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(HANSARD)

Wednesday, December 10, 2014

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, December 10, 2014

The House met at 2 p.m.

Prayers

• (1405)

[English]

The Speaker: It being Wednesday, we will now have the singing of the national anthem, led by the hon. member for Vancouver Centre.

[Members sang the national anthem]

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[Translation]

QUEBEC'S CONCERNS

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour, BQ): Mr. Speaker, there are two striking facts that sum up this most recent parliamentary session: a strong resurgence of the fiscal imbalance and the federalist parties' complete lack of consideration for Quebec's environmental concerns.

The pipeline, which has sparked a wave of concern throughout Quebec, does not seem to upset the three federalist parties in Ottawa. They all spoke out in favour of the route. The National Energy Board sees Quebec as just another lobbyist. We are not the masters of our own destiny. The Bloc Québécois, of course, knows that it is not up to the National Energy Board to make decisions on behalf of Quebecers.

It is now clear that Quebec's concerns are being ignored. The federal government prefers to boost the auto and oil industries and does not seem to believe in the principle of boosting and protecting the forestry and cheese industries.

We know we have our work cut out for us. We are the only party that cares about and defends Quebec's interests at all times, without compromise.

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[English]

PAMELA HARDISTY

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the holiday season is a time to reflect and appreciate those who have

made contributions to Parliament. I wish to thank all of our staff and parliamentary employees who have worked so hard throughout the year to enable MPs to serve their constituents effectively.

I wish at this time to note in particular the contributions of Pamela Hardisty, a former assistant parliamentary librarian, who passed away in Surrey, British Columbia, on November 7, at the age of 95.

Pamela Hardisty was born and raised in Manitoba. She obtained a bachelor of arts degree from the University of Manitoba and a master's degree in library science from the University of Toronto. In 1962, Pamela became the assistant parliamentary librarian. She was the first woman to attain this position.

Pamela Hardisty was a dedicated employee for 22 years at the Library of Parliament. Her contributions will always be remembered.

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HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today we celebrate the 66th anniversary of the United Nations General Assembly's unanimous adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This is a time to celebrate our equal rights to freedom, equality, and justice, as established under the universal declaration and the law. However, it is also an opportunity to reiterate our commitment to promoting and advancing these concepts in our society.

New Democrats believe that upholding human rights must be a central organizing principle of Canada's domestic and foreign policy. In many places around the world, people continue to be persecuted for their beliefs, their ideals, and their convictions. We need to keep working to protect those fundamental freedoms as they continue to come under threat and to be abused.

Today and every day, we must commit to protecting human rights and to building a more just and prosperous society in Canada and around the world.

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ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week there was a horrific event in my riding of Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, when RCMP member Corporal Jean Rene Michaud was shot while on duty. I know the whole community joins me in sending our thoughts and prayers to Corporal Michaud and his family while he is recovering in hospital.

Statements by Members

Events such as this are dark reminders of the dangers front-line RCMP officers across the country are putting themselves in every day of the year. They will be serving, as we spend time with our families on Christmas Eve and as we sit down to our Christmas dinners, defending and protecting Canadians and their communities.

It is important that we extend our appreciation and thanks to those who serve on our behalf. These are individuals who have built a reputation for ensuring a safe and secure Canada. The RCMP is an organization that is recognized around the world for the courage and accomplishments demonstrated by its members.

I thank the RCMP and I thank Corporal Jean Rene Michaud for his service.

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CHRISTMAS

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker,

'Twas the week before Christmas and Canadians were keen,
To witness a parliamentary nativity scene.

There are lots of bad actors in this political fray,
So I took up the task of casting this play.

The Prime Minister thought there may be a chance,
But said, "First let me check with the boys in short pants".

The kids all agreed, "All our ministers are in",
But when you look at the lineup, the talent's quite thin.

I said, "Not to be mean or even unkind,
But I don't think three wise men will be easy to find".

And the gifts they would bear, frankincense, myrrh, and gold,
Will take 50 years to deliver, I'm told.

I then got an email from the PMO lads,
"We're going to promote it with action plan ads".

So Joseph was a carpenter, a fixer of note,
Our honourable Speaker would garner my vote.

The cranky innkeeper who showed little heart,
The government House leader might like that part.

The good shepherd should be played by a brave and strong voice,
Our Sergeant-at-Arms is the obvious choice.

But who'll play the Saviour, God's only son?
How 'bout someone born Christmas Day, 1971.

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●(1410)

SPORT

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, here in Canada, children and their families are exposed to a wide variety of opportunities to participate in sports, and many dream of achieving sporting excellence. My community of Brantford-Brant is no exception. It has been blessed with elite athletes having reached the highest levels of achievement.

There are names like Gaylord Powless, perhaps the best lacrosse player the world has ever seen; Kevin Sullivan, Tom Longboat, Debbie Miller, and Rick Mannen, in track and field; local Red Sox legends Jimmy Wilkes and Ron Stead; the NFL's Nick Kaczur;

CFLers Joe Pikula and Dave Clarke; and, of course, a long list of hockey superstars, including the NHL's all-time "iron man", Doug Jarvis, and the greatest hockey player of all time, Wayne Gretzky.

Their stories, iconic memorabilia, and more are now on display in the magnificent new Brantford & Area Sports Hall of Recognition inside the Wayne Gretzky Sports complex. Be sure to visit and experience the stories of over 60 proud Canadian athletes who have left their mark on the world of sports.

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[*Translation*]

QUEBEC CITY NATIVE FRIENDSHIP CENTRE

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today I am pleased to rise to recognize the Centre d'amitié autochtone de Québec, which celebrated its 25th anniversary last week.

The centre helps first nations members living on reserve in the Quebec City region and provides services related to all aspects of modern life. The list is long: assistance with housing, food and clothing, daycare, homework help, homelessness prevention and free Internet access. It also has a whole range of programs geared to aboriginal youth.

Café Roreke, which is located inside the centre, organizes benefit suppers and offers a catering service to raise funds to pay for even more projects to help the community.

The Centre d'amitié autochtone de Québec enriches my community by building and strengthening bridges between different cultures and by offering precious help to those who need it.

I would like to thank all of the people who got the centre started and who have since turned it into a real treasure for the people of Louis-Saint-Laurent. Happy 25th anniversary.

* * *

[*English*]

FORESTRY INDUSTRY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Mr. Colin Mayes (Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the B.C. forest industry has been the backbone of the B.C. economy for the last century. Over the past century, forestry practices, environmental protection, and business models have improved to the point that the B.C. forest industry is recognized globally for its innovation.

Today, more trees are planted than harvested every year. Use of wood fibre per tree has increased from 66% to over 90% today, and the industry has become more efficient and profitable through technological advancement applications.

Our Conservative government has partnered with the forest industry to expand their access to new international markets, especially in the Pacific Rim. We have also invested in research and the development of new wood fibre products and have funded energy efficiency in the industry.

The B.C. forest industry, through innovation, has positioned itself for the next century, which will provide jobs and prosperity for all Canadians in the future.

FIREARMS

Mr. Jim Eglinski (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, law-abiding hunters, farmers and sport shooters know that there is only one party that will stand up for a safe and sensible firearms policy.

It is not the Liberal Party, whose leader said it would bring back the long gun registry and makes claims about firearms laws that either show a deep cynicism or a fundamental misunderstanding of how the firearms laws work. It is not the NDP, who has committed to bringing back the gun registry and tracking every gun in Canada.

It is our Conservative government. We have taken numerous actions to make our firearms policy safe and sensible. We ended the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry once and for all, and introduced the common sense firearms act. We will always stand up for law-abiding hunters, farmers and sport shooters.

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[*Translation*]

MOTOR VEHICLE SAFETY ACT

Mr. Hoang Mai (Brossard—La Prairie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today we will be voting on my bill, Bill C-603, which seeks to make side guards on heavy trucks mandatory.

• (1415)

[*English*]

We can and we must save lives. It is not time for politics. The coroners of Ontario and Quebec are very clear: side guards save lives.

To members who believe that the studies are inconclusive, I invite them to vote in favour of the bill at this stage, so that we can hear from experts at committee.

[*Translation*]

When I introduced my bill, I said that we must not wait for another death to occur before taking action. We have waited too long already.

[*English*]

Families should not have to lose loved ones while waiting for Parliament to take action. The time to act is now. We must support this bill.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mrs. Pat Perkins (Whitby—Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while Canada's economy is better than many, and that is thanks to this government's careful stewardship, we remain on the road to recovery.

Introducing a carbon tax would be detrimental on this road to economic recovery. This government believes in the importance of a strong economy and refuses to weigh it down with another tax on Canadian families, contrary to the NDP and Liberals who have repeatedly called for increased taxes on Canadians.

To bring in a job-killing carbon tax would be irresponsible. Our government is standing up for hard-working Canadians. Our

Statements by Members

Conservative government will never punish Canadians with the job killing carbon tax.

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CAREGIVERS

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Parkdale—High Park, the riding that I represent, is home to many women who come to Canada through the live-in caregiver program.

They leave their families behind to come here and look after our children and our relatives, but this government does not care about their safety. Instead of addressing the vulnerability and precariousness caused by their status here, the government would rather keep these women from building a life by imposing caps on applications for permanent residency.

The government should address the real issues these women face, such as exploitation and unsafe working conditions that are the result of employer-tied work permits and high recruitment fees. Only then will caregivers be safe in Canada, something every person in this country deserves.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government believes that money belongs in the pockets of Canadian families.

The opposition believes that money belongs in government's pockets. It is no secret that the opposition would like to bring forward a job-killing carbon tax. A carbon tax would raise the price on everything, including fuel in Victoria, groceries in Iqaluit and home heating in St. John's. It is a tax that no Canadian wants.

Canadians know that government cannot tax its way to the top, though the opposition disagrees. The Liberals and NDP keep trying to get their hands into the pockets of Canadians, which is why they continue to push for a job-killing carbon tax that will raise the price on everything.

* * *

JEAN BÉLIVEAU

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the great Jean Béliveau is taken to his final place of rest in Montreal, we in this House wish to pay our last respects to the celebrated Gros Bill.

[*Translation*]

He was known for his greatness, elegance and generosity, and let us not forget his incredible simplicity—the trademark of a real hero.

Everything seemed easy for this man who exuded class, but no one rises to the top of a sport without overcoming many obstacles. It was pure talent that led No. 4 to 10 Stanley Cup victories, but his strength of character and his sense of sacrifice also played a role. Did anyone exemplify teamwork better than this great captain?

He was a captain on and off the ice. I do not know what was more admirable, his athletic achievements or the attention he paid to every child who crossed his path.

Oral Questions

Le Gros Bill has hung up his skates, but his memory will live on forever in the hearts of young and old alike.

Thank you, Jean Béliveau.

* * *

● (1420)

[English]

TAXATION

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, under the strong leadership of our Prime Minister, our government is on track to balance Canada's budget. We are now in a position to help Canadian families balance theirs.

Our plan gives new money to 100% of families with children, and the majority of benefits go to low and middle-income families. With the enhancement of the universal child care benefit, moms and dads in communities like Bentley, Eckville, Millet and Blackfalds in the riding of Wetaskiwin, and across this country, will receive nearly \$2,000 per year for every child under six and \$720 per year for every child between the ages of six and 17.

However, the NDP and Liberals want to take this money away and spend it on expensive government programs and bureaucracy. Instead of giving the decision-making power to parents, the NDP and Liberals want Ottawa bureaucrats to tell families what they get to do. That is not right.

We know Canadian families deserve to make their own decisions and we are proud to be the only party standing up for them.

* * *

CONSERVATIVE PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are starting to wonder whatever happened to those Conservatives who rode into power promising to change Ottawa because instead they see that Ottawa has changed the Conservatives.

The Conservatives promised to clean up the mess from the Liberal sponsorship scandal and instead gave us Mike Duffy and Nigel Wright. They promised to end the decade of darkness in our military and instead brought in a decade of darkness for our veterans. They promised on a stack of bibles that they would regulate the oil and gas sector and now they call that very same policy crazy. They promised to do something about the economy, but now we see 400,000 lost manufacturing jobs and the temporary foreign worker fiasco.

Here is a new year's resolution for Canadians: 2015 is just around the corner, let us stand shoulder-to-shoulder united and kick these Conservatives to the curb.

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CHRISTMAS

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is Christmastime and Canadians are decorating their homes, buying presents and baking Christmas treats. However, it is a shame that many feel the need to abandon their traditions to appease the sensibilities of non-Christians. Being respectful of the beliefs of others should not require anyone to water down their own beliefs.

What makes Canada great is that people are free to believe, celebrate and practise the faith they choose without worrying about offending others, Christianity and Christmas included. I am a Sikh and I am not offended when people celebrate Christmas in a traditional way. Instead of silly political correctness, all of us should feel proud in our traditions and beliefs, and rejoice in this season of joy, peace and goodwill.

Merry Christmas to everyone.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Prime Minister said that it was crazy to regulate greenhouse gas emissions, a policy he has been promising for seven years now.

His economic policy, which relies solely on the price of oil in world markets, is a failure. The provinces are fulfilling their responsibilities, despite the federal government's inaction. There are now more jobs in the green energy sector than in the oil sector.

Will the Conservatives apologize for failing in their obligations and weakening our economy?

[English]

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, to be clear, the Prime Minister said Canada would not take unilateral action to regulate the oil and gas sector. This is a North American issue that needs a North American solution. We have always said we would like to work collaboratively with the United States on reducing greenhouse gas emissions for the oil and gas sector.

Canadians need to know that we are the first government in Canadian history to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. We are doing so without the NDP and Liberal job-killing carbon tax.

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it was the policy of the government until it was not and it was the policy of the government on Monday, until the Prime Minister said it was crazy.

In February 2013, the then minister of the environment said, "We are now well into, and very close to finalizing, regulations for the oil and gas sector."

Could the Conservatives tell us if that was true, or were they deliberately misleading Canadians when they said that?

● (1425)

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said, we are the first government in Canadian history to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and we are doing so without the NDP and Liberal carbon tax.

Oral Questions

Given the current conditions of the oil and gas sector, it would be reckless economic policy to unilaterally impose greenhouse gas emission regulations and penalties on the oil and gas sector. This is an integrated industry and regulations of greenhouse gas emissions in the oil and gas sector must be done on a continental basis.

Our government is reducing greenhouse gas emissions while preserving, protecting and creating Canadian jobs.

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, he says on a continental basis, so this is a simple question.

Could the Prime Minister, or anyone over there on the government side, tell us the last time he spoke with President Barack Obama about creating harmonized oil and gas regulations to reduce greenhouse gas emissions?

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us compare our policies to the reckless policies of the NDP. What the New Democrats would like to do is put our oil and gas sector at an economic disadvantage compared to the United States. They want to gamble with 275,000 Canadian jobs. These are jobs that rely on the oil and gas sector.

We are not going to put Canadians out of work and we are not going to put in a job-killing carbon tax.

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[Translation]

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is a crazy response.

After his about-face on climate change, yesterday the Prime Minister also changed his mind on the veterans charter. After eight years in power, the Prime Minister now describes the charter as a Liberal policy. It is time to take responsibility.

Does this mean the Conservatives are no longer in favour of the lump sum payments? Will the government finally drop its current case against Canada's veterans?

[English]

Mr. Parm Gill (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member knows full well that the government does not comment on issues that are before the courts.

Our government has made substantial investments to help Canada's veterans, even though the opposition continues to vote against them.

Some of our recent initiatives are: the road to mental health programs; the mental health first aid program; a new operational stress injury clinic in Halifax, with satellite offices across the country in St. John's, Chicoutimi, Pembroke, Brockville, Kelowna, Victoria, Montreal and the greater Toronto area.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives keep attacking veterans in court and veterans deserve better.

Yesterday, the Prime Minister referred to the veterans charter as a previous Liberal policy, but his government has been pursuing this

policy for the last eight years. We have also learned that the biggest clawback in spending for Veterans Affairs was in health care and disability payments for services veterans sorely need. The Conservatives overspent by 17% for internal services, such as propaganda, advertising and executive bonuses. What poor management. It is crazy to keep this minister.

Why does he still have a job?

Mr. Parm Gill (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is unfortunate that the opposition is focused on protecting the big government junior jobs at Veterans Affairs, while voting against support for Canadian veterans.

For example, we on this side of the House have eliminated nearly 100 positions in the veterans independence program by no longer requiring veterans to submit receipts for expenses like snow clearing, yard maintenance and home cleaning.

We will continue to stand up for Canada's veterans.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, over \$1 billion in support for veterans was promised by the government, approved by Parliament, but never delivered.

Eight specialized service centres were closed. Hundreds of front-line support staff were fired. Mental health wait times for vets stretched for dangerous months and years. However, the minister increased his political staff fourfold. He increased his advertising. He paid hundreds of thousands of dollars to bonus senior managers if they slashed veterans services.

By any decent standard, how is that acceptable?

Mr. Parm Gill (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while the opposition wants to increase government bureaucracy, we have increased front-line support for our veterans, including recently announcing eight new front-line mental health clinics for Canadian veterans.

In the service delivery branch alone, we reorganized three regional management centres into one in Montreal, and reduced hundreds of managers, processing analysts and administrative support clerks.

In the treatment benefits program, 30 positions were reduced when we streamlined calculated travel claims.

Oral Questions

● (1430)

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one year ago, retired General Rick Hillier said, “Many of our young men and women have lost confidence in our country to support them.” He was talking about PTSD among Canada's veterans. More have been lost to suicide than on the battlefields of Afghanistan.

General Hillier called for a public inquiry. Not one, but two, veterans ombudsmen have also sounded that alarm. However, a year later, the Auditor General says that the same problems persist.

How can the minister sleep at night, knowing that his failure is responsible for this mess?

Mr. Parm Gill (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government released the Veterans Affairs mental health action plan, taking action on the Auditor General's recommendations.

We have expanded front-line mental health support clinics across Canada. We have cut red tape and doubled the number of counselling sessions.

This is just the beginning, and we look forward to working with our veterans to improve how we support them and their families.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Veterans Affairs misled veterans when he said that his cuts would affect administrative services only.

In fact, he increased his office staff by 400% and eliminated 1,000 front-line positions from his department. Now we learn that his department is scrambling to hire new front-line workers as soon as possible, which is a very clear admission that the minister mismanaged this file.

When will the Prime Minister remove this minister?

[English]

Mr. Parm Gill (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have made substantial investments to help Canada's veterans since taking office in 2006. We will make absolutely no apologies when it comes to eliminating government bureaucracy in the back offices and putting the resources into the front line to help Canada's veterans and their families.

Here is an example. In the Veterans Affairs independence program, we have eliminated nearly 100 positions after we stopped requiring veterans to submit receipts for expenses like snow clearing, lawn cutting and home cleaning.

* * *

[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Mr. Speaker, whereas China and the United States have struck a deal to cut greenhouse gas emissions, the most recent Canada-U.S. air quality agreement presented by the Minister of the Environment makes no mention of regulations for the oil and gas sector.

Does that mean that the Minister of the Environment does not believe that greenhouse gas emissions produced by the oil and gas sector affect air quality? I am just saying.

[English]

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said before, we are the first government in Canadian history to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and we have done so without the NDP-Liberal carbon tax.

Given the current conditions in the oil and gas sector, it would be reckless economic policy to unilaterally impose greenhouse gas emission regulations and penalties on the oil and gas sector. This is an integrated industry, and regulations on greenhouse gas emissions in the oil and gas sector must be done on a continental basis.

Our government is reducing greenhouse gas emissions, while preserving, protecting and creating Canadian jobs.

[Translation]

Ms. Mylène Freeman (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is sad not to get an answer.

Yesterday, we were shocked to hear the Prime Minister say that it would be crazy to impose greenhouse gas emission regulations on the oil and gas sector.

To do nothing is the most irresponsible approach. Climate change is already costing Canadians billions of dollars. We are going to miss the boat on the green economy while the United States and China are already on board.

Is there something we should know about the Prime Minister's refusal to establish a strategy to regulate greenhouse gas emissions in the oil and gas sector?

[English]

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what would be irresponsible is what the NDP and Liberals want to do, which is unilaterally put in regulations in the oil and gas sector. We said that we will not do this. This is a North American issue and we need a North American solution. We have always said that we want to work collaboratively with the Obama administration to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. We are the first government in Canadian history to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and we have done so without their carbon tax.

Canadians have a very clear choice. They know that we are the only party they can trust to lower greenhouse gas emissions, while protecting the economy.

● (1435)

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, welcome to parliamentary secretary day.

Oral Questions

Yesterday, the Prime Minister said that no other country was regulating oil and gas, but a briefing note from Environment Canada explains that in fact the United States is already regulating oil and gas. It says, "For oil and gas, recent air pollution regulations are expected to result in significant GHG reduction".

Did the Minister of the Environment ever read that briefing note?

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when we talk about greenhouse gas emissions going down, it is our party, and the numbers speak for themselves. Between 2005 and 2012, greenhouse gases in Canada went down 5.1%, while our economy grew 10.6%. This is a big difference between our party and the irresponsible policies of the NDP and the Liberals.

We want to work together collaboratively with the United States to ensure we have a sector-by-sector approach that works on a continental basis. We will do that without a job-killing carbon tax.

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister thinks there should be a continental-wide regulatory system for oil and gas. Given that he used that as an excuse for Conservative inaction, could the Minister of the Environment tell us about any proposals that she has given to the Americans for such a regulatory system? Where are these proposals, or are they just made up as well?

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are very proud of our record. Internationally, we are a founding member of the Climate and Clean Air Coalition. We have made significant investments to help support green energy and infrastructure internationally. We have one of the cleanest systems in the world. We have already regulated the transportation and electricity sectors, and we are planning to reduce HFCs, one of the fastest-growing greenhouse gases in the entire world.

Thanks to our actions, carbon emissions will go down close to 130 megatonnes from what they would have been under the Liberals, and we have done it all without a carbon tax.

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VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives have been bragging about laying off staff at Veterans Affairs, but now we find out that they have been pumping money into these shadowy ministerial offices to help their ministers.

Therefore, while the Conservatives cut 25% of the staff helping veterans with health care and disability compensation, they have boosted by 21% the political staff working in these unaccountable regional offices.

Quite frankly, the Minister of Veterans Affairs does not need more spin doctors; he needs a moral compass and some ethical backbone.

How can the Conservatives justify cutting support for veterans, while hiring flunkies to support such an incompetent and disgraced minister?

Mr. Parm Gill (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government has

delivered. Today, there are more services, more benefits and more points of service for our veterans than ever before.

Here are the facts. Those members voted against expanding funeral and burial funding. They voted against career transition services. They even voted against the children of deceased veterans education assistance program.

We will take no lessons from that party over there.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that takes the cake.

The Conservatives are firing one-quarter of Veterans Affairs Canada employees, those who really take care of veterans when it comes to health care services, pensions and benefits. The Conservatives are insulting public servants by saying that they are just pencil-pushers.

Nevertheless, we have learned that the number of political staffers in ministers' offices has increased by over 20%. That just emphasizes how foolish the Conservatives are being. There is no money to take care of people, but there is money for political staffers.

Why are the Conservatives investing more in spin doctors than in people who take care of our veterans?

● (1440)

[*English*]

Mr. Parm Gill (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, while the opposition wants to increase government bureaucracy, we are increasing front-line support for our veterans, including recently announcing eight new front-line mental health clinics for Canadians across the country.

Let me give a couple of examples. In the service delivery branch, we reorganized three regional management centres into one in Montreal, and reduced hundreds of managers, processing analysts and administrative support clerks. In the treatment and benefit program, 30 positions were reduced when we streamlined health related travel claims.

We will continue to stand up.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I do not know whether the Minister of Veterans Affairs remembers Jenifer Migneault. One of the last times he saw her, he ran away so that he would not have to answer her questions.

Oral Questions

Ms. Migneault's husband, Claude Rainville, is still waiting for services to deal with his tinnitus, which is seriously diminishing his quality of life.

Mr. Rainville clearly told me that the Conservatives are not just firing backroom bureaucrats. They are cutting essential services.

Why is the minister trying to save money at the expense of veterans like Mr. Rainville?

[*English*]

Mr. Parm Gill (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have brought in real services and real programs for veterans, and we will continue to do that.

The reality is that those members keep voting against every program and measure that we have brought forward. They voted against disability and death compensation. They voted against the earning and loss supplementary retirement benefit. They voted against the veterans independence program.

On this side of the House, we are taking action. We are providing services to our veterans, and the opposition needs to get on board.

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, nobody believes that stuff anymore. Conservatives are failing veterans and refusing to take responsibility, veterans like Richard Brown, injured on duty and unable to hold down full-time work due to mental injuries. He was given a single payment of just \$64,000. Jordie Yeo suffered broken bones and PTSD after being ambushed by a sniper, but initially was refused compensation altogether.

When will the minister finally admit that it is wrong and disgraceful to treat our veterans this way?

Mr. Parm Gill (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, veterans who are injured and in rehabilitation receive a minimum of \$3,500 in financial benefits each month. Veterans who are most seriously injured can receive \$8,000 or more a month in financial benefits from the Government of Canada, and their military pension.

Our government has increased two disability awards to a new combined total of a half a million dollars tax free. Injured veterans now have access to up to \$75,800 toward university and college retraining.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, while the government sends our brave men and women off to war, it refuses to admit that when they come back with physical or mental challenges there is a moral and social obligation to care for them. It has lawyers in B.C. right now arguing the point, spending thousands of Canadian tax dollars, that there is no moral or social contract for our veterans.

Does the parliamentary secretary believe or does he not believe that there is a legal, fiduciary, moral and social obligation to care for the heroes of our country?

Mr. Parm Gill (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite knows full well the case is currently before the courts and that we are not in a position to comment on it.

What I will say is that this is effecting a policy that was brought forward by the Liberal government in 2005, which was supported by all parties in this House.

I would encourage—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please.

It is getting quite noisy. The hon. parliamentary secretary still has the floor. Many members are carrying on conversations. I would ask them to do so outside the chamber, so the parliamentary secretary can finish his response.

● (1445)

Mr. Parm Gill: Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House, we will continue to stand up for Canada's veterans, even though the opposition, both the Liberal Party and the NDP, continue to vote against every single initiative we bring forward—

The Speaker: Order, please.

The hon. member for Random—Burin—St. George's.

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Veterans Affairs misleads Canadians when he says that his harmful cuts to veterans are in the back room.

Last year, direct spending on health care services was cut by \$82 million and spending on disability and death compensation was cut by nearly \$70 million, but spending on back office programs rose by more than \$13 million and the minister's political staff increased by over 400%.

The minister has abandoned veterans. It is a national disgrace

When will the minister resign?

Mr. Parm Gill (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, since taking office, our government has made substantial investments to help Canada's veterans with benefits and services.

On this side of the House, we support our veterans. The reality is that we voted for the agent orange compensation program; they voted against it. We voted for the Canada remembrance program; they voted against it. We voted for the health care program and reestablishment services; they voted against it. Their rhetoric in this place does not match their record. They should stop playing and start voting—

The Speaker: Order, please.

The hon. member for Guelph.

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for the additional millions the minister is spending on communications and political staff instead of on veterans' benefits, one would think that his parliamentary secretary—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please.

Oral Questions

Perhaps if members would remain quiet they might be able to hear the member. The hon. member for Guelph has the floor. There is so much noise that it is really taking up a lot of time. Let us give the hon. member for Guelph our undivided attention and listen to the question.

Mr. Frank Valeriote: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

One would think his parliamentary secretary would have better answers for his failure on this file by now.

Now that his deep cuts to service delivery have been exposed, the minister is scrambling to refill these front-line positions, including in the communities where he closed regional VAC offices. However, we still see evidence that the most serious cuts have been to staff delivering benefits and that money is going from the front line to his backroom.

Why do our veterans have to beg for the services they deserve?

Mr. Parm Gill (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would encourage the member opposite and that party over there to start standing to vote in favour of the initiatives our government has brought forward to support Canada's veterans.

Their record is completely opposite. Let me give some examples of the some of the initiatives they have voted against. They have voted against the veterans independence program; Community War Memorial Program; the partnership program; the community award memorial program; the earnings loss and supplementary benefit retirement program—

[*Translation*]

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. member for Bourassa.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in 2009, the Prime Minister made a formal commitment to significantly reduce greenhouse gases by 2020.

Yesterday, the Minister of the Environment said that we would completely miss that target unless we regulate the oil and gas industries.

The Prime Minister was in favour of regulations for eight years, and now he has no plans to regulate the industry.

Can the Prime Minister tell Canadians that the Conservatives never planned on meeting that target in 2020?

[*English*]

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what that member said is ridiculous.

To be clear, the Prime Minister said that Canada would not take unilateral action to regulate the oil and gas sector. We have been very clear that this is a North American issue that needs a North American solution. We have always said that we would like to work collaboratively with the Obama administration to reduce greenhouse

gas emissions in the oil and gas sector. We are going to do this without a job-killing carbon tax like the New Democrats and Liberals want to put in.

* * *

● (1450)

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday 28 countries made new commitments to resettle Syrian refugees, but to our shame, if not surprise, Canada was not one of them. The minister appears deaf to the pleas of the UN, and certainly blind to the plight of millions of Syrian refugees about to face a very harsh winter. Sweden has resettled 30,000 refugees while Canada has agreed to take in only 1,300 and has failed to meet even that small commitment.

Will the minister stop playing these games with the numbers and start to do his part?

Hon. Chris Alexander (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, someone is going to have to teach Franz Kafka over there the difference between a resettled refugee and an asylum claimant.

Canada has approved the resettlement of 1,150 Syrian refugees, mostly this year but starting in 2013. Canada has received 1,900 Syrian refugees since the start of this conflict. Canada has received over 22,000 Syrian and Iraqi refugees in recent years.

Danish and French socialists have sent war planes to join us in the fight against ISIL terrorism. Barack Obama's Democrats are fighting ISIL terrorism. Why have the New Democrats and the Liberals taken Vladimir Putin's position on this issue?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, 28 countries expressed their solidarity with Syrian refugees. Germany has already taken in 20,000 refugees and Sweden has taken in 30,000. Winter is approaching for these people. They need our help.

The United Nations refugee agency representative in Ottawa called on Canada to answer the UN's call.

Will the minister finally commit to accepting more Syrian refugees?

Hon. Chris Alexander (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the United Nations High Commissioner is asking us because we resettle one in 10 refugees worldwide every year, because we have already resettled 22,000 refugees from Iraq and Syria, and because there are already 1,900 Syrians in Canada.

What is hard to understand is why the New Democrats and the Liberals do not even stand with Danish and French socialists and Barack Obama's Democrats in the fight against terrorism and the Islamic State. That is what Canada is doing. Why are they taking the same position as Vladimir Putin?

*Oral Questions***TAXATION**

Mr. Alain Giguère (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on another subject, the Conservatives' job credit will cost taxpayers \$550 million, but it will create just 800 jobs. The government implemented it without studying the proposal at all. The minister relied exclusively on a Canadian Federation of Independent Business study. The problem is that the study the government based its proposal on had nothing to do with employment; it was about retirement benefits.

How can the minister justify throwing away half a billion dollars without having done any analysis at all?

Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Department of Finance carries out thorough analyses of each measure that we propose, and it analyzed the small business job credit.

Small businesses made it very clear that their payroll taxes are the biggest obstacle to employment across Canada. Canadians know that the Liberals and New Democrats would raise taxes for job creators, which would hurt our economy.

[*English*]

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we know about the Conservative fondness for offshoring and outsourcing Canadian jobs, but it has gotten so ridiculous that even the Minister of Finance is happy to outsource the analysis of his own schemes to a business lobby group.

He did not do his own assessment of his half-billion dollar EI scheme, but relied on one of these lobbyists. It turns out that the study he relied on was totally bogus. That is the problem with outsourcing, namely quality control.

Will the minister finally admit that his \$550 million EI rip-off is a complete fraud, and that maybe next time he should do his own homework?

• (1455)

Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I explained before in French, we do an analysis of every single proposal.

It was not necessary to do an employment count because there were many other reasons to go ahead with this excellent initiative that will benefit 780,000 small businesses, some 90% of all businesses.

Everybody knows that increased taxes are a killer for employment, and we have done the right thing for small business and the Canadian economy.

* * *

TAXATION

Mr. Lawrence Toet (Elmwood—Transcona, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government knows that Canadian families know best how to spend their money. This is a fundamental difference between our party and the Liberals and the NDP. That is why our government has taken real action to reduce taxes on Canadian families, including the family tax cut and the enhanced universal child care benefit.

Can the Minister of Employment please update the House on our government's initiatives to put more money in the pockets of Canadian families?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Elmwood—Transcona for his excellent work in fighting for the families of Winnipeg and asking for family tax fairness, which we are delivering through the family tax cut.

Together with the enhancement of the universal child care benefit, we are delivering real, tangible financial benefits to 100% of the some nine million Canadian families with children under the age of 18, who will benefit by an average by \$1,200 a year, two-thirds of which will go to low and modest income families.

Finally we have a government that is respecting the choices families make, rather than taxing them for expensive bureaucratic programs that would only benefit 10%—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Northwest Territories.

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Northwest Territories, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in 2010, Eddie Snowshoe of Fort McPherson, Northwest Territories, committed suicide in the Edmonton Institution's segregation unit. His mother still grieves. Though he had been diagnosed with mental health issues and as suicidal, he was in solitary confinement for 162 days straight.

The UN Special Rapporteur on Torture has stated that solitary confinement is contrary to one of the essential aims of the penitentiary system.

How many more Eddie Snowshoe's will there be? How many more deaths will it take before this minister takes some action?

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC): Mr. Speaker, every death in custody is taken seriously and there is always an inquiry.

Let me comment on a procedure that is done in all western countries, called administrative segregation. It is done for safety reasons: the safety of the inmate, the safety of the personnel, and the safety of the facility.

This procedure is applied with a lot of common sense by our correctional officers. We expect to have more development of our mental health strategy, an action we have taken to make sure that those who have serious mental health issues are well taken care of.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is way simpler than that. This minister needs to stop putting the mentally ill in solitary confinement and start getting them the treatment they need.

It has now been almost a year since the inquest into Ashley Smith's death. That inquest made 104 recommendations to prevent similar tragedies.

Oral Questions

We have heard nothing from the minister by way of response. How many more tragedies will it take before the minister does respond? When will he put an end to the use of solitary confinement for the treatment of the mentally ill in Canadian prisons?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I invite my colleague to read through the action plan that we implemented more than six months ago. I can send the press release to him.

First and foremost, I would like to say that we have put processes in place to assess and screen inmates as soon as they arrive. Staff have received training. Inmates are medically monitored at all stages as soon as they are identified as having mental health issues. It is something that we are taking seriously.

I look forward to seeing how Correctional Service Canada will respond to the coroner's report on the tragic death of Ashley Smith.

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for a year we have been waiting for the Conservatives to take action and respond to the recommendations from the inquiry into the tragic death of Ashley Smith, but the minister prefers to continue to avoid the question.

In the meantime, tragic mistakes keep happening. People like Edward Snowshoe continue to be put in solitary confinement.

How many more inmates with mental health issues will have to die before the Minister of Public Safety finally takes action?

• (1500)

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said, administrative segregation is a practice that is used in prisons in western countries. It is done for the safety of the inmate, the safety of the personnel, and the safety of the facility.

As for the report from Correctional Service Canada in response to the coroner's recommendations, I expect it to be delivered very soon. However, that has not stopped us from implementing many measures in the meantime.

We have a five-point action plan that is designed to help us treat people who, ideally, would not be in prison but in a hospital. We will ensure that they receive proper treatment.

* * *

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, violence against Inuit women and girls is 14 times higher than the national average.

Despite that, the Conservatives are spending less than 1% of their so-called action plan on this scourge. Rebecca Kudloo, president of Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada, said that these paltry sums are simply offensive and discriminatory. You know what, Mr. Speaker? She is quite right.

How can the Conservatives justify that their action plan completely ignores the pressing needs that exist in our northern communities?

[*English*]

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch (Minister of Labour and Minister of Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me be very clear. Any of these allegations are actually false. I want to be very clear. We have taken a number of actions, including recently, just last week, working with Inuit women throughout northern Canada with the white ribbon campaign. This is substantive action for local communities.

On this side of the House, we are taking action. We are involved in local community actions. We are involved in making sure that the right legislation is in place. I find it passing strange that the opposition brings up these issues again and again but does not support the initiatives to make sure we are supporting these women who are victims of crime.

* * *

PUBLIC WORKS AND GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government's annual cost estimate for replacing Canada's aging CF-18 fighter jets is a shocker. There is another \$1 billion price hike for the F-35s that it planned to sole-source as Canada's largest military acquisition ever, with no competition, and still more delays will mean still higher costs.

Will the Conservatives stop this ongoing fiasco and commit to Canadians that they will hold an open and transparent competition to replace these important jets?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in fact, no decision has been made on the purchase of replacements for the CF-18s. We will always ensure that our brave men and women in uniform will have the equipment that they need and deserve to do the job that we ask of them. This is why the CF-18s are being life-extended to maintain their capability right through 2025.

* * *

INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, here is a familiar story. The Conservative premier of Newfoundland and Labrador says, "We have a deal." The Conservative Prime Minister of Canada says, "Oh, no, you don't." Here we go again.

The feds say today they will only help displaced plant workers, but back in October 2013 a spokesperson for International Trade Canada said, "The program will address fish and seafood industry development and renewal as well as workers whose jobs are displaced...."

The government says it likes to be clear, so now is the time to be clear. Will the fishing industry of Newfoundland and Labrador receive its \$280 million, yes or no?

Oral Questions

Hon. Rob Moore (Minister of State (Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Canada-European Union trade agreement is by far Canada's most ambitious trade initiative ever. Every region of this country stands to benefit, including Newfoundland and Labrador.

The minimum processing requirements fund was created to compensate for anticipated losses from the removal of minimum processing requirements. The fund was never intended as a blank cheque that would give the industry in Newfoundland and Labrador an unfair advantage over other Atlantic provinces.

We have been clear from the start that the MPR fund was to compensate for demonstrable losses. Our officials remain open to receiving proposals from their provincial counterparts on how to move forward.

* * *

INFRASTRUCTURE

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it seems the federal Conservatives and the Ontario Liberals have more in common than they care to admit. Yesterday's Auditor General report—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. I thought we were back on track after the first half of QP, and it was my hope that this week would go rather smoothly. I cannot tell you how disappointed I am. The hon. member for Parkdale—High Park had just started her question. I would invite members to wait until she is finished, and then they can feel free to respond.

The hon. member for Parkdale—High Park.

● (1505)

Ms. Peggy Nash: Mr. Speaker, the federal Conservatives and the Ontario Liberals have more in common than they care to admit. Yesterday—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. They say the soul of wit is brevity, not repetition. I would invite members to not make the same joke over and over again. The hon. member for Parkdale—High Park has the floor.

Ms. Peggy Nash: Maybe third time lucky.

Mr. Speaker, the federal Conservatives and the Ontario Liberals have more in common than they care to admit. Yesterday's Auditor General's—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. That is taking up a great deal of time, so I will have to find that somewhere else. I will say to the member for Parkdale—High Park, who has already made the preamble, that it might serve the House well if she—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Parkdale—High Park has the floor. Let us let her put the question.

Ms. Peggy Nash: Mr. Speaker, the federal Conservatives and the Ontario Liberals have more in common than they care to admit. Yesterday, the Auditor General's report revealed that the Liberal government wasted nearly \$8 billion on the extra costs of public-private partnerships. That is no small change, yet in spite of this evidence, the Conservatives are forcing municipalities to go to public-private partnerships for local infrastructure, adding time and costs to badly needed construction projects.

Are the Conservatives really happy following the Liberal example of misspending billions on P3s?

Mr. Peter Braid (Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that was a very inappropriate question as we approach Christmas, I might add.

Our government believes that in certain circumstances, there are appropriate infrastructure projects for which P3s are applicable. Why do we believe that on this side of the House? It is because we are concerned about value for taxpayers. P3s offer value for taxpayers. They stretch the taxpayer dollar.

It is this Conservative government that is renewing infrastructure and enhancing the quality—

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Parkdale—High Park.

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the truth hurts. It was \$8 billion on P3s, and the Auditor General did not even get to the Pearson rail fares that will cost over \$27 one way. The Conservatives have once again put ideology before evidence. Instead of letting municipalities make their own decisions, the Conservatives are forcing them to undergo a costly and time-consuming screening by PPP Canada. Long-overdue projects could be delayed for years.

The Ontario Liberals just wasted \$8 billion on flawed P3s. How much do the Conservatives plan to blow on their scheme?

Mr. Peter Braid (Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the municipalities believe it has been like Christmas since this Conservative government came to power in 2006 with respect to infrastructure. In 2007, we established the Building Canada plan. In 2013, we extended that plan and created the new Building Canada plan, the longest and largest infrastructure investment in Canadian history. It has been open for business since March, and numerous projects have already been approved, representing hundreds of millions of dollars.

It is this Conservative government that is making record investments in infrastructure, renewing infrastructure, and enhancing the quality of life for Canadians.

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when I asked the environment minister to support the 17th century Acadian village of Beaubassin in Cumberland County, Nova Scotia, her response was pure nonsense.

Obviously the member for Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley has never complained about work stopping at Beaubassin three years ago, so I again ask if the minister will ensure that funding is provided to properly promote this incredible Acadian site in time for Canada's 150th anniversary.

• (1510)

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this issue has been brought to our attention by the member for Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley before. The House should know that our government is committed to protecting Beaubassin and presenting this unique part of our shared Canadian heritage to visitors from within Canada and around the world.

In fact, our government met with stakeholders last month to present plans for development of a vista, a view park area, trails, interpretation signs, a shelter, commemorative plaques and monuments, and an accessible parking area. These participants applauded Parks Canada's engagement in taking steps to present the exceptional history of the—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Victoria.

* * *

TAXATION

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Canada Revenue Agency is going after an 82-year-old B.C. man who has dementia. It is fining him \$12,000 for failing to declare a small foreign pension income in his 2011 tax return. It is ridiculous. It was an honest mistake, but the CRA is telling him and his family it will take 15 months to address.

Meanwhile, the real tax cheats are stashing billions of dollars in tax havens, and the Conservatives just keep letting them get away with it. When will the minister stop targeting seniors and charities and go after the real tax cheats?

Hon. Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay (Minister of National Revenue, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government has a very strong record of combatting international tax evasion and getting tough on tax cheats. From 2006 to March 31 of this year, the CRA audited over 8,600 international tax cases and identified over \$5.6 billion in additional taxes that is being collected.

Moreover, economic action plan 2013 introduced a number of new measures dedicated to offshore compliance activities and invested \$30 million over five years to support that implementation. We are doing—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Miramichi.

* * *

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill Gordon (Miramichi, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the lobster fishery is critical to Atlantic Canada's economy and provides

Oral Questions

important economic opportunities for our rural and coastal communities. Canadian lobster is sought after by consumers around the world, especially during this holiday season.

In order to sustain this industry, it is vital that our fishermen have access to new markets. Could the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans tell the House what our government is doing to ensure that the lobster industry continues to grow?

Hon. Gail Shea (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Miramichi for that question. I know the lobster industry is very important to her riding, and she certainly works very hard on behalf of all fishermen.

We have taken action to ensure that our lobster industry is in good health and to secure vital trade agreements, such as the Canada-Korea trade agreement and the Canada-Europe trade agreement, and markets are responding quickly. Korean Air has launched a dedicated cargo jet to bring lobster from Halifax to consumers in South Korea. The Halifax airport is reporting that in the last five years alone, Canadian live lobster exports to Asia have—

The Speaker: The hon. member for New Westminster—Coquitlam.

* * *

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the minister has misled Canadians and closed regional offices and the Auditor General has reported that he has failed veterans, yet he stands in this place and refuses to take responsibility.

What about veterans like Daniel Scott from Surrey, who lost his spleen and has health problems that will plague him for the rest of his life? The government gave Scott a one-time payment of just \$41,000. Does the government really want to force veterans like Daniel through the courts just to get justice?

Mr. Parm Gill (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a veteran who is injured and in rehabilitation receives a minimum of \$3,500 in financial benefits each month. Veterans who are most seriously injured can receive \$8,000 or more per month in financial benefits from the Government of Canada and their military pension. Our government has increased the two disability awards to a new combined total of half a million dollars, tax free. Injured veterans now also have access to up to \$75,800 toward university and college retraining.

Private Members' Business

[Translation]

INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in August 2014, the Conference Board predicted that in 20 years, the federal surplus will be \$110 billion, while the provinces will face cumulative deficits of \$172 billion. This trend was confirmed by last month's update. We have a fiscal deficit.

Let us not kid ourselves: this obscene surplus is being built up at the expense of the unemployed, seniors, veterans, provincial transfers—basically, because the federal government refuses to do its job.

Given that the federal government is swimming in a surplus, will the Minister of Finance commit to significantly increasing transfers to Quebec and the provinces?

• (1515)

Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we will balance the budget and grant long-term transfers to the provinces and territories.

Federal support has reached historic levels of \$65 billion and will continue to grow every year. Federal support for health, education and social services has increased by nearly 56% since we formed the government. We will make the necessary changes to ensure that transfers grow in line with the economy.

* * *

[English]

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: That concludes question period for today.

I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of the Hon. Glen Abernethy, Minister of Health and Social Services, and Minister Responsible for Seniors and Persons with Disabilities for the Northwest Territories.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

IMMIGRATION AND REFUGEE PROTECTION REGULATIONS

The House resumed from December 3 consideration of the motion.

The Speaker: Pursuant to an order made Tuesday, November 25, the House will now proceed to taking of the deferred recorded division on Motion No. 505 under private members' business.

Call in the members.

• (1525)

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

(Division No. 305)

YEAS

Members

Ablonczy	Adams
Adler	Albas
Albrecht	Alexander
Allison	Ambler
Ambrose	Anders
Anderson	Andrews
Armstrong	Aspin
Baird	Barlow
Bateman	Benoit
Bergen	Bernier
Bezan	Blaney
Block	Boughen
Braid	Breitkreuz
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Brown (Barrie)
Bruinooge	Butt
Calandra	Calkins
Cannan	Carmichael
Carrie	Chisu
Chong	Clarke
Clement	Crockatt
Daniel	Davidson
Dechert	Devolin
Dreessen	Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Dykstra	Eglinski
Falk	Fast
Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)	Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Fletcher	Galipeau
Gallant	Gill
Glover	Goguen
Goldring	Goodyear
Gosal	Gourde
Grewal	Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hawn	Hayes
Hiebert	Hillyer
Hoback	Holder
James	Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)	Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Kent	Kerr
Komarnicki	Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lake	Lauzon
Leef	Leitch
Lemieux	Leung
Lizon	Lobb
Lukiwski	Lunney
MacKenzie	Maguire
Mayes	McColeman
McLeod	Menegakis
Miller	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Norlock
Obhrai	O'Connor
Oliver	O'Neill Gordon
Opitz	O'Toole
Pacetti	Paradis
Payne	Perkins
Plamondon	Poillievre
Preston	Rajotte
Rathgeber	Reid
Rempel	Richards
Rickford	Ritz
Saxton	Schellenberger
Seeback	Shea
Shiple	Shory
Smith	Sopuck
Sorenson	Stanton
Storseth	Strahl
Sweet	Tilson
Toet	Trost
Trottier	Truppe
Uppal	Valcourt
Van Kesteren	Van Loan
Vellacott	Wallace
Warawa	Warkentin
Watson	Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to
Sky Country)	Wilks
Weston (Saint John)	Yelich
Williamson	Young (Vancouver South)
Young (Oakville)	Zimmer— 154
Yurdiga	

Private Members' Business

NAYS

Members

Allen (Welland)	Angus
Atamanenko	Aubin
Ayala	Bélanger
Bellavance	Benskin
Bevington	Blanchette
Blanchette-Lamothe	Boivin
Borg	Boulerice
Boutin-Sweet	Brahmi
Brison	Brosseau
Byrne	Caron
Casey	Cash
Chan	Chicoine
Chisholm	Choquette
Christopherson	Cleary
Comartin	Côté
Cotler	Cullen
Cuzner	Davies (Vancouver East)
Day	Dion
Dionne Labelle	Donnelly
Doré Lefebvre	Dubourg
Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Dusseau	Easter
Eyking	Foote
Fortin	Freeland
Freeman	Fry
Garneau	Garrison
Genest	Genest-Jourdain
Giguère	Godin
Goodale	Groguhé
Harris (Scarborough Southwest)	Harris (St. John's East)
Hsu	Hughes
Hyer	Jones
Julian	Kellway
Lamoureux	Lapointe
Larose	Latendresse
LeBlanc (Beauséjour)	LeBlanc (LaSalle—Énard)
Leslie	Liu
MacAulay	Mai
Marston	Masse
Mathysen	McCallum
McGuinty	Michaud
Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)	Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)
Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)	Murray
Nash	Nicholls
Nunez-Melo	Papillon
Péclet	Pilon
Quach	Rafferty
Rankin	Ravignat
Raynault	Regan
Rousseau	Sandhu
Scott	Sellah
Sgro	Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind- sor)
Sims (Newton—North Delta)	Stewart
Stoffer	Sullivan
Thibeault	Tremblay
Turmel	Valeriotte
Vaughan— 113	

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

* * *

CANADA ELECTIONS ACT

The House resumed from December 5 consideration of the motion that Bill C-524, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act (election advertising), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Speaker: The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at second reading stage of Bill C-524 under private members' business.

● (1530)

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

(Division No. 306)

YEAS

Members

Allen (Welland)	Andrews
Angus	Atamanenko
Aubin	Ayala
Bélanger	Bellavance
Benskin	Bevington
Blanchette	Blanchette-Lamothe
Boivin	Borg
Boulerice	Boutin-Sweet
Brahmi	Brison
Brosseau	Byrne
Caron	Casey
Cash	Chan
Chicoine	Chisholm
Choquette	Christopherson
Cleary	Comartin
Côté	Cotler
Cullen	Cuzner
Davies (Vancouver East)	Day
Dion	Dionne Labelle
Donnelly	Doré Lefebvre
Dubourg	Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	Dusseau
Easter	Eyking
Foote	Fortin
Freeland	Freeman
Fry	Garneau
Garrison	Genest
Genest-Jourdain	Giguère
Godin	Goodale
Groguhé	Harris (Scarborough Southwest)
Harris (St. John's East)	Hsu
Hughes	Hyer
Jones	Julian
Kellway	Lamoureux
Lapointe	Larose
Latendresse	LeBlanc (Beauséjour)
LeBlanc (LaSalle—Énard)	Leslie
Liu	MacAulay
Mai	Marston
Masse	Mathysen
McCallum	McGuinty
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)	Michaud
Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)	Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)
Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)	Murray
Nash	Nicholls
Nunez-Melo	Pacetti
Papillon	Péclet
Pilon	Plamondon
Quach	Rafferty
Rankin	Rathgeber
Ravignat	Raynault
Regan	Rousseau
Sandhu	Scarpaleggia
Scott	Sellah
Sgro	Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind- sor)
Sims (Newton—North Delta)	St-Denis
Stewart	Stoffer
Sullivan	Thibeault
Tremblay	Turmel
Valeriotte	Vaughan— 120

NAYS

Members

Ablonczy	Adams
Adler	Albas
Albrecht	Alexander
Allison	Ambler
Ambrose	Anders
Anderson	Armstrong

Private Members' Business

Aspin	Baird
Barlow	Bateman
Benoit	Bergen
Bernier	Bezan
Blaney	Block
Boughen	Braid
Breitkreuz	Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Barrie)	Bruinooge
Butt	Calandra
Calkins	Cannan
Carmichael	Carrie
Chisu	Chong
Clarke	Clement
Crockatt	Daniel
Davidson	Dechert
Devolin	Dreeshen
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	Dykstra
Eglinski	Falk
Fast	Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)
Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)	Fletcher
Galipeau	Gallant
Gill	Glover
Goguen	Goldring
Goodyear	Gosal
Gourde	Grewal
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)	Hawn
Hayes	Hiebert
Hillyer	Hoback
Holder	James
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Kent
Kerr	Komarnicki
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Lake
Lauzon	Leef
Leitch	Lemieux
Leung	Lizon
Lobb	Lukiwski
Lunney	MacKenzie
Maguire	Mayes
McColeman	McLeod
Menegakis	Miller
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	
Moore (Fundy Royal)	
Norlock	Obhrai
O'Connor	Oliver
O'Neill Gordon	Opitz
O'Toole	Paradis
Payne	Perkins
Poilievre	Preston
Rajotte	Reid
Rempel	Richards
Rickford	Ritz
Saxton	Schellenberger
Seeback	Shea
Shiple	Shory
Smith	Sopuck
Sorenson	Stanton
Storseth	Strahl
Sweet	Tilson
Toet	Trost
Trottier	Truppe
Uppal	Valcourt
Van Kesteren	Van Loan
Vellacott	Wallace
Warawa	Warkentin
Watson	Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)
Weston (Saint John)	Wilks
Williamson	Yelich
Young (Oakville)	Young (Vancouver South)
Yurdiga	Zimmer — 150

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion defeated.

● (1535)

NATIONAL HEALTH AND FITNESS DAY ACT

The House resumed from December 8 consideration of the motion that Bill S-211, An Act to establish a national day to promote health and fitness for all Canadians, be read the third time and passed.

The Speaker: Pursuant to an order made on Tuesday, November 25, the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at third reading stage of Bill S-211 under private members' business.

● (1540)

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

(Division No. 307)

YEAS

Members

Ablonczy	Adams
Adler	Albas
Albrecht	Alexander
Allen (Welland)	Allison
Ambler	Ambrose
Anders	Anderson
Andrews	Angus
Armstrong	Aspin
Atamanenko	Aubin
Ayala	Baird
Barlow	Bateman
Bélangier	Bellavance
Benoit	Benskin
Bergen	Bernier
Bevington	Bezan
Blanchette	Blanchette-Lamothe
Blaney	Block
Boivin	Borg
Boughen	Boulerice
Boutin-Sweet	Brahmi
Braid	Breitkreuz
Brisson	Brosseau
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Brown (Barrie)
Bruinooge	Butt
Byrne	Calandra
Calkins	Cannan
Carmichael	Caron
Carrie	Casey
Cash	Chan
Chicoine	Chisholm
Chisu	Chong
Choquette	Christopherson
Clarke	Cleary
Clement	Comartin
Côté	Cotler
Crockatt	Cullen
Cuzner	Daniel
Davidson	Davies (Vancouver East)
Day	Dechert
Devolin	Dion
Dionne Labelle	Donnelly
Doré Lefebvre	Dreeshen
Dubourg	Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Dusseau	Dykstra
Easter	Eglinski
Eyking	Falk
Fast	Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)
Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)	Fletcher
Foote	Fortin
Freeland	Freeman
Fry	Galipeau
Gallant	Garneau
Garrison	Genest
Genest-Jourdain	Giguère
Gill	Glover

Godin
Goldring
Goodyear
Gourde
Groguhé
Harris (St. John's East)
Hawn
Hiebert
Hoback
Hsu
Hyer
Jones
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Kellway
Kent
Komarnicki
Lake
Lapointe
Latendresse
LeBlanc (Beauséjour)
Leef
Lemieux
Leung
Lizon
Lukiwski
MacAulay
Maguire
Marston
Mathysen
McCallum
McGuinity
McLeod
Michaud
Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)
Moore (Fundy Royal)
Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)
Nash
Norlock
Obhrai
Oliver
Opitz
Pacetti
Paradis
Péclet
Perreault
Plamondon
Preston
Rafferty
Rankin
Ravignat
Regan
Rempel
Rickford
Rousseau
Saxton
Schellenberger
Seeback
Sgro
Shipley
Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor)
Sims (Newton—North Delta)
Smith
Sorenson
St-Denis
Stoffer
Strahl
Sweet
Tilson
Tremblay
Trottier
Turmel
Valcourt
Van Kesteren
Vaughan
Wallace
Warkentin
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)
Weston (Saint John)
Wilks
Yelich
Young (Vancouver South)
Zimmer — 271

Goguen
Goodale
Gosal
Grewal
Harris (Scarborough Southwest)
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hayes
Hillyer
Holder
Hughes
James
Julian
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Kerr
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lamoureux
Larose
Lauzon
LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)
Leitch
Leslie
Liu
Lobb
Lunney
MacKenzie
Mai
Masse
Mayes
McColeman
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Menegakis
Miller
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)
Murray
Nicholls
Nunez-Melo
O'Connor
O'Neill Gordon
O'Toole
Papillon
Payne
Perkins
Pilon
Poilievre
Quach
Rajotte
Rathgeber
Raynault
Reid
Richards
Ritz
Sandhu
Scarpaleggia
Scott
Sellah
Shea
Shory
Sopuck
Stanton
Stewart
Storseth
Sullivan
Thibeault
Toet
Trost
Truppe
Uppal
Valeriote
Van Loan
Vellacott
Warawa
Watson
Williamson
Young (Oakville)
Yurdiga

Government Orders

NAYS

Nil

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.
(Bill read the third time and passed)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS*[English]***ECONOMIC ACTION PLAN 2014 ACT, NO. 2**

The House resumed from December 9 consideration of the motion that Bill C-43, A Second Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on February 11, 2014 and other measures, be read the third time and passed, and of the amendment.

The Speaker: The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the amendment to the motion at third reading of Bill C-43.

[Translation]

May I dispense?

Some hon. members: Agreed.**Some hon. members:** No.*[Chair read text of amendment to House]*

● (1550)

[English]

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

(Division No. 308)

YEAS

Members

Allen (Welland)	Andrews
Angus	Atamanenko
Aubin	Ayala
Bélangier	Bellavance
Benskin	Bevington
Blanchette	Blanchette-Lamothe
Boivin	Borg
Boulerice	Boutin-Sweet
Brahmi	Brison
Brousseau	Byrne
Caron	Casey
Cash	Chan
Chicoine	Chisholm
Choquette	Christopherson
Cleary	Comartin
Côté	Cotler
Cullen	Cuzner
Davies (Vancouver East)	Day
Dion	Donne Labelle
Donnelly	Doré Lefebvre
Dubourg	Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	Dusseault
Easter	Eyking
Foote	Fortin
Freeland	Freeman
Fry	Garneau
Garrison	Genest
Genest-Jourdain	Giguère
Godin	Goodale

Government Orders

Grogué	Harris (Scarborough Southwest)	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Harris (St. John's East)	Hsu	Moore (Fundy Royal)
Hughes	Hyer	Norlock
Jones	Julian	O'Connor
Kellway	Lamoureux	O'Neill Gordon
Lapointe	Larose	O'Toole
Latendresse	LeBlanc (Beauséjour)	Payne
LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)	Leslie	Poilievre
Liu	MacAulay	Rajotte
Mai	Marston	Reid
Masse	Mathysen	Richards
McCallum	McGuinty	Ritz
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)	Michaud	Schellenberger
Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)	Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)	Shea
Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)	Murray	Shory
Nash	Nicholls	Sopuck
Nunez-Melo	Pacetti	Stanton
Papillon	Péclet	Strahl
Perreault	Pilon	Tilson
Plamondon	Quach	Trost
Rafferty	Rankin	Truppe
Ravignat	Raynault	Valcourt
Regan	Rousseau	Van Loan
Sandhu	Scarpaleggia	Wallace
Scott	Sellah	Warkentin
Sgro	Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind- sor)	Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)
Sims (Newton—North Delta)	St-Denis	Weston (Saint John)
Stewart	Stoffer	Wilks
Sullivan	Thibeault	Yelich
Tremblay	Turmel	Young (Vancouver South)
Valeriotte	Vaughan— 120	Zimmer— 151

NAYS

Members

Ablonczy	Adams
Adler	Albas
Albrecht	Alexander
Allison	Ambler
Ambrose	Anders
Anderson	Armstrong
Aspin	Baird
Barlow	Bateman
Benoit	Bergen
Bernier	Bezan
Blaney	Block
Boughen	Braid
Breitkreuz	Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Barrie)	Bruinoooge
Butt	Calandra
Calkins	Cannan
Carmichael	Carrie
Chisu	Chong
Clarke	Clement
Crockatt	Daniel
Davidson	Dechert
Devolin	Dreeshen
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	Dykstra
Eglinski	Falk
Fast	Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)
Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)	Fletcher
Galipeau	Gallant
Gill	Glover
Goguen	Goldring
Goodyear	Gosal
Gourde	Grewal
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)	Hawn
Hayes	Hiebert
Hillyer	Hoback
Holder	James
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Kent
Kerr	Komarnicki
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Lake
Lauzon	Leef
Leitch	Lemieux
Leung	Lizon
Lobb	Lukowski
Lumney	MacKenzie
Maguire	Mayes
McColeman	McLeod
Menegakis	Miller

Nil

PAIRED**The Speaker:** I declare the amendment defeated.*[Translation]*

The next question is on the main motion.

[English]

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.**Some hon. members:** No.**The Speaker:** All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.**Some hon. members:** Yea.**The Speaker:** All those opposed will please say nay.**Some hon. members:** Nay.**The Speaker:** In my opinion the yeas have it.*And five or more members having risen:*

● (1555)

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

*(Division No. 309)***YEAS**

Members

Ablonczy	Adams
Adler	Albas
Albrecht	Alexander
Allison	Ambler
Ambrose	Anders
Anderson	Armstrong
Aspin	Baird
Barlow	Bateman

Private Members' Business

Benoit	Bergen	Byrne	Caron
Bernier	Bezan	Casey	Cash
Blaney	Block	Chan	Chicoine
Boughen	Braid	Chisholm	Choquette
Breitkreuz	Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Christopherson	Cleary
Brown (Barrie)	Bruinoooge	Comartin	Côté
Butt	Calandra	Cotler	Cullen
Calkins	Cannan	Cuzner	Davies (Vancouver East)
Carmichael	Carrie	Day	Dion
Chisu	Chong	Dionne Labelle	Donnelly
Clarke	Clement	Doré Lefebvre	Dubourg
Crockatt	Daniel	Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Davidson	Dechert	Dusseault	Easter
Devolin	Dreeshen	Eyking	Foote
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	Dykstra	Fortin	Freeland
Egliniski	Falk	Freeman	Fry
Fast	Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)	Garneau	Garrison
Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)	Fletcher	Genest	Genest-Jourdain
Galipeau	Gallant	Giguère	Godin
Gill	Glover	Goodale	Groguhé
Goguen	Goldring	Harris (Scarborough Southwest)	Harris (St. John's East)
Goodyear	Gosal	Hsu	Hughes
Gourde	Grewal	Hyer	Jones
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)	Hawn	Julian	Kellway
Hayes	Hiebert	Lamoureux	Lapointe
Hillyer	Hoback	Larose	Latendresse
Holder	James	LeBlanc (Beauséjour)	LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)	Leslie	Liu
Kenny (Calgary Southeast)	Kent	MacAulay	Mai
Kerr	Komarnicki	Marston	Masse
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Lake	Mathysen	McCallum
Lauzon	Leaf	McGuinty	McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Leitch	Lemieux	Michaud	Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)
Leung	Lizon	Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)	Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)
Lobb	Lukowski	Murray	Nash
Lunney	MacKenzie	Nicholls	Nunez-Melo
Maguire	Mayes	Pacetti	Papillon
McColeman	McLeod	Péclet	Perreault
Menegakis	Miller	Pilon	Plamondon
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)		Quach	Rafferty
Moore (Fundy Royal)		Rankin	Ravignat
Norlock	Obhrai	Raynault	Regan
O'Connor	Oliver	Rousseau	Sandhu
O'Neill Gordon	Opitz	Scarpaleggia	Scott
O'Toole	Paradis	Sellah	Sgro
Payne	Perkins	Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor)	
Poilievre	Preston	Sims (Newton—North Delta)	
Rajotte	Rathgeber	St-Denis	Stewart
Reid	Rempel	Stoffer	Sullivan
Richards	Rickford	Thibeault	Tremblay
Ritz	Saxton	Turmel	Valeriotte
Schellenberger	Seeback	Vaughan— 119	
Shea	Shiple		
Shory	Smith		
Sopuck	Sorenson		
Stanton	Storseth		
Strahl	Sweet		
Tilson	Toet		
Trost	Trottier		
Truppe	Uppal		
Valcourt	Van Kesteren		
Van Loan	Vellacott		
Wallace	Warawa		
Warkentin	Watson		
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)			
Weston (Saint John)			
Wilks	Williamson		
Yelich	Young (Oakville)		
Young (Vancouver South)	Yurdiga		
Zimmer— 151			

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.
(Bill read the third time and passed)

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

MOTOR VEHICLE SAFETY ACT

The House resumed from December 9 consideration of the motion that Bill C-603, An Act to amend the Motor Vehicle Safety Act (vehicle side guards), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Speaker: The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at second reading stage of Bill C-603 under private members' business.

NAYS

Members

Allen (Welland)	Andrews
Angus	Atamanenko
Aubin	Ayala
Bélangier	Bellavance
Benskin	Bevington
Blanchette	Boivin
Borg	Boutlerice
Boutin-Sweet	Brahmi
Brison	Brosseau

Private Members' Business

● (1605)

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

*(Division No. 310)***YEAS**

Members

Allen (Welland)	Andrews
Angus	Atamanenko
Aubin	Ayala
Bélangier	Bellavance
Benskin	Bevington
Blanchette	Boivin
Borg	Boulerice
Boutin-Sweet	Brahmi
Brisson	Brosseau
Byrne	Caron
Casey	Cash
Chan	Chicoine
Chisholm	Choquette
Christopherson	Cleary
Comartin	Côté
Cotler	Cullen
Cuzner	Davies (Vancouver East)
Day	Dion
Dionne Labelle	Donnelly
Doré Lefebvre	Dubourg
Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Dusseau	Easter
Eyking	Foote
Fortin	Freeland
Freeman	Fry
Garneau	Garrison
Genest	Genest-Jourdain
Giguère	Godin
Goodale	Groguhé
Harris (Scarborough Southwest)	Harris (St. John's East)
Hsu	Hughes
Hyer	Jones
Julian	Kellway
Lamoureux	Lapointe
Larose	Latendresse
LeBlanc (Beauséjour)	LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)
Leslie	Liu
MacAulay	Mai
Marston	Masse
Mathysen	McCallum
McGuinty	McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Michaud	Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)
Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)	Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)
Murray	Nash
Nicholls	Nunez-Melo
Pacetti	Papillon
Péclet	Perreault
Pilon	Plamondon
Quach	Rafferty
Rankin	Ravignat
Raynault	Regan
Rousseau	Sandhu
Scarpaleggia	Scott
Sellah	Sgro
Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor)	
Sims (Newton—North Delta)	
St-Denis	Stewart
Stoffer	Sullivan
Thibeault	Tremblay
Trost	Turmel
Valériote	Vaughan
Warawa — 121	

NAYS

Members

Ablonczy	Adams
Adler	Albas
Albrecht	Alexander
Allison	Ambler
Ambrose	Anders

Anderson	Armstrong
Aspin	Baird
Barlow	Bateman
Benoit	Bergen
Bernier	Bezan
Blaney	Block
Boughen	Braid
Breitkreuz	Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Barrie)	Bruinooge
Butt	Calandra
Calkins	Cannan
Carmichael	Carrie
Chisu	Chong
Clarke	Clement
Crockett	Daniel
Davidson	Dechert
Devolin	Dreeschen
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	Dykstra
Eglinski	Falk
Fast	Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)
Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)	Fletcher
Galipeau	Gallant
Gill	Glover
Goguen	Goldring
Goodyear	Gosal
Gourde	Grewal
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)	Hawn
Hayes	Hiebert
Hillyer	Hoback
Holder	James
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Kent
Kerr	Komarnicki
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Lake
Lauzon	Leaf
Leitch	Lemieux
Leung	Lizon
Lobb	Lukiwski
Lunney	MacKenzie
Maguire	Mayes
McColeman	McLeod
Menegakis	Miller
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	
Moore (Fundy Royal)	
Norlock	Obhrai
O'Connor	Oliver
O'Neill Gordon	Opitz
O'Toole	Paradis
Payne	Perkins
Poilievre	Preston
Rajotte	Rathgeber
Rempel	Richards
Rickford	Ritz
Saxton	Schellenberger
Seeback	Shea
Shiple	Shory
Smith	Sopuck
Sorenson	Stanton
Storseth	Strahl
Sweet	Tilson
Toet	Trotter
Truppe	Uppal
Valcourt	Van Kesteren
Van Loan	Vellacott
Wallace	Warkentin
Watson	Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)
Weston (Saint John)	Wilks
Williamson	Yelich
Young (Oakville)	Young (Vancouver South)
Yurdiga	Zimmer — 148

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion defeated.

Routine Proceedings

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

* * *

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS*[English]***NATIONAL DEFENCE**

Mr. Bernard Trottier (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to table on behalf of the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and the ministers of National Defence and Industry, in both official languages, as part of the government's seven-point plan, the following three reports: "Next Generation Fighter Capability Annual Update 2014", "Independent Review: 2014 Department of National Defence Annual Update on Next Generation Fighter Capability Life Cycle Costs", and "Canadian Industrial Participation in the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter Program".

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and for International Human Rights, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Minister of Foreign Affairs and pursuant to Standing Order 32(2), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the document "Report on Exports of Military Goods from Canada 2012-2013".

* * *

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Hon. Ed Fast (Minister of International Trade, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, three treaties.

The first treaty is entitled "Agreement between Canada and the Republic of Senegal for the Promotion and Protection of Investments", done at Dakar on November 27, 2014.

The second treaty is entitled "Agreement between Canada and Mali for the Promotion and Protection of Investments", done at Dakar on November 28, 2014.

The third treaty is entitled "Agreement between the Government of Canada and the Government of the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire for the Promotion and Protection of Investments", done at Dakar on November 30, 2014.

An explanatory memorandum is included with each of these treaties.

* * *

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's responses to eight petitions.

* * *

CITIZEN VOTING ACT

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-50, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act.

INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1), I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian delegation to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Parliamentary Assembly respecting its participation at the 23rd annual session of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly in Baku, Azerbaijan, June 28 through July 2, 2014.

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton—Leduc, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1) I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the report of the Canada-United Kingdom Inter-Parliamentary Association respecting its participation in the bilateral visit to London and Cardiff, Wales, United Kingdom, from January 18 to 25, 2014.

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 12th report of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights in relation to Bill S-2, an act to amend the Statutory Instruments Act and to make consequential amendments to the Statutory Instruments Regulations. The committee has studied the bill and has decided to report the bill back without amendment.

This is the fourth bill this committee has reported back in the last three weeks. I thank it for its hard work.

● (1610)

[Translation]

FINANCE

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton—Leduc, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the eighth report of the Standing Committee on Finance.

[English]

Mr. Speaker, if you will allow me, I would like to thank all the individuals and organizations who made submissions to the committee. I want to thank the witnesses who appeared before our committee. I offer my respect and appreciation to all members of the committee, from all parties, for all the work they did this fall. I want to thank the committee staff who helped produce this report, in particular our analysts, Mark Mahabir, Michaël Lambert-Racine, and June Dewetering.

[Translation]

Finally, I would like to thank our clerk, Christine Lafrance, for her excellent work.

[English]

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I agree with the chair, the member for Edmonton—Leduc, that this report contains much useful information. We heard from dozens of witnesses who were able to appear before the committee.

Routine Proceedings

It contains, as well, a supplementary report by the official opposition, the NDP. Unfortunately, many of the committee's Conservative majority recommendations are so self-congratulatory in tone that they must embarrass the chair as much as they do us.

Few of the recommendations include the progressive measures Canadians are looking for to build a fairer, greener, and more prosperous Canada.

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the seventh report of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food in relation to its study of the order of the House referring back to the first report of the committee.

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

* * *

[Translation]

BROADCASTING ACT

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour, BQ) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-645, An Act to amend the Broadcasting Act (independence of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to introduce the bill to amend the Broadcasting Act regarding the independence of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.

The CBC ombudsman recently informed us that the Prime Minister's Office and Canadian Heritage pressured the crown corporation, thereby threatening its independence. Since we do not want to have state television, but rather a neutral, independent public broadcaster, I am introducing this bill today in order to oblige CBC to take the necessary measures to preserve its freedom of expression and its independence.

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

* * *

[English]

JOURNEY TO FREEDOM DAY ACT

Mr. Mark Adler (York Centre, CPC) moved that Bill S-219, An Act respecting a national day of commemoration of the exodus of Vietnamese refugees and their acceptance in Canada after the fall of Saigon and the end of the Vietnam War, be read the first time.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to rise today to introduce Bill S-219, entitled the journey to freedom day act.

This bill will establish a day to pay tribute to the thousands of Vietnamese refugees who risked their lives escaping Communist persecution after the fall of Saigon in 1975.

Bill S-219 would also establish a day to honour Canada's humanitarian tradition of accepting refugees during and after the Vietnam War. After the end of the Vietnam War, thousands were forced to flee and leave everything behind in the pursuit of freedom.

I am proud to say that Canada was among the first countries to welcome Vietnamese refugees with open arms. As a representative of a large and vibrant Vietnamese community in my riding of York Centre, it is a great privilege for me to introduce this legislation in the House, which honours not only the brave souls who risked their lives to live in freedom but also the generous spirit of the Canadians who welcomed them without hesitation.

(Motion agreed to and bill read the first time)

* * *

● (1615)

[Translation]

PETITIONS

AGRICULTURE

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusking, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to present a petition on behalf of the people of Hearst, Ontario, on respecting the rights of small family farms to store, trade and use seed.

The petitioners are calling on the government to adopt international aid policies that would support small farmers, especially women, and recognize their vital role in the struggle against hunger and poverty. They are also calling on the government to ensure that Canadian policies and programs are developed in consultation with small farmers and that these policies protect the rights of small farmers in southern countries to save, use and freely trade their seed.

[English]

IMPAIRED DRIVING

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to present this petition representing thousands of Canadians. The petition highlights, sadly, that 22-year-old Kassandra Kaulius was killed by a drunk driver. A group of people who have also lost loved ones to impaired drivers, called Families For Justice, believe that the current impaired driving laws are much too lenient. They are calling for mandatory minimum sentencing for people who have been convicted of impaired driving. They would also like the sentence to be considered vehicular manslaughter.

It being Christmastime, I encourage everyone to drive responsibly, and if they have been drinking not to get behind the wheel of a vehicle, but to take a taxi or phone Operation Red Nose instead.

HEALTH

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition regarding sickle cell disease and thalassemic disorders. In sickle cell disease, red blood cells harden into long slivers that block veins and arteries, causing injuries to the blood vessels of organs, including the brain and lungs. About 10% of children develop strokes. Children with sickle cell disease are also extremely vulnerable to infection and have periodic health crises that cause terrible pain and difficulty breathing.

The petitioners call upon the House of Commons to adopt Bill C-221.

Routine Proceedings

MENTAL HEALTH

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to stand today to present a petition on behalf of constituents in my riding of Newton—North Delta, and surrounding areas. The petitioners are calling on the Government of Canada to create a ministry for people with disabilities and mental health issues. They feel there are very limited after-hour and weekend programs offered to those with disabilities or mental health problems.

Like the petitioners, I want to see real leadership on mental health. We need to work with communities to fight the stigma and to foster recovery, to ensure better access to treatment, and to reduce the disparities in sports and services across the country.

New Democrats recognize the importance of ensuring that Canadians who are living with mental illness have access to the supports they need.

VIA RAIL

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36, I rise today to table a petition regarding VIA Rail service in Canada. I am pleased to table this petition on behalf of concerned Canadians. I look forward to the government's response.

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions. The first one is from residents of Oliver, Osoyoos, and Okanagan Falls. The petitioners are calling on the government to adopt international aid policies that support small-scale farmers, especially women, and recognize their vital role in the struggle against hunger and poverty, and to ensure that Canadian policies and programs are developed in consultation with small family farmers. They call on the government to protect the rights of small family farmers in the global south to preserve, use, and freely exchange seeds.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my second petition is a follow-up to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which concluded that the warming of the earth's climate system was unequivocal. The petitioners call upon the government to adopt a carbon policy that applies a fee to greenhouse gas emissions at their source of production in Canada, or port of entry into Canada; increase the fee over time; and distribute 100% of the money raised from the fee equally among all Canadians; and urge all nations around the world to adopt a similar carbon policy.

This is from residents of Castlegar, Nelson, and surrounding areas.

• (1620)

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36, I stand to present a petition signed by almost 800 people from my riding—including Broad Cove, Blues Mills, Glencoe, Glencoe Station, and Lake Ainslie—in support of permanent residency for Kurt Andresen and Leaf Kraft, two Americans who have been living in Whycocomagh since 2002.

Marilyn MacDonald has taken it upon herself to rally the community behind them. They are fabulous people, highly motivated and educated, who love to be part of this community, which loves them for being part of it. The petitioners are hoping that permanent residency is a dream that is fulfilled. I present the petition in that spirit.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have three petitions today from my constituents in Parkdale—High Park. The first calls on the government to restore full environmental protection to the Humber River and to support Bill C-502.

The second petition calls on the House to support the NDP climate change accountability act to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and to hold the government accountable.

RAIL TRANSPORTATION

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the third petition is to support the electrification of the air-rail link in Toronto, rather than having dirty diesel trains; to support more frequent stops of the train; and to support affordable, accessible fares for the train.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today, I am presenting two petitions.

The first calls on the government to work with Canadian National to put an end to the legal proceedings, protect the public when it comes to rail transportation and assess the condition of the Quebec City bridge.

MENTAL HEALTH

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition has to do with veterans and is for the Minister of Veterans Affairs and the Minister of National Defence.

We are asking them to take immediate measures to expand mental health services for members of the Canadian Forces and the RCMP.

[*English*]

DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition containing dozens of signatures from the Greater Victoria area, the majority of them from my riding, forwarded to me by the very engaged citizens of Fair Vote Canada.

The petition notes the unfairness of our winner-take-all system, which results in a House of Commons that is not representative of the votes actually cast by voters, and calls for an equal and effective vote system for fair representation in Parliament. It also calls on us to introduce a form of proportional representation at the earliest opportunity.

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[Translation]

PENSIONS

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today, I have the privilege of presenting a petition signed by dozens of my constituents who are very concerned about their defined benefit pension plans.

The petitioners are calling on the government to resist the temptation to authorize the conversion of defined benefit pension plans into so-called shared risk plans, which would reduce the benefits paid out to retirees.

The petition also indicates that most Canadians do not have a pension plan. The petitioners are therefore also calling on the government to expand the Canada pension plan.

[English]

NUCLEAR WASTE

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, GP): Mr. Speaker, I have received over a thousand petitions regarding the Nuclear Waste Management Organization and how it is dealing with the possible storage and transport of nuclear waste in northwestern Ontario.

Of the 15 communities being considered, most of them are in northwestern Ontario. Some 60 million people depend on the water that Lake Superior sends down through the Great Lakes system. They are asking for great caution and are expressing great concern about the storage and transport of nuclear waste. They want wider consultations throughout northwestern Ontario by the Nuclear Waste Management Organization.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

MOTIONS FOR PAPERS

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

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS**VICTIMS BILL OF RIGHTS ACT**

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-32, An Act to enact the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights and to amend certain Acts, as reported (with amendments) from the committee.

● (1625)

[English]

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): There are four motions in amendment standing on the notice paper for the report stage of Bill C-32. Motions Nos. 1 to 4 will be grouped for debate and voted upon according to the voting pattern available at the table.

MOTIONS IN AMENDMENT

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, GP) (seconded by the member for Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour) moved:

Motion No. 1

That Bill C-32 be amended by deleting Clause 17.

Motion No. 3

That Bill C-32 be amended by deleting Clause 23.

Motion No. 4

That Bill C-32 be amended by deleting Clause 30.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I rise to present deletions to Bill C-32, the Canadian victims bill of rights.

I and the Green Party support, in general, this important piece of legislation, but with some hesitations about its weaker parts.

Given the damage that the current government has done to the criminal justice system, I am surprised to be saying that. I believe that the victims bill of rights could be a positive step toward alleviating some of the frustrations and emotional pain that victims face participating in the justice process today.

However, the bill is still an imperfect document. I hope that we will improve it in years to come. We were disappointed that, in committee, our worthy amendments were dismissed.

Recent research points to a worrying trend. Canadians, especially victims of crime, have lost confidence in our justice system. A recent report by our own Department of Justice on survivors of sexual violence found that:

While 53% of participants stated that they were not confident in the police, two-thirds stated that they were not confident in the court process and in the criminal justice system in general.

It is no surprise that victims often do not report crimes. As so many victims groups have shared with us, going through the justice process can be confusing, emotionally draining, frightening and demoralizing.

The bill seeks to address some of the concerns of victims, those being greater rights to information, restitution, and protection. However, in the bill, these are more accurately called promises than rights.

I do not believe the bill would deliver what the Prime Minister said it would, that now "Victims will have enforceable rights in Canada's criminal justice system".

As many witnesses pointed out to the justice committee, the bill would not really set out rights because there are no substantial redress for violations. Victims are entitled to file a complaint if they feel their rights have been violated and a complaint is better than nothing, but it is not redress.

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If this promise is followed by good faith and funding, we will have succeeded in improving the experience of victims in the justice system; if not, we will have made matters worse by promising but not delivering.

Though I support the bill on balance, I have concerns about some of the provisions. As Ms. Sullivan wrote, it is not necessary that we all agree on every aspect of the bill, and:

...what is important is the marking of a cultural shift to more fully consider and integrate victims' in Canada's criminal justice system and, jointly, the opportunity for important discourse about victims' needs and how to better address them.

Since many of the concerns of victims were not addressed in the bill, I hope that Bill C-32 is only the start of the conversation on this important issue.

Three sections, in particular, worry me. I am most concerned about, first, restitution; second, redefining the purpose of sentencing; and third, non-disclosure of witness identities.

I have some concerns with clause 30 that would require that the court consider making a restitution order against the offender, regardless of the offender's ability to pay. This could cause issues both for the victims and the offenders. Restitution, as we have heard from many victims groups, can be an extremely important part of the healing process. It can also be an important step for offenders taking responsibility for their actions.

However, I am concerned, and witnesses were concerned, by the way these provisions are worded. As Catherine Latimer, executive director of the John Howard Society, has warned, these orders for restitution could have a disproportionate effect on those offenders who, far too often, are:

...poor, marginalized, battling mental health and addictions and without the lawful means to provide financial compensation to others.

These orders could also open up the issue of fairness in the justice system.

At the same time, legal experts argue that the wording of 739.2, that requires the judge to specify a day by which the full amount is to be paid, would undermine the good that this system does for victims.

● (1630)

According to the Canadian Bar Association, "Including a deadline for payment could create adverse consequences for victims".

The victim would not be able to go to court to enforce their order until the final date has lapsed, which could be many years away. According to the Bar Association, "[It] may have the adverse effect of providing victims with false hope of financial recovery".

The worst thing that could happen is that victims be given the expectation of funds that they will never receive, and at the same time, burdening impoverished offenders with long-term debts that will prevent their rehabilitation.

I am concerned that these provisions will receive the same fate as the victim surcharges that judges have simply been refusing to order and this will leave victims unsupported.

Bill C-32 also seeks to redefine the purposes of sentencing in the Criminal Code. To echo the concerns of the Bar Association:

The cumulative impact of these proposed amendments, with the increased use of mandatory minimum penalties and the elimination of conditional sentence orders for many non-violent offenders, risks adding to Canada's over-reliance on incarceration.

I do not see how these changes will have positive benefits for victims and may have the negative effect of prioritizing harm done over the other purposes of sentencing. Sentencing is a delicate balance, and there is no evidence to suggest that the balance in the code is presently broken.

Perhaps the most egregious element in this bill is clause 17. That would allow a judge to "make an order directing that any information that could identify the witness not be disclosed in the course of proceedings".

As every legal expert who testified before the committee noted, this is an unprecedented and almost certainly unconstitutional breach of the right to a fair trial. As Howard Krongold of the Criminal Lawyers' Association testified at committee:

But it's hard to imagine a more fundamental change to Canadian law, one less consistent with Canadians' visions of open, fair justice, where everybody has a chance to a fair trial, where they can make full answer and defence and confront the witnesses against them.

Eric Gottardi of CBA added:

Clause 17 contemplates at least the possibility that the accused and counsel for the accused and the crown might have to cross-examine or direct examine a witness when they have no idea who the witness is. I haven't found a single case that talks about that, and I can't imagine a scenario, short of life and death and someone essentially amounting to a confidential informer, where that kind of process would pass constitutional muster.

Under extreme circumstances, judges already can use their discretion to limit the disclosure of witness identity through the use of pseudonyms, publication bans, and other measures. These are exceptions to the open court principle and they are used sparingly by judges. I would like to repeat the concerns of so many legal experts that what this clause anticipates is a clear violation of the open court principle. This is very worrying.

Every party in this House supports Bill C-32 in principle. It seems, though, that the Conservatives just could not help themselves. They had to insert something blatantly unconstitutional into a bill that everyone supports in principle.

All in all, the bill is a reasonable step toward addressing the difficult position that victims hold in the justice system. It needs to be strengthened and improved, and it will take work. As I said earlier, the bill constitutes more of a promise than it does a bill of rights. Let's make sure we keep that promise.

● (1635)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his speech on the amendments.

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The member indicated that Bill C-32 is a step in the right direction but that it does not do enough for victims. However, rather than talking about victims, he spent 10 minutes talking about other issues such as sentencing, the consequences of disclosing the name of a witness and restitution.

I am trying to understand. Are we trying to strengthen the victims bill of rights or amend certain principles of criminal law? If I understood correctly, the member seemed to say at the beginning of his speech that the bill of rights is rather limited. However, if I understood the amendment correctly, the member wants to scale back the victims bill of rights.

[*English*]

Mr. Bruce Hyer: Mr. Speaker, the bill has good intent and it has some good parts, but we are asking for deletions because there are some parts of the bill that are flawed, particularly in terms of sentencing.

I would like to read the portion of the Criminal Code, section 718, which is redundant in the bill and muddies the waters a bit by reiterating some of the objectives. It reads:

The fundamental purpose of sentencing is to contribute, along with crime prevention initiatives, to respect for the law and the maintenance of a just, peaceful and safe society by imposing just sanctions that have one or more of the following objectives: (a) to denounce unlawful conduct; (b) to deter the offender and other persons from committing offences; (c) to separate offenders from society, where necessary; (d) to assist in rehabilitating offenders; (e) to provide reparations for harm done to victims or to the community; and (f) to promote a sense of responsibility in offenders, and acknowledgement of the harm done to victims and to the community.

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for Thunder Bay—Superior North for his speech. It was a very insightful analysis into some of the major flaws of the bill.

All of the flaws that the member pointed out were identified and flagged, as he said, by the Canadian Bar Association, whose representative testified at committee. They were also the subject of amendments that were proposed at committee and rejected.

In fact, the Canadian Bar Association submitted an extensive brief with several recommendations. Every single one of those recommendations was proposed in amendment form and every single one was rejected by the Conservative majority on the committee.

However, my question has to do with resources. It is all well and good to have a lengthy preamble and statements about how we are going to improve the lot of victims and all of these declarations, but unless there are adequate resources to fund programs, and unless there are adequate resources to give the victims the right to information and to complain, contained in the bill, then it is really not worth the paper it is printed on.

I would like to get the hon. member's views on what more should be done, other than what is in the bill, to give the victims the standing in the justice system that they so dearly want.

Mr. Bruce Hyer: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned in my speech, the Prime Minister effectively made a political statement promising that the bill would really help in terms of victims' rights. However, as I have commented repeatedly in my speech, it does not really do that as strongly as it might.

The hon. member for Charlottetown talked about the purpose and intent of the bill and if we would have the resources there for that.

The bill is visionary. It does point us in a strengthened direction with good ways in how to strengthen victims' rights. However, we come to Hyer's law, and Hyer's law of vision is that vision without funding is hallucination.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Thunder Bay—Superior North, Seniors; and the hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst, Official Languages.

Resuming debate. The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice.

• (1640)

Mr. Robert Goguen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise once again to speak to a subject that we have been studying in committee for quite some time. This government's bills are all about protecting victims. Bill C-32 is the result of consultations with 185 groups from across the country as well as 300 online submissions.

One thing that the government heard frequently is that victims face many injustices when they interact with the justice system. I would like to give an example of what Bill C-32 is going to do to help victims and witnesses deal with the difficulties they experience in the courtroom.

Ms. Timea Nagy, founder of Walk With Me Canada Victim Services, shared with us something that happens quite often in trials involving organized crime.

[*English*]

Let me tell members a bit about what this organization is doing in the community.

Established by a survivor of human trafficking, Walk With Me was created with a commitment to ensure that survivors have a place in providing first response care to victims of human trafficking and to recognizing that survivors should have a voice in developing a coordinated community response that can meet immediate crises and longer-term needs of trafficked victims. Since its inception in 2009, Walk With Me has been working closely with various police services across Canada and has been able to provide unique services and support to many victims of human trafficking in Ontario and all across Canada.

[*Translation*]

You can already imagine the immense courage that Ms. Nagy and the people she helps must have.

During the committee study, Ms. Nagy shared a story with us. When she testified in court in a human trafficking case—she was both witness and victim—the accused's brother was in court and motioned to her that he would slit her throat.

It is understandable that this type of behaviour intimidates victims and witnesses. In many cases, the victims or witnesses are too scared to testify because they are afraid of reprisals. The crown attorneys cannot use their testimony to send dangerous criminals, members of organized crime, to jail.

Bill C-32 will allow witnesses to testify without seeing those present. The purpose of this measure is to reduce intimidation in order not to revictimize the victim. The bill will also improve the justice system by providing crown attorneys with additional tools to collect more solid evidence against criminals during their trial. We hope that this will reduce the number of criminals who avoid serving jail time because they manage to intimidate key witnesses.

Revictimization is an issue that came up a number of times. Victims felt it was important for Bill C-32 not to create additional delays. A procedural delay prevents victims from moving forward in their healing process.

As Alain Fortier, the president of Victimes d'agressions sexuelles au masculin, explained, victims are forced to remember the details of terrible, traumatic events. They have to constantly relive the negative experience and describe it in court. Victims want to be able to heal. The longer the process is, the greater the consequences for the victim. That is why it would be bad for Bill C-32 to create additional delays in a process that is already too painful.

Another interesting point I want to talk about is spouses being uncompellable. In short, this means that witnesses cannot be required to disclose something their spouse told them. This frequently comes up in cases of drunk driving, where the only witness is often the driver's spouse.

Lise Lebel, the president of the Fondation Katherine Beaulieu, a Quebec organization that does similar work to that of Mothers Against Drunk Driving, told the committee:

Our organization agrees with the amendments proposed in Bill [C-32], which obliges spouses to testify in all cases. These amendments reflect a systematic trend towards providing crown prosecutors with access to all relevant evidence.

Once again, it is important to give crown prosecutors all the tools they need. Our justice system needs to re-earn the public's trust, and this is another good example of how we can achieve that.

A number of victims' groups told us that the victims bill of rights was a step in the right direction. I want to name a few of the groups that testified in committee.

• (1645)

[English]

They include MADD; Robert Hooper, lawyer and victims' rights advocate; Steve Sullivan, former federal ombudsman for victims of crime; Boost Child Abuse Prevention & Intervention; Comité des orphelins victimes d'abus; Timea Nagy, founder of Walk With Me Canada Victim Services; the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police; Kristen French Child Advocacy Centre Niagara; London Abused Women's Centre; Victimes d'agressions sexuelles au masculin; La fondation Katherine Beaulieu; Sue O'Sullivan, Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime; Sheldon Kennedy Child Advocacy Centre; the Alberta minister of justice, the Hon. Jonathan Denis; the Canadian Parents of Murdered Children and Survivors of Homicide Victims Inc.; the Canadian Bar Association; the Canadian

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Centre for Child Protection; the Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crime; the Canadian Crime Victim Foundation; the Canadian Association of Crown Counsel; the Canadian Coalition against Terror; the Canadian Centre for Abuse Awareness; the great Sharon Rosenfeldt, pioneer in victim services in Canada and founder of the Victims of Violence Canadian Centre for Missing Children; and l'Association des familles de personnes assassinées ou disparues. We can even add, albeit to a lesser extent, the Criminal Lawyers' Association.

Some aboriginal groups also came to express their opinion on the bill and to talk about the challenges that their communities faced. They all, in the end, support this bill.

I thank the office of the Nation nishnawbe-aski, NWAC, and the Pauktuutit Inuit women's association for their precious contribution to the work of the justice committee.

[Translation]

Bill C-32 has near-unanimous support. I want to quote my hon. colleague from Gatineau, the NDP's justice critic.

[English]

She said:

I think everybody agrees that Bill C-32 is a good step. It's a step in a good direction. It has good at the heart of it.

[Translation]

In conclusion, I want to say that Bill C-32 had the unanimous support of all parties represented on the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights.

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for quoting me.

Having said that, I still do not understand why Conservative members of the committee objected to a request from the official opposition that mirrored a request made by two justice ministers, neither of whom was on my colleague's list of witnesses who appeared.

The committee did hear from two justice ministers, the attorneys general of their provinces, Alberta's justice minister and Saskatchewan's justice minister, if I am not mistaken. Both called for an adjustment period given that, as Mr. Murie of MADD Canada said, 90% of the new charter falls under provincial jurisdiction. The two attorneys general of those provinces, and others I talked to, felt that three months to implement the bill following its enactment was not enough. They asked for six months, but their request was turned down. That seems like a very logical request to me, so I would like the parliamentary secretary to explain why it was refused yet again.

Mr. Robert Goguen: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her excellent question.

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Representatives of two of the ten provinces appeared before the committee. All of the provinces and territories were invited. Two provinces seemed to want a longer deadline for implementation. However, even though all of the provinces and territories were invited to appear or to send written submissions, only two provinces sent representatives. Why would we extend the deadline when only two of the 13 provinces and territories asked for that? The victims have waited years for a law that would consider their needs. Sharon Rosenfeldt is a pioneer who has been waiting for this law for 33 years. She contributed a lot to developing this law.

Basically, victims have been waiting for a long time, and it is time we acted to protect their interests.

• (1650)

[*English*]

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the parliamentary secretary about the testimony of another witness at committee, a person by the name of Maureen Basnicki. She described herself as a very reluctant member of the victims of crime club. Her husband was killed in the 9/11 attacks in the United States.

The definition of “victim” contained in the act excluded her. Why did the government exclude this group of victims, and, once it was pointed out, why did it not fix it?

Mr. Robert Goguen: Mr. Speaker, the incidents that led to the death of this witness's husband are truly regrettable, but one can easily understand that laws that have extraterritorial provisions are often the subject matter of international conventions. Certainly it was not within the scope or the ambit of the act to act in such a fashion to give, I guess, credence to this victim's request.

Mr. Craig Scott (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would simply like to ask my colleague if he is aware of whether or not the government gave consideration to something that came to my attention when we were dealing with the bill. It was in an earlier private member's bill and was about adding penalties to perpetrators of crimes to help pay for victims.

The restitutional and compensation provisions that allow for claims to be brought in this bill are one thing, but that fact of the matter is that the needs of victims and their families for support at the level of trauma and grief are huge in this country. We are faced with a patchwork quilt and not across-the-board federal involvement.

I wonder if my colleague across the way can tell us whether any consideration was given to enhancing the role of the federal government in supporting groups on the ground that are helping people struggling with grief and trauma.

Mr. Robert Goguen: Mr. Speaker, I am not certain if the exact topics that the learned member is talking about were brought to my attention.

What I can say is that obviously part of the web of services that would come to victims are not only out of the victims bill of rights but also from victims' groups that are financed, in some instances, by the federal government.

Members will recollect that we did do the victims' surcharge act. Of course, the funds that come from the victims' surcharge go directly to victims' services and in some instances to groups that try

to deal with grief. Certainly there is more work to be done with regard to grief and helping victims through the trauma, and that is at the very heart and essence of what this act attempts to accomplish.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House to speak to Bill C-32, Victims Bill of Rights Act, at report stage.

This charter codifies the federal rights of victims of crime to information, protection, participation and restitution. It also amends some related legislation. Basically, this charter is meant to grant rights to victims, who have often been the forgotten parties in our justice system.

We are at report stage, but it took eight years and countless photo ops and press conferences for the Conservatives to finally decide to introduce their bill. I would really like to believe the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice when he said that they consulted 185 groups and 300 online submissions, but I am not sure they actually heard the message.

All the parties represented on committee agreed on the charter, although we tried our best to improve the charter so that it would produce the desired results for victims. My heart breaks for these victims. However, this is a first step, so we will take it. It is important to be positive in life.

That said, we could have done so much better. We already spoke about this charter at length at second reading. The parliamentary secretary has already named a number of witnesses, and I will not repeat that. However, I will say that about 40 people appeared before the committee over the many days we spent listening, reflecting and presenting amendments that we felt reflected the concerns of victims.

At least we had enough time to hear all the witnesses we called in. As an aside, of all the provinces only Saskatchewan submitted a brief in the form of a letter and only Alberta's justice minister provided testimony via video conference to share his arguments.

It is too bad, because victims groups, victims rights groups, and legal groups all agree: the responsibility of enforcing this bill of rights will fall to the provinces. We all realize that. It is clear that the provinces will bear the burden of codifying these rights to information, protection, participation and restitution.

It is too bad that we did not get opinions from all the provinces, but at the same time, as one witness in committee said so well, this suggests that the provinces are not very interested in this Canadian bill of rights.

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More often we were told that this bill of rights simply codifies federally what is already being done on the ground. The victims rights groups showed us that this is applied haphazardly and in different ways in various regions across our large country. That might be the good thing about this victims bill of rights, but the provinces still need to be on board. As a crown prosecutor who testified before the committee wisely said, if every tribunal applies these rights differently, then we are no further ahead.

We could have done so much better. The government rejected a number of sound amendments. I will read a few.

● (1655)

I am especially saddened to hear that victims rights groups, or the victims themselves, came before the committee to tell us that the problem with the charter is that there is absolutely nothing binding in it.

We often rise in the House to criticize the government for its mandatory minimum sentences and the fact that it basically forces the courts to go in a certain direction and does not let them be the judge or use their own judgement and experience to hand down the best decisions. We have a charter that offers too much flexibility, to the point that just about anyone can do just about anything with this charter.

The message for the victims is sad, but also positive. The positive aspect is that we are finally talking about the victims and we are all united in this. Something has to be done, something has to happen. A heartfelt plea has been made and heard. We must not allow this to be forgotten, so that in three, four, five or six years we will not have to go back to the drawing board and do things right.

I want to give some examples of how this is not very binding. The bill of rights provides for a complaint mechanism. We cannot tell the provinces how to do their job. At the federal level, no one is quite sure how this complaint mechanism will work. To whom do people complain? What we are being told is that if someone files a complaint, the decision will not be binding, so as not to create problems. This means that we have a complaint mechanism, but ultimately, it will not do much.

I also want to talk about the right to information. I think it is rather absurd to say that victims have a right to information, since victims will have to assert that right. The amendments that the NDP proposed in committee were basic amendments. They had nothing to do with how the processes work. They did not affect outcomes or protections for the accused. They were in full compliance with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, but at the same time, they made certain aspects of the bill of rights stronger, such as the right to information. All victims have the right to information, but not as it is currently set out in the bill of rights, which states that they must request it.

It is a matter of onus. The onus is still on the victims. Victims have to ask for their rights, whether it be the right to information or the right to be kept up to date. Things will be done only at the victims' request. In my opinion, the crux of this bill of rights is found at the very beginning of Bill C-32. That is the very heart of the rights set out in this much-touted bill of rights. Without that, it is just a bunch of statements of principle that do not amount to much.

The bill enacts a bill of rights and then states:

Information

Every victim has the right, on request, to information about...

In clause 7, it reads:

Every victim has the right, on request, to information...

Clause 8 indicates:

Every victim has the right, on request, to information...

If we want to do right by victims, if we want to really give them rights, if we want to give them their rightful place in the justice system, then at some point we need to do more than introduce a bill filled with platitudes.

We are not objecting to Bill C-32. I agree with everyone that it is a small step in the right direction. I am pleased that the government accepted an amendment from the opposition, one of the amendments that I proposed. I am not trying to flatter myself because I feel as though my proposal was completely watered down. We were asking for the House of Commons committee, the Senate committee or the committees for both chambers designated or established for that purpose to examine the application of the enacted Canadian victims bill of rights two years after clause 2 came into force. The Conservatives changed the timeline to five years.

● (1700)

That is rather unfortunate, as is the fact that they did not agree to listen to the provinces, which were asking for a little more time to apply the bill of rights.

Money will be the sinews of war when it comes to the application of the bill of rights.

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her speech and her leadership at the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights. She is a real leader in committee.

She spoke a bit about the amendments that the NDP proposed in committee. I feel that at least one of those amendments was very important, namely the one that proposed an annual report with statistics. I would like to hear the member talk about that.

[*English*]

As we say in English, "If you can't measure it, you can't manage it."

[*Translation*]

I believe that was the point of the amendment.

Could the member explain why this amendment was important and talk about the reasons the government gave for rejecting this worthwhile suggestion?

Ms. Françoise Boivin: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments from the hon. member for Charlottetown. I want to thank him for giving me the opportunity to say a few more words. He is right, this amendment was extremely important.

Amendment No. 5 from the NDP created this new clause:

REPORT TO PARLIAMENT

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30. The Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada must prepare and cause to be laid before each House of Parliament an annual report for the previous year on the operation of this Act that contains the following information:

- (a) the number of restitution orders [which our Green Party colleague spoke about] made under section 16;
- (b) the number of requests for information [from victims] made under sections 7 and 8; and
- (c) the number of complaints filed under sections 25 and 26.

We feel this is a vital part of ensuring that this kind of bill succeeds. In 10 years or less, victims will have faced this legal ambiguity first-hand, as it will likely come into force in the coming year. It would have been useful to have these statistics.

However, once again, as in so many other areas, this government is not very fond of statistics. It does not like any facts that could prove that this was all just a smokescreen. This charter presents well in polite company, but it needs a little more meat on the bones.

That amendment would have put more meat on the bones, but unfortunately, the Conservatives rejected it.

• (1705)

[English]

Mr. Craig Scott (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would also like to thank my colleague, who has, not just on this bill but on countless bills, put in so much effective and hard work in the justice committee.

The question I had asked earlier of the parliamentary secretary touched on a bill that we worked on dealing with surcharges. One of the things I have learned about the government's attitude is the idea that support for victims from the federal perspective comes from one of two things. One is the perpetrator pays, which is a completely inadequate philosophy given how little money most have and how little that would amount to anyway, and/or the provinces pay.

I wonder whether my colleague would comment and agree with me, perhaps, that the understanding of the government about the criminal law jurisdiction of the federal government is entirely cramped and that it really stops at the gates of legislating for law and order purposes and really does not take into full account the responsibility of federal law for working with the provinces to deal with victims and their families, and the trauma and grief they experience, in particular.

[Translation]

Ms. Françoise Boivin: Mr. Speaker, I will try to be brief, but we could hold an entire conference just on this subject.

When it comes to criminal justice, in particular, we often have the impression that the Department of Justice is a bill-making factory. Lawyers in the Department of Justice, whom I commend, work incredibly hard.

These are fine principles, the Canadian victims bill of rights and tougher penalties for criminals. However, once they are debated in this magnificent, beautifully decorated chamber, it is the real people outside these walls who must work every day with real victims and in real courts in the provinces and territories. It is the real world that is called upon to enforce these laws, which we spew out at an alarming rate.

We need to proceed a little more thoughtfully when it comes to matters of justice, otherwise there will be chaos. If we think people have a bad impression of the justice system now, it will only get worse in the years to come.

[English]

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak to Bill C-32, the bill on victims' rights. I am also pleased to indicate that the Liberal caucus will continue to support this legislation.

As the members opposite will fondly recall, supporting victims of crime has long been a Liberal priority. Specifically, I would point to the Liberal government's 2003 statement of basic principles for justice for victims of crime. This statement was collectively drafted by provincial and federal representatives to modernize basic principles of justice for victims.

As the Department of Justice states, those are the "basic principles continue to guide the development of policies, programs and legislation related to victims of crime. They also provide a foundation for the Policy Centre for Victim Issues' work."

Further, in 2005, with the hon. member for Mount Royal serving as justice minister, the Liberal government announced new initiatives to support victims, including allowing them to apply for financial assistance to attend the National Parole Board hearings of the offender who harmed them.

I also want to acknowledge that victims' rights is an issue that has drawn multi-party support in the past. The Liberal government's progress built on earlier efforts from the 1988 Progressive Conservative federal government, which also worked together with the country's territorial and provincial justice ministers.

This is the sort of constructive engagement with the provinces and territories that many on this side fondly recall. This type of co-operation for the betterment of Canada has been eroded in recent years.

• (1710)

[Translation]

Bill C-32 contains a number of suggestions for helping Canadians who are victims of crime, violent crime in particular. This bill creates the Canadian victims bill of rights, which provides victims with a substantial number of legal rights.

Even though in many cases Bill C-32 simply codifies existing rights and practices, when it comes to helping victims, I am pleased to side with legal certainty.

What does Bill C-32 seek to accomplish? It seeks to create the rights to information and services that will give victims peace of mind during the criminal proceedings they will be involved in and thereafter. It will clarify the victims right to be protected, to submit a statement, and to obtain restitution from offenders. It will make it easier for vulnerable victims to testify, expand intimidation as a criminal offence, and amend an archaic statute in the Evidence Act in order to compel testimony from the spouse of an accused, a law that has already been subject to a number of exceptions.

[*English*]

However, though we generally agree with what the government seeks to accomplish, we wish the government would have followed the practices of former PC and Liberal governments by accepting advice on how Bill C-32 could have been improved for victims of crime. The committee process could best be described as a missed opportunity.

Bill C-32 is not a perfect bill. A significant problem is that it would increase the obligations on backlogged courts and the demands on prosecutors, without increasing the resources allocated to meet those obligations. In short, the bill would assign new work without providing new funds. Apparently, the government is operating on the assumption that our courts and prosecutors are underworked. Of course that is not the case, and the already overburdened provinces will have to pick up to the tab.

To the point on resources, I would like to share with members one example included in the Canadian Bar Association's recommendations, an example I shared with our Conservative-controlled committee in the hopes that it would seriously consider improving the bill. The example deals with the new requirement that prosecutors attempt to inform victims of plea deals.

I will read a quote from the Canadian Bar Association:

A typical experience for a front line Crown counsel dealing with the proposed legislative change might go like this:

A Crown counsel is dealing with 100 cases on a particular morning where the accused is scheduled to enter a plea. Lawyers for ten of the accused inform the Crown only that morning of a guilty plea.

The Crown has no time to contact victims of the ten accused to tell them of the proposed pleas. When the Court asks the Crown if victims have been informed, the Crown says no, in regard to the ten cases. The Court adjourns those cases, so the guilty pleas are not accepted. By the next appearance, four of the ten accused change their minds about pleading guilty and want a trial. Victims are then required to testify when they otherwise would have been spared the trauma of reliving their experience through vigorous cross-examination.

At committee I introduced an amendment to remedy this flaw in the bill, a flaw that without the provision of additional resources is likely to slow the administration of justice and traumatize a significant number of the victims we are all trying to help.

As the Canadian Bar Association recommended, I suggested that a victim only need be notified of a plea deal where there would be a joint submission on sentencing, that is, the deals that the prosecutors would more likely have made in advance. These are also the deals where the crown would be suggesting a particular sentence rather than a plea to a lesser offence.

What was the Conservative response? Before the Conservatives voted against this particular amendment of mine, the parliamentary

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secretary and the member for Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe said the following:

We're concerned that this amendment would lead to delays, and would place an undue burden on the crown prosecutor. The system has to function, and for that reason, we can't support this amendment.

● (1715)

[*Translation*]

The purpose of my amendment was to reduce the wait times this bill will create, but the Conservatives decided to vote against that amendment. I would like them to explain the logic behind that, but then again contradictions are notoriously hard to explain. That is just one of the amendments that I proposed.

In committee, the Conservatives rejected 18—that is right, 18—Liberal amendments that could have improved this bill. They did not reject the amendments because they were bad. They rejected them simply because they were Liberal amendments.

Honourable colleagues, this kind of behaviour is Parliament at its worst. With that in mind, let us look at other amendments the Conservatives rejected.

[*English*]

As I indicated in an earlier question at committee, we heard from a witness named Maureen Basnicki. Ms. Basnicki is a Canadian whose husband was killed in the 9/11 attacks. At committee, she explained that she had experienced difficulty in accessing victims' services because her husband was murdered by terrorists outside the country. She urged us to extend any lawfully available domestic rights to Canadian victims of crime that occur outside of Canada.

I would like to share some of her testimony with the chamber. She said:

...perpetrators of crimes are still demanding their rights as Canadian citizens when they've been successfully prosecuted for crimes outside the country, and I want to bring balance to this. This is not a new step. It's new for Canadians, perhaps, but other countries do this, many other countries. Most other countries do.

After listening to Ms. Basnicki, I introduced an amendment to capture her unfairly overlooked constituency, to grant domestically available victims' benefits to Canadians who have experienced serious personal injury crimes outside the country, or whose family members have been murdered outside the country.

The Conservatives refused to include the victims of the 9/11 attacks in the legislation, and refused to amend it after hearing from Ms. Basnicki.

We also heard from a representative of the Chiefs of Ontario, who wanted to bring some balance to consider the unique circumstances of aboriginal victims in the justice system. All of the amendments proposed by the Chiefs of Ontario were similarly rejected.

Bill C-32 is not a perfect bill, but it is a good bill. It will do good work for Canadian victims of crime, so the Liberals will support Bill C-32 and endeavour to improve on these efforts when we form the next government.

Private Members' Business

[Translation]

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his speech. There is no denying that the Liberals unfortunately have little to show for their 13 years in power. In 1996, they promised to introduce a victims charter. However, like their Conservative friends, they merely made a promise and got a lot of mileage out of it while they kept on postponing any such initiatives.

I would like to know why, under the government whose party my colleague now represents, this measure was not established and implemented.

● (1720)

Mr. Sean Casey: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure that the member heard my speech. The first paragraphs of my speech highlighted all the measures implemented by Liberal governments and the measures introduced by the former justice minister, the member for Mount Royal in 2003.

[English]

Perhaps it bears repeating. In 2003, the Liberal government passed a statement of basic principles of justice for victims of crime. In 2005, the member for Mount Royal, serving as justice minister, announced new initiatives to support victims, including allowing them to file for financial assistance to attend the Parole Board hearings of the offenders who harmed them.

I do not accept for a minute that the history and tradition of the Liberal Party has not been in support of victims. It absolutely has been in support of victims and will continue to be so.

[Translation]

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Charlottetown for his speech.

It is true that the Liberals, my colleague from the Green Party and the NDP proposed several amendments. We did not do it for the fun of it, but to try to improve the bill and carry out our mandate as a committee. After second reading in the House, the bill goes to a committee where we have the opportunity to hear witnesses explain things and to listen to what they have to say. We take away the key messages, analyze them and try to incorporate them into the legislative process. Then we report to the House.

I wonder how the member for Charlottetown explains the fact that, committee after committee, and despite all the hard work we do, we inevitably get stock answers. The parliamentary secretary reads us an answer, which was probably written by someone else, telling us that the amendment is not acceptable and that the Conservative members will not accept it.

How does he explain that? Do members not have the responsibility, regardless of political allegiance, to do the work they are tasked to do as members of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights?

Mr. Sean Casey: Mr. Speaker, I share my colleague's frustration. She is absolutely right. The process at committee was not a real process. Unfortunately, it was a bit of a sham.

[English]

The process that we saw at committee, and continue to see, makes committees a bit of a joke. It is a perfunctory process. We hear from witnesses who have solid recommendations, including the Canadian Bar Association. That association, apparently, is worthy enough to be consulted when we appoint judges, but when it comes before the justice committee and makes eight recommendations to improve the bill, each and every one is rejected out of hand. It is a sad charade.

● (1725)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The Chair must interrupt the hon. member for Langley at this time. He will have five minutes remaining when this matter returns before the House.

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.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

AMENDMENTS TO STANDING ORDERS

The House resumed from October 31 consideration of the motion.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to speak today to Motion No. 535. At the outset, I will be speaking against the motion for a number of reasons.

Although my hon. colleague opposite has suggested some very significant changes to the Standing Orders, in my view, they do not make a lot of sense. Specifically, they deal with three areas of how this Parliament, or any parliament, functions.

First, it speaks to the method in which parties can elect or appoint House leaders and whips of their respective parties. Second, it suggests a significant change to how question period operates. Third, it suggests very significant changes to the composition and selection process of members to parliamentary committees.

Let me start with the first suggestion the member opposite has on how parties should select or appoint their House officers.

The member suggests in his motion that House leaders and party whips should be selected by an absolute majority vote within their respective caucuses. While to some that may seem like a fairly reasonable suggestion, it is inherent with a lot of problems. Let me give just a few examples of where this could be very problematic.

First, let us suggest for a moment that some of the parties would have difficulty in determining which member of their caucus should be selected as their House leader. We could have two, or three or perhaps even more qualified candidates all having support within their respective caucuses, but because of that number, it would be difficult to find an absolute majority for one of the three or four candidates. If that were the case, then clearly that party would be under a very significant hardship because House leaders, as we all know in this place, play a very significant role in the smooth functioning of Parliament.

Private Members' Business

Second, that should not be the proper way in which House leaders and whips are selected because both House leaders and whips work extremely closely with their party leaders. The party leader must have absolute confidence in those two House officers. Therefore, it would be helpful if party leaders maintained the status quo and appointed who they wished to see as their House leader and their whip.

Third, the obvious, at least on the government side, is that every House leader in a government is a cabinet minister. Many times the Chief Government Whip is a member vested in cabinet. Because of that, they are appointed to the cabinet based on recommendations by the prime minister to the governor general. What the member opposite has suggested in his private member's motion would take that prerogative away from the governor general and the prime minister. Therefore, it really does not look to me that this suggestion would be workable whatsoever.

The member opposite's second point is on how we make fundamental changes to question period. The member suggests that each member of the opposition should have at least one question per week. If my math is correct, there are approximately 170 questions asked weekly by members of the opposition. In the current configuration of Parliament, there are approximately 135 to 140 members of the opposition. Therefore, individual parties would have very little leeway in which to construct a strategic approach to question period.

Let me give an example from the not too distant past. We saw recently, and months previously, the leader of the official opposition would from time to time stand up during question period and ask the first 10, 12 or 14 questions, all directed at the Prime Minister. That was his strategic imperative. The members felt as a party, and he probably felt as a leader, that was the most effective use of their questions during question period. Perhaps it was to give him increased profile. Perhaps they felt he was the most effective questioner in their caucus. Regardless, it was the prerogative of the Leader of the Opposition and his party to determine who in his caucus would ask questions, in what order and how many questions that individual would ask.

● (1730)

Under the member opposite's suggestion, that right of opposition leaders and opposition caucuses would be taken away because, in effect, there would be a selection process where each member of the opposition would have the ability to ask a question each week during question period.

That may seem democratic to some, but I can assure everyone that it would very much curtail the abilities of opposition parties to form a strategic approach to question period. Many times, as we have seen, and we have certainly seen recently, opposition parties will hone in on a particular minister of the government, thinking they have an area to explore, some criticisms to try to exploit. If a caucus does not have the ability to design its own strategy in question period, it is really at a disadvantage.

We know that question period, primarily, is to the advantage of opposition parties, so why in the world would opposition members want that curtailment, which would prevent them from asking the

most penetrating and effective questions of the government of the day? Again, it does not seem to make much sense to me.

Last, the member opposite suggested that in the composition of committees, it should not be done as it is now, with the whips of each party selecting members to sit on particular committees based on their levels of expertise or interest. The member suggested, basically, that a reverse order on the order of precedence in private members' bills be used to allow members to select their own committee. Again, I would point out that sometimes members may want to sit on a committee where they have absolutely no expertise, but they want to sit on it because it is something they find exciting or interesting, or they may even feel they have an opportunity to do some travelling. I know that may seem odd to some, but those of us who have been around here for a while realize that some members take that right very seriously.

With all due respect to my colleague opposite, while these suggestions may be, in his mind, an improvement to the way Parliament operates, I suggest it is just the opposite. Further, I would point out that, as the member opposite should know and I hope does know, we currently have a process in Parliament where after each new election there is a requirement for Parliament, through the procedure and House affairs committee, to do a thorough examination of the current Standing Orders and make recommendations for change if it feels it is deemed necessary.

I have been a member of the procedure and House affairs committee for eight of the ten years I have been in Parliament. I can assure members that the examination and reconstruction sometimes of the Standing Orders is not something to be trivialized. It is something to be taken very seriously. However, it is also an extremely onerous task. We have spent the last several years in Parliament examining the Standing Orders, all parties trying to come to some agreement in finding ways to make the Standing Orders better so they better serve all members of Parliament.

I can assure my colleague opposite, who put this private member's bill forward, that members in the committee worked very collegially and effectively. The approach we took was that any suggestion to change the Standing Orders had to be agreed upon by all members of the procedure and House affairs committee who were examining the Standing Orders. We believed that if there was not total unanimity, then it was not worth the attempt to change the orders, because Standing Orders govern and guide us all.

Using that approach, we have made a few modest changes to the current Standing Orders, but in years future, should there be a need to change the Standing Orders, it should be done in the current method before us, where the procedure and House affairs committee examines it at the start of each Parliament, makes changes that it feels necessary, and does not make changes arbitrarily through a private member's bill.

● (1735)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank you for allowing me to speak to Motion No. 535.

Private Members' Business

First of all, I would like to thank and congratulate the member for Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, my riding neighbour, for trying to address some of the dysfunction in Parliament and in the way we operate. Very few of us can deny that some aspects of our work in Parliament, whether it be in committee or the way we are chosen to speak in question period, are dysfunctional or could be improved.

Nevertheless, I cannot vote in favour of my colleague's motion simply because the solutions it proposes will not resolve the various problems. In fact, it does not target the main problems that have been identified by many members of this House.

As the parliamentary secretary mentioned in his speech earlier, this motion contains three main reforms. I would like to provide an overview of each one and tell members what I think about them.

The first reform calls for positions such as the whip, the house leader and caucus chair of each party to be elected by the entire caucus. I think that raises a phoney issue because it relates to the inner workings of a political party. The official opposition, the NDP, has a personalized approach to this situation, and I am sure that the other parties do too.

I do not think that the proposed solution can directly deal with that. I would even go so far as to say that, given the weight members have in caucus, if problems arise regarding the work done by the whip or the house leader, for example, those problems can be resolved by all of the members. In that sense, it is an internal matter that cannot really be dealt with in a motion like this one, which seeks to change the way the House operates.

The second reform would provide for a system ensuring that each opposition member in the House was entitled to ask at least one question per week. I appreciated the speech from the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House, who said that we have a British parliamentary system. In our system, the parties can gain power by taking a strategic approach to question period.

Hypothetically, if there is a specific problem that requires immediate answers from the government, it makes sense—especially for the official opposition, but also for all members in the House—to ask questions about it. For example, let us take an issue that pertains to foreign affairs. Obviously, the official opposition should take the opportunity to question the government on this foreign affairs issue. However, the critic on this matter, the foreign affairs critic, would only be able to ask one question—or maybe two—that week. The same goes for the deputy critic. That would be it. According to this motion, if the opposition has a strategic approach, all the rest of the questions would have to be asked by various members in the House who do not necessarily have experience with the matter.

Ultimately, the opposition members, instead of gaining power by asking questions, would lose influence due to the lack of a strategic approach to keep the government on its toes. Again, it is clear that there are problems with question period. It has often been said that the non-answers we usually get from the government are a problem. However, that element of the motion is not really something that will help us resolve this type of problem, which is far more pressing in my mind.

The third reform would use the reverse order of the draw conducted to determine the priority for private members' bills and the order of priority for membership in the various committees. Once again, I do not really see how this would work. To begin, and this is a major omission in the bill, we need to acknowledge that parliamentary secretaries are not included on the list because they cannot introduce private members' bills.

● (1740)

They are therefore automatically excluded from committees. Besides, the organization of political parties in a British parliamentary system is such that each party can determine its own strengths.

I am pleased to be a member of the Standing Committee on Finance. I have some expertise on the subject through my education, work experience and training in the past. I could have sat on other committees, such as agriculture or natural resources, where my expertise could also have been helpful. However, I readily admit that I have less expertise in some other areas. For instance, national defence and foreign affairs are topics that I am interested in as a member, but I have a lot less knowledge in those areas than in finance.

If I were one of the lucky ones to be selected first among the members who get to introduce legislation, I would be the last to choose the committee I want to join. I could therefore not choose to sit on the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology or the Standing Committee on Finance. I might even be excluded from all committees.

There is a provision in the motion allowing members to trade roles within committees. However, there is no guarantee, first of all, that members who were elected to join a committee will want to leave it. Second, to get to the point where we are today, where the strengths of each member are recognized and can be optimized in committee, it would be a lot of work to reorganize all the committees in relation to the requests we might expect.

In that respect, there is a major omission. I agree with the member for Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia and all of the independent members of the House that independent members are not represented on committees. This is a matter that Parliament and the House of Commons should address.

This is an urgent problem because the procedure the government imposed for committee membership not only excludes independent members from the committee process, but also prevents them from presenting amendments and debating them in the House at report stage.

Instead, independent members are told to give their recommendations to the committee, where they can give a two-minute presentation, and the committee will then debate without them. I think that solution is totally unfair and takes power away from independent members.

Private Members' Business

I would really have liked to see some elements in this motion that would enable us to resolve problems related to the way we operate, problems that are a major cause of dysfunction in Parliament.

I really appreciate what the member for Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia is trying to do. He is trying to solve a problem that is not really the House's problem or a problem related to how political parties work. This is about how powerless members whose party is not recognized in the House and independent members feel, how powerless they are. I agree that these members lack the power to adequately represent their constituents.

However, I have taken a close look at this motion, and I do not think that it resolves the main problem; it tries to resolve much more peripheral problems. That is why I cannot vote in favour of this motion, especially since it would be binding. There will be no opportunity to debate it in committee, for example. As soon as this motion is agreed to, if that happens, it will be binding and will immediately change how Parliament works.

If we want to address the issue of the lack of power of independent MPs or other dysfunctional aspects of the House, such as how question period works, there should be a debate. Therefore, I would have liked to see a bill rather than a binding motion. There would be a way for the parties to agree, because we have proposed a number of elements. We had a vote on adopting a mixed member proportional voting system for elections to Parliament.

• (1745)

The NDP supports motions, resolutions or bills that would increase the power of members and the power of the House. Therefore, let all of us discuss this. However, this motion has missed the mark.

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I often have the habit of starting my presentations with a quote. I have another one today. All quotes have their shortcomings and do not apply 100%, but I would like to quote Blaise Pascal, who said that "the road to hell is paved with good intentions". The spirit of this quote could apply here. The motion introduced today does not represent hell, but the means proposed are not in keeping with the intentions of the motion. I will have the opportunity to explain.

Members will have already understood that I will be voting against this motion for the good reason that we do not have before us a bill, but a binding private member's motion. Therefore, I will not be referring to the two hours of debate, because the two hours allocated for this motion will be two hours of discussion. We will have the opportunity to listen to the arguments for and against from each member who speaks, of any political affiliation, including independents. However, we will not have the opportunity to take this discussion to a higher level where we can ask questions of others or of ourselves and talk about where this motion could be taken further and improved.

Since we are talking about a binding motion, it means that even if we mostly agree with the motion, it would take effect immediately, without any further discussion. A bill would have to go through the regular process, which involves a clause-by-clause examination in committee and a more thorough debate. Most members could have likely gotten on board with that approach.

I understand the member's concerns, but good intentions must be combined with appropriate methods in order to achieve truly democratic parliamentary reform. That is the main weakness of this motion. The motion proposes a legitimate principle, but the methods suggested for achieving it are somewhat questionable or even completely inappropriate.

I want to say right away that I am opposed to this motion, as I already mentioned. Before getting into the mechanics of this motion, I would like to make an analogy, but once again, no analogy is perfect. For those who are watching at home, we are fairly fond of sports here in the House. If we compare a political party to a hockey team, it is easier to understand the problem. It would be one thing if we let players choose their position on the team. They might choose based on talent but they might also choose based on the fact that forwards have better statistics and score more goals than defence-men. If we also asked players to choose their captain, their coach and even their general manager, it is easy to see how this would cause problems that would negatively affect the team's performance. The success of a hockey team or any sports team, like the success of a political party, depends on the ability to put the right person in the right place to do the right job.

In that regard, we are still trying to maintain a balance between members' opinions and our party-centric parliamentary system. Concretely, we are trying to make Parliament work effectively while enhancing the independence of members and their role of representing the interests of their constituencies.

As hon. members know, the public pays close attention to question period. Beyond how it appears in the media, question period is an opportunity for our audience and our constituents to keep abreast of the most pressing national and local issues. For that reason, it is appropriate for a party to be able to develop a strategy for effectively exercising oversight over the government's activities. This motion hinders the opposition's ability to organize and to check and analyze the government's policy choices. The motion proposes mechanisms that totally exclude the strategic dimension of this exercise.

In examining the content of the motion, I get the impression that the hon. member does not know what a party is trying to achieve during question period.

• (1750)

We ask questions to draw attention to local and national issues and show the flaws and contradictions in the government's policies. The ultimate objective is to put pressure on the government and make it reconsider its positions or, quite often, make it do something.

With this motion, it seems as though my colleague wants to turn question period into a game in which the objective is for every member to ask a question. To make the game even more fun, my colleague is suggesting that members take turns, on rotation, asking the questions they want to ask.

Private Members' Business

We can already imagine, if not the disorganization, how difficult it would be to organize an efficient question period in which we hold the government accountable. I remind members that it is important for every member to participate in this process, but we must keep in mind that we need to see results from our right to ask questions of the government. The most important thing for members of a team is for the team to be successful and to hold the government accountable to the people we represent.

The objective, then, is to push the government to change direction and, more importantly, to reveal to the public the flaws, if not the failures, of its public policies, while putting forward our point of view regarding the day-to-day concerns of our constituents. The motion completely alters the role of question period, because it would prevent the parties from working together and coming up with a consistent, effective strategy for putting pressure on the government on certain issues.

I would remind members that on many bills debated in the House, our effectiveness in question period as the official opposition party has forced the government to make some compromises and back down on some important points. Consider, for example, Bill C-23, which we asked about on a daily basis until the government backed down on some of the more controversial parts of its election reform.

Another example would be rail safety. Our collective effectiveness pushed the government to phase out DOT-111 tank cars, thereby making for safer rail shipment of dangerous goods, particularly flammable liquids like oil.

I find it hard to believe that these issues could have been dealt with as effectively in the kind of random, arbitrary question period that this motion is proposing. What is more, how can this motion ensure that there will be equal representation of genders, languages and regions? Those values are central to our objectives and they will be completely overlooked by the parties if this motion is adopted.

The same can be said of the lottery that would allow members to choose the various committees they wish to join. Once again, it is clear that any team strategy could go out the window. I am not saying that it definitely would and that this is unavoidable. However, there is a real risk that people would choose a committee for the wrong reasons, because one has a higher profile than another or because they are hoping to get re-elected. The basic premise of the work we do as parliamentarians is that everyone's skills should be put to the best possible use. In other words, we should be putting the best person in the best position to get the best results. The lottery being proposed would not achieve that objective.

• (1755)

There are many other reforms we could have worked together on and even agreed on in order to promote the important role that MPs play in the House. I will just quickly mention the option that we put on the table, since I am running out of time. We proposed that after 2015, we no longer use this unfair election method where votes are not given equal value or importance in the House. Proportional representation would eliminate or alleviate many of the problems that this motion is looking to resolve.

I would like to conclude by, unfortunately, restating my intention to vote against this motion. I think that the gap between its objectives

and the methods proposed to achieve those objectives is too great for me to be able to give it my support.

• (1800)

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia for moving this motion. However, I have to agree with my colleagues who spoke before me.

When I read through the member's motion and saw how he envisioned the so-called debate, I had some serious doubts about what was motivating his proposal, what goal he was trying to achieve and his desire to build bridges, foster dialogue and negotiate better conditions for all members of the House.

Working conditions for the 308 members of the House are far from ideal. Some of our colleagues have little power to act, whether they belong to a recognized party or not. I have been aware of this reality for a long time. In 2015, I will be running in my fourth general election as an NDP candidate. It will also be the 10th year of my life as an NDP politician—I was a candidate in Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière in May of 2006. I made a very long-term commitment after decades of building my own awareness of the political reality of our country.

This debate reminds me of when I was young in the 1970s, imitating my dad, who tuned in to the six o'clock news religiously. The paper that was delivered every day was another ritual at my house. My father read it, and I followed his example on that score too. I very quickly became aware of the issues facing our society and the fact that politics is an unavoidable fact of our lives as citizens of this country.

Since my father was very involved in politics and unions, he ended up becoming a card-carrying member of the Liberal Party of Canada. Unfortunately for him, after the sponsorship scandal, he got mad and tore up his card. Fortunately, as he was deciding which party to turn to, his son gave him a good enough reason to consider supporting the NDP during the elections in the 2000s.

May 2015 will mark the 10th anniversary of my political career as an NDP candidate. One of my important roles has been to support and encourage good NDP candidates in the Quebec City region. I am very proud to have taken on responsibilities in the Quebec City region for the NDP.

In 2011, of the nine seats in the greater Quebec City area, including the two seats on Quebec City's south shore, there were six women and three men standing as NDP candidates. That was an extraordinary achievement. Of these nine candidates, four women and three men were elected, just on Quebec City's north shore.

Private Members' Business

• (1805)

In trying to meet the challenges of representing different genders, ethnicities and people all across our very large and diverse nation, which has very different social realities, a political party can be an extraordinary vehicle. A political party can direct and reflect the realities of this representation as fairly as possible in order to offset forces and a certain social legacy that can be quite a burden and misrepresent a reality to the detriment of certain under-represented groups.

With its lottery system and its very random system for representation on committees and during question period, my colleague's motion provides absolutely no response in that regard. On the contrary, this motion could lead to huge discrepancies on some committees, for example.

Of course, my colleague from Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques mentioned the Standing Committee on Finance. He was especially drawn to this committee, not just out of personal interest, but also because of his qualifications, which are widely recognized in our NDP caucus.

However, we could wind up with poor or absurd representation on committees. I am using the word “absurd” because of the approach proposed in the motion.

After reading the motion moved by the member for Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, I would say that the biggest problem that I noticed was that it does not resolve the issue of domination of the executive, an unfortunate reality in Canada. In fact, the motion could actually increase that domination. Experts have been discussing and debating this major problem with our political system and our democratic institutions for decades.

I remember buying a book published in the 1960s at a used book store that talked about some of the problems associated with the executive branch and accountability. Unfortunately, the problems with accountability and the domination of the executive have only gotten worse over the years.

Right now, the Prime Minister's Office is exerting so much domination over political life that it is embarrassing, particularly given Canada's democratic tradition, which is widely admired, and rightly so for the most part; however, this tradition masks the outrageous domination that has no place in other political systems throughout the world.

Young democracies throughout the world are doing much more than we are here to try to offset these problems and prevent this sort of domination, which they may have experienced in their history, under a dictatorship, before they built democratic institutions.

Unfortunately, my colleague is not trying to deal with that issue. On the contrary, he is going to tie the hands of the opposition parties and every member who is not part of the government party and leave them at the mercy of the whims and desires of the executive branch and the Prime Minister's Office.

• (1810)

In conclusion, unfortunately, this motion is inadequate and does not ensure that all members of the House will be involved.

[English]

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise to speak to this motion. I want to say right off that I appreciate the effort made by the hon. member to bring this matter forward. He is a very amiable member of this chamber, and I appreciate chatting with him from time to time on matters in the House.

I can fully understand, as I am sure everyone in the House understands, the frustration that would drive him to bring forward this motion. It is very hard for the independent members in this chamber, because they are not accorded rights equal to recognized parties. That is what our system is. Why is the system that way? It is not that there have not been a lot of changes proposed. New forms of interaction have been proposed by the government side—individual members at least—and by our party.

Certainly, the way we operate in this place can be improved, but I think it is really important for us to recognize our responsibilities. We are here because we were elected, and we were elected in certain numbers, which resulted in three parties being represented in this place, and in certain numbers. We are between 90 and 100 members. The government has considerably more, another 20 or 30 members, and the Liberal Party has a certain number of members. Then we have some independents who tend, from time to time, to stand up and say that they are a party, but in fact, they are independent members.

Everyone here wants to make sure that everyone has a right to participate, because they too were elected by their constituencies. However, as a number have said who have been debating this motion, it is very important that we recognize the system and the way this place operates.

If I had my druthers, I would prefer that this place operate by consensus, but that is a dream for the far future. It is our dream in the New Democratic Party that this can best be achieved through proportional representation. Some of the members of the third party say they like that idea. Other members of that party say they like first past the post, because perhaps they could be the commanding party in the next election.

I think we have to recognize that our system is the system it is, and the electorate brings us forward and we are here representing the constituents. In so doing, we can still change the system. We can try to improve it in some way.

One of the things we have tried to do on this side, certainly in our party, is try to be equitable in the way we represent our constituents. If others in this House had the opportunity to join our caucus, they would see a lot of the debate that goes on. One thing we have in common is that we agree that there should be gender balance. We agree that all regions of this country should have a voice in this place. We believe that both official languages should be represented in debates in the House, in question period, and in committee.

It is not always easy to bring that balance, but we certainly endeavour to do that, and we think it is a really important principle for this place that those basic principles be represented.

Private Members' Business

Unfortunately, while we know that the member means well and is trying to reform the place so that everyone has an equal, or at least a fair, voice, the proposals the member is bringing forward will not enable that to occur. Every member having a chance to ask a question per week would make it very difficult to provide any kind of cogent representation in question period.

It is very important to recognize that the official opposition has a very important role in this place. It is our duty in the parliamentary system to hold the government of the day accountable, so it is very important that we have the opportunity to be strategic. To do that, we have to have the freedom to decide who will be raising the questions of the day.

The certain aspect or concern the member has raised is committees. Certainly in our party, we can recognize his frustration. We have our own frustrations as the official opposition. I myself have been very frustrated by the difference between this government and the same party but in a previous Parliament, where there was much more toing and froing on what we would discuss in committee, how we would discuss it, and the witnesses who would come forward. We also discussed amendments when the bill was before us, or even in a report.

There are enough frustrations. I do not think we need to make it more complicated with lotteries and those kinds of systems.

We have, from time to time, as some of my colleagues have pointed out, actually supported some of the initiatives of the independents. For example, we defended the rights of the independents when the government moved to constrain the right of independents to table amendments at report stage. We have been very clear. We should be given greater rights in this place.

• (1815)

We also supported the amendments to Bill C-23 proposed by one of my colleagues from the Edmonton area, the member for Edmonton—St. Albert, that would have allowed independents to form riding associations and engage in fundraising between elections. We are open to good proposals that come forward and to giving everyone in this place who is duly elected greater opportunities to represent, speak to, and engage their constituents and speak for them when they come to this place.

Again, we have endeavoured to provide the same kind of balance in committees that we have in question period. We endeavour to have both official languages represented through our party, to have a gender balance, and most important of all, to develop expertise, which goes back to the proposals for changing question period. It is very important that the questions we bring forward are based in knowledge, experience, and work at the ground level on the issues of the day that are brought forward either by the government or other members in this place.

I would close by saying that I commend the efforts of the member in bringing the motion forward. He has taken his one spot to speak to a motion in this place to bring forward parliamentary reform. My hope is that the government will finally listen to our proposals and that we will bring together all the representatives in this place to come forward with procedures and policies to make sure that we

actually work better together and co-operatively in the interest of Canadians.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Before we get under way, I will let the member for Hamilton Centre know that in order to keep five minutes remaining for the sponsor of the motion before the House, I will need to provide about seven and a half minutes for his remarks. I am sure he will be disappointed by that, and I am sure the House will be as well.

The hon. member for Hamilton Centre.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am sure the disappointment is far greater on my part than the rest of the House.

I appreciate the opportunity to add my comments to the motion before us. Let me just say at the outset, though, that the best kind of reform we could bring to this place is proportional representation. If we really want to change things and make it better, that is the big move.

I also want to acknowledge the enhancement of independent MPs because this place really is structured around two parties. I will go so far as to say that there are rights that the third, fourth and at times fifth parties do not have. I will give an example and these are things that should be changed.

I was shocked when I got here, having been a House leader at Queen's Park, when it came to ending a bell. Members will remember that the reason we ring the bell is to tell everybody that we are having a vote and they should get their rear ends over to the House and get ready to cast their votes.

We calculate our time because we are all spread out across the precinct and based on fewer green buses because the government has laid off all the drivers. It is interesting that the ones who are driving around in their warm limos are the ones who cut the budget for the green buses that the rest of us have to ride, but I will not go too far on that one at this point.

When those bells are ringing, it is to tell members that the vote is going to happen and they need to get to the House. The bells can be shortened if the whips agree. For instance, if we are all in the House and we have just done something ceremonial, the whips will say that we do not really need to run 30-minute bells, we are all here, we all agree, and we will cut it off after 15 minutes. That is when we see the whips march up to the front, we do the little applause, they do a little bowing, the bells end, and then we move to a vote.

The problem with the process that we have here in this place in terms of the rights of minority parties is that the whips of the parties other than the government and the official opposition are not considered. On at least two occasions, back when there was a minority, the government and the Liberals worked in cahoots to deny us the right to be here.

It was a minority government and those kinds of votes mattered. We did not always really know what the outcome would be. Ending those bells had the effect of denying us the right to vote. All of that would be eliminated if the whips of all the recognized parties were a party to any agreement to shorten the bells. Instead, two parties can do it. Those who are in the other parties, oh well, too sad, too bad; that is just the way it goes.

In terms of reinforcing the rights of independent members and the other recognized parties, we have a lot of work to do because this place really is geared to two parties. Everybody else is sort of a bit player, and I say that with great respect, having been in both the third and the fourth party in my time. No one should be treated as a bit player here. We certainly have some sympathies with that.

In terms of all the various changes that are suggested, I want to commend the member for thinking outside the box. I see our friend, the member from Wellington, has been working for years now on bringing about changes. I think we are getting close to that. Those could bring some refreshing reforms to this place, again, modest but significant in terms of the dynamic of this place. We look forward to hopefully seeing that bill in its final form pass this place.

I compliment the member on thinking outside the box and adding to the list of ideas about how to make this a better place that works better for everyone. However, it is very problematic, certainly from my point of view. Next year, it will be 25 years that I have been in parliamentary places, both here and Queen's Park, and city council before that. It is not the same.

I see some real problems with the idea of electing all those positions. First of all, it has always been my personal position that the leaders of any party need to be able to count on their House leader and whip. If they cannot count on their House leader and whip, they are in big trouble.

• (1820)

There was a time in one caucus, when I was at Queen's Park, when we elected not just the caucus chair, but the House leader and the whip, and that is just a recipe for disaster. If we set aside our partisanship and just go with our personal experience, colleagues will agree with me that caucus meetings are not always *Kumbaya*, hearts, flowers, and pixie dust. Sometimes there are divisions and fractures—

• (1825)

Mr. David Sweet: Let us just all love.

Mr. David Christopherson: Mr. Speaker, now, I see my colleague from Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale is advising me that it is a big love-in whenever the Conservatives meet, so I stand corrected. The Conservatives never fight. They always get along, and everything is fine. I can accept that political defiance and political gravity.

However, it is a real problem. It is a problem of a leader who cannot count 100% on the House leader and whip. The fact that they can be elected means that those who may have just finished a leadership race from other camps could have these big positions and may decide that the election is not over, so we can guess what happens. It is very problematic.

Private Members' Business

On the other hand, I would like to take the last couple of minutes to support the idea of electing caucus chairs. I have always believed in it very strongly. In my own experience, I was an elected caucus chair when we were in government at Queen's Park. If we think that leaders are omnipotent when they are in opposition, we should see what they are like when they are in government. To me, the one and only mandate that does not come from an appointment by the leader is an elected caucus chair. When we are at caucus meetings, the leader still has all of the power that a leader has, but the caucus chair owes that position and that position only, with a few minor exceptions, in the caucus by virtue of the independent caucus mandate.

That is an important counterbalance to the overwhelming power of the leader, rightly, in our system. It provides a good counterbalance. The rest of it I find somewhat problematic.

If I can get this in at the end, a lot of people want us all to be more independent in the same way that they see in the United States, where the members of Congress can go here and there. The problem is that under our system, we run on a platform. The leader has every right to be able to say to the people who elected them to form a government, regardless of the party, that this is their policy and this is what they are going to enact and that the leader expects everybody to uphold that.

If people do not have to follow party discipline, which can go too far, and say that party discipline is not on at all, how can a leader go about enforcing a platform when people cast some of their votes for us individually—we like to think it is all of them, but that is not true—while others vote for a platform? The leader needs the ability to enhance that platform.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-François Fortin (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, FD): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me to rise in support of Motion No. 535, which I moved. First of all, I want to thank all the parliamentarians who took the time to debate this issue, over the course of two hours of debate, to share their thoughts, to contribute to the discussion and to be thorough, as is necessary in any debate.

Are people afraid of change? Yes, the motion I moved involves some significant changes. These days people are cynical about politics. Parliamentarians should really be asking themselves some questions. We should be looking into why nearly 40% of people do not vote. Some people look to the voter and ask why they did not vote, but I look at us, here in the House, and I think that we need to change our processes. We cannot ignore the fact that democracy is ailing, and when someone or something is ailing—in this case, democracy—we need to make changes and fix what is wrong.

Adjournment Proceedings

My fix would give more powers to the members. Over time, political parties have become more influential in the House of Commons. Originally, the House of Commons was designed as a place for elected members of Parliament to speak on behalf of their constituents. I understand that there are reasons, in terms of logistics and coordination, for the existence of political parties. I am not saying that they should not exist and should not develop strategies to get across a consistent message in their speeches, in order to score some points against the government or even other parties.

However, we cannot forget that at the very heart of democracy is the idea of electing representatives who have the power and even the duty to come to the House of Commons and to ask questions, pass laws and hold the government accountable. Over time, this power has eroded. Members have increasingly become champions of their party's wishes in their own ridings. Sometimes, they even become their party's spokesperson in their community, instead of being the spokesperson for their community, their region and their territory here in Parliament.

The motion I am moving today is primarily designed to correct certain shortcomings. It is not perfect, I admit. Each of us has a vision of how to reform question period. The motion I am proposing would give each opposition MP one question per week. Members would have had the time to take a close look at the motion. The question slot is assigned to an MP, who can allow the party to use it, trade it with another MP or agree, within the party, to use it in a way that would allow for that unity, that consistency, that powerful impact that each party wants to have in the House of Commons.

Currently, it is the party that determines which MP will be entitled to ask a question. I have heard from members who said that they have asked for the right to ask a question in the House of Commons, but they were not allowed to do so. For various reasons, their party denies them the basic right to question a minister, the government. This motion aims to change that.

I offered to make a presentation to all the parties, to answer questions, both to clarify the philosophy behind the motion and to explain how simple and workable it is. It was drafted with the House's legal experts. It was not drafted in a partisan manner. Every party can define their own terms to make it applicable in everyday life. Ensuring that MPs can have the power to ask questions is fundamental.

The second thing, of course, is to ensure that every member who has the qualifications and expertise can choose the committee he or she would like to sit on, according to the concerns of his or her constituency. That makes sense. Again, a very simple mechanism that would allow the member to trade places with other members, according to the party's strategy, or a strategy that would identify that member as the right person to defend the people of his riding in the interest of the party.

I invite all members to vote, to reflect over the holidays, ask me questions, contact me and see how this motion could contribute to improving democracy.

● (1830)

This is a good motion. Our cravings for democracy might not all be the same. Nonetheless, I invite people to chew on this during the holidays and change the practices of the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): In my opinion, the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Pursuant to Standing Order 98, the recorded division stands deferred until Wednesday, January 28, 2015, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

[*English*]

SENIORS

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, GP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians across the country have written to me repeatedly expressing their anxiety over the lack of quality services for seniors especially, including the slashing of services to veterans. In Thunder Bay—Superior North, my constituents are extremely concerned about how the Conservatives plan to deal with their growing problems. Health care is a priority for Canadians and the Conservatives have not adequately addressed the needs of seniors.

As Canadians, we pride ourselves on our universal health care that seems to shield us from inequalities sometimes seen by our neighbours in the U.S. We hear stories of how radiation therapy has bankrupted American families, how Americans hesitate to visit the emergency room because they do not know if they can afford it. We listen to these stories and have thought we were protected from this, but our confidence is declining.

Not only is the cost of pharmacare too high for most Canadians, but the growing demand for long-term care facilities and in-home workers for seniors has not been met with planning, or funding or action.

Adjournment Proceedings

The Conservatives should realize by now that our growing senior population will require more long-term care facilities and that there is a huge demand for residential care as well, as many seniors wish to remain in their homes and with their loved ones as long as possible. Unfortunately, the supply of in-home care is simply insufficient. We are not doing enough to support in-home care for seniors. As a result, many seniors are forced into expensive acute care beds in hospitals that are better used for other patients. This is hugely inefficient and winds up costing seniors more than they can bear, and our health care system even more.

In-home caregivers and services have been praised by those in the health care system as being a more dignified and cost-efficient way for seniors to receive the care they need at home. Seniors can maintain their independence much longer and thus have the freedom to manage their lives as they see fit.

A part of managing their lives is learning to manage their finances. Seniors need some education on how to organize the financial aspects of their lives in this complex world. Without this, seniors are prone to poverty and a reduced standard of living. Education is one key to keeping seniors financially stable despite the changing economic climate.

It is hard to see what the Conservatives have done to improved health care for seniors while they have been in power. One thing they have entirely neglected is the vulnerable state of seniors' retirement savings. We need to increase CPP. We know that most Canadians depend on CPP, but with their current benefits, many seniors are falling into poverty. We need to strengthen CPP and protect seniors from the trappings of poverty.

The Conservatives have avoided this issue every time it has been brought up. They have done nothing to implement much-needed pension reform and thus leave Canadian seniors worried for their financial stability. Canadians need a national strategy to fight seniors poverty. The federal government needs to match sentiment of Canadians and make this a priority.

• (1835)

Mr. Scott Armstrong (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to answer my colleague's question today concerning the efforts our government has made on behalf of seniors from coast to coast to coast. I welcome the opportunity to respond to the concerns of the member for Thunder Bay—Superior North.

First, his assertion that nothing is being done at the federal level for seniors is completely and utterly false. This is exactly why our government wants the information for seniors and information for caregivers portals on our seniors.gc.ca website. These new programs introduced by our government allow seniors, their families, and caregivers to easily find information on federal, provincial, and territorial services that seniors can utilize.

As members know, seniors' issues are the responsibility of all three levels of government in various jurisdictions across the country. Just this fall, we published another helpful resource, the Government of Canada—Action for Seniors Report. This demonstrates how the government works across departments and agencies to support seniors. Visiting this website or reading through the report

reveals very clearly that there is a great deal being done for seniors by the federal government.

For example, largely owing to the sound management of our public pensions, Canada now has one of the lowest levels of seniors poverty in the world. Further to that, since 2006 our government has implemented the biggest increase in the guaranteed income supplement in over 25 years, which lifted hundreds of thousands of seniors across the country out of poverty.

While every bit of financial support helps our seniors, we also recognize the importance of staying active and staying engaged. This is why the National Seniors Council recently released its "Report on the Social Isolation of Seniors", which has some key information on how to tackle this issue of isolation and inactivity by seniors. One way is through the new horizons for seniors program. New horizons program funding supports projects for intergenerational learning.

However, there are seniors in Canada who need more help. It pains me to say that the estimates we have say that between 4% and 10% of seniors experience some form of abuse. That is why we adopted the Protecting Canada's Seniors Act. This act sets tougher penalties for elder abuse. We also developed financial literacy strategies that specifically respond to seniors' needs.

Those are just a few of the many programs and services that we have provided for Canadian seniors across the country.

I would like to address one further thing that the member across spoke about, and that is health care issues. As we all know, the delivery of health care in Canada is within provincial jurisdiction. The Government of Canada's role is to ensure that the provinces have the resources to provide equitable health care service for seniors and for all Canadians from one end of the country to the other. That is why we have increased health care transfers to the provinces each and every year we have been in office, and those increases will continue. We are actually now increasing money to the provinces at a rate that is higher than the rate at which many provinces are increasing their own spending on health care.

A lot of the issues the member across the way put forward we actually agree with. We agree that there needs to be more seniors' housing. We agree that there needs to be better health care for seniors in many measurable areas of health care. The provinces have been given the resources by the federal government to deliver adequate, equitable, good health care for seniors across the country. It is up to the provinces to put programs and policies in place to deliver those health care programs.

• (1840)

Mr. Bruce Hyer: Mr. Speaker, our seniors, including our military veterans, need some real action. We cannot wait around for the Conservatives to decide it is the right time for reform. Seniors need in-home care. They are asking for it, but what is the government doing to support their choice for independence? I have not seen a thing yet. Our seniors are asking for help, and the system is failing them.

Adjournment Proceedings

CPP and seniors poverty have been ignored for far too long. Benefits simply need to be increased. The Conservatives are putting seniors at risk. We need a national strategy to combat seniors' poverty—as well as children's poverty, for another evening—immediately.

Seniors need to be respected and supported in the workforce. The Conservatives need to ensure that employers are supportive of older workers, and they need to support these businesses with the right incentives.

Will the Conservatives please step up and invest in proper pensions and quality health care for our seniors?

Mr. Scott Armstrong: Mr. Speaker, that is exactly what we have done. As I said in my previous remarks, we have increased health care transfers to the provinces each and every year we have been in office so that the provinces can deliver equitable, adequate, and sound health care to our seniors, and in fact, to all Canadians. That is why we continuously increase those valuable transfers, not only for health care but for education, as well.

As I said, Canadian seniors show one of the lowest poverty rates in the world today. One of the reasons is our increase in the guaranteed income supplement, which, as I said, has lifted hundreds of thousands of seniors in this country out of poverty.

We have introduced things to help support the finances of seniors. Income splitting for seniors has provided seniors I know throughout my riding with literally thousands of dollars, in many cases, of added revenue in their coffers, in the pockets of these seniors, which they can spend on supporting all the things the member across the way spoke about: their home care, their health care, and their ability to get out and enjoy society, stopping what we call the isolation of seniors. There is support in cases of elder abuse so that we do not have seniors who are being preyed upon by neighbours, friends, or even, in some cases, family.

We are standing up for seniors. I can tell members that no government has done more for seniors in Canadian history than this Conservative government.

[*Translation*]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today because I asked a question last week about the energy east pipeline that TransCanada wants to run from western Canada to eastern Canada.

My question was as follows:

Mr. Speaker, francophones are being treated like second-class citizens in the energy east pipeline debate. It is unacceptable that the National Energy Board is not being required to provide all documents in both official languages. The issues are too important and the people must have their say. The documents must be available in both official languages and have the same authority. Will the government finally put its foot down and require the board to respect francophones?

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources replied:

Mr. Speaker, the National Energy Board has fulfilled its requirements under the Official Languages Act. Any documents produced by the National Energy Board must be published in both official languages. Questions related to documents filed by the applicant should be directed to the project proponent.

I do not think the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources is very familiar with this file. We know that TransCanada submitted 30,000 pages of documents to the National Energy Board concerning the energy east project. A complaint was filed and TransCanada agreed to have the documents translated. However, the National Energy Board said it would not accept that and the only documents that it would accept and that would have authority were the ones in English. The only legal documents were to be the English ones. This is déjà vu.

As members may remember, we had a debate on documents about soldiers in Afghanistan. The documents were tabled in English or French, but not all of them had been translated into the other language. A complaint was made to the Commissioner of Official Languages. Even Parliament has to follow that rule. It has to produce its documents in both official languages. They were obliged to do the translation so that the documents would be legal. We are not second-class citizens. The people of Quebec whom I talk to, including farmers around Quebec City, are concerned. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage certainly knows that. These people have the right to see the documents and to use them just as anglophones do. This is completely unacceptable and it is against the law.

In her answer, the minister said:

Mr. Speaker, the National Energy Board has fulfilled its requirements under the Official Languages Act. Any documents produced by the National Energy Board must be published in both official languages.

She admitted that it has to be in both official languages. Once again this evening, my question is this: will they admit that the law was broken? Will francophone citizens across Canada have the same opportunity as anglophones to see the document in both official languages? In our country, the law on official languages is very clear.

• (1845)

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, for Official Languages and for the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague seems to have misunderstood the role of the National Energy Board and its obligations with respect to Canada's official languages. We do not take a position on specific energy infrastructure projects until an independent review is done. Our government relies on the National Energy Board to make decisions on energy infrastructure projects such as the energy east pipeline.

The National Energy Board is currently conducting an independent scientific study into the energy east pipeline project and is taking into account the comments it has received from the public, the industry, environmental groups and aboriginal peoples. The National Energy Board's review will meet all the requirements of the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, the National Energy Board Act, and the Official Languages Act.

Upon reviewing the evidence brought before it, the National Energy Board will recommend that the project be approved if it serves the public interest in Canada. No project will be authorized unless the government is satisfied that it is safe for the public and safe for the environment.

Adjournment Proceedings

We are anxious to get the results of their rigorous, in-depth and independent review. Our government was clear: projects will be approved only if they are safe for the public and safe for the environment.

As an agency, the National Energy Board must meet the requirements of the Official Languages Act, and it does so consistently. That is why the National Energy Board will be holding a completely bilingual hearing about the application TransCanada filed for the energy east pipeline project. The documentation that will be distributed will also be available in both official languages, French and English.

However, the companies and people who participate in National Energy Board hearings are not subject to the Official Languages Act. The company that filed the application and other stakeholders are free to submit information to the National Energy Board in the language of their choice. In this case, TransCanada made parts of its application for the energy east project available in French on its website, and I invite the member to speak to the proponent if he has any questions in that regard.

The House can rest assured that the National Energy Board is meeting its obligations under the Official Languages Act when it comes to its review of the application for the energy east project and every other project.

The application and the issues it deals with are important because all Canadians must be able to access federal documents in the official language of their choice. The National Energy Board wants to hear from those who are directly affected by projects and encourages those individuals to submit their comments in the official language of their choice. That is why we encourage all Canadians who are directly affected by a project to submit an application to participate in the review.

• (1850)

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, I have never heard so many contradictions.

The National Energy Board has a fundamental duty to represent Canadians in both official languages. The parliamentary secretary is telling us that francophones can get sections of the documents on the company's website. Francophones in Quebec, New Brunswick and elsewhere in the country will not have the same information as anglophones.

There is a reason that the Commissioner of Official Languages is investigating this. It would not be the first time that the Conservative government has violated the Official Languages Act. This is the same government that has refused to allow the Standing Committee on Official Languages to sit since September. It has done everything possible to prevent us from doing our work on official languages. This shows a complete lack of respect.

Once again, Quebeckers, New Brunswickers and people in northern Ontario and Manitoba will not have the information. The government is wrong. The National Energy Board has a fundamental duty to provide the documents in both official languages, and it comes under the government. Forget this idea of independence. We must have the documents in both official languages. This is against the law.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, as I explained before, the National Energy Board meets the requirements of the Official Languages Act, as it is supposed to do. Groups or individuals who are directly affected by the project or who have relevant expertise should submit an application to participate in the National Energy Board review. They can do so in the official language of their choice.

All of the documents produced by the National Energy Board will be published in both official languages. However, questions related to documents filed by the applicant should be directed to the project proponent.

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

(The House adjourned at 6:52 p.m.)

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