missisquoi, under which all new bills would be subject to the Federal Sustainable Development Act.

Sustainable development encompasses the economy and social and environmental considerations. Bill C-22 is a step in that direction. Unfortunately, it still does not fully respect the spirit of sustainable development. That is why we must refer to a speech that will go down in history, the speech the leader of the opposition and member for Outremont delivered to the Economic Club of Canada in Ottawa on a prosperous and sustainable energy future for Canada.

In this plan, he mentions the three key components of sustainable development, in other words the economic, social and environmental aspects. It is important for people to understand.

Three aspects need to be considered in Bill C-22, including sustainability. Sustainability means the polluter pays the bill for pollution instead of handing the bill to the next generation. The problem here is that the Conservatives are saying that this bill is based on the polluter pays principle, but that is not true. It is true that the polluter will have to pay a little more, but not much. Again, the taxpayers will be paying the lion's share.

I will provide some examples a little later. Members might fall off their chairs when they see the huge costs a nuclear or oil-related disaster can rack up. They will be shocked. They seem to be comfortably seated in their chairs, so it should be alright.

The other element that depends on our energy future strategy is the partnership with the first nations, the provinces and environmental groups. It is what we call social licence. The important thing is having social acceptability for value-added jobs here. Unfortunately, the Conservatives are exporting most of our jobs. Long-term prosperity is also important.

• (1210)

What I mean is that the government introduced a bill that looked good at first glance. However, we are quickly realizing everything it entails. In reality, the bill masks a lot of other things that the government has done that harm our economy. That is right: they harm our economy.

What have the Conservatives done to harm our economy? They have scuttled environmental legislation, such as the famous Canadian Environmental Assessment Act. There are now bills that

will be passed and challenged and that will not have social acceptability.

For example, the Enbridge line 9 project was approved without social acceptability. This will pose significant problems because there is no reliable, safe and strong environmental legislation. This is important. The NDP will ensure that there is better legislation that will allow us to know where we are going.

I will now provide some figures. My colleagues should brace themselves. I am not kidding.

In 2010, a major oil spill occurred in the Gulf of Mexico. So far, the cleanup costs have been estimated at \$42 billion. Under Bill C-22, BP would pay \$1 billion. Who would pay the remaining \$41 billion? Taxpayers. That is not in line with the polluter pays principle. It is a gross injustice if the polluter pays \$1 billion and the people pay \$41 billion. There is no way we can accept that.

Take, for example, nuclear accidents. There was one at the Fukushima nuclear power plant in 2011. The Government of Japan currently estimates the cleanup and repair costs at \$250 billion.

Under this bill, the polluter would pay \$1 billion. Who would pay the remaining \$249 billion? Canadians. Payments would be spread over several generations, because that amount cannot be paid today, just like that.

In 2012, the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development published a report on environmental liabilities. I actually asked the Minister of the Environment a question when she testified on the issue before the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development. At the time, she was new to the field, but she has now done her homework. I will see her again soon at a meeting of the same committee, and I will be able to ask her the same question again.

Environmental liabilities now amount to several million dollars. Who is supposed to pay for environmental liabilities? The public purse. In other words, Canadians, the people of Drummond. In Saint-Edmond, a municipality close to Drummondville, many people are concerned because of the contaminated site there. The government is not getting the cleanup done.

In a nutshell, this is a good bill at first glance, but the polluter pays principle has not been applied in the slightest. In addition, I did not even get to say that the responsibility of the minister must be removed from the bill. I will talk about that during questions and comments.

• (1215)

[*English*]

**Mr. Brad Trost (Saskatoon—Humboldt, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I will help out my hon. colleague over a bit of a misunderstanding that he perhaps may have. The billion dollar limit in the legislation is only if a company has not been negligent. If a company is negligent, as it is assumed BP was in the Gulf, it can be sued and can end up paying more than \$1 billion.

*Government Orders*

With that in mind, I would like to also ask my hon. colleague what he thinks about the provisions in the legislation that would protect Canadians from international incidents, that would provide greater compensation for Canadians should an incident happen south of the border.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. François Choquette:** Mr. Speaker, before I respond to my colleague's question, I would like to talk about something I did not have time to address.

I think this is a very important point because it is causing a great deal of concern. I am talking about the minister's responsibility. This bill gives the minister discretionary power. I believe the Conservatives are giving themselves far too much discretionary power. Discretionary power means that the minister can do whatever he wants, when and how he wants, simply because he decided to do so. In this case, we are talking about \$1 billion, unless the minister decides not to enforce that limit and sets whatever limit he wants, such as \$500 million, for example.

The question is about the \$1 billion in a situation where the company is not responsible. One day there might be oil exploration in the Arctic. As everyone knows, the Arctic is an unknown and dangerous place. Some companies have even backed away from Arctic oil exploration because they believed it was too risky. This does not mean that companies would be negligent in their approach. It is a risky place, even if one is not negligent. There is a risk of oil spills that could cost tens of billions of dollars, so \$1 billion is not enough. Even if companies are not negligent, the risk is still there. Who will cover that risk? Taxpayers will; the people of Drummond will.

**Mr. Dan Harris (Scarborough Southwest, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

He just spoke about ministerial discretion, which is in the bill. However, he did not really have an opportunity to say why we should perhaps be concerned about these types of discretionary powers.

Could taxpayers in the ridings of Drummond and Scarborough Southwest be obliged to pay more if the minister decided that \$1 billion was too much in a given situation?

**Mr. François Choquette:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from Scarborough Southwest for his excellent question and the remarkable job he does in the House representing his community.

It is very worrisome because there is a growing number of these small measures that increase discretionary power in Conservative legislation. There is a \$1 billion cap, as was mentioned earlier. However, even if the company is not negligent, the risks are high. The risks are high in the Arctic offshore. If there is a spill, it will not cost \$1 billion. It will cost many billions of dollars over many decades. For that reason, it is important to our ridings and the people we represent that we oppose this bill and the minister's discretionary power.

I am pleased that my Conservative colleague said earlier that this bill has some flaws and that it must be improved. I hope he will be one of the first to fight for improvements in committee. I am going to follow the committee's discussions to make sure that my

Conservative colleague does his job, because clearly the bill has flaws.

As for the minister's discretionary power, it serves no purpose. It is not necessary. Why would he have this power? It is completely useless. I hope that the committee will take away this discretionary power and that the bill will be improved because, fundamentally, it is necessary.

• (1220)

**Ms. Marie-Claude Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the hon. member for Drummond on his excellent speech. He is a great source of information on the environment, and he works very hard on this issue. I want to commend his work, and I tip my hat to him.

I am pleased to speak today to Bill C-22, which would amend the law concerning Canada's oil and nuclear operations. We are supporting this bill at second reading so that it will be sent to committee for in-depth study. We hope that the government will agree to work on improving the bill, as it desperately needs it. Clearly, our support at third reading will depend on the government's willingness to make much-needed improvements to the bill.

Bill C-22 references the polluter pays principle explicitly to establish that polluters will be held accountable. However, after researching this principle, I came to the realization that the bill does not adequately enforce it. For example, the nuclear liability limit is being increased from \$75 million, which is quite insufficient, to \$1 billion. It is a small step in the right direction, but it is not enough.

The polluter pays principle is based on the idea that the polluter pays. It is not complicated. Creating a \$1-billion cap means that if a disaster were to happen, taxpayers would foot the rest of the bill, through no fault of their own. They will have to pay for that, in addition to suffering the health and environmental consequences. A bit later, I will share some statistics on that.

Another thing that bothers me about liability is the minister's discretionary power. I am sick and tired of seeing that in bills. MPs have a responsibility, but they can and should get help from experts in every field. We are talking about the environment and natural resources. These experts have dedicated their lives to researching the subject, so I do not see how the minister can set a cap without taking their opinions into account. That bothers me.

I do not understand why the government is always trying to grab more power. This is not the first time the government has tried to give a minister discretionary power in a bill. When will this stop? This is something we need to talk about because it is a real problem.

There is one positive aspect to the bill in terms of liability in the nuclear industry: it extends the limitation period for submitting compensation claims from 10 to 30 years. That is good for people who develop the kind of latent illnesses that are frequently linked to the nuclear industry. It is about time the government did this, but is it retroactive? Perhaps one of my colleagues opposite can answer that question during the time for questions.

*Government Orders*

As for liability in the oil and gas sector, this bill updates the Canadian liability regime for offshore oil and gas development to prevent incidents and ensure rapid response should a spill occur. Once again, it is about time the government took this important step.

This is all very nice on paper, but enforcement has to be strict. That is what the minister should be responsible for, not exercising a discretionary power to decide the extent of a company's liability for an incident.

• (1225)

That would be worthwhile, it seems to me.

The limit of liability for oil development goes from \$40 million in the Arctic and \$30 million in the Atlantic to \$1 billion. That is a very small step in the right direction, and it is still clearly insufficient.

As I mentioned earlier, taxpayers should not be footing the bill. When I say taxpayers, I mean those who make financial contributions to society, but I also mean all citizens of all ages and in all situations. They should not be footing the financial bill, nor paying the price in terms of the environment, their health and their integrity. They should not be paying for incidents related to this kind of energy. We know full well that other sources of energy exist, renewable ones, in which greater investments could be made. For the nuclear industry and the oil industry, the polluter pays principle could apply.

I am thinking about biomethanization, for example. It provides an incredible source of green energy. If my colleagues opposite would like to come to my riding to visit the biomethanization plant in Sainte-Hyacinthe, I would be happy to welcome them. It is very interesting. Wind energy can also be used, as Quebec is doing. These are sources of energy that we can also embrace.

Now I would like to go back to the subject of financial liability. A billion dollars may seem like a spectacular amount, but it is very little. In Germany, for example, absolute liability is currently \$3.3 billion per plant. With the paltry \$1 billion that appears in this bill, Canada is far behind that. In the United States, the figure is \$12.6 billion U.S. In Japan, there was a tragic nuclear disaster in 2011. The cost has been estimated at \$250 billion. If a similar disaster happened in Canada, taxpayers would therefore have to pay \$249 billion. Personally, I do not see the logic in that. In 2010, there was an oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. The costs of the disaster are constantly rising, as they are in Japan too. The costs could exceed \$250 billion. Mexico has already spent \$42 billion, but it is not over yet.

I feel that we have to ask ourselves some serious questions. What do we want as a society? To what extent do we want to protect our citizens? To what extent do we want taxpayers to pay and keep on paying?

I also think it is important to point out that Canada is not immune to disasters. The thing I find particularly worrisome about this bill is that there is no mention of prevention. There is just what I call harm reduction or amortization of costs. That is all we find in the bill. It says that if x happens then we will do y. Nonetheless, the bill does not include specific measures for adequate prevention. What should we be doing every day to avoid a similar disaster and to make sure

that people will not have to pay the financial, health and environmental costs?

This week marked a very sad anniversary. Today is the 25th anniversary of the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill along the Alaskan coast. It has been 25 years and the repercussions are still being felt. Nature still has not recovered.

• (1230)

Under the circumstances, I do not understand how the government can introduce bills that contain only half-measures to oversee activities that have catastrophic consequences for our environment and our health. It is worrisome.

I wonder when we will have a real bill that promotes green energy, truly advocates and enforces the polluter pays principle, focuses on prevention and actually protects people and our environment. I think that will come sometime after 2015.

[*English*]

**Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the member's speech demonstrated that she has not really looked at the bill and that she certainly does not understand it.

The member talked about liability. The reality is that this legislation proposes \$1 billion absolute liability, which means whether companies were at fault or not they would have to pay up to \$1 billion for cleanup. However, there is also unlimited liability. It is still there, unlimited liability for companies, so if they are found to have been negligent in any fashion, any costs would have to be covered by the company, and those costs could go well above and beyond \$1 billion. The member certainly did not indicate that she understood that. Maybe the member had not got to that part of her speech, or maybe she just decided not to include that in her speech. Does she understand that is the situation?

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Marie-Claude Morin:** Mr. Speaker, I did not understand the bill. I do not understand anything. I am a nitwit.

Let us be serious. We are talking about the environment and about potential disasters. This is a matter of protecting Canadians and their health, and the accountability of nuclear energy and oil development companies. Now is not the time for playing politics, but for deciding what we really want. We want green energy, yes, but we also want to protect Canadians from possible disasters.

I think my colleague quite simply does not want to hear what we are trying to criticize.

**Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I listened to my colleague's speech carefully, and I would like to ask her a question directly related to the statement we heard in a previous question having to do with a minimum of \$1 billion. That amount is a joke when we consider the magnitude of disasters that occur worldwide.

How can the hon. member explain this approach by the Conservatives, who are trying to tell us that there is \$1 billion in protection, while the same bill gives the minister the power to lower the cap for that protection, if necessary, for vague, unknown circumstances?

*Government Orders*

•(1235)

**Ms. Marie-Claude Morin:** Mr. Speaker, that is actually a problem. In wanting to pass the buck to taxpayers, by giving discretionary authority to the minister and by imposing such a cap, the government is showing that it is unable to make companies truly accountable.

I do not understand where these figures came from. What really happened elsewhere has not been properly considered. I do not understand why the government is trying to tell us that there is \$1 billion in protection, when the minister could decide to reduce it.

I do not know why we are in this situation, when incidents are occurring. We should be passing a responsible bill that makes companies accountable.

[*English*]

**Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am delighted today to speak to Bill C-22. In my presentation I will answer some of the questions that I have asked of the members across the floor and that they have completely avoided answering; the first one being that, under this legislation, companies would have absolutely unlimited liability. If the cost of cleanup, for example, is \$10 billion and if the company is found to have been negligent in some fashion, it would be responsible not only for the \$1 billion absolute liability but also for the unlimited liability of \$10 billion. The member across the floor, and in fact the last two members, completely refused to acknowledge that, even when questioned on it. I do not mind criticism on legislation, and in fact I appreciate it, if it is fair criticism based on reality. However, that is not what has happened and I am somewhat concerned by that. So in my presentation I will answer some of those questions.

I would like to speak to the offshore aspect of this bill. It does of course cover nuclear liability as well.

I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, and I look forward to hearing her presentation.

As most hon. members know, the importance of the natural resources industry in Canada's economy cannot be overstated; it is extremely important. When we take the direct and indirect impacts into account, the natural resources sectors represent nearly 20% of Canada's GDP and employ 1.8 million Canadians. Together, the energy, mining, and forestry industries produce an average of \$32 billion a year in government revenue to fund things like education, health care, and other social programs, including seniors' pensions.

These numbers suggest one thing, that the development of our natural resources sectors is central to the goal of improving the lives of Canadians right across this country. The critical social programs that benefit Canadians—including health, education, and public pensions, as I mentioned—are all partly funded and sustained by government revenues gained from our natural resources sectors. Our willingness to invest in our natural resources sectors provides continued opportunities for Canadians to live a high quality of life.

We are discovering more opportunities to invest in natural resources, specifically in the energy sector, particularly in Atlantic Canada where there are more than 8,000 people working directly in the offshore sector. As we continue to expand the offshore industry,

we will open up even more opportunities for employment. This means more Canadians will be able to provide for their families and invest in their future.

“Future” is the key word here. In fact, at our natural resources committee just today, we are carrying out a study on the cross-country benefits of the oil and gas sector, and in our committee today we had the mayor of Saint John, as an example, expressing the importance in Saint John, New Brunswick, of the oil and gas sector. We had the head of the economic development group there, who expressed very clearly the importance in New Brunswick of the oil and gas sector. They also expressed the potential future if resources in Atlantic Canada and in Newfoundland and Labrador are developed completely. There are many real positives coming from this study, and it is exciting to hear the benefits across the country and the potential benefits into the future.

We cannot do that without also considering the future of our environment, and we all agree with that. That is why, under our plan for responsible resource development, our government intends to ensure that the expansion of offshore resources is done safely and responsibly. It is why we are introducing Bill C-22, new legislation to increase the safety and accountability of Canada's offshore regime. We can say with confidence that our offshore regime is already extremely strong. Companies operating in the offshore are strictly monitored today, even before this legislation.

•(1240)

In the two offshore areas in Atlantic Canada, both the Canada-Newfoundland and Labrador Offshore Petroleum Board and the Canada-Nova Scotia Offshore Petroleum Board ensure that no offshore development proceeds unless rigorous environmental protections are in place. It is already there.

Our government believes that industry must be accountable in the event of an accident. We have been working together with our two partners, our provincial governments in Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia, to establish an offshore regime that is not only strong but truly world class and world leading. When I speak about holding industry accountable, I am referring to the polluter pays principle, which has already been acknowledged by members in the House as being something they support. I think we all do. This principle holds industry liable for environmental damages incurred in the unlikely event of an incident offshore.

*Government Orders*

The industry is already subject to unlimited liability, which is what I was talking about, if the parties are found at fault or negligent in the case of an incident. We would not be changing that legal fact with this legislation. What we would be entrenching with Bill C-22 is the principle of increasing the amounts of absolute liability. Absolute liability ensures that operators have the resources for the cleanup costs of an accident or damages to others, regardless of fault or negligence. Right now absolute liability is set at \$30 million for the industry operating on either of the two Atlantic offshore areas. That applies to the nuclear sector as well. It is set at \$40 million elsewhere in Canada's offshore. Under Bill C-22, the minimum would be set at \$1 billion for all areas of the offshore, bringing us in line with international standards, and in most cases exceeding them. That is absolute liability. Some members who have spoken to this legislation have not differentiated or understood that there is the \$1 billion absolute liability and also unlimited liability, which would go beyond that in the case of negligence and that type of thing.

With the passing of this legislation, companies operating in the offshore would be subject to among the highest absolute liability thresholds in the world. To ensure compliance with this new standard of liability, companies wishing to operate in these areas must show proof of financial capability equivalent to their absolute liability. It is not some airy-fairy thing; rather, it is based on a careful review of the companies involved.

As part of the assessment, the regulator must be assured that the company has the financial assets to cover the \$1 billion absolute liability requirement. We would also require the operators to provide regulators with rapid and unfettered access to at least \$100 million that may be used in the rare case of an incident.

Industry would also have the option of setting up a minimum \$250 million pooled fund. Operators could choose to use membership in such a fund to serve as their financial responsibility. This would ensure that all companies have the capacity to respond quickly in the unlikely event of an incident. Bill C-22 would also provide the offshore boards, which regulate these operators, with the increased authority and infrastructure to ensure the standards are upheld.

I would like to close by saying that our offshore industry is expanding rapidly, providing Canada with more opportunities than ever before. Canada is well placed to benefit from these opportunities. However, our government is committed to doing so in a responsible and safe fashion. That is the way we are approaching the development of all natural resources. Because of that, Canada is viewed as a country that has the regulatory regime that could be a standard that other countries strive to meet.

I welcome any comments or questions from members across the floor.

• (1245)

**Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, listening to the member say that unlimited liability is a good situation in the case of negligence sort of begs this question. What is his definition of negligence? If there is a huge oil spill and an agent or employee of the company caused that problem, does that mean the company is negligent, or is negligence, in his definition, simply the case where a company does something on purpose that is wrong or goes bad?

I wonder if he could expand on what he means by negligence.

**Mr. Leon Benoit:** Mr. Speaker, this is second reading of the bill, which is a general look at the legislation, but the situation is such that the company itself is liable for the actions of the contractors. So the \$1 billion absolute liability and the unlimited liability actually do apply to contractors working for the companies, and the companies themselves are held accountable. I think that issue is covered. It was a good question.

**Mr. Scott Andrews (Avalon, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I welcome the comments by the member, especially when he talks about Newfoundland's offshore and the some 8,000 people who work on the offshore. Again, I am going to ask the question that I asked earlier.

First, I would compliment the government and the Newfoundland and Labrador Offshore Petroleum Board for implementing most of the recommendations of Justice Wells' inquiry into the Cougar flight crash. However, when are the government and the Offshore Petroleum Board going to implement all the recommendations, not just some of them, from this inquiry? Some of these recommendations are even outstanding from the Ocean Ranger disaster in the east. There are still some recommendations that need to be implemented. Recommendation 29 is one of them, which calls for an independent Offshore Petroleum Board safety regulator. These are very important recommendations coming from a very serious accident in our offshore. When is the government going to implement all of the recommendations?

**Mr. Leon Benoit:** Mr. Speaker, the member's question is a good one and a very important one. It is rare that all of the recommendations of any inquiry are accepted by government, but I believe there is only one or maybe two items from that study that the government is not including in this legislation.

However, the judge who carried out that review came before committee and indicated that in reality what we are doing with this legislation really does the job. So there are other ways of doing the job than exactly through the recommendations the judge and the review presented. He made that very clear. He said that he had made that recommendation, but that the problem was being solved and the situation was being dealt with in another fashion.

I would argue that all of the concerns of the study have been dealt with in this legislation.

**Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, my colleague started by dealing with some of the misinformation he heard in some of the speeches today. In my community of Oshawa we have many people who are employed in the nuclear sector, for example, which has been proven to be a very safe form of electricity generation.

We hear the NDP's job-killing policies and the fearmongering that goes along with issues such as pipelines and their talk today about Fukushima and the nuclear sector. Why does he think the NDP members have to rely on fearmongering in their speeches and debates?

*Government Orders*

• (1250)

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** The hon. member for Vegreville—Wainwright, a short answer please.

**Mr. Leon Benoit:** Mr. Speaker, that is a very important question that the voters should take a very serious look at in the next election. When the voters in British Columbia looked at that, they rejected the NDP, which had been way ahead in the polls, and elected a Liberal government again, even though the Liberals were very unpopular. The Liberal government in B.C. is of course the conservative government.

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

**Mr. Leon Benoit:** Mr. Speaker, it just has a different name. I just wanted to make that clear for the Liberal members across the floor who were responding.

The nuclear industry is of course safe. But still, in case there is an incident, it is really important to have the protection in place and provision for the cleanup needs in place. That is why we have the \$1 billion absolute liability and unlimited liability. So if there is \$10 billion in damage, the company is responsible for paying the \$10 billion in a situation—

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

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke.

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as the member of Parliament for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, which includes the Chalk River Laboratories of Atomic Energy of Canada, thank you on behalf of the almost 3,000 employees at that facility for the opportunity to discuss Bill C-22, the energy safety and security act. It is an important piece of legislation that would increase accountability in Canada's nuclear and offshore industries.

As my hon. colleagues are aware, Bill C-22 has both a nuclear and an offshore component. Given the importance of the nuclear industry to my riding of Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, I would like to speak to the nuclear aspect of the bill today.

Our Conservative government is strongly committed to responsible stewardship in support of a strong and sustainable nuclear industry in Canada. Nuclear energy is a key part of Canada's energy mix and one of the main reasons that our electricity supply is among the cleanest in the world. In fact, here in Ontario, more than half of the entire province's electricity is provided by safe, clean, and reliable nuclear power.

Canada's nuclear power industry is an important contributor to our national economy. It generates close to \$5 billion a year in revenues and provides employment for more than 60,000 Canadians, most of them here in Ontario.

As Canadians, we are aware that our Conservative government is focused on Canada asserting its role as a clean energy superpower. Nuclear energy is an integral part of that energy mix. We know that modern and effective nuclear liability legislation is essential to the sustainable growth of Canada's nuclear industry. It helps to protect Canadians, and it provides stability to the entire industry.

In the highly unlikely event of a nuclear accident that results in civil damage, it is crucial that Canadians be compensated equitably and quickly. In order for that to happen, the operators of nuclear facilities must know their financial obligations so they can undertake appropriate planning. With this in mind, we are demonstrating our commitment by reintroducing legislation with new improvements to strengthen Canada's nuclear liability regime.

What most hon. members might not realize is that Canada's nuclear liability regime is already nearly 40 years old. Certainly, times and standards have changed when it comes to the nuclear industry in Canada. Therefore, this legislation clearly needs to be brought up to date.

When it comes to nuclear power, it is absolutely important to note that times have changed. Unfortunately, there are environmental extremists like Gerald Butts, the principal advisor to the trust-fund-pampered Liberal Party leader. Mr. Butts is co-author of the so-called Green Energy Act in Ontario that is causing electricity bills to skyrocket out of control, and hollowing out the manufacturing sector in Ontario as business flees to places like New York State, which receives taxpayer subsidized electricity from Ontario. These people, and others like them, are living in the past.

It used to be just the NDP that had its head in the sand when it came to economical, greenhouse gas-free nuclear power. With the dangerous presence of people like Gerald Butts, the Liberal Party has become a threat to the thousands of Canadians who work in our nuclear industry. Whenever the word "nuclear" is raised, informed Canadians, like the individuals in my riding who work in the industry, understand that the world has come a long way in 40 years when it comes to nuclear research.

When it comes to nuclear waste, the CANDU nuclear system, our Canadian nuclear success story, leaves behind a lower volume of waste due to its superior design utilizing more of the nuclear fuel than our competitors do with their light water reactors. As we work to perfect this technology, the end result is to reduce the radioactivity in spent fuel from the tens of thousands of years down to just hundreds of years or fewer, all the while generating emission-free electricity.

Our nuclear industry can supply this power, all at an economical price, compared to the industrial wind turbines that are bankrupting Ontario and making a few Liberal Party insiders rich.

• (1255)

Our government has sought advice from and received input on this legislation from a broad range of stakeholders over the years. They include the governments of nuclear power-generating provinces, as well as the nuclear industry. We are confident, therefore, that this legislation is a solid reflection of what we have heard from Canadians and the industry itself, both operators and insurers.

*Government Orders*

The current operator liability limit was set in 1976. This is clearly unacceptable. Under Bill C-22, our government would increase the liability beyond the current \$75 million to an amount of \$1 billion. This amount would put Canada's liability limit among the highest internationally. In the event there is an accident resulting in civil damages exceeding \$1 billion, Bill C-22 would require the Minister of Natural Resources to table a report before Parliament estimating the cost of the damages. This report would allow the government to make any decisions about additional compensation on a case-by-case basis, and any final decision would be decided by Parliament.

Let me assure all hon. members that Bill C-22 would maintain the key strengths of the existing legislation. Most importantly, it would ensure that the liability of the operator would be absolute and exclusive. Put another way, it means that there would be no need to prove fault and no one else could be held liable. The new liability amount of \$1 billion would ensure equitable compensation for civil damages—that is, within the capacity of insurers—and would not burden taxpayers.

This legislation would include a number of other significant improvements. First, it would include a new mechanism to periodically update the operator's liability. Under the legislation, the Minister of Natural Resources would have the authority to review the limit regularly and the amount could be increased by regulation. This would ensure that our nuclear liability system remained current at all times. Second, it would contain detailed new definitions of compensatory damage, including certain forms of psychological trauma, economic loss, preventive measures, and environmental damage.

Third, it would include a longer limitation period to submit compensation claims for bodily injury from the current 10 years to 30 years. The 10-year limitation period would be maintained for other forms of damage. Finally, it would elaborate the features of the quasi-judicial claims tribunal to be established to replace the regular courts if necessary. This would significantly accelerate claims payments to Canadians.

Under this legislation, operators would be permitted to guarantee their financial liability with traditional insurance and up to 50% with other forms of financial security, such as provincial government guarantees, letters of credit, and self-insurance.

The government would provide coverage for certain risks for which there is no liability insurance. It would also provide increased coverage for lower-risk nuclear facilities, such as small research reactors at universities, through indemnity agreements with operators. All of the measures I have highlighted in Bill C-22 have the same goal in mind: protecting the environment and the health and safety of Canadians.

Our government is taking concrete steps to address important issues in the nuclear sector. This includes responsibly managing legacy waste, restructuring Atomic Energy of Canada Limited, and promoting international trade. I would like to touch upon the international efforts our government has undertaken with regard to Bill C-22.

In December 2013, our Conservative government signed the international Atomic Energy Agency's Convention on Supplemen-

tary Compensation for Nuclear Damage. By joining the convention, Canada will bolster its domestic compensation regime by up to \$450 million by bringing in significant new funding for compensation. In Canada, this would bring the total potential compensation up to \$1.45 billion, and by joining this convention, our government is advancing our commitment to a strong and secure global nuclear liability regime.

Given that the United States, our closest ally and neighbour, is already a member of the convention, our membership enables us to establish civil liability treaty relations with it. By becoming a member, Canada is playing an important role in making this convention one step closer to reality.

• (1300)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Jean Rousseau (Compton—Stanstead, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech.

Regardless of whether we say good things or bad things about the bill, something is missing. If disaster strikes, what will we do? It is all fine and dandy to accuse the companies and to plan to spend millions of taxpayers' dollars to repair the damage. However, what about our dependence on outdated energy?

Yes, this bill had to be updated. The Conservatives should just get up to speed sometimes.

What about the damage? In April, it will be 28 years since the Chernobyl disaster. The Three Mile Island disaster took place in 1979. It will be 35 years ago this Friday. What happens with the virtually never-ending collateral damage, when we know what radioactivity does?

Could my colleague tell me why this bill does not look at the environmental side?

[*English*]

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant:** Mr. Speaker, first and foremost, on our side we have prevention, in the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission, ensuring that before anything is even built all legacy issues as well as safety issues are addressed.

The member opposite cited a couple of disasters, but it is important to note that Canada's technology, CANDU, is the safest in the world. Other countries use light water reactors whereas we use a heavy water reactor. This is used as a moderator, which slows down the neutrons and is much safer. It is in a separate container, apart from the boiling water. In Fukushima, the technology resulted in disaster.

We have the separate system as well as many passive systems in place, so that if electricity were lost, we have several features that would come into play to avoid disaster.

My answer, first and foremost, is that we have prevention and superior technology.

*Government Orders*

**Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, with respect to the member's good constituents, the good people of Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, I am sure they did not appreciate the member's nasty personal vitriol aimed at different individuals throughout her remarks. This is an opportunity for her to withdraw those.

That being said, I have three points to make for her to respond to. One is that during the first pronunciation of the clean energy superpower speech by the Prime Minister, in London, England, he promised that as a condition of Canada becoming a clean energy superpower, he would price carbon at \$67 a ton by 2016. Where are we on that?

Second, the Prime Minister's former director of communications ran down the asset that the member rightly points out is an important asset for Canada, calling AECL a \$12-billion sinkhole, before selling it off at fire sale prices to SNC-Lavalin.

Third, could the member tell us how many of the 124 requests for proposals for nuclear power plants worldwide AECL is actually bidding for right now?

• (1305)

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant:** Mr. Speaker, I will probably have no more time than to focus on the first question that the member opposite asked.

My constituents are infuriated over the skyrocketing costs of electricity that are a consequence of the provincial Green Energy Act, which his brother enacted under the authorization and architecture of Mr. Gerald Butts, who is now the key advisor to the Liberal Party leader.

If we want to have any idea of how energy costs are going to increase nationwide, we only have to look at what is happening to our hydro bills in Ontario to get a taste of that.

Further, this all started with the introduction of wind turbines. One of the first companies to reap the windfall is now also the president of the Liberal Party of Canada. It is a way of funnelling good taxpayers' money into government coffers, thereby funnelling it to their individual party interests. All the while, it is forcing Ontario taxpayers and ratepayers, hydro payers, out of their homes and into debt. They have to choose between heating or eating.

**Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to speak on Bill C-22, an act respecting Canada's offshore oil and gas operations, enacting the nuclear liability and compensation act, repealing the Nuclear Liability Act and making consequential amendments to other acts.

This particular bill is a long time coming. It is the fifth attempt by governments to improve and modernize our legislation when it comes to liability in the case of nuclear accidents, and now in the case of accidents with the oil and gas sector.

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

**Ms. Peggy Nash:** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the enthusiasm of my colleagues, but I am having trouble continuing.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** Order. If members want to continue a conversation from the previous speech, they are welcome to do so in the lobby.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Parkdale—High Park.

**Ms. Peggy Nash:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This gives me the opportunity to say that I will be splitting my time with the member for Windsor West.

Mr. Speaker, this is an important piece of legislation. As I said, it is the fifth time that the government has tried to get this right over the past nearly 40 years. It is long overdue. It is a chance for us to try to at least catch up with what other countries are doing around the world with similar forms of liability.

Our concern is that Bill C-22 does not offer Canadians the protection they need. The bill talks about the principle of polluter pay. It would have many reassurances for Canadians, and I will concede that it would make a step forward in terms of protecting Canadians from liability in the event of an accident in this sector. However, the bill's major shortcoming is that it would set the amount of liability at just \$1 billion. What that would mean is that Canadians would be on the hook for any additional costs for the cleanup.

Now, \$1 billion sounds like a lot of money. However, Canadians watching this should remember that any costs in addition to the \$1 billion would come from the pockets of Canadians. All Canadians would share in the liability for any costs exceeding \$1 billion.

I want to give some examples of what other countries are doing and the costs of some cleanups that have taken place.

Germany, for example, has unlimited absolute nuclear liability and financial security of \$3.3 billion Canadian per power plant. This is not \$1 billion overall; it is \$1 billion per power plant. The United States has an absolute liability limit of \$12.6 billion U.S. Other countries are moving to unlimited absolute liability.

The amount of \$1 billion in liability for nuclear accidents would cover just a small fraction of the costs.

I want to say that our nuclear industry in Canada has been safe. We have been fortunate that we have not had accidents that other countries have experienced. There are many people who earn their livelihoods in the oil and gas industry and the nuclear industry, and this industry has had a positive safety record compared with other countries. I want to cite, for example, Japan's 2011 nuclear disaster at Fukushima. The Government of Japan estimates that the cost of the nuclear disaster at Fukushima could cost over \$250 billion. Canada is talking about a \$1 billion liability in the event, God forbid, that any disaster happened here.

We have had a good record. We plan to prevent disasters. However, that is the thing with disasters; they are often unexpected.

*Government Orders*

I would argue that the higher the liability for the industry itself, the greater the focus the industry will put on preventing accidents and maximizing the safety in our facilities. That, surely, is for the greatest good of all Canadians. If the industry believes, “Okay, it’s \$1 billion liability and we want our facilities to be safe, but anything that exceeds \$1 billion is on the hook of Canadians”, then I think that changes the thinking of those who are responsible for safety in these facilities.

● (1310)

Let us look at the oil and gas sector. We all remember the disastrous offshore BP oil spill of 2010 in the Gulf of Mexico. That spill is expected to cost as much as \$42 billion in cleanup costs, criminal penalties, and civil claims against BP. The firm is reported to have already spent \$25 billion on cleanup and compensation. In addition, it faces hundreds of new lawsuits that have been launched this spring, along with penalties under the Clean Water Act that could reach almost \$17 billion. A billion dollars sounds like an enormous amount to Canadians, but they have to realize that we are talking about huge sums with the possibility of anything going wrong in this sector.

It is not just New Democrats who are speaking out on this issue and putting Canadians first, before the needs of the industry. Others as well are saying that the government needs to really keep pace with best global practices. Let me cite some other examples.

The Canadian Environmental Law Association has requested the federal government to undertake a meaningful public consultation on how the Nuclear Liability Act should be modernized and to learn from the Fukushima disaster. Natural Resources Canada has been privately consulting Canadian nuclear operators on how to revise this legislation, but these behind-door consultations with industry alone are simply unacceptable. The NLA transfers the financial risk from reactor operations from industry to Canadians. Therefore, it makes sense that Canadians should be consulted.

Martin von Mirback of the World Wildlife Fund says:

To put it bluntly, there is no oil spill response capacity to address a sizeable well blowout or large-scale spill in Arctic waters. ... In conclusion, there is currently insufficient knowledge and inadequate technology and infrastructure to safely carry out drilling in Canadian Arctic waters. More time is required to address these gaps, but this necessity can become a virtue if at the same time we collectively invest in the research, planning, infrastructure, and dialogue that are the key characteristics of responsible stewardship.

Responsible stewardship—that is what we are asking for here. Let us take advantage of this opportunity to modernize this legislation to show responsible stewardship.

Let me end with a well-known, progressive, leftist organization, the Fraser Institute, on nuclear liability caps. I quote Joel Wood, the senior research economist. He says:

Increasing the cap only decreases the subsidy [to the nuclear industry]; it does not eliminate it. The government of Canada should proceed with legislation that removes the liability cap [of \$1 billion] entirely rather than legislation that maintains it, or increases it to be harmonious with other jurisdictions.

We have an opportunity that only comes around once every 40 years to protect Canadians, modernize our legislation, show that we are at least attempting to keep pace with the rest of the world, and protect the public good. Let us not fail to seize this opportunity.

● (1315)

**Mrs. Kelly Block (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to bring us back to the facts and then perhaps ask my colleague a question.

In the United States, the system is very different from what it is in other countries. In fact, the liability of the operator is capped at \$375 million of insurance. In the event of an accident resulting in damage exceeding the liable operator’s insurance, all U.S. operators of their 104 reactors would also contribute up to \$125 million for each reactor they operate, which would make available a compensation pool of a maximum of \$13 billion, should it be required. This type of pooling system would not be feasible in Canada, given that we have far fewer nuclear reactors, so I am thankful for the opportunity to bring us back to those facts.

My question to my colleague is this: what is the NDP’s position on clean nuclear power?

**Ms. Peggy Nash:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question, but the issue at hand here is whether we are going to protect the safety of Canadians or whether we are going to limit liability of the nuclear and oil and gas industry to just \$1 billion.

My colleague wants to cite facts. The fact is that there is an absolute liability regime of \$12.6 billion in the U.S. That is more than ten times the liability here in Canada.

Let us look at other countries if she wants to cite facts. Germany, Japan, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Austria, and Switzerland all have unlimited liability for nuclear power plants. Why did her government not consider this unlimited liability for Canada?

**Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I listened to the question from the Conservative member and the answer to it. I do not think the member can be allowed off that easily. The question was very direct. The member has not answered the question. I asked it earlier today of another colleague: what is the position of the New Democratic Party with respect to nuclear power in Canada as we go forward?

To use the member’s words, she talked about responsible stewardship, so let us talk about responsible stewardship. If the New Democratic Party formed government, what would it do with respect to the almost 60% of electricity generated in Ontario, for example, from nuclear power? What would it do with respect to the future of Atomic Energy of Canada, having seen it gutted by the Conservatives and sold off to SNC-Lavalin? Would it do anything to ensure that we would actually be competitive in the very fast-growing global market for nuclear power going forward?

**Ms. Peggy Nash:** What we would not do, Mr. Speaker, is play fast and loose with coal-fired power plants for the purpose of winning votes in certain ridings in Ontario. We would not be doing that.

I spoke in my remarks about the importance of this industry and the safety of this industry. If the nuclear power industry is a mature industry, which it is, then surely it needs to pay for itself.

*Government Orders*

For goodness' sake, it is the 21st century, so if Canadians are to subsidize energy, let us put our subsidies into clean energy. Let us put subsidies into wind, solar, and bioenergy. Let us put our resources where we can get on the cutting edge of energy efficiency and renewable energy, and not focus strictly on the past with respect to energy, which, with all due respect, is what my colleague is doing.

I appreciate that he is a great fan of nostalgia and I appreciate the glory years of his party in the past, but let us look to the future. If Canadians want a future of energy efficiency, of renewable energy, of cutting-edge technology and protection for Canadians who end up footing the bills, then clearly the choice is the New Democratic Party.

• (1320)

**Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to follow my colleague, who gave some outstanding reasons as to why we have concerns about Bill C-22, An Act respecting Canada's offshore oil and gas operations, enacting the Nuclear Liability and Compensation Act, repealing the Nuclear Liability Act and making consequential amendments to other Acts. I will be focusing on some of the nuclear aspects of this legislation, but I will include some of the offshore issues as well.

First and foremost, we have to recognize how long it has taken for this legislation to be updated. The legislation was first tabled in 1976, and it is extremely outdated. It has been a low priority for the Conservative government, and it is sad that it has taken so long to come to the chamber. That is regrettable, because some important decisions need to be made with regard to the shipping of nuclear steam generators that need treatment and with regard to deep geological repository storage of secondary nuclear waste. I will focus on these two issues shortly.

The issue that we are really concerned about is the \$1 billion liability covering Canadians. Canadians have been subsidizing nuclear energy for decades, and they are now facing the consequences of outdated legislation and not having proper safety regimes in place. Should there be an accident requiring some cleanup and damage control, there would be major subsidies. That is important to note, because taxpayers need to be aware that they are at risk.

People would not have insurance like this on their houses. This would be like having house insurance that only covers a fraction of what could be written off, despite paying a high price for the insurance. That is the equivalent of what is in this legislation. It is similar to having auto insurance that would only permit the bumper to be written off if the entire car was wrecked in an accident. We cannot stress enough the negligence in this measure, because other countries have been doing a much better job, and I will name a few of them.

They really understand nuclear energy. Part of their overall strategy is to require companies to clean up when necessary. There have been disasters and costs associated with those disasters, and I will highlight some of the costs to those countries with respect to liability.

Germany has unlimited absolute nuclear liability and financial security of \$3.3 billion per power plant. The United States has

absolute unlimited nuclear liability of \$12.6 billion. Other countries are moving toward unlimited liability.

The cost could be over \$250 billion with respect to Fukushima. This shows us that \$1 billion is not a lot, given some of our aging nuclear facilities and the requirements they have.

I would like to note two examples in particular that we have been working on in southern Ontario. One was the Bruce power plant proposal to ship nuclear steam generators across the Great Lakes, which was fortunately scrapped. In February 2011 the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission issued a statement allowing the transport of these steam generators through the Great Lakes. This would have exposed people to radiation. The problem was that the generators would go from Canada to Sweden for treatment. The generators were going to be scrapped, but it was claimed that the contaminated nuclear material could be recycled and then sent back to Ontario.

Sending these huge steam generators through the Great Lakes would have exposed Canadians to great risk, as was brought up by the Ontario New Democrats, in particular Peter Tabuns. I would like to thank Mayor Bradley from Sarnia for his advocacy and strong leadership. First nations also expressed their opposition to this idea, and the Council of Canadians had petitions signed by 96,000 people.

These radioactive steam generators also created problems on the U.S. side, as American politicians started speaking against this idea. That was important, because the commission wanted to do this without a full environmental assessment, but when it became clear that it was not going to take place in the United States, it backed off from this program.

• (1325)

I am thankful, because the Great Lakes it is one of the world's most treasured ecological systems for the environment and for our economy.

Just this past week, I and a number of members of Parliament had the opportunity to go out on ice-breaking manoeuvres on Lake St. Clair with our great men and women of the Coast Guard. I can say that shipping goes on during the winter. Those men and women do an incredible job. It is critical for our economy and our environment. As opposed to putting that at risk for steam generators and recycling and having no plan, we should be taking care of our own nuclear waste. We have had a lot of concerns. I again want to thank a number of organizations that are opposed to that.

There is another important situation that is still evolving. In Kincardine, the Bruce Power plant wants to store its secondary radiation elements down a shaft, basically, within one kilometre of Lake Huron. They want to bury it in a layer of limestone 680 metres underground near the Bruce Power station. There are a lot of concerns about that. The scientist Dr. Frank Greening, a former employee, raised the fact that the numbers for the many radioactive elements that would be shipped there have been underestimated. This is of great concern. There has been a huge public outcry with respect to storage facilities so close to our water system, placing it at risk.

*Government Orders*

I want to thank a number of organizations that have been active with respect to this. If members are interested in this issue, because a decision has to come forward at some point in time, these groups are the Inverhuron Committee, Northwatch, Save our Saugeen Shores, and Bluewater Coalition. People can sign a petition online at the Stop the Great Lakes Nuclear Dump website. I want to thank those organizations for their leadership, because they have seen that the exposure of our Great Lakes system would hurt our economy, our transportation, and our environment. There has been a lot of work done by these organizations to raise public awareness, because we still do not treat our Great Lakes properly. That is one reason we need to start investing in it. We must be cognizant that with the nuclear power plant situation, there would be costs. There should be the polluter pays principle. That is not happening. We saw that in the past with Three Mile Island and other situations in North America.

I will quote from *The Star* with respect to an incident that happened most recently. It states:

A U.S. nuclear waste site near Carlsbad, New Mexico leaked radiation in February. Proponents of the Bruce site have taken local municipal officials on tours of the Carlsbad site. Thirteen workers at Carlsbad were exposed to radiation, where an investigation continues.

That is important, because the type of work it is talking about in terms of this site operation has been described as a guinea pig, which is not the way we would expect to be dealing with our nuclear waste and the problems associated with the cost of it. We need to be responsible.

Cities like Windsor, Toronto, Kingston, London, and Hamilton have all opposed this. Also rejecting the site are Oakville, Mississauga, the town of Blue Mountain, Sarnia, Lambton County, Essex, and the town of Kingsville, just to name a few.

That is why we think the bill needs a lot of work at committee. We are willing to try. This liability issue of \$1 billion is a childish way to approach dealing with this serious problem. We would like to see that fixed. We will see what happens at committee in the future.

• (1330)

**Mr. Erin O'Toole (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, I only caught the last half of the speech by the member for Windsor West. What troubles me about his remarks is that he was praising a number of groups that opposed steam generator transport, thereby criticizing the work of the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission, which is a quasi-judicial body that uses science and expert testimony to determine whether something is safe for transport.

In the case of those steam generators, the misinformation by the Council of Canadians and other groups, which is not based on science but on fear, actually hurts the economy and hurt jobs, like those of the Power Workers' Union.

Those generators would have less chance of exposing people to radioactivity than an X-ray a Canadian might have. It is a radically low amount.

I would ask the member if his party, the NDP, puts the work of the Council of Canadians and some of these email-based groups above the work of our quasi-judicial Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission.

**Mr. Brian Masse:** Mr. Speaker, I am sorry that the parliamentary secretary is taking such a condescending tone toward those organizations, those citizens of our country, and some Americans who signed the online petition, who are concerned about this. He also takes a condescending tone toward American politicians who signed against this. That does not help our relationship with our American friends. Senators and congressmen being typecast by the member does no justice to this House and does nothing for our relationship with the United States.

Simply put, these large steam generators would be put on transportation vessels going across the Great Lakes and across the ocean to Sweden. Yes, nothing could go wrong in that situation; I am sure he is right about that. It is ridiculous to suggest that they would be the perfect solution.

**Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I want to commend the member for his remarks. I think he has raised some important questions about the storage of nuclear waste, although I do not think they are evidence-based, but I do commend him for raising them.

For a third time, I will ask an NDP member speaking to the bill to answer a very simple question. What is the position of the New Democratic Party with respect to nuclear power in Canada today? What would it do with the almost 60% of energy in Ontario that is generated through nuclear power? Does it intend to phase out those plants? If so, what would the NDP replace them with exactly?

I am trying to get an understanding of the actual position of the NDP today with respect to existing nuclear power in Canada, the use of nuclear power in Canada going forward, and the ability of Canadian nuclear expertise to conquer international markets.

**Mr. Brian Masse:** Mr. Speaker, we are not going to take the bait on this type of situation.

The reality is that we are debating a bill that has very specific measures that concern us. We are going to continue to use our time to raise the fact that Canadians would be put at risk by this bill, both financially and in terms of their well-being. We are going to continue to raise this every single time we talk, because it is a significant liability for this country. It is the most important thing, which is why we do not care what the Liberal policy is.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Jean Rousseau (Compton—Stanstead, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague from Windsor West for his excellent speech.

The Conservatives are talking about atomic and nuclear energy in Canada, while they have slashed basic research on all university campuses across Canada. How can they brag about being leaders in atomic and nuclear energy? It is very important that we discuss atomic and nuclear waste and all the adverse effects it can have on the environment. He spoke about the Great Lakes in Ontario, which are a vital natural resource for Canada and the United States.

*Government Orders*

•(1335)

[English]

**Mr. Brian Masse:** Mr. Speaker, we need to look at some of the models from other countries in rolling out the policy. Germany, in particular, and others have much more profound and robust strategies. That is what I believe we should be doing.

**Mr. Jasbir Sandhu (Surrey North, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to stand in the House on behalf of my constituents from Surrey North to speak to Bill C-22, an act respecting Canada's offshore oil and gas operations, enacting the Nuclear Liability and Compensation Act, repealing the Nuclear Liability Act and making consequential amendments to other acts.

Before I get to the main point of the bill, I want to talk about some of the things that happened in my constituency during the break week. It is important to bring the concerns of my constituents from Surrey North to Ottawa, rather than the other way around. I know that most of the Conservatives would rather take everything from Ottawa back to their constituencies.

I had an opportunity to knock on doors during the last two weeks. Some of this relates to the issues in this bill.

In one young family, which has been in Canada for the last five years, the spouse is a truck driver and the wife works in the health care industry. I want to bring to the attention of the House the lack of credentialing and recognition of the degrees they have from the country they came from. They like staying in Canada, but one of the issues they brought up was their inability to practise in the fields they are trained in.

They have a young child. The mother was a registered nurse in her home country. She has been trying to upgrade her skills here. She was very distraught that there is not enough help from the government. There are not enough pathways for her to take some schooling to upgrade and contribute in a meaningful way in a profession she worked in for 10 years. She was a supervisory nurse in emergency care at a very prestigious hospital in her country, and she is very distraught that her skills are not being translated to this country.

Her husband is a trained IT specialist with an engineering degree. He also pointed to the lack of ability to translate his credentials to Canadian standards so that he could work in an industry in which he has considerable expertise. He could contribute in a meaningful way to the Canadian economy as a new citizen. He drives a long-haul truck. It is difficult for the family.

It is important for me to bring forward those concerns. Those are the kind of issues we need to address when we are bringing in skilled workers or skilled labour from other countries. We should provide adequate training and adequate liaison into the fields they have practised in. That is woefully lacking across this country and is something the government needs to address in the House.

Another fellow I met was very unhappy with the unfair elections act. He let me and the government have it in regard to an institution that has been built over many years and is world renowned. Our ability to conduct fair and democratic elections is a role model for all countries. In fact, other countries use our model to bring in new laws to improve their democracies. He told me that the government's

introduction of the unfair elections act was doing an inadequate job of consulting with citizens in regard to what changes need to be brought in.

This brings me to Bill C-22. He talked about the inability of the government to consult Canadian citizens to bring about change.

•(1340)

In particular, he was talking about the inability of the current government to consult Canadians when it brought forward the unfair elections act. We heard it throughout the day yesterday and throughout the discussions on the unfair elections act, and clearly, the government had not consulted Canadians when it brought forward the unfair elections act.

This leads me to Bill C-22. It has been two and a half years since the NDP has been the second party, and I have not seen a bill brought forward by the government on which it has consulted the very people who are going to be impacted. On this bill also, I do not think it has consulted communities, citizens, stakeholders, and Canadians on what needs to be in this liability bill with regard to nuclear and offshore gas and oil. That clearly shows some of the flaws in this bill.

Liberals talked about certain issues in the House today, and the Conservatives have asked certain questions of the NDP. Where have they been for 25 years? There has not been a change to this bill for the last 25 years. The Conservatives have had five tries at it and it is still not law. The Conservatives are very good at throwing mud at the NDP, with help from the Liberals today. It is beyond me, because the Conservatives have had the opportunity to bring in legislation that would improve the liability issues and the safety of nuclear power plants and offshore oil drilling.

Canadians will be astounded to hear that this is the fifth time this bill is being introduced. We on this side of the House are hoping that the fifth time will be the charm. It is time we acted to strengthen liability limits for nuclear operators and offshore gas operators. This change is long overdue. It has been 25 years and it is long overdue that we address this issue to bring it into the 21st century.

In fact, Canada's liability limit for nuclear operators has not changed for 38 years, and we are falling behind the actions other countries are taking to protect their citizens. Similarly, offshore oil and gas liability limits have not changed for over 25 years. The sentiment behind this bill is a good one and I am sure we can all agree to it in principle, but on the fifth go-round, it is time to get the bill right. This is the fifth try by Parliament in the last 25 years. We owe it to Canadians to get it right after the fifth time.

*Government Orders*

These are some of the things I am going to talk about in my speech. We need to expand liability and ensure that Canada falls in line with best global practices. Again, I go back to consultation. Not only should we be consulting Canadians, the very stakeholders who will be impacted by this particular bill, but we should be looking at what is happening in the United States and in Europe. We should be learning from best practices about what works to protect our pristine waters, whether they are in British Columbia or off the east coast, how to protect Canadians, and how to protect areas around major cities where there are nuclear plants. What are the best practices? What are the other countries doing to ensure that their citizens are protected? What is the level of safety that would reassure Canadians that they can live in those situations and that the environment off our coasts will be protected?

The pristine waters off British Columbia are an important resource to our economy. They generate hundreds and thousands of jobs, whether they are fishing, coastal logging, or tourism. Those are the kinds of jobs we need to protect.

● (1345)

We need to ensure that offshore oil and gas drilling and nuclear safety are intact, so we can grow the expanding tourism and agricultural industries off our coast. When it comes to protecting our beautiful country and our citizens in the event of a major environmental disaster, we need to take strong action.

This bill is based on the polluter pays principle. In its simplest terms, this means that polluters are held accountable for their actions. I am sure this is a principle that all Canadians can get behind. It makes sense to all Canadians that a polluter should pay for the costs from polluting. Every Canadian would agree. The Conservatives often talk about it, but they do not really practise it when it comes to the oil, gas, and nuclear industries. It is a fundamental principle that we should ensure that those costs are not passed on to the next generation.

I will give members an example of how the polluter pays principle works. I know that the Conservatives would love to hear it. I will talk about my own family. I have two young children, a son and a daughter. My son often makes a mess, and his toys are often all over the place. His mom usually tells him to pick up his toys. He runs around, picks a few of them up, and takes them aside, but he leaves the rest floating around. He then dares to ask his sister to clean up the mess. Guess what my daughter says? She says no. She says it is his mess and he should clean it.

That is the basic principle. My seven-year-old understands this. I am astounded that the Conservatives do not understand the polluter pays principle. If people make a mess, they clean it up. In my example, the mess is not my daughter's fault. She gets up and tells her brother that he made the mess and he has to clean it up. It is a basic principle.

The member across is pointing to himself. I know he has his family business, too. We have heard the pizza analogies, and now I am bringing my own family into this.

A seven-year-old understands it. He is okay with cleaning up his mess once his sister tells him that, no, it is his mess and he needs to clean it up. My daughter is clearly for the polluter pays principle.

Children understand this polluter pays business, where whoever makes the mess cleans it up. The Conservative government, however, does not seem to want to address that particular issue. It is such a simple concept that whoever makes the mess cleans it up.

Let us extrapolate this example further. The liability limits proposed in this legislation are a step in the right direction, but they do not go far enough. It is just as it is with my son. He cannot get away with just cleaning a little bit of the mess. He needs to clean the entire mess. It is his responsibility. It is his mess.

Based on what is proposed right now, if a nuclear accident were to happen, the operator would be liable for \$1 billion. That seems like a lot, but it is actually not a lot. Compared to the disasters we have seen, it is very little, and I will give some examples in my speech. If we look at the disaster that happened in the Gulf of Mexico with BP, there was about \$42 billion of assessed damage. The limit of \$1 billion would be less than a couple of percentage points. It is not very much at all.

It might sound like a lot of money, but on the grand scale of nuclear accidents, we have seen enough examples to know that it would only cover a fraction of the cost. Who would be on the hook for the rest? It would be the Canadian taxpayers. They would be on the hook for the rest of the money.

On one hand, we understand the polluter pays principle. If people make a mess, they clean it up. Why would Canadian taxpayers be held accountable for pollution they did not contribute to in the first place? This is the Conservative logic of cleaning up the mess.

● (1350)

The Conservatives talk about profits. Whenever there is a profit, they privatize. Whenever there is cost or expenses, they socialize those. Guess who gets to pay those costs? It is the taxpayers.

Using the example of my house where my son gets to clean up his mess, it is time we hold people accountable who make those messes or cause a disaster. It is the polluter pay principle. We need to ensure there are adequate resources available to clean up a mess, God forbid. It has been fairly good in this country. Again, we want to ensure the principle of fairness is upheld. We want to make sure the taxpayers are not being left holding the bag at the end of the day.

It would be as if my son cleaned up a few of his toys and then expected his sister to come and finish the rest of the job. It is not the greatest way to enforce "his mess, his responsibility". If the government truly believes in the polluter pay principle, the taxpayers should not hold the risk of these energy projects.

The nuclear industry in this country has strong roots. We are not talking about a new industry or providing subsidies to a new industry entering in the economy. This is a mature industry, and mature industries should be able to factor in those costs and ensure that Canadians are not responsible for any liabilities.

*Government Orders*

The current liability limit for the nuclear operators is about \$75 million, which is so low that international courts would not even recognize it. This bill proposes to increase the absolute liability limit for nuclear operators from \$75 million to \$1 billion.

As I mentioned earlier, this is a step in the right direction but this does not go far enough to protect Canadian taxpayers. Using the example of my son, parents set rules such as, if my son makes a mess, he cleans it up, and if my daughter makes a mess, she cleans it up. As parliamentarians, I think we have a responsibility to taxpayers to set some rules to ensure that those who are liable for pollution, whether it is nuclear, oil, or gas, are held accountable.

We have a joint responsibility to protect all Canadians, all taxpayers, not just the big corporations, letting them have a free hand at liability.

Here is another example. If I had \$100 and went to a casino, and I knew that my risk was only that \$100, I would be betting as much as possible and taking as much risk as possible to gain more profit. If my liability were only \$100, I would be taking major risks.

If the liability is higher, risk-takers or any business would ensure safety in the facilities whether they are nuclear, oil, or gas. Having that additional responsibility to ensure the provision of safeguards for those industries is important, and Canadians clearly expect that.

I also want to illustrate just how arbitrary this number is in light of nuclear costs. Let us look at the costs of Japan's 2011 nuclear disaster. The estimated costs of that disaster are at about \$250 billion, and yet we have set the liability limit at \$1 billion, which would only cover a fraction of that.

Many other countries have already deemed that their citizens deserve much higher protection in the event of a nuclear accident. Germany has unlimited, absolutely clear liability, fault or no fault. We can learn from these other countries that have actually set very good examples.

• (1355)

I urge my colleagues to defeat the bill. We will gain some insight during committee and we look forward to providing some additional amendments to the bill.

**Mrs. Kelly Block (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to clarify a couple of things with my colleague across the way.

I want to know if he and his caucus colleagues agree with the words of the member for Winnipeg Centre, when he attacked our hardworking men and women in the nuclear industry by saying, "Somewhere out there Homer Simpson is running a nuclear plant", or when he attacked jobs in Ontario when he said, "We do not want to see the Darlington nuclear power plant doubled in size. We want to see it shut down", or does he and his colleagues stand by the words of his leader: "I want to be very clear. The NDP is opposed to any new nuclear infrastructure in Canada".

My question: What is the NDP's position on clean, nuclear energy?

**Mr. Jasbir Sandhu:** Mr. Speaker, it is pretty clear our policy is for clean energy. We have been talking about this for the last few

years. I do not know where this member has been or whether she has been in this House or not.

We have been advocating for clean energy to improve the energy we have available to us. We have been asking the government to invest in clean energy projects, to invest in energy that will help enhance Canadian businesses.

As far as speaking for my leader, he will be here this afternoon and this member will have plenty of opportunity to ask him that question directly.

**Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, for the fourth consecutive time, I would like to put a question to the NDP member.

New Democrats can bob and weave, they can dance and sing, they can flip-flop on the dock like a fish out of water, but there has to be an answer. What is the position of the New Democratic Party with respect to nuclear power? That is, nuclear power which is in existence today, nuclear power which might be in existence tomorrow; and what is the position of the party with respect to Canadian nuclear expertise bidding for and conquering international nuclear markets, whether for energy or for water desalination?

**Mr. Jasbir Sandhu:** Mr. Speaker, I have heard that question a number of times and I think it has already been answered.

It is very clear that New Democrats do not need to learn from the mess the Conservatives have created, and also the mess that the Liberals have created.

Let us talk about the bill. It has been 25 years. For half of those years the Liberals were in government, and for half of those years the Conservatives have been in government. They have failed to protect Canadians. That is the bottom line.

We have been asking for increases in liability in regard to nuclear power, in regard to offshore gas and oil. Clearly the government, and before that, those guys in the corner there, has failed to deliver for Canadians. It is time we take positive steps. It is time to revamp our Nuclear Liability Act to ensure that Canadians are protected in case of a disaster.

On the principle of polluter pays, I have been very vocal about having my children clean up their own mess, and it is time the government ensured the industry cleans up its own mess.

• (1400)

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** The time for government orders has expired. The hon. member for Surrey North will have six minutes for questions and comments remaining after question period when the matter returns before the House.

*Statements by Members***STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS***[English]***FORMER MINISTER OF FINANCE**

**Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Peterborough, Cons. Ind.):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to the member for Whitby—Oshawa, Canada's former minister of finance, for his selfless and determined efforts to guide our nation through the global economic crisis.

While the member for Whitby—Oshawa received international recognition for his economic leadership, perhaps what was most remarkable during his time as minister of finance was his determination to consult with national stakeholders and members of Parliament. He would later demonstrate his attentiveness by reflecting those consultations with his actions in his annual budgets.

Perhaps what stands out most was the member's personal commitment to assist low-income seniors, to reduce taxes for families and, of course, the many supports he put in place to assist persons and families of persons living with physical and mental challenges that allow them to demonstrate, and our society to celebrate, their many abilities.

The member for Whitby—Oshawa has demonstrated absolute commitment to public service.

On behalf of my constituents, I thank him for the many sacrifices he has made. I would also be remiss if I did not recognize the many sacrifices that his wife, Christine, and his sons, Galen, Quinn, and John, have made over the past two decades of the member's service to Ontarians and Canadians.

\* \* \*

**POLAND**

**Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon (Mississauga East—Cooksville, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, on March 12 this year, Poland celebrated the 15th anniversary of its accession to NATO.

By becoming a NATO member, Poland was able to strengthen its security, contribute to securing the entire Euro-Atlantic region, and assist greatly in NATO's aspiration to maintaining a region that is free and at peace.

Canada is proud to have been the first NATO ally to ratify Polish accession to the North Atlantic Alliance. Since then, Canada has become a leader among NATO countries in language and peace-keeping training, with hundreds of Polish officers and senior general staff having received training in Canada and Poland.

Our armed forces have served in joint missions together, most recently, in Afghanistan.

A transatlantic relationship is especially important now, as it provides a collective defence to any nation threatening peace, democracy, and security in the region.

Canada's help and leadership in the process leading to Poland's entry to NATO is remembered and appreciated by Poles in Poland and across the globe.

*[Translation]***CANADA POST**

**Mr. Pierre Jacob (Brome—Missisquoi, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, two weeks ago, Canada Post announced that the town of Farnham would lose most of its door-to-door delivery services. I met with Brome—Missisquoi's mail carriers and mayors to discuss the situation. I was also contacted by over 500 very concerned citizens.

Canada must not become the only G7 country that no longer offers home mail delivery. Why not look at modernizing Canada Post's services? Why not bring banking and financial services to Canada Post? This approach has proven to be successful in Europe.

I urge the government to think about this since my colleagues and I intend to continue fighting this battle as long as Canada Post refuses to reconsider its decision.

\* \* \*

*[English]***UNIVERSITY HOCKEY CHAMPIONSHIPS**

**Mr. Brad Trost (Saskatoon—Humboldt, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, last Sunday, over 6,000 hockey fans in Saskatoon enjoyed the clash between two long-time rivals at the Canadian Interuniversity Sport national hockey championship.

The University of Saskatchewan Huskies faced the University of Alberta Golden Bears in the final, after defeating the Acadia University Axemen and the Lancers from Windsor.

Even though the Huskies eliminated the Ontario and Atlantic university champs, the host team could not beat the Golden Bears, despite a responding goal by tournament MVP Derek Hulak and a shot that ricocheted off the goalpost.

Congratulations to the Golden Bears for winning their first championship since 2008.

University athletics was well presented last weekend with hard work, strong forechecking, and great saves. It was heartwarming to see that the love of the game is shared by all of these university students, their coaches, and the thousands of fans who came out for the games.

I would like to congratulate the Huskies for a great season, the University of Saskatchewan for its hospitality, and all the volunteers for giving their time to make this hockey championship possible.

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**SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY FAIR**

**Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate Debbie Cribb and her team at John Abbott College on hosting the 2014 Hydro-Québec Montreal Regional Science & Technology Fair.

*Statements by Members*

Science fairs allow students to deepen their knowledge of our physical world. In the process, some find a new passion or interesting career option. Others gain insight into the place of science and technology in business and entrepreneurship. Still others come to see the vital role of science in developing sound health and environmental policies.

By sharing their knowledge through engaging presentations, participants educate us about the science behind everyday phenomena. They empower us by demystifying chemistry, physics, and biology, and opening our minds to endless possibilities. They allow us to discover the hidden magic of the world we live in.

I can think of no more fitting location for this prestigious event than John Abbott College, whose rigorous science and technology programs teach and inspire those who will be the driving force behind our future progress and prosperity.

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● (1405)

**HEALTH**

**Mr. Dave Van Kesteren (Chatham-Kent—Essex, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Vein of Galen is a rare condition found in infants when high-pressure blood enters a brain that does not have the normal vein construction found in a newborn.

Last week, our 3-month-old grandson, James Robert, underwent his second procedure, whereby the surgeon entered the artery in the infant's leg and closed up the malformed veins in the baby's brain. This delicate procedure has been pioneered by doctors at SickKids Hospital and Toronto Western where, under the watchful eye of Dr. Timo Krings and some of the best surgeons in the world, this remarkable surgery is performed.

I want to thank all the nursing staff, as well as Dr. Peter Dirks and Dr. Karel Terbrugge who quarterbacked and so skilfully made this operation another amazing success story to young James' recovery.

Faye and I, his parents Dave and Katie, as well as all other parents blessed by this team, are eternally grateful to the remarkable and dedicated staff at Toronto's SickKids Hospital.

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]

**YOUTH EMPLOYMENT STRATEGY**

**Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain (Manicouagan, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to impress upon the House the necessity of reviving Service Canada's skills link program, which is part of the youth employment strategy.

In my riding, an organization called Action-Emploi Sept-Îles submitted a project designed to support young school drop-outs through a social and occupational integration program and by helping them get back to school. In addition to training workshops that are designed to address the pressing needs of local organizations—such as workshops on cooking for seniors' residences and community organizations—the measures proposed by Action-Emploi Sept-Îles cover other topics such as informed budget management, computer skills and job search strategies.

The promised funding is slow in coming. Repeated requests for an explanation from the department have led nowhere. Public servants indicate that there is a Canada-wide freeze, with delays of several months. All of the projects have been on hold since November 2013, and the funding is not accessible. We are calling for the Minister of Employment and Social Development to get directly involved so that the money is awarded in accordance with the agreements signed with the organizations and program participants and without further delay.

\* \* \*

[*English*]

**FIREARMS RECLASSIFICATION**

**Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, gun owners across Canada are outraged by the RCMP's arbitrary reclassification of Swiss Arms and CZ 858 rifles last month. This was a decision made by non-elected bureaucrats that does nothing to increase public safety.

Our government's recent announcement of an amnesty to protect from prosecution the owners of these now-prohibited firearms is a good first step. It gives our Minister of Public Safety the time he needs to come up with a permanent, reasoned solution to a longstanding problem.

Now is the time to establish an independent firearms expert technical committee composed of real firearms experts, including those from the civilian gun industry. Then, and only then, will the issue of firearms classifications be addressed in a fair and balanced manner.

All those gun owners who have been affected by reclassification issues past and present can rest assured that I am working with the Minister of Public Safety to make this committee of firearms experts a reality, so stay tuned.

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**SCOUTS CANADA**

**Mr. Chungsen Leung (Willowdale, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me to stand today to welcome Scouts Canada and l'Association des scouts du Canada who are in Ottawa today for their day on Parliament Hill.

Scouts is one of Canada's leading youth organizations for youth aged 5 to 26, offering programs for boys and girls in towns and cities across Canada. Scouts Canada has experienced successive years of significant growth. Today, Scouts Canada is a highly diverse, co-educational organization with over 100,000 members nationwide, representing many faiths and cultures. In addition to our two official languages, Scouts also offers programming in over 19 languages, reflecting Canada's multicultural landscape.

Scouts Canada is making itself known as the premier youth-serving organization in Canada. Scouting is both a program and a lifestyle. It has a positive impact on the lives of children and youth, focusing on the integrated physical, intellectual, emotional, social, and spiritual development of the individual. With leadership training starting at age 14, Scouts Canada is developing Canada's leaders of tomorrow.

*Statements by Members*

I was a Scout for eight years, involved in Scouting programs in Taiwan, Japan, Canada, and the United States. Scouting certainly has enriched my life.

I ask all parliamentarians to rise today to recognize Scouts Canada and l'Association des Scouts du Canada's service to our nation. I wish to remind members to join us at the reception today at 5:30 p. m. in room 160-S.

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●(1410)

**CANADA POST**

**Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, neither rain, nor snow, nor sleet, nor heat can stop our postal carriers. Sadly though, the Conservative government is worse than our worst weather. It is stopping Canada Post from doing its job.

Hundreds of Nickel Belt residents are telling me they want Canada Post to improve, not have their services cut. People are feeling the cuts both in Nickel Belt and in northern rural areas. There are fewer hours and days open for post offices, fewer postal jobs, and an end to home delivery. Change would be fine if it embraced innovation, diversification, and postal banking.

The issue is not just a trip or a walk to get the mail. It is dealing with winter, ice, and the location of these boxes. Let us have a strong, renewed Canada Post, not the government's death by a thousand cuts. How can we trust a government that cannot even deliver the mail?

\* \* \*

**TAXATION**

**Mrs. Kelly Block (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to talk about an issue that affects every Canadian, and that is tax evasion and aggressive tax avoidance.

Tax evasion places an unfair burden on hard-working, law-abiding Canadians. With this in mind, our government cannot stand by when hard-working Canadians are being taken advantage of by those who break the law. Since forming government, we have introduced over 75 measures to improve the integrity of the tax system and increase the powers available to the CRA.

The opposition has opposed us every step of the way. What is more, the opposition proposes nothing but half-hearted, ill-conceived ideas that have long ago been dismissed as pointless by experts around the world.

Our government recognizes that it is irresponsible to play politics with such a serious issue. Why will the opposition not do the right thing for taxpayers and join us in ensuring tax fairness for all Canadians?

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**NORTHERN GATEWAY PIPELINE**

**Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, on Saturday, over 500 people crammed into an auditorium in Victoria to say no to the Enbridge northern gateway pipeline project. They stood united with the vast majority of British Columbians.

They oppose this project because, unlike the Conservative government, they understand that the effects of a pipeline or tanker spill would be disastrous. The environmental and economic risks are simply too high. Over 45,000 tourism and fisheries jobs could be lost, habitat would be decimated, and communities would be devastated.

The experts, as well as Enbridge's own abysmal track record, confirm that oil spills are inevitable.

Nearly 10,000 Canadians told a joint review panel that they oppose it. Over 130 first nations oppose it. Towns and cities across B.C. oppose it. British Columbians have said no. It is time for the Conservatives to listen.

We stand united with British Columbians to stop the Enbridge northern gateway pipeline proposal. Together, we will take back our coast.

\* \* \*

**VETERANS AFFAIRS**

**Mr. Parm Gill (Brampton—Springdale, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to recognize the leader of the Liberal Party for his untimely response. It has only taken him 134 days to stand up for veterans and fire his disgraced veterans spokesman.

The Liberal Party spokesman went on to disrespect veterans on national television on Remembrance Day, and said that letting veterans manage their own finances is like "...hanging a case of beer in front of a drunk... they go and spend it, either on...buying a fast car or spending it on booze or addiction".

I welcome the member for Guelph to his new post and hope that he will treat Canada's veterans with the respect and dignity that veterans have earned.

\* \* \*

●(1415)

**GREEK INDEPENDENCE DAY**

**Hon. Jim Karygiannis (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, this year Hellenes around the world celebrate the 193rd anniversary of the independence of Greece. Canadians of Greek descent mark this milestone by sharing their history and values with their fellow Canadians.

On this day in 1821, Bishop Germanos of Patras raised the Greek flag at the Monastery of Agia Lavra, in the Peloponnese, signalling the start of the revolution against the Turks.

Greeks of the Morea, and throughout the Ottoman Empire, fought under the motto “freedom or death” during the Greek War of Independence, also known as the Greek Revolution. After a long and bloody struggle, independence from the Ottoman Empire was finally granted by the Treaty of Constantinople, in July 1832.

The anniversary of Greek Independence Day is a national holiday in Greece and falls on the same day of the Annunciation of the Virgin Mary, a day of religious significance in the Greek Orthodox calendar.

As we pay homage to those who have paid the ultimate price in this struggle, let us also remember and honour the valiant contributions of men and women everywhere who fight for freedom, justice, equality, and peace.

*Zito Ellas. Long live Greece.*

\* \* \*

#### COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT FUNDING

**Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, last week the Minister of State for the Federal Economic Development Agency of Ontario announced an \$8 million non-repayable contribution to the Western Ontario Community Futures Development Corporation Association. This will allow it to continue to deliver the Southern Ontario Fund for Investment in Innovation in southwestern Ontario.

The minister also announced a \$12 million non-repayable contribution to the Eastern Ontario Community Futures Development Corporations, to allow it to continue to deliver the Southern Ontario Fund for Investment in Innovation in southeastern Ontario.

The top-ups to each of these funds will help address the high demand for loans in both regions, with a focus on the information, communications, technology, and food processing sectors.

Unlike the opposition, our government is focused on jobs, growth, and economic prosperity. We will continue to set the right macroeconomic conditions for businesses to succeed and will continue to strategically invest in all parts of Ontario.

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]

#### SUPREME COURT OF CANADA

**Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the Marc Nadon saga is a powerful illustration of how this tired government messes up even its most important jobs.

There were plenty of people in Quebec who were qualified and eligible to join the Supreme Court, but the Conservatives decided not to follow the rules. When people expressed concerns, the Conservatives sneakily tried to change the law in their omnibus budget bill.

The Supreme Court put the Conservatives in their place, and with good reason. This is a first in Canadian history, a first they should not be proud of at all.

Unfortunately, even though the Prime Minister reluctantly said he would comply with the spirit of the law, yesterday the Minister of

#### Oral Questions

Justice refused to confirm that he would not try to play the same trick again and reappoint Marc Nadon. Add to that the fact that Vic Toews' chums made him a judge even though he broke the law, and we have good reason to worry about the legal system. It would come as no surprise if they introduced a bill on the integrity of the Supreme Court.

The Supreme Court is a formidable bastion of our democracy, an institution that must remain above Conservative politicking. The NDP will do its utmost to protect the integrity of that institution on behalf of all Canadians.

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[*English*]

#### LAW ENFORCEMENT

**Mr. John Carmichael (Don Valley West, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our Conservative government supports the great work that our law enforcement officers do each and every day to keep their fellow Canadians safe.

Recently, thanks to a tip from the Toronto Police and the United States Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, Canada Border Services Agency officers were able to intercept smugglers who were attempting to bring several handguns and grenades into Canada.

After they were detained and their home was searched, nearly two dozen other illegal firearms were located. An investigation by Toronto Police has linked one of the guns illegally imported by these smugglers to an attempted murder.

Thanks to the great work of our law enforcement officers, Canadians will be kept safe. Our Conservative government is proud to stand up for these officers who keep us safe each and every day.

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#### ORAL QUESTIONS

[*Translation*]

#### ETHICS

**Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, today on *iPolitics*, we learned that over the past eight years, the Prime Minister's plane has been used as nothing less than a taxi for Conservative Party fundraisers.

Mark Kihn raised \$3.6 million for the Prime Minister's leadership campaigns and millions more for the Conservative party.

What was Mark Kihn doing on the government plane and why did taxpayers foot the bill?

*Oral Questions*

• (1420)

**Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the RCMP is in charge of ensuring the Prime Minister's safety and recommends that he not take commercial flights.

However, the Conservative Party pays the equivalent of a commercial plane ticket when the Prime Minister travels for Conservative Party events. Finally, we have reduced the use of the Challenger by nearly 75% since the Liberals were in power.

[*English*]

**Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, that is my favourite answer from the Conservatives: "We are not quite as crooked as the Liberals used to be". That is quite a measure of government probity.

The Prime Minister has stuck taxpayers with a bill for nearly \$120,000 in flights on the government's jet by that party's bagmen. Why is the Prime Minister's plane being used as a perk to reward Conservative Party bagmen?

**Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as I just said, the RCMP is in charge of the Prime Minister's security. The RCMP recommends that the Prime Minister not fly commercial.

Obviously, when the Prime Minister travels on Conservative Party business, those costs are reimbursed to the taxpayer. That is a policy that the present Prime Minister brought into place.

I am proud of the fact that this government has reduced the use of Challengers by some 75% in comparison to the previous Liberal government.

At the same time, the Leader of the Opposition might want to explain why he is charging taxpayers for offices across this country where he has no members of Parliament.

**Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the chief Conservative whip confirmed yesterday that the NDP has followed all the rules. What we are talking about is the Prime Minister not following the rules.

Conservative fundraisers are rewarded with expensive flights on the Prime Minister's private plane. Lincoln Bedroom anyone? Reimbursing \$260 for a private jet from Calgary to Ottawa, come on. This is exactly the sort of corruption that the Prime Minister used to rail against when it was the Liberals flying around on government jets with their buddies.

When will the Conservatives take responsibility for the latest abuse of taxpayers' money?

**Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as I just said, we have reduced the use of Challengers by 75%. The Prime Minister brought in new rules that he would pay back taxpayers for the use of the Challenger when it was not for government business. That is something new.

At the same time, the NDP is starting to use offices across this country in areas to help MPs, where that party actually has no members of Parliament. That party sent out potentially illegal mailings to the people of Brandon—Souris and to the people of

Bourassa. It accepted illegal contributions from its union buddies. On every single matter that counts, the NDP is always breaking the rules and getting caught.

**Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, Don Meredith is another defeated Conservative candidate appointed to the Senate by the Prime Minister, another one under investigation.

A new audit from KPMG has found that spending safeguards in the Senate are still "significantly deficient". The Senate still lacks proper documentation to keep track of tens of millions of dollars in spending approved in this House every year.

If the Senate cannot even keep track of its own spending, why do Liberals and Conservatives in this House keep voting to give them \$100 million a year of taxpayers' money?

**Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, last June the Senate did bring in some new measures with respect to accountability in the Senate.

In the fall, we on this side of the House were fighting tooth and nail to bring accountability measures into the Senate. It was the opposition who fought tooth and nail against those reforms.

We have brought in a number of reforms that are presently in front of the Supreme Court of Canada to reform the Senate, to make it more effective.

We expect, not only our senators, but members of Parliament and the party leaders, to ensure that the funds they use on behalf of taxpayers are used responsibly, that they follow the rules, and not just the letter of the law but the spirit of the law. I would ask the Leader of the Opposition to reflect on that before he opens up offices in areas where he has no members of Parliament.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, in fact, KPMG has discovered that senators are still using the good old system that allows them to audit themselves. The rules are inadequate and the procedures are not being followed. At the end of the day, it is still the taxpayers who pay. It is ludicrous.

When will the Conservatives stop subsidizing the Senate's abuse of taxpayers' money?

• (1425)

[*English*]

**Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Minister of State for Democratic Reform has brought forward a number of recommendations to renew the Senate and make it more accountable. As we have said, if that does not happen the Senate should be abolished.

At the same time, we have been fighting very hard to make sure that the Senate is accountable. Right now there is an investigation by the Auditor General into all of the expenses of the Senate. Any senator who is found not to have obeyed the rules should suffer the full consequences of the law.

*Oral Questions*

I would suggest to the Leader of the Opposition that he might want to reflect on that before wasting taxpayer money to open up offices in areas where he has no members of Parliament.

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**INTERNATIONAL TRADE**

**Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Liberal Party, we would like to congratulate the government on, and signal our broad support for, the recent signing of the Canada-Korea free trade agreement.

Can the government please inform the House of the timeline for tabling the full details of the agreement.

**Mr. Erin O'Toole (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the third party leader for his question.

Korea has been our seventh largest trading partner, a strong ally and friend, with 26,000 Canadians having secured the democracy that Korea has enjoyed. We look forward to bringing a deal to the House, which estimates suggest will raise our GDP by \$1.5 billion.

We are glad to hear that the Liberals are behind this agreement. We are hoping that the NDP can support jobs in Canada.

\* \* \*

**JUSTICE**

**Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, there has been a vacancy on the Supreme Court for seven months and counting due to the Prime Minister's poor judgment.

Unless filled, a reduced court will make decisions on matters as fundamental as the structure of our Parliament and Canadians' rights to end of life decisions. Given this urgency, when will the government nominate a qualified candidate?

**Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as I indicated yesterday in the House, having received extensive input from the Province of Quebec, from major players, including members of the House who took part in an all-party vetting of candidates for the Supreme Court, and having sought outside advice from former Supreme Court of Canada justices, as well as a renowned constitutional expert, Peter Hogg, we proceeded with the best intent to fill this Quebec vacancy on the Supreme Court of Canada.

We obviously intend to fill that position. We have now received a decision from the Supreme Court of Canada that we are examining, and we will proceed post-haste.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, Quebec has already started studying the important issue of dying with dignity. Having three judges who represent and understand Quebec is important when making a comprehensive decision on this matter. However, because of the Prime Minister's lack of judgment, there is a vacancy on the bench.

When will the government announce the appointment of a qualified Quebec justice?

**Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, once again, the government plans to appoint a new Supreme Court justice. We have to review the nominations in order to choose the right person.

With regard to the issue presented by the leader of the third party, it must be understood that we have already voted on this matter in the House of Commons. The government does not intend to reopen that debate.

\* \* \*

[*English*]

**FINANCE**

**Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday the finance minister announced his support for income splitting—sort of. He was less negative than his predecessor, and yet not quite as positive as the Prime Minister.

This scheme would cost nearly \$5 billion and not help upwards of 85% of Canadian families whatsoever.

Can the minister tell us if this costly Conservative scheme will be in his next budget?

**Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Finance, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am looking forward to the opportunity to introduce economic action plan 2015, but not today.

As the Prime Minister said, income splitting was a good policy for Canadian seniors, and it will be a good policy for Canadian families. Once the budget is balanced, our government is committed to greater tax relief for Canadian families.

• (1430)

**Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, now that we know the pink cards come from the PMO, I wonder if there is another colour of card in there that actually has the minister's own opinion written down on it. He is avoiding taking a clear position on a \$5 billion scheme that the Conservatives have offered—

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

**The Speaker:** Order, please. The member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley still has the floor. Members need to come to order.

The hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley.

**Mr. Nathan Cullen:** Mr. Speaker, everybody knows that it is a career limiting move to disagree with the Prime Minister. We just want to know this finance minister's opinion.

Is he in favour of income splitting? Yes or no, or is he just trying to split the difference?

**Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Finance, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, having received a pink slip himself, he will—

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

**The Speaker:** Order, please. The hon. Minister of Finance has the floor.

**Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Finance, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, he had to pay \$40,000 to ask a question. Apparently, the new House leader was being paid \$40,000 not to ask me a question.

*Oral Questions*

[Translation]

Once again, the Prime Minister said that income splitting was a good policy for Canadian seniors and that it would be a good policy for Canadian families.

\* \* \*

[English]

**THE ECONOMY**

**Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the cost of changing positions is \$40,000. The cost of asking the finance minister questions is priceless.

I have got a report from the notoriously left-wing think tank, the Canadian Chamber of Commerce. “Canada's Labour Market Sputtered in 2013”, it says. The third bullet point down says, “95% of the net jobs created were in part-time positions”.

Is this the kind of economy Conservatives are so proud of? Is this what they expect Canadian families to live on?

**Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Finance, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, 85% of the positions created were full-time. That is the fact.

Our government is focused on what matters most to Canadians: jobs and economic growth. Over 1 million net new jobs have been created since July 2009. Over 85% of them are full-time. Over 80% are in the private sector. That is the best job creation in the G7 by far.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**FINANCE**

**Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, we will start with a simple question for the new Minister of Finance. Can he tell us how much money from budget 2013 was not used and which departments did not use it?

**Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Finance, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as I said, the budget will be set out next year. Now is not the time to be discussing the details. As I also already said, the economic progress made by our government has been the best in the G7.

**Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, my question was about funds allocated from budget 2013. Millions of dollars were not spent in 2013. When the minister makes promises for 2014, it should come as no surprise that no one trusts him.

Let us move on to another financial issue. On the Conservatives' watch, Canadian household debt has surpassed American household debt. The previous finance minister did nothing to address this. What is the new Minister of Finance's plan?

**Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Finance, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Canadians understand the importance of living within their means, and they expect the government to do the same thing. That is why we reduced the debt by \$38 billion before the recession, bringing it to its lowest level in 25 years. This gave Canada the flexibility needed to respond to the worst recession since the Great—

• (1435)

**The Speaker:** The hon. member for Louis-Saint-Laurent.

**DEMOCRATIC REFORM**

**Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the Minister of State for Democratic Reform is trying to prevent Elections Canada from informing and educating young people and the general public. However, this morning, former chief electoral officer Jean-Pierre Kingsley pointed out that the changes in the Conservatives' electoral “deform” to part 18 of the Elections Act should be completely removed from Bill C-23. His remarks echo those made by the current Chief Electoral Officer, Marc Mayrand.

Does the minister promise to take the advice of experts and delete the proposed changes to part 18 from Bill C-23?

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the former chief electoral officer has previously made very positive comments about the fair elections act. Today, he repeated a number of those comments.

In terms of Elections Canada's advertising, two things motivate voters: first, information and, second, inspiration. The information about where, when and how to vote should come from Elections Canada. However, the inspiration should come from the candidates and political parties. That is how we will proceed with the fair elections act.

**Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I think Canadians trust what Mr. Kingsley and Mr. Mayrand are saying much more than any comments the Minister of State for Democratic Reform might make.

In his opening remarks, Mr. Kingsley also indicated that vouching is fundamental to our democracy. He urged us not to get rid of it. With vouching, 120,000 people were apparently able to vote in 2011.

Will the Minister of State for Democratic Reform follow the recommendations of the former chief electoral officer and leave the vouching system alone?

[English]

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, there are obvious risks of fraud associated with allowing people to vote without presenting any form of physical identification. The safeguards in place to protect against those risks were violated 50,735 times in the last election, and these were not small violations.

According to the leader of the NDP, “If we can't even guarantee that the people who are voting are entitled to vote, and that can throw off the results of the elections, all is being lost”. Those were the words of the leader of the NDP when this compliance review came forward. He could not have been more right.

*Oral Questions*

**Mr. Craig Scott (Toronto—Danforth, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, as Jean-Pierre Kingsley testified today, the unfair elections act only requires data about potential voter fraud to be retained for one year, one short year. This is made worse by the fact that without the power to compel testimony, witnesses can refuse to co-operate, just as we know that so many Conservatives have done during the 2011 robocall investigation.

Will the government now commit to change this part of Bill C-23?

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the fair elections act creates a new requirement that does not currently exist to retain the scripts of mass calling campaigns by political candidates during an election period. Also, it requires that any of those mass campaigns be registered not only by the campaign but also by the service provider.

The preservation of the script for one year, I think, is reasonable because it will mostly be volunteers who will be retaining that information and to expect longer periods of time might be unreasonable for a volunteer campaign worker who does not have financial resources and is not a sophisticated political consultant. Therefore, I think we have struck the right balance.

**Mr. Craig Scott (Toronto—Danforth, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, voter contact companies are supposed to retain the data, not volunteers.

On vouching, Jean-Pierre Kingsley said it was “a fundamental ingredient in our system”. As well, the minister's constant misuse, I would say, of the Neufeld report has been contradicted by none other than Harry Neufeld himself. Moreover, the minister has consistently failed to provide any examples of fraud through vouching. Therefore, the minister's bill is unravelling before his eyes.

Will he now agree to remove this unjustifiable part of the unfair elections act?

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, my characterization of the Neufeld report was very similar to the characterization offered by the leader of the NDP, who said, in commenting on the report:

It goes to a fundamental question of the defence of our democratic institutions... If we can't even guarantee that the people who are voting are entitled to vote, and that can throw off the results of the elections, all is being lost.

Those are similar to comments that I have made. Our reasoned position is that people should choose from among 39 different forms of identification to prove who they are and where they live.

\* \* \*

• (1440)

### EMPLOYMENT

**Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, before the recession, the unemployment rate for recently arrived immigrants was 12%. Today it is 16%. In the last two weeks, 80% of my meetings were with people unemployed and looking for work. These are Ph.D.s, lawyers, and one nurse who had graduated but could not afford the \$500 for the exam, all looking for work, in need of help to feed their families.

When will the government start addressing the needs of new Canadians?

**Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, through my department and CIC, this government has invested over \$50 million in efforts to accelerate and streamline the process of credential recognition for foreign trained professionals. We brought in tax deductibility for certification exams like those for immigrants who write exams for registration with licensing bodies; and I am very excited with the micro-loans program administered by my department that offers, through non-profits and with the financial institutions, loans of up to \$10,000 at preferential interest rates to help foreign trained professionals pay for their schooling, if they need upgrading.

[Translation]

**Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg (Bourassa, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the new Minister of Finance on his appointment.

The minister is aware that 7 out of 10 provinces have seen job losses in the past year. In the riding of Bourassa, the unemployment rate is especially high among young people, newcomers and cultural communities. Where there are jobs, there is dignity.

What does the minister intend to do to help these people find work?

**Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is right. The unemployment rate among newcomers and young people in Canada is unacceptable.

That is why we are making unprecedented investments to help immigrants, disabled individuals and young Canadians find work and to give them the labour market training they need.

Among other things, we have announced loans that will help newcomers pay for tuition and exams so that they can work in their professional field.

[English]

**Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, there are 265,000 fewer jobs for young Canadians than before the downturn. Students looking for summer jobs are pressured into unpaid work just to get the work experience. This hurts students and it hurts their middle class parents who are struggling to pay the bills; but instead of tracking unpaid work, the Conservatives continue to ignore the problem. They cannot manage what they do not measure.

Will the new Minister of Finance and the government finally ask Statistics Canada to start tracking unpaid work, so we can actually make the investments to solve this problem for young Canadians and their families?

*Oral Questions*

**Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is true that we do have inadequate labour market information, and we are working with Statistics Canada on ways to get more robust labour market information with more of a microeconomic perspective, working with provinces, for example, because many of their post-secondary education institutions have very good data on labour market outcomes for their graduates, which is not being captured by StatsCan.

I accept that more can and should be done, perhaps by Statistics Canada in this respect. However, we are making record investments in programs like apprenticeships and assisting young people to get paid apprenticeships. We need businesses to invest more in that area, for sure.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**HEALTH**

**Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Health would have us believe that the country is well prepared to deal with a serious crisis even though she is about to cut \$32 million from the Public Health Agency of Canada's budget.

Last month, we learned that 500 employees will be laid off as a result of these cuts. Do the Conservatives understand that these cuts will have a serious impact on people's lives?

Health is a priority for Canadians. Why is it not a priority for the Conservative government?

• (1445)

[English]

**Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Health, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, obviously health is a priority for this government because we have funded now, through the provinces and territories, the largest and highest recorded health transfer dollars in Canadian history. This record funding will reach up to \$40 billion annually by the end of the decade. Of course, that does not include the \$1 billion in annual funding going to thousands of research projects across this country.

However, the reality is that more money is not the solution to some of the health care inefficiencies in our system. We have to work together with the provinces and territories to address this issue, and that is what we are doing, tackling that policy challenge head-on.

**Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the minister's assurances ring hollow as she cuts \$32 million from the Public Health Agency and eliminates 500 employees across the country.

The Public Health Agency of Canada was set up to respond to national emergencies. Today's possible Ebola case in Saskatchewan is a reminder of the serious illnesses that Canadians can face.

Given these deep cuts, how does the government plan to deal with public health emergencies in the future?

**Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Health, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Public Health Agency of Canada is very well funded and very well equipped to manage any of the emerging public health emergencies that we have dealt with in the last number of years.

Of course, it was our government that brought the Public Health Agency of Canada into existence.

I ask the member not to, in any way, fearmonger on the issue of Ebola, because we did confirm this morning that there is no Ebola virus in Saskatoon.

\* \* \*

**RAIL TRANSPORTATION**

**Mr. Robert Chisholm (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, passenger rail service connects our communities together, encourages tourism, and helps our local economies; but while the rest of the world is moving toward more passenger rail, the government is doing the opposite.

My colleagues and I took VIA Rail passenger service from the Maritimes to Ottawa to highlight its importance. Along the way, we met hundreds of Canadians devastated about the prospect of losing their passenger rail service.

Would the minister now agree to work with us to save passenger rail service from Montreal to Halifax?

**Mr. Jeff Watson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am sure the member did not pay for a ticket on the rail service.

Our government supports a passenger rail network that meets the needs of today's travellers while supporting the efficient use of taxpayer dollars.

I remind the member that VIA Rail is an independent crown corporation, and as such, it is responsible for its own operational decisions.

VIA Rail's primary objective is to provide a safe and efficient passenger rail service. In keeping with this objective, VIA is responsible for providing those services in as cost-effective a manner as possible.

If members opposite want to support VIA Rail, they should start voting for the appropriations that happened in our budget. They have a history of opposing passenger—

**The Speaker:** The hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst.

[Translation]

**Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, saying the same old thing over and over again is not going to save the train in New Brunswick. The people of Halifax, Moncton, Rogersville, Bathurst, Campbellton, Rimouski and Rivière-du-Loup all want to keep their train services. However, Conservative members, particularly those in the Atlantic provinces, could not care less.

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

[English]

**The Speaker:** Order, please. The hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst has the floor. There are many members making noises, and the Chair is having a very difficult time hearing the member. The members will come to order.

The hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst.

*Oral Questions*

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Do not worry about it, Mr. Speaker; they do not care about the trains.

[*Translation*]

Will the Minister of Transport meet with the mayors and the public in order to find a solution or will she let the train stop in Quebec City?

Will the Conservatives abandon the people in eastern Canada, those in Quebec and in the Atlantic provinces?

The government spent \$500 million on railway lines in Ontario. It can do the same for the Atlantic provinces and Quebec.

[*English*]

**Mr. Jeff Watson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I will point out that every dollar that has supported VIA service across this country, including in New Brunswick, has been voted for by Conservative members, including from New Brunswick, and serially voted against by that member and his team. They should be ashamed of themselves.

\* \* \*

• (1450)

#### FOREIGN AFFAIRS

**Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the crisis in Syria, which has caused perhaps the most significant humanitarian catastrophe of the 21st century, has increasingly led to the deliberate targeting of ethnic and religious minority groups.

In particular, this past weekend there were troubling reports that Armenians in the Kasab region were targeted by radical jihadists.

Can the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs please comment on this situation?

**Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the targeting of ethnic and religious groups has grown since the conflict started. This is another symptom of Syria's crisis and the many political challenges that it faces, not the cause.

Targeting individuals based on ethnicity or religion is an unacceptable violation of their fundamental human rights.

I should point out that, to meet the urgent need of Syrians and those in the region, Canada has provided \$353 million in humanitarian assistance, and we remain committed to a political solution to this crisis.

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#### NATURAL RESOURCES

**Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to welcome the Minister of Natural Resources to his new portfolio. The minister will be making decisions that significantly impact the energy sector. He will be responsible for regulations governing some of Canada's largest publicly traded companies. However, it turns out that the minister holds personal investments in an energy sector hedge fund, investments that would be impacted by the decisions he makes. Has the minister put these investments in a blind trust?

**Hon. Greg Rickford (Minister of Natural Resources and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, at the time of becoming a public office holder I disclosed all of my investments to the Ethics Commissioner. I was then and, to my knowledge, I remain in full compliance. I will continue to take any measures required by the Ethics Commissioner to remain in full compliance.

**Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the minister's predecessor listened very closely to industry lobbyists but smeared concerned Canadians as foreign-funded radicals. Conservative failures on natural resources have hurt our economy, damaged our international reputation, and will leave a massive financial and ecological debt for future generations.

Will the new minister back away from the slurs of his predecessor and commit to working with all Canadians to achieve sustainable development?

**Hon. Greg Rickford (Minister of Natural Resources and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, first of all, I want to congratulate my colleague on his appointment as the Minister of Finance.

Responsible resource development means putting in place a world-class regulatory framework, state-of-the-art technology, and infrastructure for the safe transportation of energy products. We are well on our way in these regards.

Finally, we are committed to robust consultation with first nations to ensure we strike the right balance between environmental protection and economic opportunity.

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#### FOREIGN AFFAIRS

**Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, we were happy to see the Prime Minister attending the Nuclear Security Summit this week, but the government has been sending out mixed messages on disarmament. For instance, last fall, when 120 countries signed a joint statement deploring the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons, the Conservatives were missing in action. It begs the question: What is the government's policy on nuclear weapons? Specifically, does the government support a binding international convention to reduce and eventually eliminate nuclear weapons?

**Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the member opposite knows full well that we continue to be engaged with our allies and partners across the world on these issues.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, that was a rather short answer.

### Oral Questions

In 2010, the House unanimously adopted an important motion on nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament. However, last year, the minister missed the two ministerial meetings on the non-proliferation and disarmament initiative. Given the existing issues and challenges, we must show just how committed we are.

Is the Minister of Foreign Affairs committed to attending the seventh ministerial meeting in Hiroshima next month?

[English]

**Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as I said in my previous answer, we work with our partners and allies around the world on this issue.

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### NATIONAL DEFENCE

**Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, a recent access to information request revealed that the government is forcing the Armed Forces to use its shrunken operations budget to foot the bill for military commemorations. This is funding that should be used to support ill and injured soldiers, veterans, and their families, those who still do not have the help they need. Plus, the Conservatives are keeping these costs secret after their spending on the War of 1812 ballooned to \$30 million.

Why is the government forcing the military to spend money on pictures and parades at the expense of its people?

• (1455)

**Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of National Defence, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, that is absolutely not the case. We will support our men and women in uniform as they go forward, as we should.

That being said, the war in Afghanistan has come to an end. More than 40,000 Canadian members of the Armed Forces served in Afghanistan. Yes, we will commemorate them.

I am very pleased that the Prime Minister has designated May 9 as a day of honour for all those who serve this country.

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### ETHICS

**Hon. Gerry Byrne (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I will remind the government that there are indeed rules to separate the use of taxpayer-funded resources from political party fundraising.

The government should have gotten this lesson after seeing the NDP accused of using taxpayer-funded mailings and satellite offices to subsidize its own political operations.

Now we have learned that the Prime Minister has been flying his own top fundraiser on his government plane and reimbursing only a fraction of the actual cost back to the people. He has also been increasing his own private use of the Challenger jets by over 300% since forming a majority government.

Will the government rise to the challenge and stop subsidizing the Conservative Party's fundraising efforts by using Challenger jets?

**Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker,

I was embarrassed for the Leader of the Opposition when he talked about spending the resources of Canadians responsibly and then to have a Liberal ask a question like this.

When the Liberals were in power, they used the Challenger jets as their own little personal taxi service. We have reduced that by 75% since the time when they were in government.

Unlike the Liberals, this Prime Minister has brought in a policy whereby if he does something personally or if it is based on the party, the costs are reimbursed to the taxpayers. That is a policy that this Prime Minister brought in. The RCMP is of course in charge of his security at the same time.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

### CANADA REVENUE AGENCY

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, does that mean that they are using the airplanes as personal taxis 25% of the time?

This is shameful. Approximately 3,000 individuals had their personal information compromised by the Canada Revenue Agency in 2013. That is more than all of the other agencies and departments combined. These are serious personal and financial information breaches. What is more, there are over 100 cases where the information was lost or stolen. However, less than 1% of those breaches were reported to the Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada.

The commissioner issued recommendations today. When will the Conservatives implement them? I am not asking if they will implement them, but when.

[English]

**Hon. Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay (Minister of National Revenue, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our government understands that Canadians expect their personal information to be protected when dealing with government departments and agencies.

We have taken a number of concrete measures to strengthen privacy management through a CRA directorate responsible for CRA policy and assessment procedures, a proactive training program to ensure that CRA employees are fully informed of their duties to protect the privacy of Canadian taxpayers and provide security, and privacy-related processes. We are listening to recommendations.

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### ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the breaches at CRA are only part of a larger troubling pattern of indifference on the part of the government.

There are now reports that medical records and case summaries of survivors abused in the residential school system were stolen and that the person who stole this information has threatened to go public with it. If Indian Affairs knew of this threat, why was the Privacy Commissioner kept in the dark? Have these people not suffered enough?

I would like to ask the minister this question: when was the Privacy Commissioner informed of this breach? What steps have been taken to inform each and every one of those survivors that their personal histories have been stolen under the government's watch?

**Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Indian Residential Schools Adjudication Secretariat, the administrative body that manages the IAP, is an independent, quasi-judicial organization for which this department is not responsible.

Any inquiries as to the breach of privacy should be directed to the chair of that secretariat. In the meantime, in answer to the member's question, we advised the Privacy Commissioner yesterday when we were made aware of the allegation.

\* \* \*

• (1500)

#### ETHICS

**Mr. Blake Richards (Wild Rose, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the NDP has been caught abusing MP mailing privileges during by-elections and using its House of Commons budget to run offices for partisan activities. Not only is this disrespectful of taxpayers, it is also a direct violation of the rules.

Can the Minister of State for Democratic Reform—

**The Speaker:** Order. So far everything I have heard is about actions of another party. As I said yesterday, members who want to ask questions about government business need to make that link very quickly.

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#### FISHERIES AND OCEANS

**Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we expect the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans to cut the northern shrimp quota off Newfoundland and Labrador. Rumours suggest that in area 6 alone, it will be cut by up to 20,000 tons. That is a 50% cut in the inshore fishery. However, the offshore sector will not suffer nearly as much.

Harvesters, boat owners, their crew members, plant workers, and entire communities could be devastated. Will the minister seriously consider looking at a fair and stable arrangement, a sharing arrangement? Will she strongly consider applying the principle of adjacency? The minister needs to act now.

**Hon. Gail Shea (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we realize the importance of the northern shrimp fishery in terms of the economic opportunity and employment that it provides to the harvesting and the processing sectors.

We do need to consider the long-term impacts of the changes that may be taking place in the ecosystem and their effects on shrimp, crab, groundfish, and other stock. Any quota changes for 2014 will

#### Oral Questions

be based on sound science advice and will take into account recommendations of stakeholders.

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#### VETERANS AFFAIRS

**Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, May 9 will be a very good day for veterans and those heroes from Afghanistan and a day of honour, but it will ring a bit hollow when government lawyers are arguing in a court of law that the government has no social or moral obligation to care for those who served in harm's way.

The Minister of Veterans Affairs said the other day that he believed that there is a social contract with the government on behalf of the people of Canada and those who serve in our military. My question to him is if he believes that, why are government lawyers arguing in a court of law that the government has no moral or social obligation to care for the heroes of our country?

**Hon. Julian Fantino (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, under the leadership of this Prime Minister, our government's commitment to veterans is spelled out in the legislation we passed in the House. Our commitment to veterans is spelled out in the veterans bill of rights, increased financial benefits for those who are seriously injured, and the creation of the Office of the Veterans Ombudsman.

I can understand why the NDP does not want to recognize this. Its parliamentary record is one of only voting against veterans' benefits and services.

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#### PUBLIC SAFETY

**Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I was shocked to learn about an editorial from Carleton University professor Darryl Davies that disrespects our front-line police officers who died keeping fellow Canadians safe. In fact, he even goes so far as to defend an individual who protested the funeral of Toronto police sergeant Ryan Russell.

While disrespect for law enforcement is a fundamental tenet of leftist ideology, Davies hit a new low by attacking those who died in the line of duty. Could the Minister of Public Safety please tell the House what our Conservative government is doing to give law enforcement the tools it needs to protect Canadians?

**Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, like the member for Medicine Hat, I am appalled to see these types of comments from someone who educates young people.

*Privilege*

Front-line police officers selflessly put themselves in harm's way to protect fellow Canadians and deserve our unending gratitude. Attacking a tribute to a heroic policeman such as 35-year-old Sergeant Ryan Russell, who was hit hard by a snowplow and killed while trying to protect people from a dangerous individual, is shockingly disrespectful and despicable.

[Translation]

I can assure the House that the government will continue to support its law enforcement agencies and will pay its respects to those who make Canada one of the safest places in the world.

\* \* \*

[English]

**FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

**Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, award-winning Canadian journalists have been imprisoned in Egypt for three months, and now Mohamed Fahmy's trial is again delayed, meaning more weeks in an Egyptian jail for this Canadian.

I am sure that the minister would agree with the NDP that targeting journalists simply for expressing their views is unacceptable, so what is she doing to press her Egyptian counterparts to ensure Mr. Fahmy's freedom and bring him home? Will the minister urge Egyptian authorities to respect press freedom and end this crackdown on journalists?

• (1505)

**Hon. Lynne Yelich (Minister of State (Foreign Affairs and Consular), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Foreign Affairs has been very clear. Canada stands with the Egyptian government and people in their efforts to build a stable, inclusive, prosperous, and democratic Egypt based on respect for human rights, tolerance, fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law.

Canada continues to call on the Egyptian government to promote the rights of journalists and to protect those rights in keeping with Egypt's new constitution and with the aspirations of Egypt's people to build a fully democratic Egypt.

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**DEMOCRATIC REFORM**

**Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, GP):** Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives' fair elections act is anything but fair. Bill C-23 would turn voters away from the polls. Too few voters is our problem, not too many.

Bill C-23 would do nothing to fix our undemocratic system. It would grant 100% of the power to a party with less than 40% of the vote.

Will the minister fix the real electoral problem and make our electoral system more proportional?

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, some people say that they should not need to use photo ID when they vote, and they are right. They should not, they do not, and they would not under the fair elections act. In fact, there are 39 different pieces of acceptable identification. They do not even need government-issued ID to vote in Canada.

Most people think it is pretty reasonable that when they show up to cast a ballot, they are able to identify who they are and where they live. That is the best way to ensure the integrity of our voting system, and it is all the fair elections act would require.

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[Translation]

**PRESENCE IN GALLERY**

**The Speaker:** I wish to draw the attention of the House to the presence in the gallery of a parliamentary delegation from the Republic of Burundi, led by His Excellency Laurent Kavakure, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation.

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

[English]

**The Speaker:** I would also like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of a parliamentary delegation from Israel, led by the hon. Yuli-Yoel Edelstein, Speaker of the Knesset of Israel.

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

**The Speaker:** I would also like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of the recipients of the 2014 Governor General's awards in visual and media arts: Kim Adams, Sandra Brownlee, Max Dean, Raymond Gervais, Angela Grauerholz, Jayce Salloum, Brydon Smith, and Carol Wainio.

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

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**PRIVILEGE**

ADVERTISEMENTS BY THE MEMBER FOR WESTMOUNT—VILLE-MARIE

**The Speaker:** I understand the hon. member for Westmount—Ville-Marie would like to respond to the question of privilege raised yesterday.

**Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I rise to reply to the question of privilege raised by the MP for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, a riding adjacent to my own riding of Westmount—Ville-Marie.

In essence, the member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine argued that I have infringed upon her privileges as an MP by placing an ad in a weekly newspaper that announced that I would be holding a meeting in a coffee house and that I was welcoming citizens from both my riding and her riding to join me for coffee. This would have been on January 25.

More specifically, the member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine argued that the ad I prepared for publication was trying to make it sound as though I was actually the MP for her riding.

I should point out a number of things that are relevant here.

First, the ad in question was placed in the NDG *Free Press* weekly newspaper. This weekly newspaper's distribution straddles both my riding of Westmount—Ville-Marie and the neighbouring riding of Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine.

Second, while my riding is called Westmount—Ville-Marie, it actually includes approximately 45% of the population of Notre-Dame-de-Grâce. When the member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine stated yesterday that she represented the vast majority of NDG, she was wrong. Approximately 30,000 of my constituents live in Notre-Dame-de-Grâce. I am perfectly entitled to notify them of an upcoming meeting by placing an ad in a newspaper inviting them to join me.

Third, the MP for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine accuses me of trying to present myself to her constituents as their MP. The ad very clearly identifies me as the member of Parliament for Westmount—Ville-Marie and nothing more. I believe it is a reasonable assumption, on my part, to say that her constituents know very well what riding they live in and that my ad did not confuse them in any way.

Finally, given that our ridings are adjacent, it is also reasonable to assume that we share some common preoccupations. One example is the plan to build a third rail line for the Montreal AMT train service, a public transportation service that crosses both my riding and a good part of the riding of Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine. I have been very active on this file and have organized meetings with citizens impacted by this major infrastructure addition to public transportation. As the MP for Westmount—Ville-Marie, I consider it acceptable to invite all those who might be potentially impacted by such a project to join me for a coffee, and I always make it very clear that I am the MP for Westmount—Ville-Marie.

This is no different from my colleague from Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine getting up in the House of Commons a little while ago for a member's statement and telling everyone that the NDG Food Depot, which we both support because it is a good cause, was in her riding, when in fact it is in my riding.

Both of us care deeply about the work done by the NDG Food Depot, which serves both our ridings, but the fact remains that she was wrong when she said that it was in her riding.

Am I upset? Are my privileges undermined? No. I made nothing of it at the time, because it was not, in my opinion, worth doing that.

My colleague from Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine and I both work with a number of organizations that serve both our ridings. Some of these organizations are based in my riding while some are based in her riding. I do not consider this a cause for partisanship, since in the end, the interests of our constituents should be our common priority.

It did not occur to me for one minute that when she was meeting with organizations based in my riding that serve her riding she might be passing herself off as the member for Westmount—Ville-Marie. That would be very petty on my part.

I do not want to say much more about my colleague's question of privilege other than to state that it is a frivolous question of privilege. It is a frivolous question that has been clearly raised because the NDP is trying to distract from its abuse of mailing privileges in the ridings of Bourassa, Toronto Centre, Brandon—Souris, and Provencher during the recent byelections, ridings where it used taxpayers' money to mail literally hundreds of thousands of NDP documents designed to identify votes and partisan fundraising in

### *Privilege*

ridings, possibly during the writ period. It is no wonder that the Board of Internal Economy has taken the unusual step of referring the matter to the Commissioner of Canada Elections.

Mr. Speaker, I urge you to rule quickly on this frivolous question of privilege and put this matter to rest.

• (1510)

**Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it is fair to say, given the final comments, which were rather frivolous, that the member for Westmount—Ville-Marie really does not have much of a defence.

[*Translation*]

What happened is very clear. He put an advertisement in local newspapers. He did not invite just the people of Notre-Dame-de-Grâce who live in his riding, he invited all residents of Notre-Dame-de-Grâce and the residents of Montreal West, whom he does not represent at all. That was not clear in the ad.

As I mentioned yesterday, in 2004, former Speaker Milliken ruled on the same matter and said that there was a clear, prima facie breach of parliamentary privilege. Mr. Speaker, as you review all the facts, I hope that you will find that the hon. member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine was perfectly correct in raising this matter in the House.

[*English*]

### RUSSIAN SANCTIONS

**Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it is a different question of privilege. Further to the brief verbal notice I gave you, Mr. Speaker, and the House yesterday, I rise at this time on a question of privilege flowing from the actions taken by the government of the Russian Federation.

In the course of its aggression against Ukraine, Russia has purported to impose personal sanctions directed against certain specific Canadian citizens, 13 in total so far. They include Mr. Paul Grod, the distinguished national president of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress; Wayne Wouters, the Clerk of the Privy Council; Jean-Francois Tremblay, deputy secretary to the cabinet; Christine Hogan, an advisor to the Prime Minister; a cabinet minister; the government House leader; two Liberal members of Parliament, the members for Mount Royal and Toronto Centre; a New Democrat MP, the member for Ottawa Centre; three government members, the members for Niagara West—Glanbrook, Selkirk—Interlake, and Etobicoke Centre; a senator, Raynell Andreychuk from Saskatchewan; and the Speaker of the House of Commons.

These sanctions are obviously intended to be insulting and intimidating. They are designed to interfere with the normal and proper behaviour of the named individuals. Typically, those who have reacted, so far, to their being included on this Russian blacklist have worn their sanction status as a badge of honour for standing up for freedom, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law for defending the independence, integrity, and sovereignty of Ukraine. I am sure that all of us in this House endorse that principled Canadian attitude and reject the notion of these Russian sanctions.

*Privilege*

It is bad enough that such sanctions are directed against a prominent Canadian citizen like Mr. Grod. It is bad enough that they are directed against several professional public servants. It is bad enough that the Russians are purporting to sanction Canadian members of Parliament to punish them, to interfere with their public and parliamentary duties, and to seek to intimidate them in their defence of freedom and rights. All that is bad enough.

However, it is worse still that a foreign power has attempted to insult and demean the Parliament of Canada as a whole by purporting to sanction the Speaker of the House of Commons. The Speaker represents the rights and privileges of all MPs, regardless of partisanship or any other distinction, and through them, the Speaker represents the basic values of our democratic way of life. The Speaker reflects the fundamental dignity of the House of Commons.

Sanctions by a foreign power against the Speaker of the House of Commons are a fundamental affront to Canada. They are, in my view, an unmistakable contempt of Parliament, and they should not go without a response.

I will not belabour the point. I believe it speaks quite eloquently for itself. I would simply refer to one short paragraph on page 82 of the second edition of O'Brien and Bose's *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*. It reads as follows:

Any disregard of or attacks on the rights, powers and immunities of the House and its Members, either by an outside person or body, or by a Member of the House, is referred to as a "breach of privilege" and is punishable by the House. There are, however, other affronts against the dignity and authority of Parliament which may not fall within one of the specifically defined privileges. Thus, the House also claims the right to punish, as a contempt, any action which, though not a breach of a specific privilege, tends to obstruct or impede the House in the performance of its functions; obstructs or impedes any Member or officer of the House in the discharge of their duties; or is an offence against the authority or dignity of the House...

I believe that a sufficient prima facie case of contempt exists in the circumstances of these Russian sanctions. If the Chair so finds, I would be prepared to present a motion, that, in summary, would first, reiterate the clear support of this House for freedom, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law in Ukraine and the independence, integrity, and sovereignty of Ukraine; second, express our united condemnation of the behaviour of the Russian Federation in relation to Ukraine and our rejection of Russian sanctions against Canadians; and, third, call upon the appropriate committee of this House to investigate the full meaning and consequences of a foreign power showing contempt against the Speaker of the House of Commons and the Parliament of Canada.

● (1515)

In the alternative, given what I think is a strong common view in the House around these points, I would be happy to see the House leaders convene to discuss an appropriate all-party motion on this matter of contempt to deal with what is an unprecedented situation, and to give some guidance as to how we can and should respond, as a Parliament, in cases of foreign contempt.

● (1520)

**Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I want to respond to the point raised by the member for Wascana.

Like you, Mr. Speaker, I am one of the 13 named individuals in the Russian sanctions. This did not come as a great surprise to me.

The Russians are well familiar with my concerns about their aggressive posture, their violations of human rights, and the threats they have posed to neighbours and to the sovereignty of neighbouring countries. They pay close attention to it.

I am not the first in my family to find myself on lists that have been prepared by the Russians. In fact, sadly, I follow a long line who have been on such lists, some of whom ultimately had their travel arrangements imposed by the Russians and ended up in gulags in Siberia where they met their end.

Obviously, I take these matters seriously. The freedom and democracy that I care so much about is a large function of that family history and that understanding of history. It is one of the reasons I got involved in politics, recognizing that freedom and democracy are so fragile and easily lost, as is now being experienced by some, and which is very much in question in terms of Russia's actions. It is the reason our government has been responding so forcefully. We feel it is necessary across the board.

The question becomes in these circumstances: what is the appropriate response for us?

Part of that response is to come from our government, and our government has been leading that very effectively. I am very proud of our Prime Minister's work in leading our G7 partners to the conclusions they have arrived at in ensuring Russia's suspension from the G8 and that other sanctions have been put in place.

While Canada perhaps would have liked to have moved faster and earlier on some of these matters, the benefit of the Prime Minister's leadership has been to ensure that we have a broader embrace and a more united front. That united front is an important part of the resolve that must be shown.

The question for us in this House becomes the appropriate type of response to have.

I think it is important that we have a response that is clear and united, and where this House really does speak with one voice. That is why we have proposed to the other parties that we meet, as we will be later today as House leaders, to discuss the potential for a motion on which this House can give unanimous consent to address a specific offence, not against Canada or Canada's foreign policy position but on the question of sanctions as they affect this House in particular, and the most appropriate way of doing so.

I would certainly like the opportunity to continue to pursue those discussions to ensure this House can speak with one voice, a clear principled voice, in favour of the democracy that we are lucky to have been enjoying here for so many years. The reason my family came to this country was to enjoy the freedom and democracy they had lost at home, and which remains at risk for many. We must ensure this is done in a fashion that is not with partisan advantage in mind, but rather one that is a clear message, a strong message, a united message, and one that can be taken seriously by all those who look at it.

I would be pleased to have the opportunity to have those discussions with the other parties, and I hope we will be able to come back to this House with an appropriate resolution.

**Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I have four points I would like to make, but ultimately, as you know, this is something that is in your hands and for you to judge.

Mr. Speaker, I want to cite a number of items from *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* to help round off the decision that you will have to make in this. It is fair to say that all of us, all parties here, all members of Parliament, share the concern about the human rights abuses that are taking place in Russia, and an unprovoked military invasion of the Crimea. It is fair to say that we all have great concerns about the response from the Russian government, which was entirely inappropriate. Rather than wanting to sit down, discuss, and resolve the issues, it seems to be notching up hostilities.

As far as the question of privilege is concerned, as you know, Mr. Speaker, it is your responsibility to act as the guardian of the rights and privileges of the members, and the House as an institution. When we look at *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition, it is quite clear, on page 111, about the obstruction and intimidation of members of Parliament. I will quote this for your records, as part of your decision process:

A Member may also be obstructed or interfered with in the performance of his or her parliamentary functions by non-physical means. In ruling on such matters, the Speaker examines the effect the incident or event had on the Member's ability to fulfill his or her parliamentary responsibilities. If, in the Speaker's view, the Member was not obstructed in the performance of his or her parliamentary duties and functions, then a *prima facie* breach of privilege cannot be found.

Speakers have consistently upheld the right of the House to the services of its members free from intimidation, obstruction, and interference. Speaker Lamoureux, one of your predecessors, Mr. Speaker, stated in a 1973 ruling that he had “no hesitation in reaffirming the principle that parliamentary privilege includes the right of a member to discharge his responsibilities as a member of the House free from threats or attempts at intimidation”.

Speaker Bosley, another predecessor, noted the following in a ruling on May 1, 1986:

If an Hon. Member is impeded or obstructed in the performance of his or her parliamentary duties through threats, intimidation, bribery attempts or other improper behaviour, such a case would fall within the limits of parliamentary privilege. Should an Hon. Member be able to say that something has happened which prevented him or her from performing functions, that he or she has been threatened, intimidated, or in any way unduly influenced, there would be a case for the Chair to consider.

Ruling on another question of privilege, again, Speaker Bosley further stated, “the threat or attempt at intimidation cannot be hypothetical, but must be real or have occurred”.

If we agree that the motivation and intention behind the sanctions of the Russian Federation were indeed to intimidate all parliamentarians, then I believe this would be something that should be considered by the Speaker, but the link then needs to be made between the sanctions and the discharge of MPs' duties

Finally, a ruling was handed down earlier this year under your auspices, Mr. Speaker, on January 28, 2014, regarding the way in which Senator Dagenais rather maliciously lashed out against the member for Terrebonne—Blainville. The Speaker did not find a *prima facie* breach of privilege had occurred because the direct link could not be established between the disrespectful and hostile letter

### *The Royal Assent*

that Senator Dagenais had sent publicly to the member for Terrebonne—Blainville on her parliamentary functions.

You will recall, Mr. Speaker, that you referenced page 109 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition, which states:

In order to find a *prima facie* breach of privilege, the Speaker must be satisfied that there is evidence to support the Member's claim that he or she has been impeded in the performance of his or her parliamentary functions and that the matter is directly related to a proceeding in Parliament. In some cases where *prima facie* privilege has not been found, the rulings have focused on whether or not the parliamentary functions of the Member were directly involved.

In conclusion, we all are concerned about the actions of the Russian Federation. We support the members of Parliament and members of the civil society who are the targets of these sanctions. We give only cautious support to the notion that this is a question of privilege because that is in your hands, Mr. Speaker. You have heard from the various sides of the House as to whether this does indeed constitute a question of privilege.

● (1525)

**The Speaker:** I thank the hon. member for Wascana for raising this point, and the hon. government House leader and the House leader of the official opposition. As the Speaker, I appreciate the sentiments expressed, in terms of the Office of the Speaker and the dignity of this chamber.

It does sound at this time that there are discussions under way for the caucuses to come together and perhaps have a discussion on how to best to handle it. At this point in time I will certainly take the question under advisement and see how the week progresses on that front, and then come back to the House if need be.

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## THE ROYAL ASSENT

● (1530)

[English]

**The Speaker:** Order, please. I have the honour to inform the House that a communication has been received as follows:

Rideau Hall  
Ottawa

March 25, 2014

Mr. Speaker,

I have the honour to inform you that Mr. Stephen Wallace, Secretary to the Governor General of Canada, in his capacity as Deputy of the Governor General signified royal assent by written declaration to the bill listed in the schedule to this letter on the 25th day of March, 2014 at 9:51 a.m.

Yours sincerely,

Patricia Jaton

Deputy Secretary to the Governor General of Canada

The schedule indicates that the bill assented to was Bill C-15, An Act to replace the Northwest Territories Act to implement certain provisions of the Northwest Territories Lands and Resources Devolution Agreement and to repeal or make amendments to the Territorial Lands Act, the Northwest Territories Waters Act, the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act, other Acts and certain orders and regulations—Chapter 2, 2014

*Government Orders***GOVERNMENT ORDERS***[English]***ENERGY SAFETY AND SECURITY ACT**

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-22, An Act respecting Canada's offshore oil and gas operations, enacting the Nuclear Liability and Compensation Act, repealing the Nuclear Liability Act and making consequential amendments to other Acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

**Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it is my privilege to stand in the House and speak at second reading in support of Bill C-22, an act respecting Canada's offshore oil and gas operations, enacting the Nuclear Liability and Compensation Act, repealing the Nuclear Liability Act and making consequential amendments to other acts. That is a very long name for this legislation. What we are really talking about is Canada's liability when it comes to the nuclear and offshore oil and gas industries.

These are the major issues covered in this bill, and the NDP is pleased to see that it is back here again, though I understand that it has been through many iterations during previous parliaments and has never quite been enacted. This is an area in which we have wanted to see action for a very long time, as the existing legislation is so outdated. Our rules and regulations around liability for the nuclear energy and offshore oil and gas industries are so outdated that they go back to the 1970s. We have learned a lot since then, or I hope we have, and we need to address this in all kinds of ways.

As I started to go through this piece of legislation and read some people's reactions to it, I began to see a common thread that I have seen since I became a parliamentarian. That common thread, once again, is the lack of meaningful consultation with those who are well informed on these issues. It is not just me saying that; it is being said by many people.

What really concerned me in this area is the tendency of my colleagues on the other side to ignore those who are really knowledgeable. Parliamentarians are pretty well informed, but we cannot be experts in everything. Therefore, we need to consult the experts who work in these areas. We have scientists who have spent lots of time and energy looking at these areas. We have researchers and governments that we could learn a lot from. But once again, having an allergy to data and science and informed input seems to be what has won the day with this piece of legislation.

Here is a direct quote from the Canadian Environmental Law Association. We are not talking about lay people getting together to come up with some issues, but lawyers at CELA who requested that the federal government "...undertake a meaningful public consultation on how [the] Nuclear Liability Act (NLA) should be modernized to acknowledge lessons from the Fukushima disaster...".

They also noted the following:

Natural Resources Canada (NRCan) has been privately consulting Canadian nuclear operators on how to revise the NLA. This behind-closed-doors consultation with industry is unacceptable. The NLA transfers the financial risk from reactor operations from industry to Canadians. Canadians thus must be consulted.

As I said previously, there is a tendency not only to ignore broad-based Canadians but also many groups, such as lawyers and other

knowledgeable people. This allergy to data, science, and informed advice does not serve Canadians well. Neither does it serve us as parliamentarians well, because we need to have that kind of an education and expertise informing the decisions we make.

• (1535)

There has been lack of consultation not just with this bill but also with the elections bill, which some members have called the "unfair elections bill" currently before Parliament. The current government, once again is not listening to the grassroots, not listening to the experts, not listening to the Chief Electoral Officer, and certainly going off to make some changes based on some ideological agenda. Instead of trying to make Elections Canada work for Canadians and improving our democracy, it is choosing to make the system less democratic, even when it has been made very clear by academics and researchers, who do not often come out jointly to issue or sign statements, that this is not good for democracy.

In a similar way, there has been lack of consultation with the legislation before us. In here, of course, we are not following what I would consider good practice. We just have to look at good practice around the globe. Germany, for example, has unlimited absolute liability, fault or no fault, and financial security of \$3.3 billion Canadian per power plant. What is in this piece of legislation? The Canadian taxpayers pick up the liability after the first billion dollars. Germany is not the only country. There are also Japan, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Austria, and Switzerland with the same. Even the United States has an absolute liability limit of \$12.6 billion U.S. The research has shown me that other countries are moving to unlimited absolute liability, whereas our government is quite willing to saddle hard-working Canadians who pay taxes. After Canadian taxpayers have put in an incredible number of hours to survive, and many of them struggling with affordability issues, the government is willing to burden them.

I will give one example. The offshore BP Gulf oil spill of 2010 is expected to cost as much as \$42 billion in cleanup costs, criminal penalties, and civil claims. So if we were to apply that same formula, though I am sure that the costs have gone up, the Canadian taxpayers would be on the hook for \$41 billion for the cleanup and only \$1 billion would come from BP Gulf. In a similar way, looking at Fukushima's nuclear disaster in 2011, the Japanese government has estimated that the cost will be over \$250 billion, and with Canada being liable over the \$1 billion cost if it had a similar accident, Canadian taxpayers' liabilities would be \$249 billion at best.

*Government Orders*

We often hear my colleagues across the way talk about the hardworking Canadians who pay taxes and how we must protect them and protect their buying power. I agree with them, but what I see in this bill is a government that is not living up to what its members preach quite vocally in other areas.

It seems that the NDP is the only party that is very serious about protecting the interests of ordinary Canadians, while the other parties take a cavalier attitude to nuclear safety and offshore oil and gas development. Whereas other countries, of which I have listed a few, have deemed that their citizens deserve much higher protection in the event of a nuclear accident, our government is willing to look the other way or just have a limited liability for the polluters.

● (1540)

It seems that if polluters must pay, then it would be really good if the legislation here in the House today were current with that principle and really encompass it as well.

Let us get back to the hardworking Canadians. Let us also talk about Canadians who are working very hard to find a job, but cannot find employment. When I was in my riding over the last two weeks, these are the kinds of things I heard from hardworking Canadians and those looking for work.

One of the key things I heard from them was the feeling of community safety. I heard directly from seniors who said, “We do not have enough policing. I do not feel safe at home any more. Why is it that all these cuts are being made to the veterans? Why is it that we are not looking after our veterans who served in World War II and other military engagements on which we have sent them out?”

Constituents came to my meetings and said, “We did not say this before, but we are telling you, we have had enough. Why is it our taxpayers money is not being used wisely?” I would say it is because the government has other priorities. Rather than moving toward or actually implementing unlimited liability, what we are doing once again is putting Canadian taxpayers on the hook.

At the same time, we have hardworking Canadians who are struggling with quick fixes because of the government across the way. Businesses are hurting because they are paying high transaction fees, constituents are hurting because of the high rates on Visa cards, and others are hurting because the cost of living has gone up and their minimum wage jobs are just not cutting it.

Over and over again I heard about the proposed new cuts that could limit access to training and helping people to re-enter the job force because they face challenges in their lives. Changes have been made to the job grant. Negotiations are happening with the provinces and some changes will take place, but really, we will really be denying access to the most vulnerable Canadians so they can re-enter the workforce and be self-sufficient. The savings on that program alone when people re-enter the workforce would be just huge.

I also heard while I was in my riding a very direct quote that somebody read to me—

● (1545)

**The Deputy Speaker:** The member is rising on a point of order.

**Mr. Corneliu Chisu:** Mr. Speaker, regarding the issue we are discussing here, Bill C-22, I think the hon. member should go back to discuss the issues regarding liability and the content of the bill.

**The Deputy Speaker:** As the hon. member knows, there is a very wide latitude. The member is addressing questions of security at a fairly broad level, which is somewhat related to the bill before the House this afternoon. It may be a bit of a stretch, but it is still within the realm of relevancy that we have applied in past rulings.

**Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims:** Mr. Speaker, I just want to reiterate that we are here today talking about a liability that Canadian taxpayers would be taking on. If they are taking on that liability, that means the funds that are available could be spent on the issues my constituents and other Canadians are raising. Therefore, I see a direct link here between the safety and security issues being raised in my riding and the government's unwillingness to take examples of countries like Japan, Germany, and the many others I have listed and moving toward unlimited liability so that Canadians are not on the hook.

As I said, I was also reminded recently that the government finds money for, or finds ways to connect money to, all kinds of things when it wants to; yet it has not lived up to its commitment to add the additional RCMP officers that I know Surrey needs on the streets right now.

Those are the kinds of issues Canadians want their tax dollars spent on. Canadians are very concerned. On the whole, they are a giving people but also have some cogent arguments. Once again, it is not as if the NDP members are the only ones saying this. Joel Wood is a senior research economist at the Fraser Institute, not a left wing think tank, as my colleagues across the way would like to say, but a right-wing think tank, funded by friends of many of my colleagues across the way, and many of them take an active part on it.

This is what he had to say on this issue of nuclear liability caps:

Increasing the cap only decreases the subsidy; it does not eliminate it. The Government of Canada should proceed with legislation that removes the liability cap entirely rather than legislation that maintains it, or increases it to be harmonious with other jurisdictions.

If members do not like listening to the academics, the scientists, I hope they will be a bit more open to listening to the Fraser Institute, which gets quoted by my colleagues many different times.

*Government Orders*

As I go back to this once again, it is not a frivolous issue before this parliamentary body; this is a bill that each and every one of us should be paying particular attention to, especially in light of the fact that the government that sits across the way, my colleagues, has decreased the environmental protection and environmental filters, the rules and regulations that have been dismantled. Not only have we done that at that end, but we have also put Canadians on the hook for huge liabilities. These are taxpayers. The government does not just mint money in a room somewhere, although we do have the Royal Canadian Mint; it is the taxpayers who pay taxes, and from those taxes we will have to pay for something like this. I do not know about other members, but I was quite shocked at the costs of cleanup. It may be a polluter pays system, but in it the polluters would pay maybe 1% and we would pick up the rest. That does not seem fair. It does not wash with me.

What a huge liability to leave to the next generation. As members know, I have been a teacher for years. I am always conscious of what kind of world we are leaving for our children, not just environmentally but also economically. In this case, as a parliamentarian sitting in this room, I am thinking about the kind of liability I am leaving for them. Do the young people in our country think it is fair that when they are working they should pick up the liability for nuclear, offshore, and gas? I think they would say it should not be like that. There is no way that taxpayers should be on the hook for subsidies for nuclear energy over other renewable power sources.

• (1550)

If the Conservatives across the way in government have so much money to spare, let me invite them to invest that money in renewable, sustainable energy that will also protect our environment. I invite them to read what Germany, Japan, Denmark, Finland, and other countries have. I ask them why we cannot have those same policies. What is preventing us from going with unlimited liability?

We have been blessed. We are one of the world's richest countries in natural resources and we have to be good stewards of those resources. However, we also have to be good stewards for the next generation of Canadians and, I would say, for the planet in ensuring that it is the polluter who pays. The taxpayers cannot keep taking that on.

I could give the Conservatives a million ways they could spend money, if they had some to spare, on issues that would affect and benefit my riding.

**Mr. Corneliu Chisu (Pickering—Scarborough East, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I listened with great attention to the presentation of my colleague opposite, especially as the Pickering nuclear power plant is in my riding.

My hon. colleague is asking for unlimited nuclear liability, but the NDP does not have a plan for how this would work. We have put forward legislation that would balance the responsibility of nuclear operators to cover any damages by taking into account the impact on ratepayers. What would the NDP's proposal cost the ratepayers of Ontario who rely on clean nuclear power for their electricity?

Nuclear power is one of the green forms of electricity. Does the NDP support the nuclear industry and the men and women who are workers?

In my riding there are 3,000 people working in the nuclear industry. It is very safe and has been producing safe electricity for more than 40 years without any problems.

**Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims:** Mr. Speaker, the NDP does support clean energy. Also, we have to listen to the experts, and we do not always have to reinvent the wheel.

Japan, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Austria, and Switzerland have implemented unlimited liability. I would say that this is the time for us to listen to those experts and find out how they have done it.

We can have a plant that has been very safe for 40 years, and we want it to be safe for the next 100 years. However, Japan thought it had a very safe plant as well. With the events of 2011, it was no longer safe and Japan has ended up spending over \$250 billion. Yes, we have to look at past records on safety, but we also have to prepare for the hazard that is there, which could implode one day.

Absolutely, we support workers, but I think the workers themselves want to know that everything has been done to ensure their and the planet's security and safety.

• (1555)

**Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the member focused mainly on the nuclear sector, but the bill also involves the offshore oil and gas sector. I would like the member's comments on what the limit should be in the Arctic.

We know that there is great concern among many Canadians on what would happen if there were an accident drilling in the Arctic or a blowout like the Deepwater Horizon blowout in the Gulf. Under ice, there is no real capacity to clean that up.

I would like the member to comment on whether she thinks the \$1 billion limit is sufficient in the Arctic or on what it should be.

**Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims:** Mr. Speaker, I do not have the time to go into the opportunities and challenges of exploration in the Arctic. Those are well known to us.

However, I would say that there are some countries that are stopping exploration in the Arctic. I will provide a direct quote from WestLB. The German bank has stopped financing offshore oil projects in the Arctic, and a spokesman has stated:

The further you get into the icy regions, the more expensive everything gets and there are risks that are almost impossible to manage.

Remediation of any spills would cost a fortune.

Its experts have looked at this and they are telling us that there are huge danger signs. I would say the \$1 billion cap seems very unreasonable.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I listened to my colleague's speech with great interest.

A Conservative member told her that there was a nuclear power plant in his riding and that it was very safe. However, one of the weak points in Bill C-22 is that the industry will not have to assume any financial liability greater than \$1 billion. We have questions about that because it is the people whom we represent in the House, Canadians from coast to coast, who will have to pay for the rest.

*Government Orders*

If the industry is so mature and safe, should it not have to assume a much greater part of the risk? A nuclear disaster can sometimes cost hundreds of billions of dollars. I shudder at that because, if we pass Bill C-22 as it stands, without going through a committee, it would be dangerous. We would be placing the risk on the shoulders of the taxpayers.

Is that not just another way of providing the nuclear industry with indirect subsidies on the backs of Canadians?

[*English*]

**Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims:** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hard-working colleague for her question. I have a great amount of respect for the way she works in her riding and her analyses of issues at this level. She has actually hit the crux of the matter. The crux of the matter here is that, as much as this bill enshrines into legislation that the polluter would pay, it would have the polluter pay only a small percentage of the real cost.

Once again, I want to assure my colleagues that I am not making up these figures from the air. Let us look at the cleanup for the BP Gulf oil spill, if there were a \$1 billion cap: \$42 billion has already been spent, and there is expected to be another \$35 billion spent. That \$1 billion seems like a pittance, does it not, even though \$1 billion is a huge amount of money? Who is going to be on the hook for the rest? We would not simply say that \$1 billion had been spent and no more cleanup would occur. That is just not an option. The reality is that, if it is polluter pays, then let us make this more realistic.

We are updating legislation that is over 40 years old. Let us not date it even before we have approved it in the House.

• (1600)

**Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her very good overview of what is going on in this country. She talked about the lack of consultation and the fact that whatever the government does, it sort of wanders ahead without talking to the people of this nation.

In addition to that, I live in Ontario; I survived the Mike Harris years, and I watched not just a lack of consultation but continual downloading. When the Harris government sold off the Bruce nuclear plant, the people who bought it got all the profits. Guess who got the liability in terms of decommissioning? It was the people of Ontario. It seems to me that it is the same story over and over again.

We have not even seen the end of the cost of Chernobyl, and the Japanese people are dealing with a horrendous liability. How on earth can \$1 billion even begin to touch it? I am absolutely appalled that the government would say that somehow the people of this nation are liable and the corporations are not.

**Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims:** Mr. Speaker, once again, \$1 billion for the company; \$250 billion for the taxpayers. That is what we are looking at, based on the money spent by Japan for the 2011 disaster.

There is a lot of downloading going on. With the job grants, once again a lot of the expenses for helping the most vulnerable will be downloaded onto the provinces.

It is time for us to be real when we are dealing with legislation. This piece of legislation should be amended and it should go back for consultation with experts.

**Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise and speak on Bill C-22, a bill respecting nuclear safety and liability in the nuclear and oil and gas sectors.

First of all, I want to congratulate the new minister on his new portfolio. I will be interested to see what he does with a number of issues; for instance, what his approach will be to the Keystone XL pipeline and other pipelines. I will be interested to see what degree of support he will show for rare earth elements and that whole sector, not to mention other files like Atomic Energy of Canada Limited, and how he will deal with the whole nuclear sector.

I hope that he is not prone to inflated rhetoric, like blaming everything on foreign radicals. I also hope that he can foster better relations with our first nations communities. I believe that his background suggests that he may be able to do that. I wish him well on that and I hope that he can. It is very important to improve those relations and to improve consultations with first nations and aboriginal groups. It is a very important part of his portfolio. In relation to so many natural resource developments, there are many first nations and aboriginal communities that need to be properly consulted, and he can be part of that process.

I am curious to see if he has any more success in getting this legislation passed than his predecessors, who made four or five attempts to update this legislation. I suspect that he will. As far as I know, the next election will not take place until October of next year, assuming that the Prime Minister allows the fixed-date election law to come to fruition and does not call an election ahead of that, or change the law or something else. We will not know though, of course, until it happens. I suspect, though, that the government will be able to pass this bill in the coming weeks or months. We have seen in the past sometimes that the government brings forward a bill and then does not move it further forward for months, sometimes even years. We will have to wait and see.

This bill would make a number of improvements regarding the offshore energy sector and the nuclear sector. It would increase liability limits to \$1 billion.

When I say liability limits, that is not the limit where a company or operator is found to have done something wrong or taken wrongful action that has caused an accident or spill, for example. In this case, it is where no such proof is there or there is no indication of wrongful action. However, we want to make sure that operators are held responsible, regardless, so that they have to live up to the highest possible standards. That is why there is this kind of legislation. It is to provide liability limits for absolute liability, regardless of whether any wrongful action is found to have been taken.

This bill also expressly includes the polluter pays principle. The principle has been around since the 1980s or earlier. It is a very important principle, and I am pleased to see it in this legislation. It is overdue.

*Government Orders*

The bill would update safety and security regimes and, as I said, the liability of at-fault operators remains unlimited. There would be no limits at all on those operators, whether in the nuclear sector or the offshore sector. That is important.

This is an important piece of legislation, given some of the disasters that we have seen recently around the globe. We heard today some mention of the devastation of the meltdown of the Fukushima nuclear plant. The estimation made by Japan's National Institute of Advanced Industrial Science and Technology suggests that it has cost at least \$31 billion. I heard a different figure from a colleague a few minutes ago. I am not sure what the source of that is, but the information I have is from Japan's National Institute of Advanced Industrial Science and Technology.

The damages in the BP Deepwater Horizon spill in the Gulf of Mexico are currently estimated at \$42 billion. These are very substantial sums and, yes, they are well in excess of \$1 billion. It is also true that in the vast majority of events of this nature involving the offshore and nuclear sectors, the cost has been well below \$1 billion.

• (1605)

We have to measure these things as we discuss and examine this bill.

[*Translation*]

The Liberal Party recognizes the need to raise the absolute liability limit for the offshore oil and gas sector and the nuclear sector. That is why we will support this bill at second reading. However, we will also look at ways to strengthen this legislation in committee.

For the nuclear sector, the liability cap will go from \$75 million to \$1 billion. This change brings Canada into line with promises it made when it signed the Convention on Supplementary Compensation for Nuclear Damage in December 2013.

In the offshore oil and gas sector, the absolute liability for companies operating in the Atlantic offshore will increase from \$30 million to \$1 billion and in the Arctic from \$40 million to \$1 billion.

Operators will have to have \$100 million specifically earmarked for spill response.

• (1610)

[*English*]

While this updated legislation is long overdue, we need to ensure that the level of liability is in line with the level of potential damage of either a nuclear incident or an offshore spill. As well, we need to take this opportunity to review our ability to respond to an offshore spill, particularly in the Arctic, as I was saying earlier in my question to my hon. friend from Newton—North Delta.

The bill has two parts. Part one amends the offshore petroleum regime to enhance incident prevention, response capacity, and liability and compensation. It primarily updates and strengthens the liability regime that is applicable to spills and debris in offshore areas.

Part two, on the other hand, amends the nuclear regime to establish greater legal certainty and to enhance liability and compensation in the event of a nuclear accident, something we

would never want to see in Canada, or anywhere else in the world for that matter.

It also provides for the establishment in certain circumstances of an administrative tribunal to hear and decide claims. It implements certain provisions of the convention on supplementary compensation for nuclear damage.

The Liberal caucus will support this bill because it is a step in the right direction, but we will seek to strengthen it at committee. We hope the government is not once again blinded to any potential improvements. So often we have seen bills passed in the House, passed with the government majority perhaps, that go to committee. In the House, there had been all kinds of noise about how we could perhaps look for ways to improve it, and of course then the government does not accept any amendments or really consider any of the arguments made for the amendments at the committee stage.

I urge the government to listen to what expert witnesses tell us at committee, for once, and act on their advice to make this an even stronger piece of legislation. That is what this process is really about. Unfortunately, too often the government simply uses its majority to ram through what is flawed legislation.

Bill C-22 is the culmination of several years of discussion started under the previous Liberal government with regard to operator liability. It addresses the recommendations to raise liability limits from the 2012 report of the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development. The bill establishes in statute that operators are liable for contractors, and it also allows government to seek compensation for environmental damages.

I think that is an important point, the first one in particular, that the operator cannot simply pass on work to a contractor and that contractor not be liable. Both are important, and so the way to establish that is by saying that the operator will be liable for mistakes the contractor makes. Often a contractor may be a much smaller company doing the work, with much less ability to cover the cost, which might be enormous, and at the very least would certainly be substantial.

While Bill C-22 is a step in the right direction, it also serves to illustrate that the Conservative government still lacks a coherent nuclear policy.

*Government Orders*

When it comes to the government's record on nuclear energy, unfortunately, in terms of comments made earlier today, the member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke seems to be quite misguided. The member talked about how important the nuclear sector is for her riding, and no one here would argue that point. However, she seems to think that the current mean-spirited Conservative government supports Canada's efforts and achievements in the nuclear field. The member seems to completely ignore the fact that the Prime Minister's chief spokesman called Atomic Energy of Canada Limited a "\$12 billion sinkhole". That certainly is not an indication of support from the Conservative government.

Thankfully, members like my colleague from Ottawa South are here to set the record straight. As my friend from Ottawa South said earlier today in his excellent and eloquent remarks on this legislation, the \$12 billion sinkhole reference, in his view and in mine, was a deliberate strategy by the Conservatives. It seems to have been part of a plan to degrade AECL, which was once a global symbol of Canadian know-how, so they could sell it at rock-bottom prices. It is shameful behaviour. In the process, the Conservatives compromised the country's future, as my colleague from Ottawa South said, with regard to nuclear power plants; with regard to the production of medical isotopes, an important part of the nuclear field; and with regard to obtaining a certain share of that marketplace.

It is important to note that we have quite a range of ways of producing electricity in this country. For instance, in my province a lot of electricity is produced by burning coal, but we are moving away from that. A lot of it is produced from natural gas from offshore Nova Scotia from the Sable project. More and more is being produced by wood, and some by solar. The solar-generated electricity in most cases is produced by individual family homes.

A few years ago, my sister, who lives in California, bought 14 quite large panels at a substantial cost to her and her husband. The panels were to be the main source of electricity in their home. I was very impressed that she did that. We do not have a lot of that in terms of a major production of power, and there are parts of this country where that would not work. Someone pointed out to me that it is no surprise that in the Northwest Territories there might not be a lot of solar power, because it would not work too well in the winter months for fairly obvious reasons.

Getting back to the nuclear sector, there is speculation about the future of the nuclear lab in Chalk River and speculation that the so-called GoCo model may be in trouble because of intellectual property issues.

I am hearing from the nuclear industry that it is concerned about what the Conservative government will do with the NRU reactor, the national research universal reactor. Industry feels that science should be there to help develop policy. That is a problem. I am not even sure my colleagues on the Conservative side hear that. I am not sure they hear industry saying that science should help develop policy, because we all know that the Conservatives prefer policy-based evidence as opposed to evidence-based policy. While the Conservatives should be supporting the need for a national research reactor to replace the NRU, which may only have about five years left in its life cycle, they are too busy selling off assets and botching the management of this important sector.

Bill C-22 also raises the question of whether liability limits are adequate, and that question should be explored, in my view. Hopefully it will be explored in some depth at the committee stage of the bill.

Some groups that have taken a preliminary look at the legislation have also noted that despite the fact it represents a positive step forward, there are several fundamental weaknesses as it is currently drafted. Ecojustice, for instance, has raised five concerns.

The first of the five concerns raised by Ecojustice is that in its view, the \$1 billion limit in absolute liability is too low to cover the cost of major spills like BP's Deepwater Horizon blowout in the Gulf of Mexico, especially if something like that were to happen in the Arctic.

The second concern is that there is a need to clarify the provisions for ministerial discretion to reduce absolute liability levels below \$1 billion. It is a good question. Why do the minister and the government feel that there is a need to have discretion to lower that limit in some cases? I suspect it may involve small gas fields, but it is an area we need to examine at committee.

● (1615)

The third concern mentioned by Ecojustice is that in some cases the bill provides relief from liability for the effects of dumping toxic spill-treating agents into marine environments. Clearly there is an interest in cleaning up spills and in using the best agents that can be found to clean up those spills, but it is worth examining whether permitting the spill of those agents is too broad a permission to give.

The fourth concern Ecojustice raises is that the bill does not require an operator to provide proof that it has the financial resources to pay the entire at-fault liability when wrongful conduct is demonstrated. While most of the bill is about absolute liability when there is no wrongful action, what it is suggesting is that in a case in which wrongful conduct is shown—because we will have cases like that from time to time—it is important for the operating company to prove in advance that it has the financial resources to pay the entire costs for that kind of a cleanup operation if it is found to have acted wrongfully in causing a spill or other type of disaster.

The fifth concern Ecojustice raises is that the bill fails to provide regulation-making provisions for the calculation of non-use environmental damages.

Hopefully, these and other issues can be addressed as we go through this legislation in committee.

*Government Orders*

The legislation also raises several issues that need to be studied. Will the bill make it more expensive for offshore energy companies to operate in the Atlantic and Arctic, and what impact would raising their financial liability and increasing the funds they must have on hand for disaster response have on those coasts? We would like to ask our witnesses these questions and hear their reactions.

Is \$1 billion adequate in the Arctic, where environmental conditions make full response efforts very challenging, particularly under the ice? In my view, from what I have read so far, we do not have the capacity to clean up a major spill under Arctic ice. To me, that is a major concern.

Why does the bill provide for ministerial discretion to lower that \$1 billion limit, and what are the implications of this provision?

The Liberal Party recognizes the need to raise the absolute liability limits for the offshore oil and gas development sector and the nuclear sector. That is why we will support the bill at second reading.

• (1620)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Pierre Jacob (Brome—Missisquoi, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by thanking my Liberal colleague for his speech.

Does he know that Norway is an offshore oil and gas development leader, and that its unlimited absolute liability regime does not seem to have paralyzed its industry at all?

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** Mr. Speaker, I know that, for the past 30 years or so, Norway has been very active in oil and gas development in the North Sea, as has Great Britain. I have been to Norway. When I was the minister of Fisheries and Oceans Canada, I talked about those conditions with my Norwegian counterpart. We talked about oil and gas development. That was not the main topic we discussed, of course, but it did come up.

I do not know that much about their liability regime for the oil and gas industry, but I am sure we can look at issues like that when the bill goes to committee.

[*English*]

**Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his very measured speech on this important issue.

With respect to oil and gas exploration and development in both the Arctic and the offshore, on the east coast in particular, is the member aware that the absolute liability in the U.S. is actually \$12.6 billion in U.S. dollars as an absolute liability regime? That does not seem to affect the 2,500 wells in operation in the Gulf of Mexico, for example. Could he comment on that in terms of affecting the business operation in Canada?

Also, does he really think that ministerial discretion to reduce the billion dollars is something that can be left uncontrolled, or that it should even exist at all?

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** Mr. Speaker, I want to start with ministerial discretion, the latter part of the member's question. When we think of offshore drilling or a nuclear power station, it is hard for me to imagine that we would want a minister to have the discretion to reduce the absolute liability limit below \$1 billion. I agree with what the member is saying entirely.

On the other hand, I would like to hear what the government has in mind when it proposes this provision. I have not heard its argument yet. If, as I suggested, it is intended for small gas fields, I would like to hear if there is a way to limit that possibility of ministerial discretion to circumstances in which the House might feel it was appropriate. That is an important question.

In terms of the question about what the limit should be, there is no question that raising the limit from \$75 million in the case of nuclear and from \$30 million or \$40 million in the case of the offshore to \$1 billion is a substantial improvement. I think it is worth having testimony at committee about what the ideal level ought to be, but for starters, this is an important step in the right direction. That is why we are supporting the bill at second reading: to send it to committee, where we can study it further.

• (1625)

**Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his good presentation. We have done some good work together.

I wanted to interject on the last question because McMaster University, in the riding I represent, has one of the few university reactors, and I have not had any direct conversations with the minister regarding the full scope of the intention of the ministerial discretion.

Would the member agree that so far we have been talking about big power producers in this regard, and that a small research reactor in a university or public institution would raise other questions regarding liability that would not be germane to, let us say, Ontario Power Generation and the large capability it has through reactors?

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. friend for his question. I have had the great pleasure of working with him on the industry committee in recent years, although not these days, as I am on the natural resources committee. I always enjoyed his chairmanship of our committee and I appreciate the point he has raised.

At committee we ought to have some evidence about the differences we are talking about. A reactor like the research reactor at McMaster would be much smaller than the major reactors that produce electricity in this country, and we could get an idea of what risks there are and how they compare. I would expect the risk to be smaller if the reactor is smaller. What does that mean in terms of what the limits ought to be? Should there be discretion in that case? Again, are there ways to indicate in the bill that if that discretion should exist, it would be limited only to certain kinds of cases?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Marc-André Morin (Laurentides—Labelle, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like my colleague to speak to us about something that is always dismissed out of hand and that is the precautionary principle.

*Government Orders*

I have an example. I visited the region of Japan where the tsunami occurred. There was a nuclear power plant there. The local authorities insisted that it be built on a hill. Doing so practically doubled the cost of the power plant. However, when the tsunami hit, the water ripped out the trees on the hillside without causing any damage to the power plant.

I wonder who made the better investment: those who invested in the Fukushima power plant, which was built by the sea and whose pumps stopped working when the tsunami cut out the engines, or those who were smart enough to spend twice as much on building a safe power plant?

If there is a risk that a potential disaster could cost the equivalent of twice our national debt, then I think we should start thinking about a different approach.

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** Mr. Speaker, I very much appreciate the question from my hon. colleague and the example he gave us.

We must always take measures to prevent problems from happening. The same is true for our criminal laws. We must stop closing the door after the problem has been created. Yes, we need criminal legislation and criminal penalties, but we must focus more on prevention.

• (1630)

[English]

What I am trying to say is that it is important to have more prevention in our criminal law system.

[Translation]

The company that built a reactor in Japan took major precautions, even though this was more expensive. I get the impression that there is a movement in Japan that supports building another reactor. That may seem surprising, but I read that recently. The recently elected mayor of Tokyo is in favour of nuclear energy. I imagine that they will take more precautions, which is very important.

**Mr. François Lapointe (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to inform the House that I will be sharing my time with my colleague from St. John's South—Mount Pearl, who is an excellent speaker.

I rise today in the House to speak to Bill C-22, An Act respecting Canada's offshore oil and gas operations, enacting the Nuclear Liability and Compensation Act, repealing the Nuclear Liability Act and making consequential amendments to other Acts. I have read the full title of the bill for those few brave souls listening to us on CPAC.

We are going to talk about this bill in a little more detail because, for the vast majority of Canadians, the title may be confusing. This is the fifth time that a similar bill has been introduced in the House. Previous versions were about nuclear safety. This version also deals with the liability of offshore oil and gas companies. Consequently, entire sectors of the oil industry are not covered by this bill. I will come back to this later, at the end of my ten minutes allocated for today.

The NDP is the only party that opposed the previous version of this bill, which dealt with nuclear liability, because the liability of nuclear companies was capped at \$650 million, which was clearly not enough. We have heard ad nauseam from members opposite that

we vote against this and that. Yes, we often oppose bills because what is suggested is outrageously inadequate. This is another fine example.

The NDP's current position on Bill C-22 is that we are going to support the bill in principle at second reading, because, even if it is inadequate, it is a step in the right direction.

For the brave souls listening to us on CPAC, I would like to take a few seconds to explain exactly what second reading is. It means that we support the bill and that it is going to go to committee. Committees are going to study the bill. If the government of the day shows good faith, because committees always have a majority of Conservative members, we can try to improve the bill and perhaps we will be in a position to support it on third reading. That is why we are supporting it at second reading. Our yes depends greatly on subsequent events. Canadians can therefore rest absolutely assured of this aspect of our approach.

Let us start with the few steps in the right direction that Bill C-22 takes in the specific case of the nuclear industry, even though they are still inadequate.

First, there is a clearer process through which the victims of a nuclear accident are compensated by the operators. Basically, that is a valid approach. The limit of absolute liability goes from \$75 million to \$1 billion. That may seem like a major step, but, in the light of current realities and compared to other measures in place around the world, it is quite inadequate.

The limit of liability for the operators of nuclear installations has remained unchanged at \$75 million for 38 years. So it is urgent to move on that. This justifies our efforts, in committee, to try to make this bill provide Canadians with genuine protection, along the same lines as measures taken by other major legislative bodies.

Since the last time the obligations of nuclear industry operators were considered, the inflation rate has increased more than 300%. That tells us that we absolutely have to move on this. The limit of \$75 million, that may possibly change with this bill, is so low that international courts, where victims would seek recourse in the event of a nuclear disaster, do not even recognize it. Even the suggestion of a billion dollars is much lower than what has been set by most other countries with a nuclear industry.

The bill extends the limitation period for submitting compensation claims for bodily injury from 10 years to 30 years to address latent illnesses. This is another step in the right direction. It is overdue.

Here is a disturbing example to illustrate just how overdue it is.

*Government Orders*

•(1635)

The Chernobyl nuclear disaster took place on April 26, 1986. In 2011—or 25 years after the tragedy—the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation counted 7,000 cases of cancer in the most exposed areas of Belarus, Russia and Ukraine. These cancers have a very particular profile. They affect only adults. The epidemic primarily affects a population that was under the age of 18 at the time of the accident, due to the important role the thyroid plays during childhood and the teenage years.

Someone could be exposed to a nuclear disaster at the age of 18 or younger and not develop cancer until they are in their thirties. The 10-year period that was previously applied for the limitation period for submitting compensation claims for bodily injury was not enough. We are starting to see that a 30-year period is more reasonable for dealing with the reality of the effects of a nuclear disaster.

Bill C-22 will enable Canada to ratify the Convention on Supplementary Compensation for Nuclear Damage. This convention gives the party states an additional \$500 million in compensation, drawn from an international fund financed by the various signatories to the agreement. Until recently, our requirements were so low that we were not even worthy of being considered by other countries that had signed international agreements. Bill C-22 will help improve somewhat that aspect of the problem.

What steps in the right direction does Bill C-22 take when it comes to offshore oil and gas development? It updates Canada's offshore liability regime to prevent incidents and ensure a swift response in the event of a spill. We agree with the bill's premise. Bill C-22 increases the absolute liability limit for offshore oil and gas projects in Atlantic waters from \$30 million to \$1 billion. All the limits are \$1 billion. The figure was chosen somewhat at random. Very little consultation took place. Someone on the other side thinks that \$1 billion is a good number. Why not \$4 billion or \$3.9 billion? For oil and nuclear energy, it is \$1 billion. This number really shows that there was a lack of consultation with experts, since they certainly would not all have come up with a nice round number like \$1 billion when asked how much would be required to deal with a nuclear disaster or an offshore oil spill. The bill also contains the polluter pays principle. It is a good principle that we are prepared to support.

Now, let us look at the problems with Bill C-22, which is insufficient, particularly when compared with international best practices. The basic question is this: why do Canadians not deserve to be just as well protected as people in other countries where there is major legislation governing their natural resource production?

Bill C-22 ignores best practices when it comes to recognizing the dangers of inadequate liability regimes. However, on June 2, 2010, all members of the House adopted a motion moved by the NDP member for Edmonton—Strathcona. To everyone's surprise, the Conservatives voted in favour of that motion. The motion called on the government to ensure that Canada has the strongest environmental and safety rules in the world and to report to the House for appropriate action.

We need look no further than this for an example of the government's complete failure to support a motion. Since the Conservatives voted in favour of this motion, Canada has collected booby prizes from the Climate Action Network, a coalition of 400 competent non-governmental organizations. These prizes are awarded at United Nations climate change conferences, no less.

Let us look at some specific examples of what might protect Canadians. For instance, offshore operations in the North Sea are regulated. Companies have no choice. Relief wells must be in good working order before the main well can be drilled. The moment the main well does not work, the relief well is already in place, ready to take over. If this system had been in place in the Gulf of Mexico, the oil spill could have lasted 30 minutes instead of weeks.

Also, if the Conservatives had meant it when they supported my colleague's motion, this is the kind of regulation we would have found in a document seeking to regulate offshore operations.

•(1640)

In Germany, nuclear liability is absolute and unlimited, regardless of fault, and financial guarantees are as high as \$3.3 billion Canadian per nuclear plant. In the United States, that figure is \$12.6 billion. Clearly, there are several pieces of legislation with a much stricter framework.

I have one last thing to say to our colleagues opposite. To my knowledge, the capital of the nuclear industry in the United States or the offshore oil and gas industry in the North Sea has not vanished into space. There is still activity. We can do much better.

[*English*]

**The Deputy Speaker:** Order. 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 Cardigan, Fisheries and Oceans; the hon. member for Québec, Finance; and the hon. member for Thunder Bay—Superior North, Veterans Affairs.

The hon. member for Winnipeg North.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Ottawa South has been trying to get a better understanding, as I am sure many viewers want a better understanding, of the New Democratic Party's position in regard to nuclear energy.

It is somewhat frustrating to see the NDP members skate all over the ice to avoid answering the question. In fairness to those who are interested in what the NDP position might be on nuclear energy, maybe the member could provide some clarity on the issue.

We have the status quo going forward. There is a great deal of expertise that builds on nuclear energy outside of Canada. Obviously it is a fairly significant issue for us to deal with. I wonder if the member might provide some clarity, in some murky water, as to the NDP position.

*Government Orders*

[Translation]

**Mr. François Lapointe:** Mr. Speaker, I am afraid that my Liberal colleague is setting the stage to say that a \$1 billion liability limit is acceptable.

Let us consider the opinion of Joel Wood, an economist and researcher with the Fraser Institute, which is not exactly a radical left-wing think tank, on the subject of raising the absolute liability limit:

Increasing the cap only decreases the subsidy; it does not eliminate it. The Government of Canada should proceed with legislation that removes the liability cap entirely rather than legislation that maintains it, or increases it to be harmonious with other jurisdictions.

This principle is rather simple. At the Fukushima plant, for example, it is going to cost over \$200 billion to clean up the huge mess caused by the environmental tragedy that happened there. Therefore, a \$1 billion cap is really not enough.

When the Fraser Institute says that this is practically an indirect form of financial support for the industry, we have a serious problem. In committee, these people will tell us how far we should go. It will certainly be more than \$1 billion.

We will be paying close attention and will be ready to suggest amendments to better protect Canadians.

• (1645)

**Mr. Mathieu Ravnignat (Pontiac, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, my colleague is quite right. Nothing the Conservatives have done so far suggests that they really care about international standards.

This bill does not allow us to catch up to our international partners. The United States has established an absolute liability limit of \$12.6 billion. Meanwhile, Germany, Sweden, Finland, Denmark and even Austria and Switzerland have all introduced unlimited liability for nuclear facilities.

Why, in my colleague's opinion, is the Conservative government refusing to do anything? Is the nuclear lobby that strong?

**Mr. François Lapointe:** Mr. Speaker, are our colleagues opposite extremely sensitive about major lobbies? Yes. Should we be concerned? Yes. Is it likely part of the current problem? Yes.

I want to come back to an argument that is important to me. Norway has no cap when it comes to liability and has much higher requirements for nuclear liability and everything related to offshore development.

Investments are currently comparable to ours. Investments are not disappearing because maximum protection is required. However, the industry understands the message and is making every effort possible to avoid any tragedy stemming from its economic activities. It is a strong message that incidentally ensures that there are very few development-related spills in the North Sea, which borders Norway.

The idea is to require the maximum to protect our environment, our population, our fishers and our children's future. In this way, industries will behave better and we might be able to avoid any kind of environmental tragedy. No, capital will not disappear into space, because the resource is on earth.

[English]

**Mr. Ryan Cleary (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I stand in support of Bill C-22, the energy safety and security act. It is measured support. The act deals with both offshore oil and gas operations and the nuclear liability and compensation act, but I am only prepared to speak on oil and gas.

My riding of St. John's South—Mount Pearl in my province of Newfoundland and Labrador is not exactly known for its nuclear industry, although the word “nuclear” could be used to describe my province's dislike of the Conservative government, a nuclear dislike that will redline in 2015. I could not pass that up, Mr. Speaker.

The issues surrounding oil and gas development are paramount in Newfoundland and Labrador. Oil and gas have made us a rich province, a have province. For too long, Newfoundland and Labrador was seen as a drain on Confederation, although that was never the case. The contribution of our ore, our fish, our hydro, our forestry, and our people to the rest of Canada and the world are practically immeasurable.

Today, officially on paper, we are a net contributor to Confederation and are proud of it. That is due, in large part, to offshore oil fields such as Hibernia, Terra Nova, and White Rose. The \$14-billion Hebron development is due to come on stream in 2017.

Then there is the potential, the incredible, massive potential. This past September, the news broke of a major oil find off Newfoundland, a reservoir of light crude believed to hold as much as 600 million barrels of recoverable oil, the 12th largest oil discovery in the world in the past four years. That discovery, which happened in August, is the third recent find in the Flemish Pass basin in the North Atlantic in recent years.

The potential for oil off Labrador, which is practically frontier, virgin territory, is through the roof, and the exploration is not nearly what it is in the North Sea.

I had a meeting just a couple of weeks ago with the head of Nalcor, the crown corporation in Newfoundland and Labrador responsible for energy development. The member for St. John's East and I met with the head of Nalcor, and I can tell the House that the future of oil and gas in my province is incredibly exciting. Ed Martin, the CEO of Nalcor, had a hard time containing his excitement, and it was good to see on his face.

As parliamentarians, we must ensure that worker health and safety and the environment are first and foremost, front and centre, and protected at all costs. Bill C-22 maintains unlimited operator liability for fault or negligence. In other words, if there is an oil spill and a company is found negligent and responsible, the blame is 100% theirs. There is no limit on the liability, no cap on the liability, and that is the way it should be.

*Government Orders*

In the case of no fault, the bill increases absolute liability in the Atlantic to \$1 billion from \$30 million. That is an increase of \$970 million. That may sound huge, and there is no doubt that it is huge, but is it enough? That is the question. Is a \$1-billion cap on no fault enough to cover the damage from an environmental catastrophe?

The United States has an absolute liability cap of \$12.6 billion U.S. versus, again, our absolute liability cap of \$1 billion Canadian. That is a difference of more than \$12 billion Canadian. I would say that the absolute liability amount is not enough, certainly not compared to the United States. Do Canadians, do Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, deserve at least the same amount of liability protection as the United States? Yes, we do. The answer is obvious. Of course we do.

The 2010 British Petroleum spill in the Gulf Mexico was expected to cost as much as \$42 billion for total cleanup, criminal penalties, and civil claims. British Petroleum is reported to have already spent \$25 billion on cleanup and compensation.

•(1650)

In addition, it faces hundreds of new lawsuits that were launched this spring, along with penalties under the Clean Water Act that could reach \$17 billion. Therefore, how far would our absolute liability cap of \$1 billion go? It would not go very far. It would be a drop in the oil barrel. A \$1 billion liability cap is not enough. It is a start, but it is not enough. It is not nearly enough.

This bill references the polluter pay principle explicitly in legislation, to establish clearly and formally that polluters will be held accountable. This bill is most definitely an improvement upon the current liability regime, but it is not enough to protect Canadians or the environment. In fact, it continues to put Canadians at risk. More specifically, it continues to put Newfoundlanders and Labradorians at risk.

The reality is that the \$1 billion cap is not enough. It is not sufficient. The artificial cap actually acts as a subsidy to energy companies by reducing the cost of insuring the risks that they create. Energy companies make a fortune. They make billions of dollars a year, and yet we would be subsidizing them and increasing the risks to ourselves. That does not make sense. If this were truly polluter pay, the polluter would be responsible, period.

Norway and Greenland have unlimited absolute financial liability for oil spills. To point out the irony, Norway has unlimited liability for a spill in its own waters, but as the owner of Statoil, the company that made the recent oil discovery off Newfoundland, it would have a cap in our waters. Does everyone see the difference?

What is most scary about Bill C-22, the energy safety and security act, is that it provides for ministerial discretion to reduce absolute liability levels to below the legislated level of \$1 billion. That discretionary provision could undercut the advantages of the legislated cap. It leaves the door open for reduction of absolute liability levels for certain projects as a form of economic incentive for oil and gas development that the government wants to encourage. Therefore, if the government of the day wants to lower the \$1 billion cap, it can. That is where the word “scary” comes in, especially when the \$1 billion liability cap is not nearly enough to deal with a massive spill.

To conclude, New Democrats support this bill at second reading, but we would also push for expanded liability and the implementation of global best practices. Worker health and safety and the environment should be first and foremost in our oil and gas industry, and certainly not left to ministerial discretion to potentially lower what is already inadequate liability. Why can this country not lead the way in environmental protection? Why are the Conservatives accepting anything less?

This is a step forward; make no mistake, this is a step forward. However, why should we expect anything less than elite?

•(1655)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague because every time he speaks, his love and deep devotion for his constituents is apparent, and that is truly incredible.

That is why I would like to ask my dear colleague the following question. Your pragmatic approach to jobs and the quality of life of the people in your riding is legendary. I wonder what you think your chances really are when this bill goes to committee.

Do you think that our friends opposite will be able to be as pragmatic as you are and resist pressure from an industrial lobby?

**The Deputy Speaker:** I would like to remind all hon. members to direct their comments and questions to the Chair rather than directly to other members.

[*English*]

**Mr. Ryan Cleary:** Mr. Speaker, that is a very good question. “Live in hope, die in despair” is a saying that we have back home.

Again, it is a good thing the absolute liability is being raised to \$1 billion. However, I would like to think that when we bring up good points, like the fact that the absolute liability in the United States is \$12.6 billion U.S. versus \$1 billion in Canada, the Conservatives would see how far below the global standards we are. I would like to think the Conservatives would see how sensible that is and how far below the world standards we are. Again, we live in hope, die in despair.

*Government Orders*

**Mr. Erin O'Toole (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for his remarks. Certainly we can see his passion for Newfoundland and Labrador when he speaks. I had the honour, when I was sailing on HMCS *St. John's*, to land on Hibernia as part of a Sea King helicopter crew in order to analyze the rig on a search and rescue aspect. It was great to see. In fact, it was the Conservative Mulroney government that ensured that the benefits from those developments and the development of the offshore came to Newfoundland.

The member addressed some of his concerns with respect to the legislation, but started off his remarks by suggesting he was in general support of portions of the agreement. As an opposition member, he focused his speech on his opposition. As a government member, I would like him to bring out the positive aspects he was referring to at the outset and talk about how he thinks this would be potentially good for the resource sector in Newfoundland and Labrador.

● (1700)

**Mr. Ryan Cleary:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the member across the way for the question. The hon. member is a lucky man to have landed on the Hibernia platform. I have not done that myself, but it is on my bucket list. The name "Hibernia", by the way, means "Ireland". The hon. member for St. John's East would know that as well. It means Ireland, in Gaelic.

What I do like about this bill is that it would raise the absolute liability from \$30 million to \$1 billion. That is an increase of \$970 million. That is a great thing. However, when we look at environmental catastrophes, like the Deepwater Horizon in the Gulf of Mexico, we are talking compensation, so far, that is \$42 billion U. S. Unfortunately, it is possible that we could have that kind of catastrophe off the east coast. That is possible.

If we look at \$42 billion and rising to clean up that mess in the United States versus \$1 billion that has been set aside for unlimited liability in Canada, we can see that it is not nearly enough. Again, I say that there are some good things and that this is a step. However, to reference the last line in my speech, this is a step, but we should be taking a leap.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for St. John's East.

Bill C-22, introduced by the Minister of Natural Resources, develops measures for sharing the financial burden of an industrial incident between industry players and taxpayers.

As far as principles go, I support the merits of these measures. However, after a detailed look at Bill C-22, I must express my reservations and criticisms about liability levels and other provisions in the bill.

Companies working in the nuclear and oil industries have the potential to cause health and environmental damage and, unfortunately, they do not assume all of the social, health and ecological costs associated with their high-risk activities.

This issue adversely affects the world outside the industry because taxpayers will take on the majority of the financial, health and moral problems of a high-risk activity, yet they will not take part in the business deal or benefit from the resulting monetary profits. In the end, taxpayers will suffer the consequences of these activities without directly reaping the financial benefits.

It is important that we have responsible, effective legislation that encourages technical and technological advances without shifting the majority of the costs of an industrial incident onto taxpayers.

A responsible legislator must pass measures that require the entity responsible for a disaster to absorb the various costs related to an industrial incident. This is straightforward. In other words, the company responsible must ensure that its production costs include a major part of the potential social, ecological and health care compensation paid out if an accident occurs.

I support the idea of the polluter pays principle. It is a founding principle of environmental law. However, it is clear that the government is talking out of both sides of its mouth when it claims to ensure that the polluter is morally and financially responsible and then puts a limit on that responsibility.

The liability limit set by the government does not embody the spirit of the polluter pays principle. A nuclear incident has long-term negative consequences. From a health standpoint, it can result in bodily harm that is sometimes only discovered years after the incident.

Since the federal and provincial governments are involved in nuclear plants, we can assume that they will be directly affected by any potential consequences. Therefore, it makes sense to ensure that these accidents do not happen. Nuclear plants are often owned by the government. If an accident were to take place, the government would likely be footing the bill and will therefore ensure that there is no accident, since it knows that it will end up paying. Operational safety automatically becomes cost-effective and logical.

An industrial accident has a negative effect on economic growth, and especially tourism.

● (1705)

For example, if we had an oil spill, the region affected would certainly see fewer tourists. There would also be less foreign investment if an area were to become radioactive.

Bill C-22 provides for limited liability by setting the cap at \$1 billion. Furthermore, it does not allow for indexing the amount of compensation, for example, with inflation. The government could have chosen to automatically index this amount, but it would rather let 15, 20 or 30 years go by before it realizes that this amount still has not changed and that it does not reflect the new reality. It would have been a good idea to insert provisions for this, since the effects of a disaster can last many years, and during that time the value of money fluctuates.

Bill C-22 provides a rather narrow definition of the polluter pays principle, in that the polluter would be more encouraged to pollute than to adopt best practices and standards to prevent industrial disasters.

*Government Orders*

The NDP is the only party that has credibility when it comes to environmental protection. The other political parties are not doing anything about the outdated shared liability regime. Outdated protections cost Canadian taxpayers a lot of money, since the taxpayer could be the victim of an accident and end up being taxed on that very same accident.

Unfortunately, we had a specific example in Lac-Mégantic. The insurance coverage the company was asked for was totally inadequate to cover the damage that the incident caused. The insurance was clearly inadequate to cover accidents.

In the event of an incident, the government should not expect taxpayers to act as potential contributors to its subsidies for these various forms of energy. If the government assumes that, at the end of the day, taxpayers will pick up any shortfall, it is indirectly subsidizing those two sectors by playing on the potential risks and playing with those who are going to pay the bills.

I also have to stress that other countries are planning to adopt the principle of unlimited liability, because it really is not such a good idea to set the compensation at a fixed amount. I do not believe that the negative consequences for public health and for economic activity can be reduced to a fixed amount. The responsibility comes with grave consequences for the community.

That is why it is necessary to look at a compensation plan in which liability is unlimited. Besides the effectiveness of the compensation mechanisms, public authorities must also establish safe and effective ways of reducing industrial accidents. In that context, Bill C-22 must be marked by a proactive approach.

Since I had the opportunity to attend a briefing on this bill given by the Department of Natural Resources, I asked how the limit of \$1 billion was arrived at. I expected that they would have looked at accident scenarios in order to assess the cost, but that was unfortunately not the case. I received no precise answer.

To me, it would have been logical to have simulated various reasonable accident scenarios in an attempt to say how much it would cost today, and then set the amount. That step seems logical and appropriate to me.

However, the only answer I have received to date is that the amount of \$1 billion is enough. I have received no technical or logical explanation that would allow me to understand why the \$1 billion figure was arrived at.

I repeat that I support the principle of the bill. However, there are a number of unanswered questions, including the one dealing with the fixed amount, which seems strange to me. Since I am fortunate enough to be a member of the Standing Committee on Natural Resources, I will be asking departmental officials more questions about this bill.

● (1710)

I feel that they need to be asked, because we must not limit ourselves to partial liability in this case.

[*English*]

**Mrs. Kelly Block (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my

colleague for her comments and recognize the good work she does on the committee for natural resources.

All day I have been asking the members opposite about their support for the nuclear industry and I have yet to get a clear answer from someone on that side. Did the member for Winnipeg Centre, for example, speak for his party when he attacked jobs in Ontario and said, “We do not want to see Darlington nuclear plant doubled in size. We want to see it shut down”.

On this side of the House we stand behind the 30,000 Canadians working in the nuclear industry. Therefore, I ask the member, what is the NDP's position on clean nuclear power?

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Christine Moore:** Mr. Speaker, I would first like to say to my colleague that I believe that Canada has a very good nuclear regulatory system. To date, we have shown that we can maintain a certain level of safe production.

We also have to take the provinces into account when discussing nuclear power. Some provinces have chosen to go with other sources of energy because the risks associated with nuclear power are difficult to manage. For those provinces that have access to a fair amount of hydroelectric power—Quebec, for example—it may be advantageous to choose that type of power.

Apart from the NDP's position, every province has its own position, which is articulated in their energy management plan and how they see their own future. No matter what direction the different provinces take, the NDP will be happy to talk to them and discuss the future of nuclear power in the context of their position.

**Ms. Éloïse Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague for her excellent presentation.

I would like to go back to something that was discussed by one of our colleagues in a previous speech and that is the discretionary power that this bill would grant the minister to reduce the absolute liability to below the \$1 billion limit in the event of an oil spill, accident involving pipelines that transport gas, and so forth.

I would like my colleague to tell us about the negative effects that this kind of provision could have on the objective of this bill. I believe that this is another way for the Conservative government to please its friends in the oil and gas industry, to keep from scaring them too much and to avoid making lobbyists nervous. I would like to hear more from my colleague about this.

● (1715)

**Ms. Christine Moore:** Mr. Speaker, when ministers are granted such discretionary powers, the danger is that companies will choose to invest in lobbying instead of safety. The companies will invest the millions they have in lobbying and in the lobbyists who will put pressure on the ministers and who will manage to lower the industry's standards in general, rather than investing it to make practical improvements to the safety of their business and ensure that the health of Canadians is less threatened and that environmental risks are reduced. That is the danger.

If the opportunity is there, some people may unfortunately choose to invest in lobbying, rather than choosing to improve the safety of their facilities. Proceeding that way is very dangerous. Unfortunately, we have seen some business models based on this principle that have led to disaster. I do not want that to happen again.

[English]

**Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague, the member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue, for graciously sharing her time with me in this important debate about Bill C-22, an act respecting Canada's offshore oil and gas operations that would also enact a nuclear liability and compensation act and make consequential amendments, including repealing the existing Nuclear Liability Act.

I also want to congratulate my colleague, the member for St. John's South—Mount Pearl, for his very forthright and passionate speech on this issue and on the industry in Newfoundland and Labrador, which has been so important to the fiscal position of the province and has provided opportunities for legions of workers, both in the offshore field itself and in engineering and related matters, bringing about great prosperity for Newfoundland and Labrador.

I am pleased to speak to this bill because it is an opportunity to talk about this issue and its importance within the Canadian context.

We hear a lot about western Canada. I went to law school in Alberta. I am very aware of the importance of that industry there and the oil sands, as well, but I think sometimes it overshadows the role that east coast oil and gas plays in total production and its importance to the overall Canadian scene.

We are concerned, of course, as is every country and anyone else aware of the consequences of potential oil and gas spills, both on land and at sea, about the danger of pollution and the danger of a spill that could have a catastrophic effect. We saw that in the most recent Macondo case in the Gulf of Mexico, which had huge consequences for Gulf, for the fishers in the area, for the communities, for the environment, and for all of the sea life affected by this particular spill. As a result, the need to take a close look at the liability regimes has been brought into sharp focus.

We support the bill at second reading. We want it to go to committee. We think that significant improvements have been made here. I do not know if it has been mentioned before, but the words “polluter pay” actually appear in the bill. I think that is the first time they have ever appeared in a bill in Canada. It is something that our leader has spoken about as a basic principle of our party when it comes to sustainable development. One of the hallmarks of sustainable development is that to make it sustainable, it is the polluter that should pay if there are any consequences of its economic activity, and not the public.

Here, we have a significant rise in liability from what has to be considered a ludicrous amount of \$30 million, to \$1 billion in the case of offshore oil and gas, and generally from \$40 million to \$1 billion in the case of the Arctic, for no-fault risk.

Some people might say, “Well, if it is not our fault, why should we have to pay at all?”

### *Government Orders*

The reason is that they are the author of the activity they are engaging in to obtain profit and they have to pay the consequences if something goes wrong.

It is not as simple as “no fault” or “your fault”. As a lawyer, I know that deciding who is at fault and what the fault is, is often a very long, tortuous, and expensive process. In case of the kind of activity we are talking about here, we need to know that the initial responsibility rests with the person who causes the damage, that the damage is going to be fixed, and that people who need compensation are going to be compensated. A no-fault system allows that to happen.

The at-fault position is that there is not a limit on liability. The limit, I guess, is the ability of the operator to pay. That also comes into effect and we need to know that people who are engaged in this kind of activity, which is dangerous to the environment and to life and limb, are responsible and capable operators and companies that can actually carry out this work.

● (1720)

I say life and limb; it is often overlooked that the Deepwater Horizon project that blew up and caused this big damage also cost 11 workers their lives in that explosion. It is still a very dangerous activity, as we know from the Ocean Ranger disaster in 1982 and the Cougar helicopter crash recently and another crash a couple of decades ago. It is a dangerous activity that requires serious and responsible actors in the business, and so we would want to make sure that they are responsible for the damage they cause.

The act itself has some significant limitations. I am still puzzling over why one would say we are going to raise the liability from \$40 million to \$1 billion and then say the minister can waive that requirement. There does not seem to be any particular conditions as to when he or she might do that, and so one wonders why it should be there at all.

I can see the lineup now. Everyone would want an exemption because they would say they cannot really afford that or would not be able to get insurance or not be able to operate. Everything would supposedly come to a standstill if that were enforced. The minister is going to have a lot of people at the doorstep, looking for the exemption.

In the United States, the limit is \$12.6 billion. In Denmark, Norway, Switzerland, Australia, and in numerous countries, there is no liability limit. In those countries, Norway and the United States being good examples, this has not prevented the development of robust and successful offshore oil and gas developments. We need to know why Conservatives are asking for that, but we would have a great deal of difficulty supporting that kind of exemption unless they convince someone that it was limited to one or two particular circumstances that may make sense. I do not know what they are. We have not heard the case for that yet.

*Private Members' Business*

However, we do see some progress here. The \$1 billion, in fact, was an amendment suggested by the NDP in the last Parliament when a piece of legislation was brought forward, never really seriously, because it was left on the order paper for a year before the last election, but \$650 million was proposed. The NDP recommended it be put at \$1 billion at that time, which of course did not happen and the bill died on the order paper. This is a step forward, but there is a very strong case for unlimited liability and certainly a number more than \$1 billion, and that is something to discuss at committee.

When we are talking about oil and gas development and pollution problems, there is the issue of spill response and what the capability is of dealing with an oil spill if it occurs. There is significant concern about that in the Atlantic and the existing regime right now. In fact, in a 2012 report, the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development was critical of the industry and critical of the regulators, both in Nova Scotia and in Newfoundland and Labrador, for not being in a position to take over responsibility for oil spills if they occurred. In the case of Newfoundland, a study started in 2008, just to define and determine what the operator's capability was regarding oil spill containment and activity, has not been completed.

Officials tried to determine what the capability was. They had to review the spill response capability of operators. They said they were going to do it, but they have not done it. They said they were going to do it by March 31, 2013, after five years in the making. As my colleague from St. John's South—Mount Pearl pointed out about a month ago, officials still have not produced that report.

The member for St. John's South—Mount Pearl, the member for Burnaby—Douglas, and I met recently with the C-NLOPB, which promised to have this report out very shortly. We look forward to that. We do need to know that if there is any kind of a spill, the oil companies have the capability to respond to it, to give the public confidence that this industry can be operated in safety and that the environmental concerns are taken into account.

I see that my time is up and I look forward to any questions and comments members may have.

• (1725)

[Translation]

**Mr. Marc-André Morin (Laurentides—Labelle, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to hear what my colleague has to say about one specific aspect.

We now know that the energy sector is under incredible pressure. We need only look at how the Europeans tremble before Russia, which could shut off the gas at any time. There are immense profits to be made. I understand that my government colleagues on the other side of the House are in a hurry to develop our resources and turn a profit. We see that they are trying to speed up the process, minimize consultations and facilitate the implementation of energy projects. That is already a big gift to the sector.

I have difficulty understanding why the Conservatives would impose a limit on the liability of businesses when they mess up. Would it not be fair to privatize the profit and de-privatize the expenses once again?

[English]

**Mr. Jack Harris:** Mr. Speaker, the effect of a limit and a cap on liability, both in the nuclear and in the oil and gas industries, is effectively a subsidy on the operator because if there is no limit on the liability for even a no-fault, the taxpayer ultimately subsidizes the damage done to the environment. This is something the current government has been doing with the oil and gas industry generally. It is making it easier for the industry to proceed with developments without proper consultation and environmental hearings and consideration. It is doing a lot of things to effectively subsidize that industry.

I suppose it is a Conservative principle, and we hear it from the Fraser Institute and others, that the person undertaking the activity should pay the costs, not the taxpayer. We think it should apply to the oil and gas industry as well. Undue government support for that industry, in leaving the regulations slack to the point of affecting the environment and trampling the rights of people, is not the way to go.

[Translation]

**The Deputy Speaker:** It being 5:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

• (1730)

[English]

The hon. member for St. John's East will have about two minutes of questions and comments when this debate resumes.

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## PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

### DIVORCE ACT

**Mr. Maurice Vellacott (Saskatoon—Wanuskewin, CPC)** moved that Bill C-560, An Act to amend the Divorce Act (equal parenting) and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to this private member's bill, a very non-partisan one, whose time has come in this country for the sake of families and for the benefit of children.

Throughout my time as a member of Parliament, next year my 19th year, I have fought for legislation and public policy that recognizes and protects the role of the family as the foundational unit of society. That is pretty important, and we pay a price when we do not support it, and try to deal with some of the fallout that happens occasionally and try to mitigate that as well in respect to family.

With Bill C-560 I am continuing my commitment to stand up for the Canadian family by seeking an amendment to our Divorce Act. These amendments would keep both parents in the lives of more children in those cases where marriage breaks down.

The amendments in Bill C-560 would direct the courts in regard to divorce to make equal shared parenting, and I will talk later of the range being 35% to 50% roughly, but making it the presumptive arrangement in the best interests of the child, except in proven cases of abuse or neglect.

*Private Members' Business*

I introduced a similar bill, Bill C-422, in June 2009, but it was never debated due to an election call.

Previous to that, in 2008, I introduced Motion No. 483, expressing support for the principle of equal shared parenting. At that time, the Government of the Northwest Territories expressed its solidarity with that position by way of a motion that it passed in its legislature.

Seventeen long years ago, in 1997, just prior to my having stepped onto the federal scene here, a joint House-Senate committee presented to Parliament a report entitled "For the Sake of the Children". That report urged Parliament to amend the Divorce Act to make equal shared parenting the normative determination by courts dealing with situations of divorce involving children. The non-partisan recommendation from that joint House-Senate report was based on some pretty compelling research. Members can read that extensive testimony. It was made available to all committee members of the different parties.

Bill C-560 is a modest attempt to address some of the concerns and recommendations made in that report and, in particular, the rebuttable presumption, which takes children out of the equation as pawns in the battle for gain by adversarial parents. Some marriage breakdowns are more adversarial than others, but removing children from that equation would be good. Parents could fight over the house, the boat, the land, and whatever other kinds of assets of that marriage, but not the children. We will set some guidelines. We will have some restrictions. It will not be about the children.

Bill C-560 would require parents to co-operate toward equal shared parenting unless they can make a credible compelling case that this would not be in the best interests of their children.

In this respect, Bill C-560 is catching up to the best social science research, which demonstrates the importance of a child's continued access to both parents, a father and a mother, for the best personal and social outcomes.

There are exceptions to this ordinary reality, which is why the presumption is rebuttable, and lawyers in the House would understand what that means, and why there are exceptions for proven neglect and abuse. This is not just allegations of abuse or allegations of this, that, or the other, but evidentiary proven neglect and abuse.

Bill C-560 would also replace the language of custody and access with the language of parents and it uses terms such as "parenting order" and "equal parenting".

Recommendation 5 from the "For the Sake of the Children" report reads as follows:

This Committee recommends that the terms "custody and access" no longer be used in the Divorce Act and instead that the meaning of both terms be incorporated and received in the new term "shared parenting", which shall be taken to include all the meanings, rights, obligations, and common-law and statutory interpretations embodied previously in the terms "custody and access".

The international organization Leading Women for Shared Parenting reports that:

Research also proves that, although children want a relationship with both their parents regardless of marital status, healthy bonding with a non-residential parent is impossible without a substantial amount of time spent in that parent's physical presence.

That means very close to equal.

This legislation would not establish a firm figure for what that equal time would be. In jurisdictions across the world, from more socialist countries, like Sweden, Belgium, and so on, to more-to-the-right countries, such as I suppose Australia and some U.S. states, the range has been determined to be 35% to 50% of residential time with each parent. That is considered to be consistent with the notion as it is in the courts thus far.

• (1735)

Lawyers for Shared Parenting notes that Bill C-560 conforms with the principles of children's rights as advanced by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which has been ratified by Canada. We are a signatory to that convention.

Article 9 of that UN Convention on the Rights of the Child argues for a child's prior right of access to both parents, thereby establishing a presumption for equal shared parenting in cases of divorce and separation.

Some people have objected to establishing a presumption in law regarding child custody cases, but the reality is that a presumption already exists, *de facto*, in the system. Upwards of 80% of custody cases are decided for sole custody. In effect, we do have a presumption in favour of sole custody as things presently stand.

What Bill C-560 would do is bring Canadian law into the 21st century by bringing it up to date with the best social science research, which indicates that a child's continued access to both parents following divorce or separation is in the typical child's best interest.

I think it is important to define what this best interest is. So often across the country we use the term, the amorphous, vague term, "the best interests of the child". Members might have even heard it said in speeches today around the House. Certainly people will say that they do not know if they want this bill to come into place, because they are for the best interests of the child, which is amorphous, vague, and moldable as putty in the hands of lawmakers, social workers, and so on, and it does not really get at what that really is in a factual way.

We now know from social science research that the best interests of children is to have continued access to both parents following divorce or separation. That is in their best interests. That is the understanding from a social science basis of what that term actually should mean.

Others have represented this bill by claiming that it eliminates judicial discretion. I am not a lawyer and of course I would not want to offend my legal colleagues, so we are not eliminating all judicial discretion on these custodial matters. This bill would not eliminate all judicial discretion. There could still be a consideration of the situation of each family that comes before the courts.

What the bill does is tighten up the language surrounding judicial discretion, so that it becomes more difficult to use an antiquated interpretation of the best interests of the child as an excuse to rationalize a disproportionate percentage of sole custody decisions in today's family courts.

*Private Members' Business*

Suggestions that a rebuttable presumption is too onerous a standard are also brought forward by some people. That particular accusation is really inconsistent with multiple constitutional rulings in many countries, including Canada, where those rulings have made judgments that parents are presumed to act in the best interests of their children unless shown otherwise.

If one wants to say that rebuttable presumption is too onerous, then really one is almost arguing for the revocation of the basic legal doctrine that one is presumably innocent unless proven otherwise. That is a basic tenet of our judicial system, that one is innocent until proven otherwise, presumptively innocent. In respect to parents, it is same thing. Unless one can prove that a person is not a fit parent, we are not wise to make those kinds of assumptions.

Some have argued that a presumption of equal shared parenting would increase conflict in already acrimonious family situations. In fact it is the adversarial family court system that fuels such conflict and disenfranchisement of parents that is really the most harmful to children, pitting parents against each another in bitter court battles that frequently result in a winning and a losing parent. Do we really desire that kind of a system where we litigate over children? Do we desire a system where the courts remove fit parents from their own children's lives?

The negative impact of this current system on children, mostly and foremost, as well as on their parents and extended family is really quite unconscionable and immoral.

Bill C-560 should reduce conflict because it takes children out of the equation as objects of possession to be fought over by parents. With a presumption of equal shared parenting, access to the children cannot continue to be a part of divorce negotiations and treated like a portion of the winnings or losses of divorce agreements.

• (1740)

Parents would know that, barring cases of proven abuse or neglect, the courts would enforce an equitable access arrangement between both parents. Parents would be free to surrender some access, if that works better for their personal circumstances and their children, but the presumption would create a disincentive for hostile parents to try to keep access to the children from the other parent.

For example, if a father were a long-haul trucker, he might say he has the presumption of equal shared parenting but, for him, it only works to have the kids about 30% of the time and the mother to have them 70% of the time. The mother might say that she is a physician with a busy and pressured life, and she can only handle the children 35% of the time at her location. In those cases, that kind of arrangement would be made. It would not impose upon people to say that access has to be 50%. It could be arranged, and it could be anywhere from 35% to 50%.

The presumption of equal parenting would also be expected to reduce divorce rates. This is proven to be the case. As far back as 1998, researchers postulated that. When people go into a situation without the presumption that they are going to get it all, sometimes they back away a bit and they begin to work at those marriage difficulties.

People like Margaret F. Brinig, Frank Buckley, and Dr. Sanford Braver and various publications, such as *International Review of*

*Law and Economics* and *American Law and Economics Review*, have found that there is a pre-emptive and preventive factor in this whole concept of equal shared parenting.

I think colleagues in the House are well aware of the social costs surrounding deviant behaviour among youth, whether it is in terms of the justice system or the welfare system. An important way to reduce those costs and the logistical challenges related to policing, the courts, social welfare program delivery, social worker caseloads, and more is to strengthen the families in our communities, including children's access to both their father and their mother, even in cases of separation and divorce.

Children in sole custody settings are reported as having a notably higher likelihood—three times higher, in fact—of suffering from low self-esteem, insecurity, and rejection, being underachievers, including school dropout, substance abuse, depression, suicide, teen pregnancy, and even crime. It is kind of jarring, but I am just stating the facts here. Approximately 80% of criminals are from single parent homes.

I need to quickly qualify that my hat is off to the single parents I have known, and who we all know, from the House, our ridings, and elsewhere, who do a 24-7 job and who do a remarkable job. However, it is not an easy job. The reality is, and the statistics are, that 80% of individuals in trouble with the law are from single parent home situations.

In most cases of sole custody, it is granted maybe more typically to the mother and the father is shut out. Fatherlessness in particular has been isolated as a serious indicator for poor outcomes among children. We have Big Brothers Big Sisters and other substitutes for that very reason.

I can list a host of problems. There is anxiety, learning disabilities, truancy, runaways, drug abuse, teenage pregnancies, mental illness, and suicide. They are some of the things that can occur on a long list or litany, when fathers are removed from homes unnecessarily. Equal shared parenting is an important way to combat these risks among the growing segment of children who live in homes that have experienced divorce.

There is a lot of good research. I will just drop a few names at this point. There is Dr. Edward Kruk, a professor at the University of British Columbia. There is a new study by Richard A. Warshak at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center. D.A. Smith and G.R. Jarjoura have an article on social structure and criminal victimization. We have a long list of many others who have done extensive research on the benefits of equal shared parenting. People can contact me later about them, and they are on my website for people to look at.

We have countries in Europe, including France, Sweden, the Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark, Italy, and Luxembourg, that have adopted shared parenting. A number of U.S. states have as well.

We find, as well, across our country, that about 80% of those who claim to be NDP supporters and 80% of Liberal supporters support this concept of equal shared parenting; also 80% of Conservative supporters. More women than men, above 80% again, support equal shared parenting. All across the country, the highest levels of support are in Quebec and the Atlantic provinces, where it is again above 80%.

I would close by thanking my colleague from the Liberal Party, Raymonde Folco, who was the seconder on my bill, Bill C-422. She is an avowed, staunch feminist, who stood with me as we launched that first bill.

The bill is one that all colleagues in the House, irrespective of gender or part of the country, would support for the benefit of children.

• (1745)

[Translation]

**Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member opposite for his praiseworthy dedication to this cause and his persistence.

However, I would like to ask him how the existing legislation prevents equal parenting, since everything he said over the past 15 minutes gave me the impression that if that were how the courts made decisions, there would be no need for Bill C-560.

I also wanted to mention that I am really concerned about clause 10 of his bill, the retroactivity clause. I would like him to comment on that because it means that cases that have already been ruled on could go back to court. That could result in considerable uncertainty around custody across Canada.

[English]

**Mr. Maurice Vellacott:** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's question and I look forward to her speech. We will learn from that, I am sure.

In respect to the member's first question, as things stand in our country, people can work this issue out. I remember Kris Titus, who was the president of the Equal Parenting Council across Canada, an umbrella organization for 40-some groups, telling me about when she and her ex, who were living in close communities, went to the judge the first time around to try to work out this kind of arrangement of approximately equal shared parenting. They could do it because they were living in proximity, but the judge could not get his head around it and said that, no, it would probably be a sole custody kind of thing. This was thinking in the courts at that time, and there is probably still a lot of that today.

They had to go back, and they had a battle. It is a credit to her that they actually did that. They did get an agreement of approximately equal shared parenting, but it was not easy to do in a system biased against it.

**Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I want to come back to a question that was posed by the member for Gatineau but that was not dealt with in the member's answer. It is something that troubles me also.

Most custody and divorce arrangements result in a separation agreement that deals with custody and access to the children. Many

### *Private Members' Business*

of these agreements are then incorporated into court orders. One of the things the bill would do would be to effectively reopen all of these agreements and make them subject to further negotiation and possibly to further litigation.

Does the member have any appreciation for the chaos that would be caused in otherwise settled, stable child custody and access arrangements by this retroactivity?

**Mr. Maurice Vellacott:** Mr. Speaker, that is quite a statement from the member about the kind of chaos that will be, as opposed to the chaos there presently is across the country.

With due respect to the member, we have shut out people along the way over the course of many years, and the tender years doctrine has sometimes done that in a very considerable way.

Parents never lose the desire to have contact with their children over the course of time. I can tell the member about too many conversations with parents who, after many years, once the money ran out after paying off the lawyers, finally came to an agreement.

I would think that there may be some opening of scenarios, and there will be some reasonable compromises come of that, based on a fair presumption in terms of access. Some of those children at this point will obviously be able to make the choice themselves and say that they want to be with mom or with dad on some kind of basis. They do that now. It is sometimes not honoured, but I think that will be something that will generally work out over time.

I think it is a bit of scare story to talk about chaos when there is actually chaos right now in the legal system in Canada.

• (1750)

**Mr. Erin O'Toole (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for bringing this debate to the floor here today, and particularly for mentioning Kristen Titus. I am happy to call Kris a friend and a resident of my constituency. She has been a passionate advocate on these issues as a mother talking about the importance of parents in the lives of children.

One of the positive developments I have seen since my years at law school and following the evolution of family law is the increase in collaborative law settings that avoid the strife and the real impact on children that the drawn-out traditional approach to divorce has caused in Canada. Many family law lawyers are opting out of that and agreeing to work within a collaborative setting that is focused on making sure that the children do not get missed as the parents settle these disputes.

I am wondering if that evolution of collaborative law toward family law would complement what the member is suggesting in terms of equal parenting and keeping the children and their needs at the focus of family law.

*Private Members' Business*

**Mr. Maurice Vellacott:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question. In fact, that is the whole point of what this bill is intended to do. There are many good lawyers in the collaborative law practice across the country whom I have talked to, and the collaborative law practices across the country are driving this kind of a bill. As a result, we would probably have more of these situations settled outside of the courts by way of collaboration and mediation.

That is what has happened in socialist countries, left-leaning countries, and right-of-centre countries, where they have implemented equal shared parenting. Collaborative law and mediation, and that kind of thing, become increasingly important when we have a rebuttable presumption of equal shared parenting, aside from cases of abuse and neglect.

That is a great question, and a sign of the times by way of what we have on the floor here today.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, as I was saying to the hon. member for Saskatoon—Wanuskewin, I appreciate the work he has done and his persistence, because this is not the first incarnation of Bill C-560. It came up as Bill C-422 in the previous Parliament.

Clearly, it is a hot topic. I must say that, since my election in May 2011, it has probably been one of the bills on which I have received the most correspondence and heard the most opinions, all of them varied. I received even more for some other bills.

First of all, I would like to thank all those who have written to me, especially those in my riding with an interest in the matter. I think that everyone is interested in it. Everyone in the House shares the concern about providing our children with the best environment possible. There is no doubt about that. I have felt that from both sides, both from those who supported Bill C-560 and from those who expressed major reservations.

I have also had the privilege of listening to many groups on both sides. I had an absolutely fascinating conversation with Brian Ludmer, one of the people who worked on this bill, one of its architects, one might say, in terms of its terminology.

What fascinates me about the debate on Bill C-560 is that, for the most part, everyone is saying much the same thing. Views begin to diverge when it comes to the solution or to what has to be done. That is not so clear.

I have analyzed Bill C-560. I would never claim to be an expert in matrimonial law. That is why, before making any recommendations to the NDP caucus, I spent a lot of time talking with people with much more expertise than I have. I met with people from the Canadian Bar Association and the Barreau du Québec, among others.

Make no mistake, I have already heard the arguments of those who support Bill C-560. They will say that lawyers just want to protect their turf, but that is not so. I have also spoken with lawyers who have dealt with complex cases that were not always resolved the way they would have hoped. My impression is that those dramatic cases are the reason behind Bill C-560, and Bill C-422 before it.

There are a number of them in Canada, including in Quebec. Sometimes, we wonder which legal planet we are living on.

That being said, just because some judges apply a law a certain way does not necessarily mean that we should shred up that law, throw it out and completely change the system. Whether the Conservative member introducing Bill C-560 likes it or not, this represents an immense change. It is not as easy as he would have us believe. What we do here, the thing that is at the heart of everything referred to as “child care” in Canada, is serving the best interests of the child. That is the basic principle. What this bill does is create a presumption.

When we create a presumption, even if it is refutable, in other words if we can counter or set aside this presumption by introducing evidence, this is still very different than starting with the basic premise, namely the best interests of the child.

In this bill, it is fascinating to see the text that speaks to presumption. I will read the exact text:

The presumptions referred to in subsection (4) [equal parenting] are rebutted if it is established that the best interests of the child would be substantially enhanced by allocating parenting time or parental responsibility other than equally.

Not only does this preclude the essential nature of the best interests of the child, but it demands a considerable interest. There is a major problem with that. Imposing this presumption is the major problem with this bill.

• (1755)

I asked my colleague a question about retroactivity. He could very well have introduced his bill without undoing everything that has previously been done. Not only is this situation tragic, but tons of cases could end up back in court, cases that people have learned to live with. Perhaps those were not good solutions at the time, but this is what could happen now. Retroactivity provisions in legislation are rather dangerous. The Conservative government was able to see it last week with the Whaling decision. That is a red flag for me.

The NDP caucus has often supported bills at second reading to be able to conduct an in-depth analysis in committee. The major amendment that needs to be made in this case is to withdraw the presumption of equal parenting. My colleague is right that major problems need to be addressed. However, we should not do this by way of a private member's bill; we should have a government bill instead. In so doing, we would be able to better regulate the right of judges to grant custody with a view to equal parenting. Everyone agrees with that principle. I come from Quebec, where civil law stipulates that both parents have parental authority. That is something we are still hoping to achieve.

Under the circumstances, it is not even possible to amend the bill. I will therefore not waste my time. I would rather ask the government why it does not consult with experts in the field in order to draft a piece of legislation that is true to what the member is trying to do. In fact, several reports have been signed in the House for Bill C-422. That would be done legally and without undermining the fundamental principle in family law with respect to custody and the best interests of the child.

*Private Members' Business*

The problem is that, once custody is granted to the mother, for example, it takes a lot of convincing to get a judge to change the custody terms. Things can change over the years. Sometimes, a person is not ready for joint custody when the child is one, two or three, but is ready when the child is five or seven years old. We should make equal parenting more flexible over the years.

It would have been much better to throw the baby, meaning the system, out with the bathwater, and say that the child's interest is no longer our concern. Although that is not what I heard my colleague say, because I will not put words in his mouth, that is what his bill says.

I am prepared to accept his speech as it stands, but I must deal with the terminology in the bill. It removes the principle of the interest of the child and creates a presumption of equal parenting and a heavier than necessary burden to make the interest of the child the priority again. That is a major problem that adds to the problem with retroactivity.

With all due respect for the drafters of this bill, it is fundamentally so different from what it should be that I would rather we focus our energy on agreeing that we need to make changes to the custody system in consideration of the best interests of the child and equal custody so that both parents have access to the child. That way, we would be doing a service to society. The bill currently has major problems that we cannot remedy or amend.

It is unfortunate, but this bill should not even proceed to second reading. However, we could sit down with the people who are having problems and who have had a difficult time and listen to what they have to say.

● (1800)

Sometimes judges have simply not caught up with the times and need a few gentle nudges to remind them that having two parents—a father and a mother—is important for the child.

[*English*]

**Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, may I begin by first congratulating the member for Saskatoon—Wanuskewin for his long service in this place. We differ in philosophy. We differ in political stripe. In fact, we differ on this bill. However, for anyone who has served his constituents and Canadians for 19 years, that is indeed something to be commended. I know the member has indicated that he does not intend to re-offer in the upcoming election. We have several months before the next election, I think, but it is not too early to acknowledge the significant contribution of this parliamentarian.

The bill placed before the House in his name, Bill C-560, is an effort to change the standard applied by the courts when dealing with divorce cases. Specifically, the summary contained in the bill reads as follows:

This enactment amends the Divorce Act to replace the concept of “custody orders” with that of “parenting orders”. It instructs judges, when making a parenting order, to apply the principle of equal parenting unless it is established that the best interests of the child would be substantially enhanced by allocating parental responsibility other than equally.

This is not the first time that the member has introduced a bill on this matter. The most significant changes that the bill would bring to

the Divorce Act are, first, the removal of the current definition of “custody” from the Divorce Act, replacing it with “parenting”. That is defined as “the act of assuming the role of a parent to a child, including custody and all of the rights and responsibilities commonly and historically associated with the role of a parent”. Second is the creation of a presumption that allocating parenting time equally between the spouses and equal parental responsibility are in the best interests of the child. Third is the addition of factors that courts must consider in making custody orders.

The current law mandates the application of the best interests of the child test. The best interests of the child test has been a fundamental part of most legislation relating to children for years. This doctrine is not unique to family law proceedings. It is also used in federal legislation under the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, the Citizenship Act, and the Youth Criminal Justice Act. It is also used in some provincial legislation dealing with matters, such as custody, access, and child support for unmarried couples; child protection legislation, and by that I mean legislation dealing with the apprehension and supervision of children by child protective services; adoption legislation; and in some provinces, change of name legislation.

None of the federal acts defines best interests of the child, as was pointed out by the member. However, many provincial family law and child protection acts include extensive definitions of the concept. Some provincial acts even include different best interests of the child tests for different contexts. For example, the Ontario Child and Family Services Act defines the test differently for child protection than it does for adoption.

As it stands now, courts must apply the best interests of the child from the perspective of the child, not the parents, and they must consider the long-term interests of the child as well as the child's day-to-day needs.

Three primary considerations under the best interests of the child test that the courts often consider are preserving the status quo in the interests of maintaining some stability for the child, whether one parent acted as the primary caregiver during the relationship, and the importance of keeping siblings together when considering future housing arrangements.

The best interests of the child is a critical component of the Divorce Act, and it appears in sections relating to custody. Under the current act, the best interests of the child, as it relates to condition, means that needs and other circumstances of the child are the overriding factor that the courts may consider when making a custody order. Further, when making a custody order, courts must give effect to the principle that a child should have as much contact with each spouse as is consistent with the best interests of the child. For that purpose, it should take into consideration the willingness of the person for whom custody is sought to facilitate such contact.

*Government Orders*

● (1805)

We all know that divorce is often a painful experience for couples, particularly when children are involved. In an ideal world, parents would see past their differences and would apply what the courts currently apply, which is to say, the best interests of the child standard. However, since divorce is sometimes acrimonious, painful, and filled with emotion, the best interests of the child are sometimes lost or confused with the subjective interests of a parent, and often those competing interests are to the detriment of the child or children.

It is for that reason, in part, that a judge must have the ability to apply his discretion to ascertain the facts and eventually make a determination of what is in the best interests of the child. I fear that what the hon. member is proposing would seriously alter that standard and would remove the discretion of the judge to assess the case through the best interests of the child and not the father or mother.

I am not alone in my concern about this bill. The Canadian Bar Association has very serious concerns about this bill. This is what the CBA had to say about the bill when it was introduced in a previous Parliament as Bill C-422, now Bill C-560. I will quote the Canadian Bar Association, which stated:

As lawyers, we assist all family members in restructuring their responsibilities and arrangements following separation and divorce. As a result, the CBA Section sees this issue from all sides. We firmly believe that the only perspective to foster outcomes that are best for children is to require that the courts and parents focus solely on the children's interests in making decisions.

Bill C-422 [now Bill C-560] does not accomplish what it proposes. It does not give parties tools to resolve differences, nor does it assist them in making plans to share decision-making and physical care of children to minimize conflict and maximize children's benefits. It would move from considering the individual child to preferring parents' rights. It would encourage contentious litigation in future cases of family breakdown, and equally important, would cause thousands of children to be re-exposed to litigation and conflict as many settled cases would be reopened.

Those are the words of Canadian Bar Association. They are not mine.

It further stated:

Under current law, the legal playing field is even; there is no gender bias in law requiring judges to consider "the best interests of the child" as paramount. Instead, the Bill proposes an overly simplistic idea of equality: rather than considering a fair result best for the children involved in the case at hand, children must be split right down the middle. The Bill does not advance equality for either fathers or mothers. Its proposals would come at the sacrifice of the appropriate focus, solely on what is best for children.

There is more in the way of opposition to this bill, and it comes from the member's own party. Senior ministers have come out against this effort. In 2009, speaking at the Canadian Bar Association's annual conference, the then minister of justice and attorney general, now defence minister, was asked his position on equal parenting and the bill we are now debating. He stated, "the best interests of the child are always paramount...and should be".

The member for Saskatoon—Wanuskewin will know that just two weeks ago, his colleague and friend, the current Minister of Justice, appeared at the justice committee to account for his supplementary estimates request. During the meeting, the minister was very willing to answer questions, and I felt he was reasonable and fair in some of his responses, including the response to a question about whether the

government intends to invoke the notwithstanding clause of the charter on matters where it disagrees with the Supreme Court.

I posed a direct question to the minister about Bill C-560, which is before the House today. This is what I asked the minister at committee:

A private member's bill is coming before the House, C-560, dealing with the Divorce Act. Back in 2009, your predecessor, [the Minister of National Defence], indicated that the best interests of the child are always paramount. Given that this question is about to come before the House, what are your views on that, sir?

He answered:

This particular private member's bill will receive, I'm sure, the rigorous examination that all private members' bills receive. I am familiar with the one you're referencing. I can tell you, having practised some family law—as you have in Prince Edward Island—that the long-held legal maxim and the jurisprudence definitely supports that the best interests of the child will remain the primary concern. I see no change in that regard.

● (1810)

I asked a supplementary:

The bill proposes to weaken that in favour of parental rights. Do you realize that?

The minister's response was "Yes, I do realize that".

The Divorce Act currently establishes the best interests of the child as the paramount consideration in custody cases. In other words, the rights of the parent are subordinate to the interests of the child.

This legislation seeks to weaken that. It is not acceptable to the Liberal Party of Canada. It is not acceptable to the Canadian Bar Association. It is not acceptable to the present Minister of Justice or to the former minister of justice. That is why we will oppose the bill.

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## GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

### PROTECTING CANADIANS FROM ONLINE CRIME ACT

BILL C-13—NOTICE OF TIME ALLOCATION MOTION

**Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to advise that agreement could not be reached under the provisions of Standing Order 78(1) or 78(2) with respect to the second reading stage of Bill C-13, An Act to amend the Criminal Code, the Canada Evidence Act, the Competition Act and the Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters Act.

Under the provisions of Standing Order 78(3), I give notice that a minister of the Crown will propose, at the next sitting, a motion to allot a specific number of days or hours for the consideration and disposal of proceedings at the said stage.

## RESPECT FOR COMMUNITIES ACT

BILL C-2—NOTICE OF TIME ALLOCATION MOTION

**Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to advise that agreement could not be reached under the provisions of Standing Order 78(1) or 78(2) with respect to the second reading stage of C-2, An Act to amend the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act.

Under the provisions of Standing Order 78(3), I give notice that a minister of the Crown will propose, at the next sitting, a motion to allot a specific number of days or hours for the consideration and disposal of proceedings at the said stage.

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## PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*Translation*]

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-560, An Act to amend the Divorce Act (equal parenting) and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

**Mr. Robert Goguen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House of Commons today to speak to Bill C-560, An Act to amend the Divorce Act (equal parenting) and to make consequential amendments to other Acts.

The provisions of the Divorce Act regarding custody and access have not changed since they came into effect in 1986. According to section 16 of the Divorce Act, when making an order respecting custody or access, the court must be guided by only one principle, the best interests of the child.

Provincial and territorial family laws are also guided by the principle of the best interests of the child. This principle is also recognized by many instruments of international law, such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The principle of the best interests of the child recognizes that each child is unique and that his or her best interests must be determined on a case-by-case basis. When applying the principle of the best interests of the child in cases of custody or the role of the parent, the courts take into account a number of factors. The main factors pertain to the child, such as age, stage of development, presence of special needs, and the wishes of the child, if any. There are also factors related to the role of the parents, such as the parenting abilities of each parent and how they plan to take care of the child. Finally, there are a number of other factors such as the child's relationships with brothers and sisters, grandparents or any other relative.

Subsection 16(10) of the Divorce Act also refers to the principles of maximum contact and co-operative parenting, which the courts must also take into account when considering all the pertinent factors in order to determine the best interests of the child.

These principles are as follows: the courts apply the principle whereby the child of the marriage must have as much contact with each spouse as is consistent with the best interests of the child; and

### *Private Members' Business*

for the purposes of applying the principle of maximum contact, the court shall take into consideration the willingness of the person requesting custody to facilitate such contact. This is known as the friendly parent rule.

Courts do not consider a person's past conduct unless the conduct is relevant to the ability of that person to act as a parent. When a custody order is issued, the court can amend it if the court is convinced that the child's situation has significantly changed since a judge issued the most recent order.

If the court determines that there has been a significant change, it issues an order that meets the best interests of the child. When it issues a variation, the court applies the principles of the best interests of the child, of maximum contact and of cooperative parenting. It also applies the rule on past conduct, if needed. Basically, the court has the discretionary power to establish any arrangement that it deems to be in the best interests of the child.

Bill C-560 would amend the provisions on custody and access in the Divorce Act. It would add an approach based on an equal sharing of the parental role and will replace the terms "custody" and "access" with "parenting orders", "parental responsibility" and "parenting time".

The bill would add two presumptions about the role of the parents. These are the presumption that parenting time should be shared equally between the spouses and the presumption that parental responsibility should be equal or joint. In Bill C-560, parental responsibility essentially comes down to the power to make decisions on behalf of the child.

The presumptions would not apply if it is established that the interests of the child would be better served by the unequal division of parenting time or parental responsibility. When the presumptions do not apply, the court would still give effect to the principle that a child of the marriage should have as much contact with each parent as is consistent with that child's best interests.

The bill proposes to add several criteria that the court would have to consider when determining the best interests of the child. It also proposes to add rules about changing the child's residence. It also contains provisions encouraging the spouses to settle their differences without going to court and to use other dispute resolution mechanisms such as mediation.

Family law is a very important area of law.

● (1815)

Canadians are much more likely to have problems related to family law than problems related to other aspects of the justice system.

*Private Members' Business*

As is the case for many areas of jurisdiction set out in our Constitution, responsibility for family law is shared by the federal government and the provinces and territories. The provinces and territories have authority to legislate on issues related to couples that are not married and separate, as well as married couples that separate but do not divorce. The provinces and territories are also primarily responsible for administering this justice. This means they are responsible for the operation of the courts and family justice services, such as education programs for children and mediation. The federal government has jurisdiction over divorce and any related matters, such as custody.

Given that this is a shared jurisdiction, both levels of government, that is the federal as well as the provincial and territorial, have been working together for some time to improve the legislation on family law and the family justice system. For instance, as part of the supporting families experiencing separation and divorce initiative, the federal government provided the provinces and territories with funding to support family justice services, especially innovative projects such as specialized services for families experiencing major conflicts and using mediation services from a distance.

During these many years of collaboration, the family law system has gone through many changes. For instance, authorities now focus more on appropriate mechanisms for dispute resolution. In order to minimize the negative impact of divorce on children and other family members, families need a system that will maintain good relationships as much as possible.

Collaborative family law, alternative dispute resolution and mediation are examples of different approaches that help parents come up with solutions themselves. Another example of the ever-changing system of family law has to do with the results of custody cases.

The Divorce Act itself has not changed, but the kinds of orders handed down have changed considerably since new provisions regarding custody and access came into effect in 1986.

In 1986, the majority of orders gave so-called “traditional” custody to mothers, and only 1% of orders resulted in joint legal custody.

The data coming out of certain Canadian courts between 2010 and 2012 paint a very different picture. The data are compiled according to who is living with the child. It is sometimes known as physical custody, which is similar to the concept of parenting time in Bill C-560. The data also show that legal custody of children refers to making important decisions about them. Legal custody is similar to the idea of parental responsibility found in the bill.

The proportion of orders made under the Divorce Act that require parents to make important decisions together has increased from 1% to 75% in recent years.

Statistics show considerable changes in physical custody or parenting time. In 1998, barely 5% of divorce orders set out a shared custody arrangement, under which the children had to spend at least 40% of their time with each parent. However, if we look at the numbers between 2010 and 2012, approximately 21% of cases involved shared custody. That is a significant increase.

Between 2010 and 2012, only 5% of the cases involved sole custody arrangements. That is a lot of numbers, but that is how family law has evolved.

In more than one-third of the orders made under the Divorce Act, judges order that children spend at least 40% of their time with the father. That is a significant, positive shift from what was happening in 1998.

Bill C-560 raises important issues, and I am looking forward to hearing the other members' thoughts on it.

● (1820)

**Mr. Pierre Jacob (Brome—Missisquoi, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, over the past few decades, society has gone through some serious economic and social upheaval. We are seeing the emergence of new types of families. There is a growing number of single parent and blended families.

According to the most recent census of 2006, there were 1,267,000 families in Quebec. Of that number, one-third were single parent families. They now represent a little more than a quarter of all families. That is the highest percentage ever recorded. We must take this new reality into account.

That is why I am speaking to Bill C-560, which amends the Divorce Act to replace the concept of custody orders with that of parenting orders. This bill instructs judges to apply the principle of equal parenting when making a parenting order.

This is not the first time that this bill has come before the House. It is similar to Bill C-422 from the last Parliament, in 2010. As with its predecessor, I have some reservations about Bill C-560.

When it comes to divorce, we must focus the debate on the real issue and that is the best interests of the child. I fear that is not the case with Bill C-560. It shifts the emphasis from the children to the rights of the parents.

In June 2010, in the context of its submission on the issue, the Canadian Bar Association said:

...any discussion of “parental rights” is misguided when resolving arrangements for children. The sole focus must be what is best for children.

When a parent before the law must put the interests of the child first, he or she is more inclined to put aside personal interests and make compromises. What is more, under the existing legislation, there is already the option of shared custody, if that is in the best interests of the child.

By amending the existing law, as Bill C-560 proposes, I wonder if we are not encouraging families to engage in lengthy and costly legal battles that will have an adverse affect on the child and the parents.

I would like my esteemed colleagues across the way to tell me whether this bill will give rise to an increased number of more aggressive litigation cases.

I fear that the consequences of Bill C-560 will put more emotional and financial pressure on parents and children who are already vulnerable. Combine that with the fact that some jurisdictions provide very little legal or financial aid for family matters, and we see the limits of this bill. The Canadian Bar Association shares these same concerns.

Parents make decisions before going to court, and those decisions will be better informed if they have their community's support. Parental equality would be more appropriate if those communities had more funding for parental education and had better legal services.

The current legislation always takes these variables into consideration, while keeping the best interests of the child in mind. The child must remain the primary principle in family law in Canada.

Here is how Bill C-560 changes this principle. It tries to create a presumption of equal shared parenting by ignoring the best interests of the child. However, shared custody would not be suitable for all family situations. In fact, many factors need to be taken into account to determine how the child's interests would be best served.

In other words, one size does not fit all. Each child's situation is unique, with different variables. Children grow up in different communities with dynamics that are not always the same. Judges must assess each case separately.

• (1825)

The NDP supports the principles in certain provisions of Bill C-560 concerning the importance of consultation, mediation and arbitration, provided that all this is done in the best interests of the child.

However this bill does not take that into account. I therefore find that this bill is inadequate and, unfortunately, I cannot support it.

• (1830)

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** The hon. member for Brome—Missisquoi will have four minutes when the House resumes debate on this issue.

The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

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## ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[*Translation*]

### COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

#### FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The House resumed from March 4 consideration of the motion.

**Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am happy to have the opportunity to speak to this subject. It was discussed during the first part of our debate. We are actually talking about two subjects here.

### *Routine Proceedings*

Let us recall what happened. This debate began because the Conservative side wanted to avoid a debate about one of its members who was in prima facie contempt of Parliament. Contempt of Parliament is no small thing; it is serious. The Speaker found that the member was indeed in contempt of Parliament.

We were here in the House. I will repeat the expression I used at the time: I was, quite simply, outraged. We were discussing a matter of major importance to our democracy when the motion was presented without notice to prevent us from discussing the incident of contempt of Parliament. That was the tactic they used. That is totally unacceptable and in violation of our democracy. It also shows a profound lack of respect for an extremely important issue. Using that kind of tactic is politics with a little *p*, one so small that it is impossible to see and all we are left with is "olitics". I hope that I will never find myself getting used to those kinds of tactics and that I will never learn to tolerate them.

That being said, if we have to talk about the report, I would like to point out that the New Democratic Party submitted a supplement to the report. Since our supplement is very short, I will take this opportunity to read it.

New Democrats wish to thank the witnesses for their important and often highly personal testimony, which shed significant light on the experiences of Jewish refugees from the Middle East and North Africa. This historical experience is one that must be better known by all Canadians. It is also an occasion to recognize and condemn the injustices and anti-Semitism experienced by many Jewish refugees, and to recommit to the protection of refugees everywhere.

New Democrats are in support of Recommendation 1, which calls on the Government of Canada to officially recognize the experience of Jewish refugees who were displaced from states in the Middle East and North Africa after 1948.

The NDP put out that supplementary report at the time. A little while ago we received the government's response to the committee's report. It was very interesting to see that the government essentially endorses the NDP's position, even though the Conservatives on the committee took a different position. In its response, the government endorsed the NDP's position. The government said the following with respect to the first recommendation:

• (1835)

[*English*]

The Government of Canada agrees with this recommendation. Fair and equal acknowledgement of all refugee populations arising out of the Arab-Israeli conflict requires the recognition of Jewish refugees. The Government shares the Committee's belief that such recognition does not diminish or compete with the situation of Palestinian refugees.

[*Translation*]

The government expressed some hesitations about the second recommendation, which went a bit further. It was somewhat cautious, as were we. The government said:

[*English*]

The Government of Canada understands the positive intent underlying this recommendation but at this time, Canada has offered its support to the peace process as presently structured.

[*Translation*]

That is key. Despite what the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Prime Minister are currently doing, Canada cannot and should not act alone on such issues.

*Routine Proceedings*

We need to work with the others. This is not the time to try to change the framework for negotiations that was agreed upon. Everyone wants peace in the Middle East, but to achieve peace, we will have to pursue diplomatic avenues. We have to accept that it will be a long, hard and sometimes tiresome diplomatic road, and that we will have to do the ground work and keep working over the long term.

Canada used to have a lot to contribute to this work, since it chaired the committee on refugee issues. Unfortunately, we can no longer play such a positive role because we have lost our reputation. That is too bad, since we will still have to examine issues related to peace negotiations and Palestinian refugees in the future. This is an essential part of finding a solution to sustainable peace for everyone in this troubled part of the world.

[*English*]

**Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for her intervention and the amazing work she does on her file and back in her riding as well.

As I sat here and listened to the points she made, I was reminded of the practices that I have seen being amplified in this House since I have been a parliamentarian. Since I have come to this House, I have had my eyes opened. I have seen our parliamentary democracy at work.

Unfortunately what I have seen is the majority in the House over and over again using closure, time allocations, or other tactics to shut down debate.

During question period we see colleagues across the way—ministers, the Prime Minister, cabinet ministers, and parliamentary secretaries—getting up time and time again to answer questions in such a way that those who are outside of this House, as well as those of us who are inside the House, are left wondering what the question was because the answers are totally unrelated. They go off into some kind of trajectory. If I were teaching in a classroom, I would be pulling the students right back, saying, “Here is the question; here are the parameters for your answer.”

In a similar way, here we had a very serious issue in the House, before Parliament and before the Speaker. The issue was of contempt. Instead of dealing with it very seriously and in a way that respected every single parliamentarian in this House, as well as this august body in its totality, what we had was, once again, searching the annals of history and putting on the table a very sensitive document that all of us had considerable debate on and that should be debated in a deliberative way.

We were not dealing with something that could be dealt with in a nanosecond, but instead tactics were used to stop this House from hearing a response or having any kind of a discussion on the issue of contempt.

I know I am probably getting very close to stretching my time limits, so the question I have for my colleague is this. Does she feel that the actions taken disrespected the process we have for dealing with committee reports?

● (1840)

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** I do not know that the question is pertinent to the question that is before the House. However, I do appreciate that the member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie did include some commentary along the line of that particular narrative in the course of her comments, so if she is willing, we will go to the hon. member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Hélène Laverdière:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her question and her very relevant comments. In her question, she used the key word “respect”. The way everything was handled in this matter smacks of utter disrespect. Indeed, the approach used to avoid debate in the House on another major issue is disrespectful to the work of the committee. It is disrespectful to the parliamentary process.

As my colleague said, it is another way to prevent debate and to prevent people from talking about the issue and giving their feedback. During this same week, the members of the committee voted against hearing the testimony of the Chief Electoral Officer, which I think is absolutely incredible. This shows disrespect for the committee and the House.

This lack of respect for the House was shown just as we were discussing a matter of contempt of Parliament. Our democracy is being disrespected all too often and regularly, unfortunately. I would add that this is disrespectful to Canadians. When I went back to my riding, I met with people affected by the issue. They are directly affected by the issue. They find that using this file for purely partisan purposes is disrespectful to the situation, those affected and the witnesses who appeared before the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development and touched us with their testimony.

**Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, if I understand correctly, the report was used primarily to change the position. What was happening in the House did not suit them. Then witnesses were invited and we heard their testimonies in committee. There were things the government might have done, but the government decided not to listen to the witnesses.

I would like to know what important things some witnesses had to say about what that the government might have done to help them.

**Ms. Hélène Laverdière:** Mr. Speaker, the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development did indeed hear some very moving testimony from people who have experienced very difficult situations and personal and human tragedies.

People working in foreign affairs often tend to become a little colder and try to distance themselves from discussions. I personally remember these testimonies as really quite moving. I think that what most of the people were asking for was that the government recognize that terrible things had happened to them. The NDP agreed, but the Conservatives wanted to go a little further in their recommendations. The NDP thought that the witnesses' recommendation was legitimate and entirely valid. In the end, we tabled a supplementary report basically on that. It was rather interesting and rather ironic to see that the government itself supported the NDP's position rather than that of the Conservatives on the committee.

*Routine Proceedings*

I am coming back to these people. I am sure that many of them must be frustrated that their questions and issues are being used for purely partisan purposes to avoid a debate in the House on a point of contempt of Parliament.

I am a relatively new MP, but I hope that even after 10 years on the job, if I am given that privilege, I will still be outraged by such wrongdoing.

• (1845)

[*English*]

**Mr. Mark Adler (York Centre, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by thanking the chair and the members of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development for their report on recognizing Jewish refugees from the Middle East and North Africa. I also want to thank those who appeared before the committee as witnesses.

The refugee experience holds a special place in the Canadian heart. Indeed, one of the primary roots of modern Canada lies in the mass northward movement of displaced United Empire Loyalists seeking refuge from the American Revolution.

It should come as no surprise that our country has had a long history and tradition of providing protection to those who need it. We were a haven for African Americans fleeing slavery before the American Civil War; for Poles, Jews, and Ukrainians fleeing oppression in the 1800s and the first decades of the 20th century; and for Hungarians, Czechs, Chinese, Tibetans, Vietnamese, Afghans, and others fleeing communist oppression in the middle of the last century. Later in the last century, and more recently, we have embraced refugees from South America, Africa, the Middle East and elsewhere.

These are just a few examples of the many noteworthy times we have seen Canada's long-standing commitment to protecting those most in need of refuge. In fact, since the Second World War, we have welcomed more than one million refugees.

Canada is among the world's most generous and fair countries in our treatment of vulnerable populations. The United Nations has described Canada's refugee system as "a model for other countries". We are that model for the world, and today Canada welcomes about one out of every ten of all resettled refugees globally, more than almost any other industrialized country in the world. Even in absolute terms, and according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' global trend analysis, Canada ranks number one for resettled refugees on a per capita basis. We are proud of that record and we are continuing that record.

Those who have found refuge on our shores, and their descendants, have shaped the country we live in today, as do those who selflessly sponsor refugees, help them settle, integrate, and succeed in their new home.

Canadians are very familiar with the dramatic, often tragic, and frequently inspiring stories of the waves of refugees who have come to this country. The dramatic and harrowing tales of their struggle to find refuge are an integral part of our story as a nation.

As Canadians, we never take our rights, freedoms, and peaceful coexistence for granted because we know all too well what it means

to live without these things: persecution, tyranny, and violent oppression. We know this either through our own experience, through the experience of our ancestors, or through the experience of our neighbours.

There is no greater character trait of being Canadian than our compassion, and that is what compels our government to acknowledge the experience of Jewish refugees from the Middle East and North Africa. As a country that slammed its doors on Jewish refugees from Europe before and during the Holocaust when the Jewish people needed us most, it is vitally important for us to acknowledge that dark period of history.

Whether born here or elsewhere, we all benefit from the shelter that this great country provides for us and from the troubles that plague too many parts of the world. As stewards of that shelter and of our regrettably mixed legacy of providing protection, our refugee policy now focuses on those most in need.

Since we started our resettlement efforts for Iraqi refugees, more than 16,000 have arrived in Canada, and we are on track to meet our commitment of 20,000 by 2015. This is in addition to our other notable recent initiatives, including the resettlement of up to 1,000 more Bhutanese refugees over the next two years, many of whom have family ties here in Canada. That means that, in total, Canada will resettle 6,500 Bhutanese refugees who have previously been living for years in refugee camps in Nepal.

We will also resettle up to 5,000 refugees who are now in Turkey, by 2018. These refugees will be mainly Iraqis and Iranians.

Canada has also committed to resettling up to 1,300 Syrians by the end of 2014. This includes up to 200 extremely vulnerable refugees, such as women at risk and minorities with urgent protection needs, through the government-assisted refugee program.

• (1850)

Moreover, we have allocated up to 1,100 spaces for privately sponsored refugees and are promoting and supporting partnerships between experienced refugee sponsorship agreement holder organizations and Syrian-Canadian community organizations.

Furthermore, the reforms made to our asylum system just over a year ago are making it faster and fairer. Under the new system, asylum claimants receive a hearing much faster than they did previously, generally within two to three months, instead of a year and a half under the previous regime. I am happy to report that the new system is working and that we are providing faster protection to genuine refugees. In addition, the majority of refugee claimants now have access to a fact-based appeal for the first time ever.

*Routine Proceedings*

However, Canada's welcome does not negate the experiences of refugees in their places of origin. On the contrary, when Canada offers asylum to someone, it is a recognition of that experience. As the committee stresses in its report, our recognition of what drove Jewish refugees from their home countries does not diminish or compete with the experience of Palestinian refugees. Through Palestinian immigration, their story has also become part of our story as Canadians. One of the main messages of the committee's report is that two refugee populations were created by the Arab Israeli conflict, one Palestinian and one Jewish.

However, as Stanley Urman, executive vice-president of Justice for Jews from Arab Countries, told the committee, between 1949 and 2009 there were 172 United Nations resolutions dealing specifically with Palestinian refugees while none specifically mentioned Jewish refugees from Arab countries. As Shimon Fogel, chief executive officer of the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs, noted, "The inclusion of the issue of Jewish refugees is meant to complete, not revise, the historical record".

The experience of Jewish refugees has been undervalued because most Jewish refugees went from being a vulnerable minority in societies where they were perceived as "others", to fully integrated citizens of their new countries, while Palestinian refugees became part of a new diaspora that for the most part has not been fully embraced. Not surprisingly, most Jewish refugees do not wish to return to their country of origin, while some Palestinian refugees long for the places they or their ancestors left. This difference in outcomes does not, however, change the fact that Jewish refugees left their homes as a result of discrimination, intimidation, and fear. When they left, individual and communal properties were seized or confiscated without any compensation.

Judaism is indigenous to the Middle East, with the biblical narrative unfolding from Mesopotamia to Egypt. Middle Eastern and North African Jewish communities, both inside and outside Israel, have, or had, deep historical roots. The most authoritative version of the Talmud was in fact compiled in Babylon.

However, communities outside Israel have for the most part been displaced since 1948. As Sylvain Abitbol, co-president of Justice for Jews from Arab Countries, told the committee, "...even in Morocco, despite its tolerant attitude, only 3,000 Jews remain there today out of a population of approximately 265,000 in 1948". Dr. Urman told the committee that under Muslim rule, Jews and Christians in the region had historically been considered "*dhimmi*, a privileged minority but still second-class citizens". And "The status of Jews worsened dramatically in 1948, as virtually all Arab countries declared war or backed the war against Israel. Jews were either uprooted from their countries of residence or became subjugated, political hostages in the Arab Israeli conflict". Dr. Urman estimates that Jewish refugees lost assets in the neighbourhood of \$6 billion.

The committee heard several personal and very tragic testimonies. Regina Publil Waldman, president of Jews Indigenous to the Middle East and North Africa, who grew up in Libya in the 1950s, spoke of her family's experience: "Our Jewish community was forbidden to leave the country. We were denied citizenship. We were denied passports. We were denied the right to travel, yet we had to live in this very anti-Jewish environment". Then in the period following the 1967 war, Jews were expelled from Libya under order of the

government and their property was confiscated. In Ms. Waldman's words, "We were being expelled from the country we had lived in for over 2,000 years".

• (1855)

Her family was forced to leave with almost nothing, one suitcase per person and the equivalent of \$25 per person. At the time of Ms. Waldman's birth in 1948, the Jewish community of Tripoli constituted almost 30% of the total population of the city. Today, that entire community is gone.

Gladys Daoud, a teenager in Baghdad when the 1967 Six Day War broke out, spoke of the Iraqi government of the time proceeding with "a plan of total isolation and economic strangulation" against the Jewish population. Ms. Daoud's acceptance to Baghdad University was retracted and she was refused a passport to study abroad. Her family's bank accounts were frozen and their property was confiscated. They were forbidden to leave Baghdad, but eventually escaped the country in 1971.

Another refugee from Iraq, now Canadian, Lisette Shashoua, also spoke of the retaliatory measures that were instituted against the Iraqi Jewish community following the 1967 war. She told the committee that, "In 1968 the random arrests intensified. [Jewish] Men were tortured and forced to say they were spies".

In January 1969, following mock trials, 10 Jewish men were publicly hanged and accused of being Israeli spies. The next day was made a public holiday with people invited to come and dance in celebration underneath the dangling corpses. Ms. Shashoua said, "You can just imagine the sheer terror that dominated our daily existence after that horrid day". Ms. Daoud reports still having nightmares about being back in Baghdad and reliving the anguish of those days.

The overall result of the ongoing Arab-Israeli conflict and discrimination and intimidation practised against Jews in various countries in the region was summarized by Dr. Bensoussan in his testimony. He said, "...Jews who had been present in Arab Muslim countries for a thousand years were squeezed out in the span of one generation...".

Dr. Urman informed the committee that nearly 650,000 Jews immigrated to Israel, while more than 200,000 Jews found safe haven in countries other than Israel, including Canada.

Raising awareness of the experience of Jewish refugees from the region can also shed light on broader issues of inclusion and diversity in the Middle East and North Africa. On that topic, I am very pleased that, last year, our government officially opened the Office of Religious Freedom within the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development. This office was created to advocate on behalf of religious communities under threat, oppose religious hatred, and promote Canadian values of pluralism and tolerance.

Freedom of religion is a fundamental human right under increasing threat around the world, including in Egypt, where Coptic Orthodox Christians continue to face daily, violent persecution at the hands of extremists, and in Syria, where extremists seek power by trying to pit faith communities against each other.

These extremists ultimately reject a pluralist view of their societies based on the universal principles of freedom, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law, in which all communities have a right to freedom of religion. They reject a vision of society in which all communities have a right to participate based on the principles of social cohesion, where all can contribute to society and can openly, freely, and in assurance of their peace and security publicly profess their religious faith.

The threat to freedom of religion is increasing around the world. The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life indicates that one-third of the countries in the world have high or very high restrictions on freedom of religion. As some of the restrictive countries are very populous, roughly 75% of the world's population live in countries with high restrictions.

Christians are targeted in terms of both social hostilities and government harassment, more than any other faith, in countries including Iran, Pakistan, and Vietnam. In addition to Coptic Orthodox Christians, Ahmadiyya Muslims, Baha'is, Chaldean Catholics, Tibetan Buddhists, Jews, and Shia Muslims are experiencing difficulty in their ability to worship and practise their faith in peace.

Acknowledging the experience of Jewish refugees from the Middle East and North Africa is an act of peacemaking because it helps us understand the world more holistically and with greater integrity. It speaks to who we are as Canadians and to the aspirations of others to live in societies that celebrate human diversity.

With respect to the committee's second recommendation, "...that the Government of Canada encourage the direct negotiating parties to take into account all refugee populations as part of any just and comprehensive resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian and Arab-Israeli conflicts", we must respect the integrity of the Middle East peace process as it is currently structured.

● (1900)

The ongoing Israeli-Palestinian negotiations take place in the context of the Arab Peace Initiative, which offers Israel peace with the broader Arab world if it reaches an agreement with the Palestinians. There are currently no direct negotiations on the subject of Jewish refugees between Israel and the refugee countries of origin in the Middle East and North Africa.

The government understands the positive intent underlying the second recommendation, but it would be imprudent to attempt to implement it at this delicate time in the peace process.

Canada continues to advocate for a comprehensive two-state solution, reached through a negotiated agreement between the two parties, that guarantees Israel's right to live in peace and security with its neighbours and leads to the establishment of a viable and independent Palestinian state. We welcome the relaunch of direct talks between Israelis and Palestinians, and we congratulate both sides on taking this courageous and necessary step. We commend U. S. Secretary of State John Kerry for the leadership he has shown in the peace process, and we support him in this endeavour.

Canada stands ready to assist the peace process in any way it can. When Secretary of State Kerry undertook a \$100-million initiative to contribute to economic development in the West Bank, Canada was

### *Adjournment Proceedings*

the first country to respond, contributing \$5 million toward that effort. Our ongoing support for the Palestinian people to promote security and the rule of law, stimulate sustainable economic growth, and deliver humanitarian assistance continues unabated.

Indeed, it is the Conservative government's profound support for the peace process that compels it not to take up the second recommendation at this time. The current peace process is, and should be, our number one priority.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** Is the House ready for the question?

**Some hon. members:** Question.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Some hon. members:** No.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

**Some hon. members:** Yea.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** All those opposed will please say nay.

**Some hon. members:** Nay.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** In my opinion the yeas have it.

*And five or more members having risen:*

[*Translation*]

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** Pursuant to Standing Order 66, the recorded divisions stands deferred until Wednesday, March 26, 2014, at the end of government orders.

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## ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

● (1905)

[*Translation*]

### FINANCE

**Ms. Annick Papillon (Québec, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, for approximately 20 years, increasing household debt has been one of the major economic problems of the western world.

In Canada, in the early 1980s, household debt represented, on average, two-thirds of a household's disposable income. In 2013, that ratio surpassed 160% and today it is closer to 168%. It just keeps climbing, and we have taken on more debt than ever. For each dollar of disposable income, households now owe an average of \$1.65.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

What is the explanation for this? It is simple: household spending is increasing faster than income. Basically, middle-class salaries have been stagnating for many years. That is why the NDP believes it is time to take action for families and the middle-class. After 13 years of Liberal government and a decade of Conservative government, it is clear that nothing is being done.

The NDP is not the only one criticizing the inaction of previous governments. The Governor of the Bank of Canada, Stephen Poloz, described household debt as a major threat to the Canadian economy.

The NDP is proposing clear, concrete solutions that the government can implement immediately. It just takes a little leadership to put them in place. It is not enough to think only of their little friends, their relatives and the banks. They have to take the consumers' side. That is what the NDP is doing.

That is why, today, I would like to lay out some small measures on which the government can act. The first of those measures would be to put limits on ATM fees. We in the NDP feel that it is time to limit the fee for a withdrawal at an ATM to 50¢. Bank fees are increasingly abusive. With the hidden fees, the situation is becoming a nightmare. Consumers are finding themselves faced with exorbitant fees whenever they want to take their own money out of an ATM. It really makes no sense, and that is why we must act.

Why is the NDP proposing a 50¢ limit per ATM transaction? Because we have an American study showing that operating costs are about 36¢. Allowing a profit margin of 14¢ per transaction, a 50¢ fee would be quite reasonable. Everyone could handle that, banks as well as consumers.

We also think that prohibitive credit card interest rates should be stopped. We will ensure that people have reasonable access to credit cards at prime plus 5%. That is something that we said during the last campaign, and we will say it again in the next campaign in 2015, because it is essential.

Finally, it is time to stop paying to pay. We succeeded in having the Prime Minister commit to legislation that would prevent additional fees for paper bills. Now we have to make sure that he keeps his promise and that he will move really firmly to abolish those \$2 fees we see on our bills just because the bill from our telephone company or our bank comes in the mail.

Those are the three measures I am presenting today. I invite the Conservative government to show strong support for these NDP measures.

• (1910)

[*English*]

**Mr. Andrew Saxton (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, let me first reassure the hon. member that in an uncertain world, Canada's economic action plan is working. It is creating jobs, keeping the economy growing, and returning Canada to balanced budgets. Since the beginning of the recovery from the global recession, Canada has achieved the best job creation record of any G7 country and one of the best economic performances in the G7.

Both the independent International Monetary Fund, or IMF, and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the

OECD, reaffirmed this. Both are projecting that Canada's economic growth will be among the strongest in the G7 in the years ahead. Canada's economic action plan 2014 builds on this success by continuing our government's support for families and communities across our great country. Our government is keeping taxes low, putting consumers first, protecting Canadians' health and safety, and making communities more resilient in the face of natural disasters.

Let me begin by outlining the actions we are taking to put Canadian consumers first. Since 2006, this government has taken significant action to support and protect Canadian consumers by reducing taxes and tariffs, ensuring marketplace fairness, and promoting competition in a number of industries, including financial services, telecommunications, and air services. We have also taken important steps to improve product and food safety. Economic action plan 2014 expands on the government's consumer-focused measures to improve the bottom line for Canadian families and ensure that they are getting value for their hard-earned tax dollars.

One key focus for our government has been improving competition in the telecommunications market. Economic action plan 2014 proposes new measures to do this. Our government will cap wholesale domestic wireless roaming rates and provide telecommunications regulators with the power to impose administrative monetary penalties on companies that violate rules, such as the wireless code.

Furthermore, our government will also take steps to improve access to broadband Internet service for Canadians in rural and northern communities. We will invest \$305 million over five years to extend and enhance broadband Internet service for Canadians in these remote communities. Enhancing and extending broadband access will help to create jobs, growth, and prosperity for rural and northern Canadians by increasing their ability to participate in the digital economy. In addition, small and medium-sized businesses will benefit by having increased access to information and markets.

Our government is also taking action to help lower costs for consumers in the financial sector. Economic action plan 2014 advances our government's commitment to protect consumers of financial products and services. We will ensure that banks offer low-cost basic banking services that meet consumers' banking needs; that they expand no-cost basic banking services for youth, students, and vulnerable groups, including seniors; and that they continue to provide free monthly printed statements for credit cards. Our government will also be working with stakeholders to help lower the costs that merchants pay to accept credit cards while encouraging merchants to lower prices for consumers.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

## VETERANS AFFAIRS

In addition, our government will work with Canadians on developing a comprehensive financial service consumer code that will better protect consumers of financial products and services and ensure that they have the tools they need to make responsible financial decisions for themselves and their families.

I will finish with this message: Canada's economic action plan is working for Canadians. It is putting their interests first, it is helping support their families and communities, and it is creating jobs, opportunities, and long-term prosperity for all Canadians.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Annick Papillon:** Mr. Speaker, while the Conservatives continue to applaud themselves, we in the NDP are talking to people on the ground.

I am thinking about ordinary people on the ground. I know that bills are going up everywhere. In Quebec City, for example, rents are 40% higher than they were 10 years ago. That just goes to show how difficult things have become. This means that more and more of our income is going to rent, electricity and food, which is constantly rising in price, too. Never have families struggled so hard. Never have they had such a hard time making ends meet.

Thinking of families, thinking of people in our society, those most vulnerable, the middle class, everyone, thinking very much about these people, we in the NDP have proposed some simple solutions. Fifty cents per transaction at ATMs—that is simple. All it takes is a little leadership to make it happen.

We are proposing to limit interest rates on credit cards at prime plus 5% and eliminate paper billing, and not just promising to eliminate it as we have heard the Conservatives do many times. Those are three proposals. I would like the Conservatives to respond to those proposals and not just throw around numbers.

• (1915)

[*English*]

**Mr. Andrew Saxton:** Mr. Speaker, the Conservative Party recognizes that Canadian families are trying to make ends meet, which is why we have lowered 160 different taxes since we came to power in 2006, giving the average Canadian family over \$3,400 a year extra in its pocket at the end of every year, unlike the opposition NDP, which wants to raise taxes and implement a \$20-billion carbon tax that would raise taxes on all Canadian families. Instead, what we are doing is taking action to help Canadian families.

We are ending pay-to-pay policies so that customers will not have to pay extra to receive paper bills. We are expanding no-cost basic banking services. We are working with the provinces and territories to crack down on predatory payday lenders by supporting ongoing efforts to make consumer protection regimes more robust. We are empowering consumers by requiring disclosure of the cost of different payment methods. We are taking action to end unjustified geographic price discrimination against Canadians.

These actions build on what we have already done to empower consumers, such as banning negative-option billing for financial products, making mortgage insurance more transparent, shortening cheque holding periods, and much more. The list goes on. What we are doing is helping Canadian families meet the demands of today.

**Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, GP):** Mr. Speaker, today I speak in the interest of veterans in Thunder Bay—Superior North and across Canada. The welfare of Canada's servicemen and women is an issue that cannot be ignored. Our veterans have put their lives on the line to protect our country. All too often, they come home wounded, disabled, and in need of care, but the Conservatives' treatment of our veterans has been shameful.

In February, the government closed eight Veterans Affairs offices across Canada, including ours in Thunder Bay. Ten staff members lost their jobs at our office, as did hundreds more across the country. In my community, we held a town hall meeting to protest those closures at a memorial service for the office on the final day. I know that countless veterans and their supporters spoke out at similar events from coast to coast.

Veterans travelled to meet the minister, but he brushed them aside. The Conservatives plowed ahead with the closures without a second thought.

The Veterans Affairs office in Thunder Bay served over 2,000 former service members. Our veterans came to the office for assistance with paperwork, much-needed physical and mental health support, employment and training services, and much more.

The current government is dismissing our men and women once again, telling them to access these services online or be put on hold on the phone. Perhaps the member opposite could explain to me how one staff member with only general training and no knowledge of Veterans Affairs is supposed to do the work of six and serve 2,000 people. How will the government provide assistance for aging veterans who are less familiar with computers? How exactly will the 1-800 operator respond to immediate mental health concerns?

The Conservatives simply will not face the facts about their mistreatment of veterans. In the fall, Veterans Ombudsman Guy Parent called for the government to address “urgent shortcomings” with the changes to the Veterans Charter. The new Conservative system of lump-sum payments leaves soldiers who have serious injuries at risk of poverty.

For the Conservatives, simply ignoring an ombudsman is something of an improvement, however. When the former ombudsman, Pat Stogran, criticized the government's “insurance company mentality” in their service of veterans, Conservatives gave him the boot. They would rather silence or even fire veterans advocates than admit their own failures. Things have gotten so bad that wounded veterans have been forced to sue the government just to get the support they need.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

Instead of standing up for our veterans, the Conservatives have argued that they have no responsibility for looking after injured veterans. Their refusal to acknowledge their obligation to our men and women who have served is not only disappointing, it is very disturbing. Pat Stogran called the argument ludicrous and contrary to Canadian values. It is truly a sad state of affairs when veterans who have fought overseas have to fight their own government back home for the compensation they need and deserve. Two thousand veterans were injured during their service in Afghanistan. The current government has seen their sacrifice, only to snub them when they return home. It is shameful.

I ask this again. Will this minister reverse these disgraceful cuts to Veterans Affairs and show our former service members the respect they deserve and provide the services they need?

• (1920)

**Mr. Randy Kamp (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I welcome this opportunity to rise in support of our government's continued efforts on behalf of Canada's veterans and their families.

Indeed, the Government of Canada's record is clear. We are dedicated to ensuring that we are there for those who have served our great country so well and that we provide the care and support they need, when and where they need it. That is why we have earmarked \$785 million more this year for Veterans Affairs Canada compared to what the department received in 2005. That is why, since 2006, we have invested a combined total of almost \$5 billion in new funding to enhance veterans' benefits, programs, and services. Yes, members heard that right: \$5 billion.

What is more, we will continue to make the necessary improvements to serve veterans better and faster and in more modern and convenient ways. That is why, in 2009, for example, we worked with the Department of National Defence to establish integrated personnel support centres on major bases across the country. Through this initiative, we now have more than 100 Veterans Affairs employees working alongside their counterparts from the Department of National Defence on 24 military bases and wings across the country, as well as at seven satellite offices. Through this single initiative, we are providing one-stop service to better ensure that veterans and releasing members are fully aware of the help available to them.

In addition, veterans can now visit any of the nearly 600 Service Canada locations across the country for information about the services and benefits available to them. Thanks to this partnership with Service Canada, we are providing veterans with more points of contact and greater access to professionally trained front-line staff located closer to their homes.

As well, in those communities where the local Veterans Affairs office was closed, we have assigned a full-time permanent Veterans Affairs employee to the nearest Service Canada location. It is also worth noting that the nearest Service Canada location in Thunder Bay is just four kilometres away. In five of the other affected communities, the former Veterans Affairs office and the nearest Service Canada site are actually in the same building.

Most of all, no matter where veterans live, our government is continuing to provide the home visits, face-to-face care, online

access, and toll-free telephone services that they have come to expect and depend upon.

Some Veterans Affairs Canada offices may have closed, but we have not gone anywhere. In fact, we have opened more doors for veterans and their families, and we are proud of that.

**Mr. Bruce Hyer:** Mr. Speaker, I wonder if we get a late show on top of a late show if the minister or the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs do not show up.

The response from the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans on this makes the government's position abundantly clear: it has no plan to reverse its damaging changes to veterans benefits and no plan to support injured veterans. Rather than ensuring that these men and women have the services they need, they are offering a 1-800 number and claiming that the government never promised them support in the first place.

The current Conservative government is adding insult to the injuries that these veterans have sustained in defence of our nation.

Enough is enough. I urge the minister, wherever he may be, to reverse the closure of Veterans Affairs facilities and to begin making up for this neglect of our veterans.

• (1925)

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** Before we go to the hon. parliamentary secretary, I will remind the hon. member that it is customary that we do not refer to the presence or absence of other hon. members in the chamber. During adjournment proceedings, there is not the opportunity for members to bring points of order on this particular issue. I would remind the member of this, and, of course, I am sure that he is aware.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

**Mr. Randy Kamp:** Mr. Speaker, let me repeat that our government is committed to making sure that veterans and their families receive the care and support they need, when and where they need it.

I am also pleased to repeat that we have no plans to reduce such care and support. In fact, no government has ever made greater investments in support and services for veterans.

That is why we continue to have Veterans Affairs case managers provide home visits to veterans who require them, regardless of where they live. That is why we continue to assist them with their shovelling of snow in the winter and the cutting of their grass in the summer. That is why we continue to provide them with the health care services and financial benefits that they need.

It is not complicated. Our government is proud to stand with, care for, and support the remarkable men and women who have served our great country and those who proudly still wear our nation's uniform.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** The hon. member for Cardigan not being present to raise, during the adjournment proceedings, the matter for which notice has been given, the notice is deemed withdrawn.

[*Translation*]

The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

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

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