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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, March 22, 2016

—

Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

CONTENTS

(Table of Contents appears at back of this issue.)

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, March 22, 2016

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)

[*English*]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the final report of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration entitled “Supplementary Estimates (C) 2015-16”.

SCRUTINY OF REGULATIONS

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the first report of the Standing Joint Committee for the Scrutiny of Regulations in relation to section 19 of the Statutory Instruments Act.

If the House gives consent, I intend to move concurrence on this report later this day.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among the parties, and if you seek it I hope you will find unanimous consent for the following motion: That the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development be the committee designated for the purposes of section 343 of the Canadian Environmental Protection Act.

[*Translation*]

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

[*English*]

ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 56.1, I move:

That the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development be the committee designated for the purposes of Section 343 of the Canadian Environmental Protection Act.

[*Translation*]

The Speaker: Will those members who object to the motion please rise in their places.

And fewer than 25 members having risen:

The Speaker: Fewer than 25 members having risen, the motion is adopted.

(Motion agreed to)

[*English*]

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Mr. Speaker, if the House gives its consent, I move that the first report of the Standing Joint Committee for the Scrutiny of Regulations presented to the House earlier this day be concurred in.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

* * *

PETITIONS

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present two petitions.

The first petition is from constituents who want to see the Government of Canada act concertedly to apply a carbon policy with fees to greenhouse gases at their source of production and in an economy-wide fashion that would apply to the ongoing efforts to meet the Paris agreement targets.

The second petition is directed to the issue of bottled water, recognizing that the threat of bottled water affects water supplies and increases solid waste. The petitioners call upon Parliament to discontinue the purchase of bottled water for personal use in federal government institutions.

Government Orders

PUBLIC TRANSIT

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have three petitions to introduce today.

The first petition is from hundreds of people who note that Canada is the only OECD country that does not have a national public transit strategy. It notes that over the next five years there will be an \$18-billion gap in transit infrastructure needs.

The petitioners call on the Government of Canada to create a Canadian public transit strategy which seeks to provide a permanent investment plan to support public transit, as well as federal funding mechanisms to allow municipalities to create that important public resource.

CANADA POST

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is signed by many Canadians who are continuing their call to stop the cuts to Canada Post, in particular to have the government halt the conversion of home mail delivery to community mailboxes. They want to reverse those community mailboxes that have been introduced and proven to be problematic for people, and to preserve that vital public service to allow full mail delivery for all Canadians.

CHILD CARE

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the third petition is signed by many people in my riding of Vancouver Kingsway.

The petitioners are asking the government to adopt the New Democrat plan for affordable child care. The petition points out the vital need for this program for parents across the country and that this would be a money saver, an important social investment, and would return benefits to our economy far beyond the investment in our children.

●(1010)

HOUSING

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the pleasure to present a petition today signed by many of my constituents. The petition deals with the overall condition of housing stock in Canada, and particularly in the area that I represent.

The petitioners call upon the government to reaffirm the need for strong federal leadership to work with different relevant levels of government in order to ensure there are programs to assist Canadians in affording both homes and the repairs thereof.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I ask that all questions be allowed to stand at this time.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

PUBLIC SERVICE LABOUR RELATIONS ACT

Hon. Scott Brison (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.) moved that Bill C-7, An Act to amend the Public Service Labour Relations Act, the Public Service Labour Relations and Employment Board Act and other Acts and to provide for certain other measures, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Ms. Joyce Murray (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member of Parliament for Montarville.

I rise to speak to Bill C-7. The bill would uphold the constitutionally guaranteed freedom of RCMP members and reservists to engage in meaningful collective bargaining.

A meaningful process of collective bargaining must provide employees with enough choice and freedom to allow them to pursue their collective interests. Bill C-7 does just that. It would provide RCMP members and reservists with the freedom to choose whether they wish to be represented by a bargaining agent. It would also provide them with the ability to choose which employee organization would represent them, as well as the workplace objectives they would pursue. It would also ensure that they could make those choices independent of management.

Allow me to take a moment to explain the context in which the bill was developed. Currently RCMP members are not permitted to bargain collectively and have no recourse to arbitration or strike action. In 2006, the Mounted Police Association of Ontario and the B.C. Mounted Police Professional Association, on behalf of all members of the RCMP, challenged this restriction in the courts. Ultimately the matter was brought to the Supreme Court of Canada, and on January 16 of last year, the Supreme Court rendered its decision. The court struck down the exclusion of RCMP members from the definition of employee in the Public Service Labour Relations Act as being unconstitutional. In addition, the court held that sections of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police regulations infringed on the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

The current process fails to achieve the balance between employees and employers that is essential to meaningful collective bargaining. Accordingly, the court held that this violated the charter right to freedom of association. The court suspended its judgment for one year to give the Government of Canada time to consider its options. The government sought an extension and was given an additional four months to introduce legislation in the House of Commons that would provide a new labour framework for RCMP members and reservists.

Government Orders

The Supreme Court of Canada's decision has a significant impact on the way that RCMP labour relations are managed. A new labour relations regime for RCMP members would need to provide them with an effective collective bargaining regime, and in a manner that respects the unique role of the RCMP as Canada's national police force. The Supreme Court decision therefore required careful consideration of next steps. This included broad consultation with regular members of the RCMP, and the provinces and territories that have police service agreements with the RCMP.

The Government of Canada takes our responsibility to protect the safety and security of Canadians extremely seriously. We are committed to supporting the dedicated women and men of Canada's national police service who protect Canadians on so many fronts. They combat organized crime and defend our country against terrorists. They guard us from those who deal in illicit drugs and those who commit economic crimes. They protect us from offences that threaten the integrity of Canada's national borders. They provide contract policing services in eight provinces and three territories. Through its national police services, the RCMP offers resources to other Canadian law enforcement agencies. This is by no means an exhaustive list of what these committed individuals do to protect Canadians and to deserve our respect.

Respect is a key operating principle of our government. One of the top priorities of our government is establishing a culture of respect for and within the federal public service. That is why when it comes to respectful treatment of RCMP members and reservists, we thank the Supreme Court for its ruling. It has afforded us with this historic opportunity to enshrine the constitutional freedom of RCMP members and reservists to engage in meaningful collective bargaining.

It is important to note that the negotiation of collective agreements is a right that has been enjoyed by other police officers in Canada for a very long time. In fact, the first police union in Canada was in Saint John, New Brunswick in 1919. The Ontario Provincial Police Association, representing civilian and non-commissioned uniform members of the OPP, came into existence in 1954.

Today, the bill before us would provide RCMP members and reservists with their independence and freedom of choice in labour relations matters while recognizing the unique operational reality of policing.

Independence and freedom of choice were two key elements of the Supreme Court's decision.

• (1015)

I would like to take a moment to talk about the consultations that were crucial to the development of the legislation before us today.

During the summer of 2015, an independent expert consulted RCMP regular members on potential elements of a new labour relations regime. The consultation consisted of a survey and town hall sessions and reached out to all 17,000 active members, as well as more than 1,000 members on leave. More than 9,000 members completed the survey. As well, more than 650 people participated in 13 town hall sessions held right across the country.

The legislation before us, therefore, respects regular members' preferences in determining a new labour relations regime for the

RCMP. It also takes into account the concerns and interests of those jurisdictions that contract RCMP services, including most of the provinces and territories as well as many municipalities across Canada.

Most regular members who participated in the online consultation said they support the idea of a unionized RCMP. Recognizing the particular operational reality of the RCMP, members showed a strong preference for a labour relations regime that would use binding arbitration without the right to strike as the mechanism for resolving bargaining impasses. This approach is consistent with other police forces across the country.

Members also showed clear support for the option of representation by a single national employee organization whose primary mandate would be the representation of RCMP members. Such an organization and the use of binding arbitration are two key features of the proposed legislation.

Consistent with existing provisions in the Public Service Labour Relations Act that exclude public service executives in managerial or confidential positions from representation, all RCMP officers appointed to the ranks of inspector and above would be excluded from collective bargaining.

Under this bill, the Public Service Labour Relations and Employment Board would be the administrative tribunal for matters related to the RCMP bargaining unit, as well as grievances related to a collective agreement. This would include grievances on terms and conditions of employment of a collective agreement, such as hours of work, overtime, and leave provisions.

The proposed legislation would preserve the commissioner's authority under the RCMP Act to manage police operations in an effective manner that is accountable to Canadians. Therefore, RCMP conduct matters would remain outside the jurisdiction of the Public Service Labour Relations and Employment Board and instead would continue to be managed through processes established under the RCMP Act.

The bill before us today offers RCMP members and reservists the respect they are due. The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees that everyone be entitled to freedom of association. The Supreme Court of Canada has ruled that this charter freedom protects the right to bargain collectively.

I am honoured to rise in support of this legislation, which would permit RCMP members and reservists to exercise their freedom of association by engaging in a process of meaningful collective bargaining. I encourage all members to show their respect for the women and men of the RCMP and to vote in support of this bill.

• (1020)

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, there are a number of exclusions from collective bargaining within this bill. I was wondering if the parliamentary secretary could shed some light on what exactly is excluded from bargaining under this bill and what the reasons are for excluding them.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Madam Speaker, I thank the member for the question and for his deep interest in this new phase of freedom of choice for collective bargaining for the RCMP.

Government Orders

What the bill includes is those matters that are subject to collective bargaining. The operational realities of the RCMP mean that some of the working conditions are actually part of the commissioner's responsibility to manage, and those will not be included in this bill. Therefore, what is included is consistent with what will be on the bargaining table between the RCMP members and reservists and the employee representatives who are representing them.

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Madam Speaker, we appreciate most of Bill C-7, and certainly we want to support our RCMP members and all the work they do, but I find it interesting that the bill does not include the opportunity for RCMP members to have a secret ballot when they wish to unionize. I would like to ask why.

It seems again that, when we are talking about bills on unions and democracy, secret ballots are something the government does not seem to support. I would like to ask why the opportunity for a secret ballot is not included in this legislation.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Madam Speaker, as the member may know, there is other legislation before the House that impacts the actual mechanisms of certification.

The bill reflects the wishes and the direction that the consultations with 17,000 regular members of the RCMP showed was their priority, so they will have the opportunity to have representation. Should they choose it, they will have an opportunity to have their representative bargain on their behalf.

The bill really shows respect for RCMP members, who will have the opportunities that most other police across the country already have.

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister (Intergovernmental Affairs), Lib.): Madam Speaker, one issue that reoccurs in this House around labour negotiations and proposed changes to the framework in which collective bargaining agreements are reached is this notion of a secret ballot.

If the RCMP members or if the union they choose to represent them decide on a secret ballot mechanism for any vote within the collective agreement process, they are free to choose a secret ballot if they want. We do not have to mandate that. That is something that the union can choose to do, if it chooses to proceed in that specific direction.

We are not reaching into the union and mandating a secret ballot. The union has an option as an organization to operate and conduct its votes as it chooses. Is that not true?

• (1025)

Ms. Joyce Murray: Madam Speaker, the principle of the bill is empowering RCMP members to have the same rights and freedoms as other police forces across the country and the right to collective bargaining.

At this time, details around the manner of certification are being debated in the House on another bill, so the exact mechanisms that move forward with Bill C-7 would depend on the outcome of that bill.

However, I can assure the member that this is about freedom and opportunities and equality for RCMP members and reservists.

Mr. Michel Picard (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise in this place to speak to the second reading of Bill C-7, an act to amend the Public Service Labour Relations Act, the Public Service Labour Relations and Employment Board Act, and other acts, and to provide for certain other measures affecting the Royal Canadian Mounted Police labour relations regime and its operation, tabled by the hon. President of the Treasury Board.

On January 16, 2015, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled, in the case of the Mounted Police Association of Ontario v. Canada (Attorney General), that section 2 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees freedom of association and protects a meaningful process of collective bargaining. Such a process must provide the employees with both choice and independence sufficient to enable them to determine and advance their collective interests.

Because the current labour relations regime does not meet this requirement, the court found it to be unconstitutional. The court gave the federal government 12 months to comply with this ruling. Due to the federal elections in the intervening period, a four-month extension was granted for the government to table legislation. Indeed, this is a technical bill to comply with the government's legal obligations. It does not claim to offer additional remedies to some of the challenges confronting the RCMP as an organization, such as operational stress injuries or harassment.

Our government is committed to ensuring that we provide adequate support to members of the RCMP and other first responders affected by operational stress injuries, as well as the eradication of any and all forms of harassment within this important and iconic institution for our country.

This bill was drafted following extensive consultations with regular members of the RCMP and jurisdictions with RCMP police service agreements. Jurisdictions with RCMP police service agreements were consulted, they and provided input about their concerns in the development of a new RCMP labour relations regime. As this regime is being implemented, we will continue to keep our contracting parties informed.

In addition, in the summer of 2015, RCMP regular members were surveyed and a series of town hall meetings was carried out across the country to develop a solid understanding of their preferences. Results indicated that a strong majority of RCMP regular members supported the idea of a unionized RCMP. In addition, as I noted earlier, there was strong support for binding arbitration, with no right to strike, to resolve bargaining impasses. Finally, there was also support for a single national bargaining unit comprising RCMP members and reservists only. The proposed legislation was shaped by these consultations. Our government is grateful for all the feedback that was received.

Furthermore, we intend to work with all parliamentarians in an open and engaging manner throughout the legislative process, in order to achieve the desired objective in the very limited allotted time in which we have to comply with the Supreme Court decision.

Government Orders

[Translation]

I will take a few minutes to clarify some important parts of the bill.

First, the bill would allow for the creation of a single national employee association representing all RCMP members and reservists excluding those at the inspector rank or higher. To clarify, the RCMP has a pool of reservists who are qualified police officers able to provide short-term services when the need arises.

Second, the bill stipulates that the bargaining agent must exist to serve the police. The Public Service Labour Relations and Employment Board could certify only a union whose primary mandate is the representation of RCMP members. In other words, the union could not represent other police officers, other police forces, or groups of employees who are not members of the RCMP.

Third, the bill excludes officers at the inspector rank and above from the collective bargaining process, just as public service managers are excluded from representation.

Fourth, even though RCMP members and reservists will not have the right to strike, the bill establishes a binding arbitration process for conflict resolution.

•(1030)

Binding arbitration will give members and reservists an effective way to advance their interests in the workplace. It is worth noting that RCMP members have already indicated their support for binding arbitration.

Lastly, the Public Service Labour Relations and Employment Board will serve as an administrative tribunal for all matters related to the collective bargaining process for RCMP members and reservists.

It is also important to note that any disciplinary action that currently falls under the authority of the commissioner of the RCMP pursuant to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Act will continue to be managed through the existing process.

I would like to conclude my speech by emphasizing the government's commitment to support the proud and dedicated men and women of the RCMP. If this legislation goes through, RCMP members and reservists will have the right to make choices regarding who represents them when it comes to labour relations. This will be done in a way that reflects the working environment that is unique to law enforcement.

Our government takes its responsibility to protect Canadians' security very seriously. The RCMP plays a key role in ensuring that we can fulfill this mission. Accordingly, our efforts will always focus on doing what is in the best interests of this vital Canadian institution.

[English]

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I heard the hon. parliamentary secretary say that part of what this bill is meant to do is address, in a minimal way, what the Supreme Court has asked be done with regard to the right of RCMP officers to bargain collectively. It does not pretend to do much else about a lot of other outstanding issues with the RCMP.

That is fair enough as far as it goes, but what I would like to draw the member's attention to and hear him comment on is that collective bargaining is one possible way to deal with some of the chronic problems and issues that we have heard about in the RCMP, such as harassment, and the bill is not neutral with respect to that position. It prejudices the question as to whether collective bargaining is an appropriate way to deal with those issues.

The bill does shut the door on that, and I think it is incumbent upon the government to provide better reasons for why it is not considering collective bargaining as a way to deal with some of those outstanding issues. I am hoping we can hear one of those arguments now.

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Picard: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question and the important point he raised.

Indeed, it is important to point out that the purpose of this exercise is to respond exclusively to the Supreme Court's request. There was a constitutional shortcoming in the past, and we are now obliged to meet that need and resolve this very specific problem.

It is important to understand that this problem could have been resolved before the election. That was not done. We are now obliged to fix it. We were, however, given the privilege of having a four-month extension. Nonetheless, the deadline is tight. Time is limited and it is important to take that limitation into account in our debate, as we must respond to this specific problem of giving the RCMP the right to be represented.

The other issues, such as harassment and other behavioural issues, are already being examined. We have already asked the RCMP and the Office of the Privacy Commissioner for reports and investigations.

•(1035)

[English]

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch (Simcoe—Grey, CPC): Madam Speaker, I know that the government is moving forward because of the Supreme Court ruling and what needs to happen with respect to the subject matter, but I will ask the question yet again with respect to secret ballot voting and the opportunity for allowing democratic action to take place within the RCMP.

I recognize that the member will probably get up and say that there is other legislation in the House. The RCMP is an entity that I think we all have a huge amount of respect for. We all respect these individuals because they put themselves in harm's way every day in the line of duty. Why are we not addressing this issue directly now, making sure that these individuals are allowed to have a secret ballot vote?

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Picard: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question.

Government Orders

I understand why she is proud of the RCMP. I was a civilian member of the RCMP for a few years, and I am proud of the time I spent there. I will always be proud to have been part of that organization. We owe them our respect, and we must give them the means to choose how they will be represented, within the rules. The purpose of today's exercise is to respond to the Supreme Court's findings.

My colleague is right. She even answered my question because there is a process under way. We are doing this within the legislative measures in place. If there is a change, we will adapt to the new reality. For now we are addressing the Supreme Court ruling only.

[*English*]

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister (Intergovernmental Affairs), Lib.): Madam Speaker, again, if the membership of the RCMP choose to have a secret ballot, there is nothing that restricts them from doing so. If they choose to have an open ballot, there is nothing that forces them to have an open ballot beyond this legislation, but if they choose to have a secret ballot as part of their ratification process, they are entitled to make that choice.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Picard: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question and point of clarification.

I believe that his point is correct. We will address the issue of this vote in due course. I would like to reiterate my personal concern with respect to our duty to address the issue of the right to representation, in response to the Supreme Court ruling.

[*English*]

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to rise today in this debate on Bill C-7 and to be the first speaker on behalf of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition on this important subject.

All parties in this place respect the important role played by the RCMP/GRC, our Mounties, and not just for the iconic image they represent around the world and the subsequent acknowledgement of Canadians as a people who respect one another and enjoy peace, order, and good government. We acknowledge, and we have paid homage in this House, when some of our front-line men and women have risked their lives and in fact given their lives in recent years in Alberta and Moncton, serving Canada and protecting the society we all enjoy.

The Conservative Party, when we were in government, followed the court case of the Mounted Police Association of Ontario very closely as it made its way through the courts. We are here today because of a decision of the Supreme Court of Canada that came down last year and provided an opportunity for the government to respond.

The previous government had been looking at the Supreme Court decision, consulting, meeting with senior leadership within the RCMP, and hearing from front-line members. Then there was the transition, and the same issue was faced by the new Liberal government, which asked for a bit of an extension in January. The court has given the government until April to come up with a framework for labour relations and bargaining for members of the

RCMP that meets the spirit and intent of the Supreme Court decision in the Mounted Police Association of Ontario versus Canada.

I am here today as the official opposition public safety critic. I will be speaking just before or alongside my colleague, who is responsible for Treasury Board, and certainly the impact of Supreme Court decision has a dual aspect. It solidifies and elucidates the right to collective bargaining that the Supreme Court has given members of the RCMP, as their exclusion from the Public Service Labour Relations Act was declared unconstitutional and in violation of section 2(d) of the charter, the right to association.

However, there certainly will be economic ramifications of that as well. That is the second aspect of the decision, and that is why the opposition will lead off with both public safety and Treasury Board critics speaking.

As the public safety critic, having heard from Commissioner Paulson just yesterday and having already had the opportunity to have him before the public safety committee in this new Parliament, I want to begin my remarks by thanking the front-line men and women of our RCMP. They are charged with a very important role in our country, given the breadth and size of our country and the fact that large portions of rural Canada would not have policing services were it not for the men and women of the RCMP.

This conversation on this subject, while it deals with labour relations and ultimately will have an impact on the fiscal framework for Canada, must begin by acknowledgement on all sides of this House of the tremendous respect we have for the RCMP. There are 28,461 regular force members of the RCMP, not including auxiliaries, whom we all know and see in communities across the country. They also play a very critical role, particularly for large events and things like that in our communities across the country.

Let us put that in perspective for a moment. That number of 28,000 or so members of Canada's police force is significant when we compare it to the next-largest police force in Canada, the Ontario Provincial Police, with about 6,100 uniformed members, and the largest municipal police service, also in Ontario, the Toronto Police Service, with 7,900 members.

• (1040)

The Supreme Court, and really the court case launched by the association in Ontario, recognized that alongside its municipal and provincial comrades in arms, Canada's largest police force needed the ability to have effective collective bargaining in the same way that its provincial and municipal cousins did. The Supreme Court has given some guidance on that and this has led us here to Bill C-7 today.

However, Canada's largest police force, our national police force, does attract a significant expense of the Government of Canada for salaries, a \$1.6 billion commitment to public safety, to front-line policing across the country. Only time will tell, but all parties acknowledge that the impact of the Supreme Court decision and the changing of the bargaining arrangement, or in simple terms the unionization of the RCMP, will have a significant impact upon the fiscal framework for Canada.

Government Orders

I say that mere hours before the budget is to be brought forward by the new government. I hope it approaches Bill C-7 and its implementation with a little more caution than it appears it has approached this budget, particularly when it comes to operational spending, most of which is made up of salaries. The pressure is on that, particularly once reference bargaining between the large municipal and provincial forces begins. We need to ensure our front-line officers get what they deserve, the support they deserve, the salary, remuneration, benefits, health care, and support for mental health. We need to ensure we look at the well-being of our front-line officers, not just in the context of salaries but in how we take care of them both while they are serving and after, particularly if they leave with a service-related injury.

In my far too brief time, unfortunately, as minister of veterans affairs, I had the honour of interacting quite regularly with the RCMP and its members. As the government knows, and as its new minister well knows, the ill and injured of the RCMP are provided for and their support is administered through Veterans Affairs Canada. We have certainly seen how in recent years the health and wellness support, particularly for mental injuries from service, has dramatically come into the modern era, and we are very proud of that. I know the new government will continue that important work. Our public safety committee right now is studying operational stress injuries, post-traumatic stress disorder for our front-line responders.

The interesting things we have learned over the last generation from our veterans and from our Canadian Armed Forces are now being shared with our RCMP and with municipal and provincial police forces. In fact, the document of the Canadian Armed Forces, "Road to Mental Readiness", a wellness document for mental health, is now really the touchstone for first responder uniformed personnel serving in Canada. That needs to be a very important part of this discussion, as does the implementation of what comes from Bill C-7.

As the member of Parliament for Durham, I also need to once again thank the men and women of RCMP detachment Bowmanville, in my community, who are part of the Toronto East, the "O" detachment of the RCMP, which is not as widely seen in Ontario because we have the OPP. This detachment for the Toronto GTA East is very important. Like in so many communities, when the men and women hang up their uniform after their shift, these same people are often the coaches at the hockey rinks and the soccer fields, and become the backbone of our communities.

I want to salute the RCMP members in my own detachment and speak for a minute about the other eight provinces.

Quebec and Ontario have provincial police forces, but many parts of Canada would not have the important underpinning of public safety were it not for the men and women of the RCMP, particularly rural areas where often that member will be the first and sole response to an incident. In recent years, the RCMP's ability to work with parts of rural Canada, first nation leadership, and first nation police forces, has truly been remarkable. That needs to also be part of the framework that becomes the new collective bargaining approach for our RCMP.

• (1045)

Bill C-7 is the result of the government's response to the Supreme Court of Canada's decision in the Mounted Police Association of

Ontario v. Canada. Specifically, it looked at whether the staff relations representative program within the RCMP met the test of giving the freedom of association to members of the RCMP guaranteed by the charter. One of the members of our caucus, who is a proud retired RCMP officer, knows that the staff relations representative program did try to act as that conduit between the workforce and management in the sense of a bargaining agent.

As a result of the creation of that staff relations program, going back to the 1970s, the RCMP was excluded from the Public Sector Labour Relations Act. It was specifically excluded in legislation. That exclusion, alongside an analysis of the staff representative program, was what the Supreme Court ultimately looked at. Its finding was that the staff relations program did not meet the standard it expected under section 2(d) of the charter providing the men and women of the RCMP with the freedom of association.

It is interesting and important to note that the decision of the Supreme Court did not say to just strike out those sections of the PSLRA, the Public Safety Labour Relations Act, and treat the RCMP like any other public service. The analysis of the Supreme Court decision is quite illustrative, particularly with our modern labour law, which is starting to move away from the traditional Wagner model that we inherited from 1930s labour relations in the United States.

What did the court actually say in this decision? We see parts of that reflected in Bill C-7, but we have concerns of another nature. The court said that section 2(d) guaranteed meaningful collective bargaining, meaningful representation, but it broke that down further and said that meaningful collective bargaining and meaningful representation had two parts. The first part was employee choice; there must be choice. With respect to the second part to provide that meaningful standard, there needed to be sufficient independence from management. This is really where the old model within the RCMP failed in the eyes of the court. The court felt the staff relations program was not seen to be independent enough from management. It was seen more as a human resources tool and not an agent for bargaining and protecting the collective rights of the employees. That is an important distinction to make. Had the staff relations program been a little more independent, this may have survived the Supreme Court's analysis.

The Supreme Court specifically said, "freedom of association under s. 2(d) is that the guarantee will not necessarily protect all associational activity." The arrangement must not "substantially interfere", and that is a later quote it used and is the standard, with the employees' rights to that bargaining, their choice, and the independence.

Bill C-7 does reflect that and would bring certain parts of the workplace relationship outside of the bill. I respect the fact the government has acknowledged that part of the decision. Certain elements through the grievance process and certain elements of the workplace would not be subject to the collective bargaining relationship. That is important, given the unique role and the chain of command structure and heritage of the RCMP as a police force. The government appears to have acknowledged that in Bill C-7.

Government Orders

What is absent entirely from Bill C-7 is that first element of the Supreme Court's decision, which is that meaningful collective bargaining and the meaningful right to association under the charter must have as its first principle employee choice.

•(1050)

In fact, I heard my friend from Spadina—Fort York earlier talk about the front-line members of the RCMP and say, “If they choose”. That is what the Supreme Court of Canada put as the fundamental construct to this relationship, employee choice.

However, what is absent in Bill C-7 is a codification of that employee choice which, in our modern democracy, requires a secret ballot vote. The members of the RCMP whose collective rights under section 2(b) of the charter can be exercised by their employee choice at the first instance, saying whether they want an association or not, and that vote to be conducted in a way that conforms with our democratic principles should be by secret ballot.

Why is that interesting? Because of the order paper we have two bills before Parliament. We are in the early days, so leaving out private members' business, I think we are up to Bills C-7 or C-8. Bill C-4 expresses the government's clear intention that secret ballot should not be a fundamental underpinning of the choice employees have on whether to belong to a union.

I have not heard the parliamentary secretary, my friend, in his remarks explain that omission. I hope to hear that addressed somewhere in the debate on Bill C-7, because it does drive an interesting omission on the part of the government.

The Supreme Court of Canada said that the first pillar to meaningful right of association was employee choice, but that is not codified in Bill C-7. Therefore, I think we will see the opposition, learning from the Supreme Court, ensuring that employee choice and secret ballot is directly a part of Bill C-7. We hope, with the government members being mindful of the court decision, it will agree to amend the bill to reflect that. If they do, it is our intention to work with the Liberals on it.

The previous government, as I said, was looking at the impact of the Supreme Court decision and how we could guarantee this charter right for our men and women of the RCMP, alongside ensuring that their important structure, chain of command and the important duties and risks inherent in policing are respected and not diminished, and public safety is not impacted through the course of what might be regular Wagner model union construct.

What is interesting is that this decision, along with the Fraser Health decision, has shown a gradual departure in labour law from traditional Canadian law. In fact, years ago, when Justice Rosalie Abella was on the Ontario Labour Relations Board, there was a balance between these arbitration-type boards, quasi-judicial bodies, the law and the legislature. Now that legislatures are intervening more in labour law and now that this charter right is developing with respect to association, it is changing the old model, and the courts have acknowledged that.

In fact, some of the best labour minds in the country, including some friends of mine with whom I used to practise law, including Brian Burkett and John Craig, have written on the move away from the Wagner model. What does that mean? It means the exclusivity of

a union guaranteed by the Wagner model may indeed be a thing of the past, and that it is quite acceptable for provisions of what the police do to be excluded from collective bargaining. In fact, the court has said that the Wagner model itself is not the constitutional right. It is the meaningful right to collective bargaining and an agent that is constitutionally protected.

As I said, with the fundamental charter right that led to this decision, the two-part test, the first part is employee choice. Therefore, the government should have that reflected in Bill C-7: employee choice on who their agent should be, on their priorities, as well employee choice on whether they are unionized. That should be by secret ballot, which Canada has had since 1874. If the government acknowledges and amends this, it may see some unanimity in this place, and I would like to see that.

•(1055)

Ms. Joyce Murray (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the comments by the member for Durham and all the work he does on behalf of the RCMP and the Canadian Armed Forces. However, his comments confused me.

He is insisting on a secret ballot. Bill C-525, which the Conservative government brought forward, made it more difficult for employees to unionize, harder for unions to certify, and easier for unions to be decertified. That is the bill the Liberal government is repealing with Bill C-4, in which case the board will have a choice. It will be at the discretion of the board whether there will be a secret ballot or a card check, and the board can make sure that the members' interests are reflected in the choice made.

The secret ballot makes it harder for the collective bargaining process and provides less freedom for the members. Why is the member insisting on that as the mechanism?

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Madam Speaker, in fact, I am suggesting to the House and to my colleague that that is what the Supreme Court has required. With employee choice being the most fundamental element of this charter right, the true way to provide employee choice with respect to unionization and the bargaining unit itself is the secret ballot.

I keep finding myself referencing Liberal leaders in the House, usually to show how the new Liberal government is quite different from the past. We have had the secret ballot in Canada since Alexander Mackenzie, a little known prime minister. He was a Liberal prime minister in 1874. This has been a fundamental tenet of our parliamentary democracy and, in fact, my friend who asked this question was at the briefing with her officials yesterday, when one of the senior officials said that literally every certification vote in the public service has been by secret ballot.

Government Orders

Now that we have established it as a fundamental tenet, let us have it reflected in Bill C-7. As I said, if the Liberals support the Conservative amendment to this, we may see this bill pass speedily through the House, particularly with the court deadline of April. I would like to see the government move on this and see that happen.

• (1100)

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Madam Speaker, prior to being elected, I was fortunate enough to work for a major union in this country for 16 years and represented many workers before the Canada Industrial Relations Board who were seeking certification under federal legislation. The legislation I worked under always gave the Canada Industrial Relations Board the discretion to order a vote in any certification application where it felt it was necessary. That was the law. That has always been the case.

Its practice was to permit certification when it was presented with evidence by a majority of employees who wanted to unionize. What I found, and I spent many, many days battling at the CIRB, was that when employers found out about a certification drive, many of them would interfere with their members' constitutional rights and fire and discipline and intimidate employees. It is the automatic certification that is intended to stop employers from affecting that constitutional right. That is why the card check system, where members have the ability to indicate their desires and submit them to the board, is actually the best way to test the will of a majority of employees and to minimize employer interference.

I am wondering if my hon. colleague has anything to say about the employers in this country who have violated employees' rights to certification by firing and disciplining them. He just has to go to the labour board to read hundreds and thousands of cases where that has happened.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Madam Speaker, I thank my friend who I know is passionate about the subject. However, it concerns me greatly that he would suggest that the Government of Canada would act in an untoward manner against some of its own people. I am sure he can pluck a few Public Service Labour Relations Board decisions showing an employer trying to resist unionization. We are talking about the government. That is why his colleague was at this briefing. That is why the officials said that the normal course for certification in the public realm is by secret ballot.

What I find interesting is that these decisions have shown that the old Wagner model is wearing out, and the very fact of exclusivity for a union is now at risk. As a labour lawyer himself, the member should look at that. What is nice about Bill C-7 is that the government recognized the unique nature of the RCMP. Therefore, the traditional public sector unions cannot just move in and try and unionize this workforce; rather, it has to be a unique bargaining agent looking at the needs of the workforce. That is where labour law is going. It is looking at the unique needs of the workplace and the people at the front lines. Therefore, we respect the fact that Bill C-7 has tried to get that balance right.

Its one major omission is the secret ballot right that most public sector employees have enjoyed, which the Supreme Court has indicated is fundamental. I truly hope that the government realizes this oversight in Bill C-7 and moves to correct it. Then we would have something important for our men and women in uniform that could move quickly through this place.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Madam Speaker, during my colleague's speech he alluded very briefly to the impact this might have on the fiscal framework. I think it is important to look at that.

I also need to bring this into today's context, where we anticipate a federal budget at four o'clock, with all indications being that there will be many sorts of wants, not needs, in this budget. We need to talk about the issue in terms of the space that the current government will leave in the fiscal framework for what, ultimately, will not be a want but certainly a need in terms of what the government is compelled to do.

• (1105)

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Madam Speaker, I thank my friend from Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo for her interventions, which are always very on the mark in this place, and for her support for our men and women in uniform, the Canadian Armed Forces, the RCMP and our veterans.

Today is indeed budget day. I did a poll yesterday. It is now going to be known as "red Tuesday" because the red team is taking us into the red in a dramatic fashion. That needs to be part of the background to Bill C-7, because any analysis will show that this would put more pressure on the framework, in the range of tens if not hundreds of millions of dollars potentially per year. Therefore, we need to get this right by providing employee choice first.

As I said in my remarks, we should be looking at the unique needs of policing, and the court has said the unique needs of a workplace must be reflected in its bargaining agent. We should be looking at health care, mental health support, and a whole range of service conditions and issues, apart from just the salary piece, given the unique role of the RCMP and some of the impacts on our men and women with respect to their front-line service.

Therefore, I hope that the government recognizes its omission of true employee choice in Bill C-7 and makes that fix, and that it and the minister work alongside the commissioner of the RCMP to ensure that bargaining, and the well-being of our people, are not just with respect to salary negotiations but also in terms of safeguarding the employees' wellness in uniform and afterward.

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Picard (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I applaud the tribute to the RCMP by my hon. colleague.

Government Orders

I regret that a number of things are getting mixed up in the discussion, when the point of the exercise was definitely to address a problem or correct a mistake and allow members to have full-fledged bargaining.

I defer to my colleague's legal knowledge and wisdom and would like to say that, in my opinion, the Supreme Court does not rule on the process that will get us there, but on the right of access to this type of representation.

I was delighted to hear my colleague congratulate the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security in his speech for examining the issue of post-traumatic stress.

Is the committee the best forum for studying these kinds of details, for example?

[*English*]

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the parliamentary secretary for his intervention. We are both missing being at committee because of this debate, and I am sure we will both scurry over there shortly afterward.

I think he is right. Bill C-7 is the government's response. I rose in January to say that the government was taking more time to correct a flaw. However, I will say again that the court's first and fundamental tenet of the charter right is employee choice, and that is not reflected in the bill. What is catching the government in an awkward position is that Bill C-4, which was an election promise it made to get support from labour in the election, conflicts with Bill C-7 and what the charter expects. They will have to reconcile that before the House.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise in the House today to speak to Bill C-7 and contribute to the debate on the bill.

I will start by echoing the thanks that other members have offered today to the men and women in the RCMP for their service to the country. What better way to thank them than to grant them the long overdue right to bargain collectively with their employer. It is one that unfortunately took the Supreme Court to weigh in on for it to be granted. Nevertheless, we have come to a place where we can now recognize that right. It is a good thing for the country. We in the NDP are concerned to make the bill the best it can be and to honour the right to bargain collectively to the maximum possible extent.

This issue has become personal for me. It came up while I was canvassing during the last election. I knocked on the door of an RCMP member who lives in my riding. He asked what I thought about this. Of course, intellectually, I have been on the side of labour and workers' rights all my life, but this was a guy who was working for the RCMP was frustrated about things that were happening in his workplace, which he thought could be going better. He did not feel there were meaningful avenues for RCMP members to complain within the organization that would really be heard, because he felt that management ultimately controlled all of those processes. He felt that collective bargaining was the way to start getting those concerns addressed.

Although he mentioned pay and benefits, it was interesting that a lot of the concerns he raised were not about that. I certainly got the impression, first and foremost, that what he and many of his fellow members were looking for in collective bargaining was the ability to

address workplace safety and health issues. As we have heard from some RCMP members, some of it had to do with harassment within the force. For others it was staffing ratios and how many officers are responding to calls, particularly in remote and northern communities, and what that means for the safety of RCMP members who do respond alone.

The impression I got that day is echoed by the Mounted Police Professional Association of Canada, which says, "Unfortunately the way it stands, this bill is flawed by removing vital matters from the bargaining table such as disciplinary measures and allocation of resources".

I take it from that that the conversation I had during the election with the RCMP member in my riding was representative of at least some, and perhaps many, RCMP members across the country. Some have already organized within a voluntary association to say that what they really want to weigh in on at the bargaining table, aside from pay and benefits, is their work conditions and the threats to their safety that sometimes arise because of decisions made by management about who will respond to what calls and in what way.

It would be a mistake for the government not to see this as an opportunity and to just minimally satisfy the requirements of the Supreme Court decision, but rather to create a meaningful mechanism by which RCMP members who have the experience on the ground, those who are getting to see first-hand the way policies designed by management are playing out for individual officers across the country, to weigh in on these kinds of decisions.

The Supreme Court ruling was quite clear. We all know in this chamber that simply being able to discuss something at the bargaining table is no guarantee that any particular conclusion will be drawn or that management will not maintain its prerogative with respect to a particular issue.

As we have talked about collective bargaining and what should and should not be included under the purview of bargaining, I think it would be helpful to refer to some of what the Supreme Court said in its decision about bargaining, what its intent is and why it matters.

I will quote at length from the decision. It states:

As social beings, our freedom to act with others is a primary condition of community life, human progress and civilized society. Through association, individuals have been able to participate in determining and controlling the immediate circumstances of their lives, and the rules, mores and principles which govern the communities in which they live.

Freedom of association is most essential in those circumstances where the individual is liable to be prejudiced by the actions of some larger and more powerful entity, like the government or an employer.

• (1110)

In this case, it is both.

The decision continues with:

Association has always been the means through which political, cultural and racial minorities, religious groups and workers have sought to attain their purposes and fulfill their aspirations; it has enabled those who would otherwise be vulnerable and ineffective to meet on more equal terms the power and strength of those with whom their interests interact and, perhaps, conflict.

Government Orders

This, I think, is what we are hearing from RCMP members. It is a strong feeling that the means at their disposal to address issues in their workplace are ineffective, when we hear the sense of frustration that comes with feeling vulnerable and not having a fair process through which to challenge a person or an entity much more powerful than oneself.

I would say that no small part of what RCMP members sought to achieve through this litigation process, which ultimately terminated in the Supreme Court ruling that they do have a right to collective bargaining, was the freedom to pursue their goals within the workplace. We know that some of the most important goals are about workplace safety and health and less about pay and benefits.

The Supreme Court recognized in its decision that this ability is what makes collective bargaining important. It said, for instance, that “a process of collective bargaining will not be meaningful if it denies employees the power to pursue their goals.”

The Supreme Court continues with:

The balance necessary to ensure the meaningful pursuit of workplace goals can be disrupted in many ways. Laws and regulations may restrict the subjects that can be discussed, or impose arbitrary outcomes.

I think that is certainly what we are seeing with respect to some issues in the bill before us. A law—in this case, Bill C-7—would restrict the freedom of RCMP members to be able to pursue their goals within collective bargaining. That is why we in the NDP find some of the exclusions so concerning. The Supreme Court has rightly said that what makes collective bargaining important is the freedom for employees to be able to pursue their own goals that they determine within the workplace.

We have all heard stories about RCMP members responding to calls alone in remote or northern communities and the threat to their safety and security that such a situation poses. We have heard some of the debates around that. We have heard stories recently in the news about persistent allegations of sexual harassment and the powerlessness that some RCMP members feel in being able to raise those complaints, so I can understand why they would like to be able to weigh in on those issues and why they feel that a process that puts them at the table as an equal partner in negotiating the way that these issues are going to be dealt with is the way that they feel it is best done, and that yet another regime whereby the government, along with the commissioner, decides how those things are going to be decided may, in the opinion of some members, not be adequate.

Certainly, given that collective bargaining has been prohibited in one way, shape, or form in the RCMP since 1918, there have been a lot of opportunities for government-led or commissioner-led solutions to address these kinds of persistent problems within the RCMP, yet we deal with them today. We have a new government now that is going to try in its own way to deal with those things.

Our modest proposal is that perhaps the time has come to let employees in at the ground level at the table as an equal in bargaining about how some of these issues are going to be dealt with.

Of course, that does not guarantee any particular outcome. It does not mean that the employees are going to be successful at the table. It is just to say that it makes sense to let them raise those issues at the

bargaining table if they see them as important issues, and we know from some members that they do.

Why not let them raise those issues at the table and make a determination, based on a concrete proposal, on whether or not what they are saying makes sense and whether it is consistent with what we have heard is the unique nature of the RCMP as a national police force? Let that be decided once the proposals are on the table, instead of prejudging the issue and saying that any proposals that the members of the RCMP could possibly come up with are somehow not going to be true to the unique nature of the RCMP as a national police force.

• (1115)

I submit that many members of the RCMP—frankly, most, if not all—understand the nature of the workplace that they work in, are just as committed to the RCMP as a national police force, are just as committed to the important role that the RCMP plays within Canada, and are interested in advancing solutions that would be in the interests, yes, of themselves but also of the RCMP, which I do not think need be seen as mutually exclusive. What we are proposing is simply that some of these exclusions do not make a lot of sense, or, if they do, we have not yet heard why they do.

We have heard some arguments about timeliness. We have heard that we are in a rush to get the bill through because we only have until May 16. I submit that is not a real reason. That is something that reasonable people can deal with either by simply omitting those exclusions or, if that is legislatively complex because of some of the frameworks that are already in place, by simply putting a timeline on when agreements made may supersede whatever is currently in place legislatively. These are things that can be worked out at committee. I am hopeful that the government will listen and that we might be able to reduce the number of exclusions that are in this bill through the committee stage, which is why we will be voting to send this bill to committee. It is not because it is perfect but because we need a bill that recognizes the right of RCMP members to bargain collectively, and we are anxious for the opportunity to submit proposals as to how we might improve this particular piece of legislation.

I would be remiss if I did not mention that the Supreme Court also said that limits can reasonably be imposed on collective bargaining. This is something that my Conservative colleague was alluding to earlier. The Supreme Court said:

Section 1 of the Charter permits Parliament to enact laws that limit Charter rights if it establishes that the limits are reasonable and demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society. This requires that the objective of the measure be pressing and substantial, and that the means by which the objective is furthered be proportionate, i. e. that the means are rationally connected to the law's objective, minimally impair the...right, and are proportionate in effect.

The government argued—at court, not in the House today—that the point of denying RCMP members the right to collective bargaining was to “maintain and enhance public confidence in the neutrality, stability and reliability of the RCMP by providing a police force that is independent and objective.”

Government Orders

I note that the Supreme Court found that argument unsatisfactory, but it seems to me that similar arguments are really what are underpinning the exclusions in Bill C-7 of certain matters from the bargaining process. While denying collective bargaining altogether is not the same as excluding certain matters from bargaining, it is worth considering the Supreme Court's response to the government's argument in court:

First, it is not apparent how an exclusion from a statutorily protected collective bargaining process ensures the neutrality, stability or even reliability. The exclusion of RCMP members from the federal public service collective bargaining regime... fostered, rather than inhibited, dissatisfaction and unrest within the RCMP.

Furthermore,

...it is not established that permitting meaningful collective bargaining for RCMP members will disrupt the stability of the police force or affect the public's perception of its neutrality. The government offered no persuasive evidence to that effect. Empirical research tends to show the opposite, as does provincial experience with unionized police forces....

I would put to the House today that the same is true, *mutatis mutandis*, of the exclusions to bargaining contained in Bill C-7. Those were arguments having to do with not giving the RCMP the right to bargain collectively at all. However, we could say that a similar test really needs to be applied to each exclusion. It is not clear to me that there is any great purpose served by excluding some important issues from the bargaining process, and I would really like to hear from government members with respect to these exclusions.

Without guaranteeing any particular outcome if employees brought a proposal about staffing guidelines or, if they did, that they would be successful in the process, how would excluding, say, staffing ratios from the collective bargaining regime make the RCMP more reliable, more neutral, or more stable? We just have not heard the argument for the necessity of these things.

We heard a vague comment earlier from the Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board that there are certain things that have just always been within the purview of the commissioner and that there is a managerial prerogative there.

● (1120)

I would say that begs the question. What is at issue is what will be under the managerial prerogative. That would be all well and good, perhaps, if we were making an argument in court where the law was established, but as legislators in the House, it will be for us to decide what is within the purview of management's prerogative. That is what we are contesting here today.

We have a pretty good test coming out of the Supreme Court decision. It is the same test that would apply to whether RCMP members should have the right to bargain collectively overall. It could be applied to each exclusion to ask for arguments and evidence that the RCMP would be jeopardized as an institution if these things were submitted to bargaining.

That is a hard case to make, and I think it is particularly hard to make in light of the fact that this legislation would not provide a right to strike. Disagreements would go to binding arbitration, and in their deliberations the arbitrators would be instructed to take into account the unique role of the RCMP as a national police force.

If proposals were put on the table by RCMP members at bargaining, it is clear through Bill C-7 that whatever could not be

resolved, presumably because RCMP management felt that those proposals were unreasonable, would go to arbitration. As part of their mandate, arbitrators would have to consider whether those proposals respected the unique role of the RCMP as a national police force, and also, by implication, whether any of those proposals would somehow be a threat to the stability, neutrality, or reliability of the RCMP as a national police force.

The RCMP's mandate and unique role, a term we are using here, would be well protected within that process, so these exclusions seem to me to be redundant. In the absence of further argument from the government, although I will stress again that I do not think we have been given anything that would count as an argument for any of these specific exclusions, it seems to me that the unique role of the RCMP is quite well protected by this legislation, so the exclusions are redundant.

As I say, I am hopeful that these are things that can be corrected at committee. If we do that, we will end up with a proposal that can better reflect the desire of the RCMP members who have been vocal on this case. That is what we should be striving for. Minimally meeting the conditions of the Supreme Court decision is really not enough.

We have an opportunity here to respect the spirit of what collective bargaining should be. We have a mechanism already in the bill—and it is not exclusion—to ensure that the unique role the RCMP plays as a national police force is respected and that there is a way to have it respected within that process by the arbitrator.

These are the reasons we feel the bill should go to committee, where it can be better explored. We will be looking for arguments from government on specific exclusions. In the absence of those arguments, we will be presenting proposals to improve this legislation and make sure that RCMP members get the right to bargain collectively, both in spirit as well as in letter.

● (1125)

Ms. Joyce Murray (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for Elmwood—Transcona for his interest in the well-being of the RCMP members and reservists, and for his work on this subject. He is calling for a vastly expanded scope to the bill.

To his expression of hope that the government will engage in this discussion with an open-minded committee, the answer is yes. Our government sees committees as the place for members of Parliament of all parties to put forward their ideas and have those discussions, and the government will listen to what the committee members are proposing. It is a different manner of running committees than the previous government.

As the same time, the bill has never been intended to look at the entire scope of all of the issues, as important as many of them are. The member mentioned harassment. The government has taken several direct steps to have a review of the policies around harassment. There are a number of things being done, and more to come, on some of the issues that the member has raised.

Government Orders

I would like to ask the member whether he sees the bill, with the scope that it intends to cover, which is the interpretation, application, and terms and conditions of employment and the ways of being able to grieve those, as a major step forward from where we are today with no collective bargaining powers by the RCMP members. Or, does he see this as a positive step forward, notwithstanding that it does not cover everything in the terrain that may take a much longer time period to work through a new regime?

• (1130)

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Madam Speaker, I certainly acknowledge that RCMP members are going to have more of a say around certain aspects of their employment by virtue of the bill. The thanks goes to the Supreme Court on that, not the new government. To the extent that the bill responds minimally to the Supreme Court decision and tries to protect certain exclusions from bargaining, I would say it is a missed opportunity.

There is perhaps a persistent misunderstanding of my point in the response from the parliamentary secretary. It is not that government would have needed to conduct all of these studies and then include the responses in a bill. Part of the virtue of opening some of these things up to collective bargaining is that the resolution to these issues could actually happen away from the government table, between RCMP members and RCMP management. Government need not be involved, to the extent that adequate solutions are being found at the bargaining table. These exclusions foreclose on that possibility.

There is the idea that these are issues, the solutions for which we need to look at later, motivating the government's position. What it misses is that the bill forecloses on one good option, which is to let RCMP members at the table address some of these issues. I think that is unfortunate. It would be a good way to deal with some of those issues, or potentially be a good way.

To the extent that it is not, the provisions around binding arbitration and having the arbitrator consider the unique role of the RCMP as the national police force, a phrase we are hearing a lot, would protect the interests of the RCMP. What I am trying to say is the government is already making a limited decision by closing the door on one option by advancing the bill and not addressing these exclusions.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Madam Speaker, I negotiated a few collective agreements in the past. We introduced harassment clauses into our collective agreement, both harassment prevention and early conflict resolution clauses. In my opinion, such clauses helped to make the organization more stable, not less.

We know that many harassment complaints have been filed within the RCMP in recent years. It seems to me that harassment prevention and conflict resolution clauses could only help to improve stability within the RCMP, as they did for the employees for whom I negotiated.

I would like to hear my colleague's thoughts on that.

[*English*]

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Madam Speaker, I thank the member for the question because it cuts to the essence of what I am trying to get at.

Collective bargaining can be an important tool to address persistent issues within an organization or workplace. When the government says it is looking at those issues and will get around to them, that they are separate, I think there is already a mistake in conceiving how we might deal with these issues. There would be virtue in submitting some of those issues in collective bargaining and seeing what the employees and employers within the workplace can figure out.

Part of the persistent problem, perhaps historically within the RCMP, which we certainly hear about from some members, has been that members of the RCMP cannot get their voices heard, that management is always in charge, that the system is not working, that management develops another system and there may be meaningful consultation or there may not. There will be differences of opinion about that. However, what certainly has been true is that management has had the ability to come up with new systems for decades within the RCMP, and certain problems persist.

What would be genuinely new, a novel approach, is to allow employees in at the ground level to address some of the issues at the bargaining table, with the knowledge and expertise they have because they are living it. They could see if they, working with the employer, could come up with solutions that management has not been able to come up with on its own.

I am glad that the government is concerned about those issues, and I am glad it is going to pay some attention to them. What I am upset about is that it is foreclosing on what would be a genuinely new way of dealing with the issues when the old ways clearly have not worked.

With my last few seconds, and for the information of members who may want to know, I want to recognize that my wife is visiting the nation's capital today.

• (1135)

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank the member for Elmwood—Transcona for standing up for the efforts that Liberals are taking to move collective bargaining forward through the work on Bill C-7, and the work we did on Bill C-4 previous to this.

Bill C-7 is respecting the Supreme Court of Canada's decision, and reflects the government's consultations with 9,000 RCMP regular members via a survey and 655 town hall meetings. The timing on this has been set by the Supreme Court, which gives Parliament until May 17 to respond to its ruling. Could the hon. member please reflect on the combination that we now have in front of us, Bill C-4 and Bill C-7, in strengthening Canada's collective bargaining process?

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Madam Speaker, to the extent that I believe that once Bill C-4 passes we will have a better certification regime in Canada, it is a happy coincidence that the two bills are moving in tandem through the House of Commons. That means that when RCMP members are ready to organize, if they choose to do so, they will have a better certification regime under which to do it.

Government Orders

My colleague in the NDP spoke earlier about some of the issues that come up when workplaces are on the cusp of forming unions and the intimidation that workers can be subjected to. I do not think anyone is naive in this place. We do not live in a perfect world. Intimidation can sometimes occur on both sides, but many methods of intimidation may be available to an unscrupulous union, or to the employer as well. There are far more tools available to the employer than are available to anyone else doing the organizing, which is why the card check system is important. The employer can put the jobs, lives, and families of workers on the line, if they decide they want to be represented in the workplace. It is not just plucking a few examples, as one member suggested earlier. It is far more the case that we can provide thousands of examples where this has happened.

I am pleased that RCMP members will have the opportunity to organize under a better regime, that is if they do not organize beforehand under the old regime.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is a privilege to stand in this place to share some thoughts on yet another very important piece of legislation, something that I suspect people should be supportive of.

I have had the opportunity on previous occasions to address different types of legislation. I would recommend that my colleagues, no matter what side of the House they are on, take into consideration that this legislation is before us because there was a Supreme Court of Canada decision that was made, and as a result legislation was then required. I would argue that this type of legislation could have, and possibly should have, been introduced long ago, even prior to the last federal election. I think it would have been nice to have had something in place.

I am very happy with the approach that this government has taken in addressing legislation, in particular with some of the labour issues. I truly believe that we can do much more in terms of improving the quality of the relationship between labour and management, not just within the private sector, but also the public sector.

A couple of weeks ago, I met a member of the public union at a local restaurant. He shared with me a questionnaire that was circulated among the civil service. It was discouraging. The questionnaire results were based, I believe from 2014. The results were very disturbing, in the sense that there is a high level of dissatisfaction, of mistrust. There is this sense that the Government of Canada was not listening to the needs of Canada's public service, or at the very least was not demonstrating respect for our civil service.

There has been a change in attitude since the last federal election. We have seen our new Prime Minister and the Canadian government take a different approach in dealing with our civil service, or unions in general. We recognize the valuable contributions they make to our society. This is ultimately recognized, not only here in terms of the citizenry of our country, but also in other jurisdictions in the world that have recognized the professionalism throughout our public service.

I tried to assure my constituent when he was sharing these very poor results from 2014 that there is a new attitude in Ottawa, in terms

of appreciation and gratitude for the phenomenal work that our civil service puts in.

When I look at the legislation before us today, it is an extension of other areas in which the government is trying to demonstrate that things have changed. There was a four-month extension that was given.

I listened to the comments, whether they were from Conservative critic or the NDP member of Parliament from Elmwood—Transcona, about wanting to see changes. I have good news for them. The good news is that we within government want to see change in the way in which our standing committees themselves operate. If the opposition takes the gesture that is coming right from the Prime Minister and the cabinet, and in essence from the government benches, I would suggest that we will see amendments brought forward, not only potentially to Bill C-7, but to other pieces of legislation.

● (1140)

I had the opportunity to serve over 20 years in opposition, and I have often had a sense of frustration when I wanted to see amendments brought forward, and for whatever reason—usually because they came from the wrong side of the committee—opposition amendments were just completely outright rejected.

I am suggesting, as have other colleagues, that there is a new open attitude toward the way in which committees and standing committees could be working into the future.

I tend to agree with the Prime Minister that a lot of the heavy lifting and the hard work can in fact be done in our committees. Therefore, when the member for Elmwood—Transcona talks about some of the ways he believes we have fallen short on the legislation, let me suggest for him and for all members—it does not matter whether they are even on the opposition benches, so even for my colleagues on the government benches—that if they are prepared to do the work and the consultation and share their ideas in a proactive fashion, in a progressive manner, they should not be surprised to see their amendments actually accepted and ultimately improve the legislation.

That could happen with Bill C-7 or any other piece of legislation, but the onus and the responsibility in good part is on those who are sitting on the committee. At the end of the day, if we are passing legislation through second reading and a member has some thoughts and some ideas that could improve the legislation, the government is open to listening to them. Why would we not approve, or at the very least consider, amendments that would improve the quality of the legislation itself? All Canadians would benefit from that. The Prime Minister has spoken out on this. We want to see more effective and functional standing committees that will ultimately contribute to improving the system.

Government Orders

I recognize, in the hour or hour and a half in which we have had the opportunity to debate this issue, that there were a number of members who talked about the importance of amendments. Let me qualify that by saying—and the parliamentary secretary in particular made reference to a fairly extensive survey where literally thousands of RCMP officers were consulted and feedback was solicited, and we received a considerable amount of information—that we understand what is being asked of the government in coming up with the legislation as to what they would like to see in the legislation. I will make more reference to that a little later in my comments.

We have to look at amendments to legislation from a holistic approach, everything from the legislation itself and the impact an amendment would have on the legislation, to what degree we are hearing from the different stakeholders and the witnesses who ultimately appear before a committee.

One of the things I really enjoy, coming from a provincial legislature to the House of Commons, is the degree to which standing committees have the ability to bring experts from across the country to provide their input on legislation—and on other matters, but specifically on legislation.

When the bill ultimately goes to committee, we will hear from experts from virtually all regions of our great nation, coming forward, sharing their thoughts, and I suspect from a combination of what they, opposition members, and government members are saying, that we might actually see some amendments brought forward.

I decided to take some time to emphasize the importance of this because there is a time limit. I do believe there is some merit to see the bill ultimately pass in a timely fashion.

● (1145)

As has been pointed out, the Supreme Court of Canada made its decision in January 2015. It said we needed to change the law to enable our RCMP, a wonderful national institution, to unionize if it chose to do so.

We were given a year. We had to apply for that four-month extension. From a court procedural sense, we need to speed up the process if we can. However, it should not be only about the perspective of the court. Many members of our RCMP have been anxiously awaiting this. The sooner we put this in place, then the sooner we would be allowing those fine members, who have served us so well over the years, to do what they would like to do.

There are two good reasons why I would recommend to my colleagues, no matter what side of the House they sit on, that they allow this legislation to go to committee. The sooner it gets to committee, the more opportunity the committee will have to deal with the many different issues that have been raised so far in the debate. Ultimately it will come back from the committee, and looking at the actual number of sitting days and the government's proposed legislative agenda, we see that time is a scarce commodity in this chamber. We could do a great service by recognizing the value of getting the bill to committee stage.

A number of thoughts came to my mind while I was listening to the Conservative critic, and I wanted to pose a question for him in

regard to those thoughts. Some of his remarks were a bit off topic, for example, when he referenced debt and deficit that he attributes to Liberal prime ministers. If he has been listening closely to what the government has been saying, he is probably finding it intellectually challenging as to why he might stay on that side, given the number of times he has quoted Liberal prime ministers. Rather than adding more comment on that particular issue at this time, I will wait until we get the opportunity during budget debate. Suffice it to say that, when the member referenced the deficit, I would suggest that the Conservatives had a huge deficit and debt issue, far exceeding any Liberal administration since Confederation.

The member also made reference to Bill C-4 as if it were bad legislation. I am from Winnipeg, and maybe it is because Winnipeg faced the general strike of 1919 that I tend to differ with the Conservative Party. I recognize the valuable role that unions play in society, both today and into the future, but the Conservative Party in particular does not recognize this. We saw that with respect to the questions the member put forward and his statements while addressing Bill C-7. The member was critical of Bill C-4, but he does not recognize that Bill C-4 would improve Canada's labour legislation, just like the bill we have before us today. If passed, Bill C-7 would improve the labour situation here in Canada.

Bill C-4 is not the government's first priority piece of legislation. Our first priority was Bill C-2, which concerned our tax break for the middle class. Bill C-4 is a priority because the Conservatives changed labour legislation to the detriment of the union movement in Canada. That particular piece of legislation was brought in to rectify a wrong that the Conservatives had put in place.

● (1150)

That is the reason why I suggested earlier that the Conservatives have a different approach to dealing with labour legislation, which has ultimately led to what we have in Bill C-7 today. They had eight or nine months to deal with the legislation in some form or another. They have talked a lot about the secret ballot. They had the opportunity to put that into the legislation if they were prepared to bring it forward back then. However, it was a low priority, even though the Supreme Court of Canada had ultimately made a ruling. I would suggest that the Conservatives were negligent on this file and, as a result, that has created a time crunch, and I hope and I trust that all members will recognize that.

Before I get into more of the details of the legislation itself, I did want to pick up on a couple of important points. The most important one is that this legislation was brought forward to deal and assist with a free bargaining process for our RCMP officers. I do not think that enough could be said about the incredible work that our RCMP officers do from coast to coast to coast. The RCMP is one of those great Canadian institutions from which Canadians as a whole get a great sense of pride, especially when we see the traditional red uniform with the hat. It is something I believe embodies a great sense of pride for Canadians. It is an iconic institution that is recognized around the world as one of the greatest police forces of modern time. I believe we should all pay tribute to the fantastic work that the RCMP does.

Government Orders

We need to also recognize that this is not the first time that a police or law enforcement agency is looking at the possibility of forming a union. We have had police unions in Canada dating back almost 100 years, so Canadians do not need to be fearful of a union, as some members on the other side might try to espouse. There is a great deal of benefit to recognizing the valuable role unions have played in police forces in Canada to date. It is not as if we are going into an area that has never been explored in the past. The opportunity for the RCMP to unionize is very real, and I suspect it will likely happen. However, at the end of the day, it is the RCMP that will ultimately make that decision. The important thing to recognize is its right to have a collective bargaining regime. That was the essence of the ruling that was made by the Supreme Court.

I will highlight this fact. In that massive consultation and surveying that was done with RCMP officers, there were a couple of points that need to be recognized. One was that there was strong support for a union throughout all of those consultations and so forth. There was also strong support for a single national bargaining unit, and the idea of binding arbitration versus the ability to strike.

With those very few words, I trust and hope there will be a few questions.

• (1155)

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Madam Speaker, I listened intently to my hon. colleague across the way wax eloquently about his love and admiration for the RCMP, yet when he referred to the uniform, he called it the red uniform and that hat. It is called the red serge and it is a campaign hat. It is a true Canadian icon and represents Canada.

The member opposite also said that the Conservative Party is against unions. I have been a member of five unions in my lifetime and absolutely see the importance of them in the workforce. We also see the importance of allowing employees to have a say without fear of repercussion.

Today, in the RCMP, we are hearing about harassment. We are also hearing that over 33% of the workforce is facing and suffering from PTSD and is fearful of coming forward with that.

Would it not behoove the government and the member opposite to support the Conservative stance and amendment that would allow RCMP members the right to a secret ballot vote?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I appreciate the member's bringing up my reference to the red uniform. It was not meant in any way to be disrespectful. If someone did feel I was being disrespectful, I apologize. The red serge is a very impressive uniform that has been recognized, as I indicated, throughout the world. The word actually escaped me at the moment when I was talking about it.

In regard to the question at hand, members will have an opportunity to make the case at committee stage. I would encourage the member and the Conservative opposition to seriously consider whom they might want to invite as expert witnesses before the committee.

I trust that in coming up with their amendments, the Conservative members will substantiate and make credible their amendments, including where those amendments are coming from and the types of

real, tangible support they might have for those particular amendments.

The cautionary note I would make is to recognize the debates that took place on Bill C-4. There was a great deal of concern regarding the whole secret ballot issue. We need to be very sensitive to the important balance between labour and management.

• (1200)

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we on the NDP side appreciate the Supreme Court's pushing the government to extend to the RCMP the same right to collective bargaining enjoyed by every other police force in Canada. That is a good thing.

The issues that are front of mind include the shooting of multiple RCMP officers in Mayerthorpe 11 years ago, and less than 2 years ago, the shooting in Moncton. Those were very high-profile events and caused great damage to the families of those fallen officers. They were terrible tragedies that could happen again.

Therefore, the issues around deployment, officer safety, support in rural areas, and the equipment officers have available in urban situations are very front of mind to Canadians. So is the issue of sexual harassment in the workplace. The complaint procedure is not working well. We have multiple high-profile complaints about that process.

Can the member give a single reason why those issues should not be included in the government's proposal on what should be included in collective bargaining? We need to change what we are doing—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, just to comment briefly on the member's opening editorial, I do recognize the valuable role of the RCMP. Whether we are talking about policing in our rural communities, the organized crime unit, our sense of security against terrorist threats, the protection of our borders, economic crimes, the eight agreements or contracts with different provinces, and the feeling that in some areas without the RCMP there is no sense of security and community, and the leadership role the RCMP plays that goes even beyond just policing, all of these are important to recognize. I am glad the member did so.

Specifically, in response to the member's question, what we see are issues such as hours of work, leave, and overtime. I do not necessarily know all of the things that will be included in the final form of the legislation from committee. I look forward to the amendments that will be proposed. Hopefully, some of them will gain the support of the committee, thereby enhancing the legislation that all Canadians will benefit from.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, my question for the hon. parliamentary secretary picks up on the comment just made by the member for Nanaimo—Ladysmith.

I am working with a lot of women within the RCMP who have filed complaints. One of the things I find disturbing is the lack of support for officers, men or women, who are being harassed within the force. There is no support during the process of laying a complaint for harassment.

Government Orders

I am working with an officer right now who has complained that her direct supervisor has harassed her in ways that have made her going back to the workplace impossible. I will not go into the details of the case, but you would be shocked, Mr. Speaker, as would my friend the parliamentary secretary.

However, there is no provision, as they would have if they were unionized, of legal support and victim services for those officers who need to lay complaints about the harassment they face working in the RCMP.

Therefore, I would ask the hon. parliamentary secretary if he would envision the legislation needing amendment to address this within collective bargaining. If so, would the government benches be open to amendments to ensure that in a unionized workforce, people within the RCMP who are victims of harassment of all kinds have the protections and support they need to ensure they have a healthy workplace?

• (1205)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, not only is the government open to amendments of various kinds, but we would also like to think that the opposition would be open to the idea that sometimes some of the issues that might be referenced could be dealt with outside of legislation.

I can tell the leader of the Green Party that years ago, even before the leader of the Liberal Party was Prime Minister and I was a part of that caucus, the issue of harassment in the RCMP was talked about. I can assure the leader of the Green Party that the Prime Minister, along with the other members of the Liberal caucus, is committed to dealing with that issue. We take it seriously and want to make sure that the right thing is done. Whether that ultimately turns up in this piece of legislation, I am not sure. However, I know the harassment issue is something we take seriously. We believe it needs to come to an end.

Ms. Joyce Murray (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments by my colleague, the member for Winnipeg North, who also touched on the comments by the member for Durham about Bill C-4, which is seeking to rescind Bill C-525. On this side of the House, we believe that Bill C-525 had a negative effect on rights and freedoms in the workforce.

It turns out, interestingly enough, that just when the former Conservative government was pushing forward Bill C-525, claiming that it would not adversely affect the rights of workers to unionize, its own internal labour program research department had conducted a study showing that it would adversely affect the union movement and its ability to organize. That study was hidden. Our minister, just yesterday, tabled that study at the human resources, skills, and social development committee.

I would like to ask my colleague what he believes the role of evidence should be, and the role of openness and transparency about this evidence, in making decisions around legislation for the benefit of the rights and freedoms of the Canadian workforce.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, my colleague and friend raises a very good point. When that particular bill was being debated and the Conservatives were in government, there was a great deal of suspicion about the motivations behind the bill. We believed it

would have a negative impact on labour relations in Canada and voted against it.

There was a great deal of opposition to it at the committee stage. We talked a great deal about it during the election. That is ultimately why we felt it was important to get it right and why we introduced Bill C-4, to correct the mistakes the Conservatives made back then.

When the minister brought forward the report, it reaffirmed that we were correct when we were sitting in opposition, when we told Canadians that the legislation the Conservatives were proposing would not be healthy for labour relations in Canada.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to contribute to the discussion on Bill C-7, an act to amend the Public Service Labour Relations Act, the Public Service Labour Relations and Employment Board Act and other acts and to provide for certain other measures. This act would deal with the right of our brave men and women of the red serge to bargain collectively.

This bill is a response to the Supreme Court's ruling on the matter last winter. The court gave the government a year from January 15 to implement a new collective bargaining regime for the RCMP. That deadline has since been extended. The ruling also indicated that it was the right of RCMP members to unionize based on paragraph 2 (d) of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and it found that the existing staff relations representative program was an insufficient guarantee of that freedom of association.

I am generally satisfied with the contents of the bill itself. Let me explain why.

First, the bill would not require the RCMP to unionize. It creates a framework based on the existing certification laws under the public service employment legislation, whereby RCMP members can, if they so choose, form a union.

Furthermore, it would create certain protections that are necessary in light of the unique nature of employment within a policing organization. First, a prospective union must have as its primary mandate the representation of RCMP members. It cannot be affiliated with another bargaining agent or association that does not have that as its primary purpose, and it cannot be certified to represent any other group of employees. In other words, it would be an organization-wide bargaining unit represented by a single bargaining agent that would exclusively serve RCMP members and no other group of employees within the federal government. That is important, because if RCMP members choose to unionize, that union should be of RCMP members, by RCMP members, and for RCMP members for it to be truly representative and appropriate for a police force.

I am very proud of the police force that we have serving nationwide. The RCMP headquarters is here in Ottawa, close to my home. I am also very proud that Conservatives introduced legislation to help the RCMP do its job better and to keep our streets safe from crime and terrorism.

Government Orders

I should go on, though, to express my satisfaction with certain other limits that exist within this proposed legislation so that we can protect the work of the national police force. For example, policies on law enforcement techniques, transfers, appointments, promotions, disciplinary actions against RCMP members, and an RCMP officer's duty, dress, equipment, and medals are rightly left outside of the collective bargaining process and managed within the context of the RCMP Act. This bill would do that.

Next, the bill would, rightly, increase the size of the Public Service Labour Relations and Employment Board from 10 to 12 members and insist that the two additional members have intimate knowledge of policing, so that when matters related to employment and labour relations within the RCMP come before the board, policing expertise will be found around the table. That is a reasonable proposal.

Furthermore, as with most police organizations across the country, under this legislation there will be no right to strike, for obvious reasons, because we need to protect our streets. Even in the event of a dispute or an impasse in labour relations, we cannot afford to have our officers off the street and on strike. The government has rightly recognized this fact and embedded that reality in the bill itself.

● (1210)

The bill itself is reasonable and fair. However, it cannot be looked at in isolation. Simultaneous to this bill, our House and our Parliament are debating and discussing another bill that would strip the democratic rights of federally regulated workers across the country.

Bill C-4 would remove the right of a secret ballot vote from federally regulated workers in matters of certification. It is important to be clear on what this means. It means that a union could take over a federally regulated workforce without there being a vote by the members who work in that workplace. In other words, thousands of employees from any number of federal employers could be forced to pay dues to and be represented by a union for which they never had a chance to cast a vote. This is particularly alarming when it relates to the RCMP, an organization comprised of members who put their lives on the line each and every day, in part to defend our democratic way of life. Therefore, it is a great irony that members of the RCMP, of all groups of employees, would be deprived the most basic democratic right, which is the right to vote in secret on whether to certify a union.

The alternative to a secret ballot is a process called "card check", where those people who want to take over a workplace and form a union go around with a petition and ask people to sign it. Then when they get 50% plus one of the employees to sign on, the board recognizes a majority and declares the union to be a bargaining agent. The obvious problem with that is intimidation. When workers have to put their names down on paper for all eyes to see, they risk being pressured unduly into favouring one side or another. It would be the equivalent of holding our national elections by a show of hands. Imagine that? The government said that our previous Bill C-525, which empowered workers with a secret ballot, was undemocratic.

The government is in the process of trying to change our electoral system. I wonder if the Liberals are simultaneously considering taking away the secret ballot from our general elections and

replacing it with some sort of petition, or show of hands, or a card check as it is called. The parliamentary secretary earlier cited a report from the ministry of employment, showing the statistical reality that if workers were given the right to vote, they were less inclined to choose unionization. In other words, unions are not formed at as high a rate when people are given a chance to vote on the question as they are when people are forced to sign a card-check petition.

The government's problem is with the outcome. The government might not be happy that when workers are given the choice through a democratic vote, they opt not to unionize. However, that is the choice of the workers not the choice of the government. It is obvious that rates of certification would go up if those people doing the certifying were able to intimidate those they were trying to certify. Naturally, if they can show up on the doorsteps of employees at 10 p.m., ask them to sign a form and leave implied consequences for failing to do so, it is not surprising that unions are able to certify at higher rates than when the workers are given a chance to go into a voting booth and mark a secret ballot, exercising their true prerogative without anybody looking over their shoulders. However, that is not evidence of why we should take away their right to vote.

● (1215)

I was not particularly thrilled with the results of the last federal election, but I would never propose taking away the rights of Canadian voters to cast their ballot in secret as a result. It is their choice on how they vote. I could probably produce some sort of study to show that in some aspect of Canadian life voters would cast a ballot differently if they were given a chance to vote secretly on the matter. That is not a reason to take away the secret ballot.

The fact that workers or anyone votes differently when they have the right to do so secretly than they would if they were being watched by an authority figure is the very reason we need secret ballots. That is precisely the reason they were created, and they are a basic foundation not only of workplace democracy, but of Canadian democracy.

I would call on the government to recognize that fact and amend the bill to ensure the RCMP members will not be unionized without the right to vote on that unionization. In fact, Canadians agree with the right of secret ballot. It is basically in our democratic DNA. Secret ballot voting to certify union is not new or controversial. Ontario requires it. British Columbia requires it. Both of these provinces are currently represented by Liberal governments. Saskatchewan, Alberta, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland and Labrador also require secret ballots and none of them is represented by the Conservative Party.

Government Orders

In administrations run by the NDP, the Liberals, the Saskatchewan Party, and others, we have secret ballot certifications in provincially regulated workplaces right across the country. In Quebec, Canada's second most unionized province, there is enormous support for secret ballot votes on certification.

One poll in August 2009 found that 71% of Quebecers said that secret ballots should be required as a way of getting union certification. In the United States, polls have shown that 80% of people believe a secret ballot should be required for a union to form. Therefore, it cannot simply be seen south of the border as a Republican or a Democratic issue. It is an issue that unites basically all North American public opinion in a vast majority who favour a secret ballot vote before a union can certify a workplace.

I would further identify the fact that if RCMP members are forced to join a particular union without having a chance to vote, that union will have difficulty establishing itself as a legitimate representative for the workers for which it will become the bargaining unit.

I also have warned the government of a political problem, and that is the reality that if it does deny employees in the RCMP the ability to conduct a secret ballot vote on unionization, it could very well learn of stories of intimidation within the workplace and those stories will reflect badly on the government's decision to strip that basic right from RCMP members.

I ask the government to consider an amendment to the legislation which would preserve the existing secret ballot formula that is found in public service labour relations legislation and ensure that the men and women who put on the uniform of the RCMP are given that basic human right in an eventual and inevitable certification drive. If they should select to unionize through that mechanism of a vote, then we, nationwide, should respect the result of that vote and respect the legitimacy of the union that it produces.

This is not a radical concept. We have five provinces in the country where provincially regulated workplaces certify their unions through secret ballot voting. It is a basic tenet of democracy.

• (1220)

Deep down I think members of the Liberal government understand and agree with that, and I will tell members why.

I have listened to all of the Liberals' comments with respect to their proposed repeal of Bill C-525, which is the bill the Conservative government passed to create secret ballot voting rights. However, the two words they never say when they are talking about that bill are "secret ballot". They say that bill, which is now law, makes certification harder and decertification easier, but they do not say how. They say that it lowers unionization rates, but they do not say why. The bill really only does one thing. It replaces a card-check petition with a secret ballot vote. However, members on the government side can never actually bring themselves to utter those two words "secret ballot".

Why? Because I think they know that if they were to openly argue against the right to vote for federally regulated workers on the grounds that it was not consistent with the government's view of labour relations, they would be laughed out of any room in our country. Everybody, coast to coast, acknowledges that democratic decision making has to happen through a secret ballot.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, you are chosen by secret ballot. We choose representation for our very House through a secret ballot vote. Every person in this room has a job today because they were elected by secret ballot. In fact, most unions elect their representatives through a secret ballot vote when they are certified. Everybody acknowledges that decisions of this magnitude made by a group of employees in a workplace should be done through a secret ballot, unless one has an ideological motivation to override the real will of the working people and to impose an outcome on them.

I think members will find that, in reality, those who are pushing for an end to secret ballot voting within the workplace on matters of unionization are those who are unhappy with the outcome that the secret ballot democratic vote would produce, which is no excuse. One cannot oppose democracy simply because one does not like the outcome to which it leads.

This is why we, as official opposition, congratulate the government for Bill C-7 in its own right, as a fair and balanced approach to respond to the Supreme Court's ruling on collective bargaining in the RCMP. However, I would ask that the bill be made better through an amendment that would allow the brave men and women who wear the RCMP uniform to be the masters of their own destiny by giving them the right to vote.

• (1225)

Ms. Joyce Murray (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Carleton for his comments, and especially for confirming that Bill C-7 itself is reasonable, fair, and constructive, and we do look forward to comments and proposals at the committee level.

The member used most of his time to talk about Bill C-4 and to talk about Bill C-525, which his government put forward. I would like to remind the member that there was a huge amount of controversy and comment that Bill C-525 was pushed through without consultation, in contrast to Bill C-7, in which there was extensive consultation. That is one point I want to make before I get to my question.

The second is this. If the member is so proud of Bill C-525, which would require a mandatory vote, why did the previous government hide the report that its very own department tabled, showing that a mandatory vote is detrimental to labour relations in comparison to the card check method? The card check method does enable the public service members to indicate their preference around being represented by an employee organization.

I find it stunning, given that the Conservatives hid the evidence that suggested their bill was a bad one, and they never consulted on it, that this would be the key thing that the member would want to push for in this House. It just defies belief.

We have the NDP saying the card check is the only—

• (1230)

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. We are working on limited time for questions and comments.

The hon. member for Carleton.

Government Orders

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, the member said we should have consulted more on Bill C-525. The ultimate consultation is a secret ballot vote. That is what Bill C-525 provided. It gave hundreds of thousands of employees in federally regulated workplaces the right to vote on whether or not they wanted to be represented by a particular union.

I note that the member, again, was afraid to say those two terrifying words: secret ballot. She could not say them, because she knows that her position and her government's position on this issue is totally untenable.

The Liberals put out a report yesterday in which they said that unionization rates are not as high when workers get a chance to vote on the question. That is not proof that they should have their rights stripped away from them. Just because workers do not vote the way Liberals and people on the union left want them to, does not mean they should lose the right to vote.

A worker should have the right to vote because it is an inherent basic right that dates back hundreds of years in our parliamentary system of democracy, and we on this side of the House of Commons will keep standing up for that right.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, while the member was in government there was a decision made by the Supreme Court of Canada. Could he provide some information to the House as to why he believes that there was no legislation brought in by the former government to deal with this issue? There did not appear to be any push from the government at the time to try to get this particular issue dealt with, when it had the opportunity to do so.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: That is a fair question, Mr. Speaker. The ruling came out in January 2015. Parliament rose in June 2015, and that was the last time that this place convened before the election. In that brief interval of four or five months, it was not possible to properly consult RCMP members and police leaders, in order to construct a legislative solution to that ruling.

That is evidenced by the fact that the present government has been in office since November and it is now mid-March, which means that its members took some time to craft a response. Within the confines of the bill itself, notwithstanding the related flawed bill, Bill C-4, the government has done a decent job.

Mr. Nick Whalen (St. John's East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time today with the member for Laurentides—Labelle.

I thank the House for this opportunity to explain why Bill C-7 is a constructive and responsible development in federal labour relations.

If passed, this legislation would allow RCMP members and reservists to choose whether they wish to be represented by a bargaining agent independent of RCMP management. The key features of the bill include the requirement that the RCMP bargaining agent have as his primary mandate the representation of RCMP members; the exclusion of officers, those of inspector rank and above, from representation; and the designation of the renamed federal Public Sector Labour Relations and Employment Board as the administrative tribunal for matters relating to the RCMP

bargaining unit as well as grievances related to the collective agreement, should one be affected.

The bill would provide for binding arbitration as the means to resolve impasses, in light of the essential nature of the work performed by the RCMP.

As a standard in federal labour relations, the bill would require that, to be certified as a bargaining agent, an employee organization would need the support of a majority of RCMP members in a single national bargaining unit.

The labour relations regime that this bill would create marks the beginning of a new era in the history of the RCMP. For the first time, RCMP members and reservists would have the same constitutional rights as other Canadians concerning collective bargaining. It is time the RCMP had the opportunity to decide whether to exercise these rights itself.

Our national mounted police have a storied past in Canada in the settlement and development of our country and in keeping peace across the land for almost a century and a half. Since its beginning in 1873, when the act establishing the North-West Mounted Police was introduced in the House by then prime minister John A. Macdonald, the RCMP has been an integral part of our history, indeed our culture. From the 1874 march west from Fort Dufferin in Manitoba, to policing the Klondike gold rush, to the *St. Roch's* passage through the Northwest Passage, to the vital roles in World War I and World War II, the RCMP has played instrumental roles in Canadian history.

Yet despite their long history, this legislation would be the first time these employees would have the right to freedom of association with respect to collective bargaining. This is a right guaranteed to all Canadians by our Charter of Rights and Freedoms. It is a right the RCMP defends and should also enjoy.

Members of the RCMP work with the goal of serving Canada and protecting Canadians. They are the people who protect the Governor General, the prime minister and other ministers of the crown, visiting royalty and dignitaries, and diplomatic missions. They are our neighbours, who participate in international policing efforts, safeguard the integrity of our borders, and provide counterterrorism and domestic security. They are the Canadians who enforce our federal laws against commercial crime, counterfeiting, drug trafficking, and organized crime.

This legislation would help support those who support us.

The bill also acknowledges the importance of collective bargaining in the development of Canadian society. Since it was officially recognized in 1944, collective bargaining has helped lift many Canadians out of economic insecurity and poverty. Working Canadians in both English and French Canada have a long tradition of organizing themselves to negotiate for better working conditions and more secure lives for themselves and their families. Their struggles and triumphs have been essential to Canada's development.

Our government recognizes that collective bargaining and Canadians' fundamental freedoms are vital to a healthy democracy in which people can pursue their livelihoods with a sense of fairness, security, and professionalism.

Government Orders

We promised to restore fair and balanced laws that acknowledge the importance of unions in Canada. That is what we have done, and that is what this legislation would continue to do.

In December, the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour introduced legislation to repeal Bill C-377 and Bill C-525. These two bills amended the Canada Labour Code, the Parliamentary Employment and Staff Relations Act, and the Public Service Labour Relations Act, and procedures for the certification and the revocation of certification of bargaining agents that existed before June 16, 2015.

The government has also introduced legislation to repeal Bill C-59, which would have provided the authority to unilaterally override the collective bargaining process. The bill we are considering today, which recognizes the right to collective bargaining for RCMP members and reservists, is another example of our commitment to fair and balanced labour relations.

Fair labour relations need to be available to the brave men and women who put their lives on the line for us. This legislation would do that, and it demonstrates our respect for fundamental liberties and the values at the heart of our democracy.

• (1235)

In 1873, parliamentarians like us voted in this House to establish the North-West Mounted Police. Today, we are here at the beginning of a new chapter in the history of the RCMP. We are considering whether, 143 years later, the men and women in our national police force should have the same fundamental freedoms as so many other Canadians enjoy.

I urge all members to support the bill that would give them those freedoms, and to vote with us to help those who help others.

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's speech. It was interesting to hear him speak on this legislation and give us a historical perspective of where we have been with the North-West Mounted Police, and how we have come to this point where we are now debating this bill to extend bargaining rights to RCMP personnel.

In a previous life, before I was elected to this House, I was actually the registrar for the human resources profession in the province of Alberta. Many of the members I represented then took care of labour bargaining in that province. One of the things our members always spoke of was how critical it was to have the secret ballot, and how critical it was during negotiations to ensure that it was included at the table or that it was included on behalf of the membership. It meant union members were just as keen to have this as were employers who had one or more unions participating in it.

I would like to hear the member talk about how important it is to have the secret ballot extended to RCMP personnel, if they choose to form a bargaining unit.

• (1240)

Mr. Nick Whalen: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his informed question.

As we heard earlier today in the House, the issues regarding whether or not the rights provided under Bill C-525 would continue

or not is dependent on separate legislation. It is not the legislation we are talking about here.

What we are talking about here is whether or not the RCMP gets these narrow rights for collective bargaining that are required by the Supreme Court of Canada decision, which needs to be implemented before May 16 in order to prevent the application of the current Public Service Labour Relations Act from applying to RCMP members.

In order to avoid that unfortunate result, we are putting forward legislation that addresses that fine point of the collective bargaining rights mandated by the Supreme Court of Canada. The issue as to whether or not the members of the RCMP choose of their own accord to adopt a process within their collective bargaining rights that requires a secret ballot would be up to them, and indeed if the bill currently before the House regarding the repeal of Bill C-525 does not achieve royal assent before this one, my understanding is that the current regime as it exists now would apply to the certification, or not, of any collective bargaining agent being proposed under this new regulatory regime.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a part of this bill that has not received much attention is the removal of the exclusion of the RCMP from the Government Employees Compensation Act.

That is some complicated work that needs to be done. I wonder if the hon. member could share with this House if that work has been started. Is it completed? Are they ready to actually transition, because it is certainly a very important transition?

Mr. Nick Whalen: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for her question regarding the pension issues for the RCMP.

My understanding is that the legislation being put forward now excludes amending a number of bills. There is a number of bills that would not be affected by the labour negotiating rights, and the tribunal would not have the right to review a number of different aspects related to the collective bargaining.

Various issues, including issues related to workplace duties, pensions, roles and responsibilities, right to strike, and a number of issues like these, as set out in the legislation, would not be the responsibility or purview of the Public Service Labour Relations Board in respect of overseeing the bargaining agent in the collective rights. Those would be reserved for the commissioner under the existing RCMP legislation.

As was noted earlier by my colleagues, if the member feels that this is something that needs to be brought forward in this legislation at this time, the best place to raise those issues would be in committee, to see if the committee process could address her concerns. Indeed, there will be further opportunities to address these types of perceived deficits in the regulatory regime as it affects the RCMP over the course of this mandate.

• (1245)

[Translation]

Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to rise today to support Bill C-7.

Government Orders

It is an honour to participate in this debate and take a stand on behalf of the members and reservists of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the RCMP.

Today's bill seeks to uphold the constitutionally guaranteed freedom of RCMP members and reservists to engage in meaningful collective bargaining. Collective bargaining is a right that other police officers in Canada have enjoyed for many years.

However, RCMP members and reservists have been denied that right, despite the significant contribution they have made to our proud, strong, and free nation over the past 143 years. My personal connection to this file dates back to almost the very beginning. My great-great-grandfather, Dr. Louis Paré, was the assistant chief surgeon for the Royal Northwest Mounted Police.

This bill will remedy that situation. It is a clear and reasoned response to the decision rendered by the Supreme Court on January 16, 2015, which indicated that section 2(d) of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms “protects a meaningful process of collective bargaining that provides employees with a degree of choice and independence sufficient to enable them to determine and pursue their collective interests”.

The court stated, “The current RCMP labour relations regime denies RCMP members that choice, and imposes on them a scheme that does not permit them to identify and advance their workplace concerns free from management’s influence.”

I thank the Supreme Court for this ruling, and I am pleased to support this bill today, which would give RCMP members and reservists freedom of choice and independence from management, while recognizing their unique operational reality.

This bill was carefully developed from the results of consultations held with key stakeholders. The initial consultations were held with regular members of the RCMP. The next round of consultations were held with the provinces, territories, and municipalities that have police service agreements with the RCMP.

There are some important features in Bill C-7. First and foremost, it gives access to independent, binding arbitration when the bargaining dispute resolution process reaches an impasse.

Members of the RCMP bargaining unit will not have the right to strike, which is in line with the practices of other police forces across the country. Those who participated in the online consultation expressed a strong preference for this provision.

The bill will also create a single, nation-wide bargaining unit composed of RCMP members appointed to a rank as well as reservists. In order to be certified, an RCMP bargaining agent must have as its primary mandate the representation of RCMP members.

Once again, regular members have shown strong support for these provisions. The bill also provides for the exclusion of officers at the inspector level and above from representation.

Lastly, the Public Service Labour Relations and Employment Board will act as the administrative tribunal for matters related to the RCMP bargaining unit, as well as grievances related to the provisions of the collective agreement.

This bill is in line with the government's efforts to restore fair and balanced labour rights in this country. Consider, for example, Bill C-5, which repeals division 20 of Bill C-59, the bill to implement budget 2015, introduced in April of last year by the previous government. That bill gave the government the power to unilaterally override the collective bargaining process and impose a new sick leave system on the public service.

The Public Service Staff Relations Act was first introduced in 1977 in order to give public servants the right to organize and to bargain collectively. Guaranteeing collaborative efforts between the parties is crucial, as is increasing the capacity of the public service to serve and protect the public interest.

Our government has made it abundantly clear that it will not adopt an approach that does not take into account the bargaining process between an employer and a group of employees who want to reach agreements on employment conditions.

● (1250)

By repealing these provisions of Bill C-59, we are demonstrating our respect for the collective bargaining process. We believe in collective bargaining. Today's bill is a testament to our belief in that right. We also believe in fair and balanced labour relations. Unfortunately, over the past few years, many basic labour rights have been undermined.

Consider Bill C-377 and Bill C-525, which will change how unions can be certified or decertified and impose new financial reporting requirements on them.

Those bills were passed absent any of the usual consultation involving employers, unions, and the government, which took place during the Public Service Staff Relations Act reform.

As a result, it is now harder for unions and employers to bargain effectively in good faith. We must ensure that workers are free to organize, bargain collectively in good faith, and ensure safe workplaces for themselves.

To make that happen, the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour introduced a bill to repeal Bill C-377 and Bill C-525. Bill C-4 restores the bargaining agent certification and decertification processes that were in place before June 16, 2015.

Bill C-4 also amends the Income Tax Act, in order to get rid of unnecessary requirements imposed on labour organizations and labour trusts with regard to filing certain financial information.

As hon. members know, legislative measures are already in place to ensure that unions make that financial information available. Under section 110 of the Canada Labour Code, unions are required to provide financial statements to their members on request and free of charge, which makes these requirements to produce extra reports unnecessary.

The bill being introduced today is consistent with our belief in fair and balanced labour relations. Every other police force in Canada has had the right to engage in collective bargaining for quite some time.

Government Orders

This bill respects that right, while recognizing the particular circumstances of the RCMP as a national police force. It is time for us to give RCMP members and reservists the respect they deserve.

To that end, I am calling on all hon. members to show their support for RCMP members and reservists by voting in favour of this bill.

[*English*]

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to follow up on my earlier concerns about officer safety.

The fact that officers work alone in rural areas is a workplace safety issue that may well benefit from being included in collective bargaining. Sexual harassment is another workplace safety issue that apparently is not included in collective bargaining, but which is now thankfully being extended to the RCMP. I am curious as to whether the member can inform us if this was an issue that was discussed during the online consultation he had cited, and whether it specifically excluded, and whether he can give any more rationale as to why this is not something that is a matter for collective bargaining for police officers within the RCMP.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Mr. Speaker, I cannot address the specifics of the online participation because I was not involved with it. However, I can say that this was done in consultation with members and relevant stakeholders in response to a specific Supreme Court ruling. This is not something where we said, "Let's just do it", but something we were required to do and did a very good job at. I am very proud of the work that was done in this bill.

Mr. James Maloney (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, further to my friend's point, I understand that the consultation process that was initiated involved some 9,000 members of the RCMP. Obviously, in response to the Supreme Court's decision, it is important to get the RCMP members' input.

Perhaps the member could explain why he feels it is so important that this consultation process took place.

• (1255)

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Mr. Speaker, it is important to do a consultation with the stakeholders to make the best possible decisions. We are a government that believes in evidence-based decision-making and consulting with the people who matter, rather than saying, "This is how we are going to do things and who cares what you think." This is a very good process and I am proud of it.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his excellent speech and contributions to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

My understanding is that for certain items that are not in the collective bargaining process of this or many other police forces, there are alternative mechanisms in those police forces for addressing some of these types of issues. I do not know if the member is familiar with those, or could outline those, or get back to me with them at a later date.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Mr. Speaker, I have been privileged in my life not to have been a police officer, but just take advantage of their protection and help, so I do not know the specific processes they have. I cannot give any details, but I would be more

than happy to consult with the very good chair of the procedure and House affairs committee any time on this topic.

Ms. Joyce Murray (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his remarks, and to discuss the RCMP Act and the powers of the commissioner under that act to make certain determinations about work, disciplinary measures, working conditions, conduct, and so on. The members have the ability to grieve decisions under the RCMP Act. I would like the member's comment on the concept of having limited the bill to the basic working terms and conditions of employment, which is the requirement of the Supreme Court of Canada, and the very tight timeline to deliver on it.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Mr. Speaker, I think the government made the right decision in preparing the bill in compliance with the Supreme Court ruling and the timelines available. We have many years ahead of us to make a lot changes on all topics, but we met the requirements given to us by the Supreme Court and it is the right path to be taking. I appreciate the member's intervention. She is helping me greatly understand this file.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I too am glad to rise on Bill C-7.

Before I begin to share some of my comments and thoughts, I would note that I will be sharing my time with the member for Brandon—Souris.

As I believe all of my colleagues have started their interventions on the bill, I would like to thank the RCMP who serve us every day. I am from British Columbia and have worked in rural communities. I do not think we can say enough of how important the RCMP are throughout our country, in terms on our safety and the work they do every day, which is sometimes dangerous. Also, there is the important pride and ceremony that they add to our lives.

Certainly as a nurse who worked in a small rural health centre, I remember many times when the RCMP would stop and check in. They wanted to make sure that we were okay. Of course, we were always very thankful, because it was a small community and we could have difficult patients. At a click of a button or a random stop-in, we knew that they cared about us and were there for us.

I also witnessed some of the horrific things they dealt with. They were at the scene of many accidents, and we would receive these patients in the emergency department. I understand some of the very difficult situations that they have to deal with.

I also want to make note of the danger. It was a little over a year ago in Kamloops, where I live now, when one of our RCMP members was doing a somewhat routine traffic stop. He was following someone who was refusing to stop. He got out of the car and was shot multiple times. Thankfully, he survived.

Government Orders

There is the very dangerous work they do every day, but, as important, I look at the pride when our RCMP members are dressed in the red serge and the tourists come and want their pictures taken. In Kamloops, whenever we require someone for ceremonial purposes, they are always there. We put in a request, and there is someone who is always willing to volunteer. Whether it be Remembrance Day, Canada Day, or special recognition ceremonies, they are there for us. I, like everyone in the House, want to thank them.

Broadly, we do support Bill C-7 and the intervention of the Supreme Court. For the most part, I think the government has done a reasonable job in putting a piece of legislation forward that reflects the Supreme Court of Canada's decision. It has some flexibility, which is very important for the unique role of the RCMP.

Having said "broadly", I will talk about the one or two issues that we do have with the bill. However, there is a piece that I want to highlight that is perhaps less known, that no one has spent much talking about it, which is the Government Employees Compensation Act. There are some elements of the bill that I would like to reflect upon, as perhaps some people do not know what the situation is currently.

With regard to the Government Employees Compensation Act, what we call GECA, clause 40 of the bill would remove the exclusion of RCMP members from the application of the workers' compensation scheme. Clause 42 of the bill would amend the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Superannuation Act by repealing subsection 34(1). There is a lot of technical language, and I will explain what it means in a minute.

There is also a complementary amendment being made to GECA. The legislation would amend GECA to remove the exclusion of the RCMP members, and amend the RCMP compensation act to ensure full coverage under GECA for RCMP members. This would allow these members uninterrupted access to third-party adjudication, specialized medical and disability claims, and management services for the workers' compensation boards. It is an important element of the bill.

• (1300)

For those who might not know, although I think most people are very familiar with it, every province in Canada has what they call a workers' compensation board or, as we call it, employees' compensation. That is where firemen, loggers, or people in a desk job who are injured on the job or exposed to occupational health and safety hazards have the boards deal with issues of work-related injuries and disabilities.

Actually, until I became a member of Parliament, I never really thought about how our federal government employees were covered in terms of workers' compensation. For a number of years, there have been contracts with every compensation board across the country. People working at a fisheries office in British Columbia are covered by the system in British Columbia. Our Canada Revenue Agency employees working in Prince Edward Island have coverage through the Government Employees Compensation Act. The members of the RCMP have never had that support. They had an internal system that dealt with their issues.

As members might imagine, the workers' compensation boards have developed a lot of expertise in a number of different areas. This is expertise that could not be duplicated in a very small system, such as perhaps a small group within the RCMP. I will give a few examples. The boards have realized that prevention is significant and important, and there are amazing results in terms of prevention. Obviously, there are a lot of medical staff and programs and services, including occupational therapists and physiotherapists with ability and expertise in assessing workplace injuries. Some people would say that the RCMP is unique and would wonder whether this would work. I would argue that the boards deal with police services, provincially and municipally. They deal with firefighters, and a number of others. I think that the expertise that will come to bear is very important expertise.

The adjudication process, the third-party assessment, will be a much fairer system. This is a significant change. It is not a change that we have talked about in this House very often. We have not debated it as part of the legislation. However, I think it is important that we highlight the exclusion of the RCMP to the Government Employees Compensation Act. Not only did we work on it prior to this being introduced, but this is a piece of the legislation that we are very supportive of.

I need to conclude, but I have to talk about the secret ballot. It is ludicrous that the government members cannot even say the words "secret ballot". The decision on whether to unionize or not is a difficult decision. It is a very personal decision. The RCMP members, in my conversations, have had a lot of struggle with that issue. The card-check method is very public. Someone who might be their friend puts a card in front of their face and wants them to sign it. Pressure comes to bear, and the pressure can come from either the employer or employees.

In my heart of hearts, I truly cannot understand why the government has moved away in terms of its secret ballot. It is not guaranteeing the right for the RCMP to have a secret ballot on an issue that is so divisive and personal. It is absolutely essential that this legislation allow what votes all over do.

• (1305)

My colleague earlier talked about card checks and whether we want a card check for our federal government system. That is the one area that I think Conservatives have particular concerns over. I do think there are some good elements of this bill that appropriately respond to the Supreme Court of Canada's decision.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Picard (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her speech and for sharing her interest in officers' compensation.

Government Orders

The exercise concerns Bill C-7, and we have a very limited amount of time as we had to ask for an extension because the deadline had passed. I would like to give my colleague the opportunity to explain in a little more detail the basis on which the court is interpreting the process that the RCMP will use to decide on certification and whether there will be a secret ballot. I hope she will excuse my legal and technical ignorance. The court's simply requested that by May 16 we have a provision that will allow the RCMP to proceed.

[*English*]

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Mr. Speaker, this is a conversation that has been going on within the RCMP for quite a few years now. Obviously before it got to the Supreme Court of Canada, there were many years and many components of the conversation. There was a staff relations representative program, and it was felt that they were able to represent the employees in terms of having conversations with management.

The Supreme Court of Canada did some things in its decision, saying that this was a violation of a section of the charter and there was a need to move forward in terms of members being able to make a decision. It was a very interesting decision, a complex decision, and I think a very appropriate decision in terms of the significant flexibility that was provided.

• (1310)

Ms. Joyce Murray (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo for her remarks, and particularly for highlighting the changes to the Government Employees Compensation Act, which, as the member mentioned, will provide more seamless support for injured RCMP members.

Unfortunately, the member then brought back the issue of the right to secret ballot for union members. She was part of a previous government that put forward Bill C-525. The very organizations that represent public sector members were almost unanimous in believing that it was the wrong way to go. They claim that the card check method is more likely to be free of employer interference. Therefore, suggesting that the right to secret ballot is good for employees is contrary to what the representatives of those employees are saying.

Why would the representatives of government employees speak out so strongly against Bill C-525 when it was passed, if it were in the interest of the employees, or in this case in the interest of RCMP members?

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Mr. Speaker, it is interesting that what the government is failing to mention is that in many provinces across this country, secret ballot is the system.

Actually, Bill C-525, which government members are speaking of as being a terrible piece of legislation, is the system in the province where I live, British Columbia, and I can tell my colleague the opposite. I worked in an environment where there was a certification union drive. It was a small health centre, and it divided the employers and employees. The fact that it was a secret ballot was a relief to the nurses and physiotherapists who worked there because their choice was private and was not the business of their colleagues. Ultimately, a decision was made.

It is not an unusual situation in this country to have a secret ballot.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege to rise in the House today to speak to Bill C-7 as well. I concur with my colleagues who have just spoken in regard to the bill.

I had the opportunity, particularly in the Kamloops area at an earlier age, to work with RCMP members who actually came down to play hockey with us when I worked in that fair city a number of decades ago. The Sakaki family gave me my first opportunity to work in that community and the opportunity to play hockey with these RCMP officers as well.

Of course, that is what we are talking about here today: the RCMP officers who give their lives and work every day on behalf of Canadians to keep us safe.

I rise to express my concern regarding Bill C-7. The bill has some worthwhile and necessary provisions, as has been pointed out by some of my colleagues. However, the bill continues the Liberal tradition of bowing down to unions at the expense of democracy and increasing the power of unions at the expense of some of their members.

The Supreme Court's ruling makes it clear that the current regime must be updated to give RCMP members a greater voice in their workplace while continuing to ensure public safety. However, certain provisions of the bill are thinly veiled attempts to pay unions back for their support of the Liberal Party in the last election. These are the parts of the bill that make it a bit undemocratic.

I stood in the House recently to speak against Bill C-4, the Liberals' first attempt to pay unions back for their election support. That bill was also deeply problematic. The timing of it could not have been more opportunistic in its attempt to make the government's own collective bargaining process easier at the expense of union members.

That bill also scaled back one of the most important rights of union members, the right to participate in a secret ballot on certification and decertification. We have seen that the government side is afraid of the words "secret ballot". What are they afraid of? I would suggest they are afraid of democracy in this situation.

The combination of Bills C-4 and C-7 leaves RCMP members without a secret ballot vote on future union drives. The result is that a certification could occur through intimidation and undemocratic pressure tactics that are all too common with card check certifications. I believe strongly in giving workers the right to a vote that is free of intimidation prior to being forced to join, pay dues to, or be represented by a bargaining agent.

As I have said before, each hon. member in the chamber is here today because the residents of their constituency chose to give them the most personal thing they possess, their vote. As elected members of the House, our highest duty is to defend the democratic principles that brought us here. The secret ballot is the highest pillar of this process. It is difficult for me to believe that the Liberals have the nerve to argue that the public servants at the front line of Canadian safety do not deserve their democratic rights.

Government Orders

Our brave RCMP officers put our safety above theirs every day when they get up to go to work every morning and on every shift. Without them, we would not have the rule of law. Without them, many resolutions of the House would be worth less than the paper they are printed on. Without them, Canada would not be the free and safe society it is today.

Our RCMP stand up to criminals in some very dangerous situations. They rely on their fellow officers, their team, to have their backs. Bill C-7 would make our RCMP officers less safe by encouraging internal conflict within RCMP ranks. It creates a climate in which a union could pressure its members into signing their support. This really means that certain RCMP members would be pressuring others, creating tension and conflict while destroying trust.

Just as during election campaigns when candidates ask for the support of their friends and neighbours by going door to door, union representatives would be able to go from officer to officer to try to pressure them. As many of my hon. colleagues will know from their own campaign experience, while many people mean the support they promise, many people on the doorstep just want us to get off the porch or do not feel comfortable saying no to our face.

● (1315)

Without a secret ballot to guarantee the rights of public service workers, the potential for intimidation is disturbing. We all know that the potential for workers to be intimidated by their unions is very real. While this is serious for all workplaces, it is even more serious for a workplace where having a cohesive team can mean the difference between injury and safety, between life and death, as in the RCMP.

The Liberals have absolutely no good reason to get rid of this vital check. With the beginning of an important process for the RCMP, the Liberals are creating a problem that is easily avoided. The card check system allows for a workplace to be unionized without letting all employees have their say, and it could proceed with a significant portion of the workers having no idea that it was even going on.

The bill narrows the democratic legitimacy of an RCMP union and scales back the rights of our hard-working officers to select their representatives and determine their own fate. While the current regime must change to give our officers a greater voice in the workplace, it has to be done correctly.

As the bill currently stands, it sends a terrible signal to the men and women who keep us safe, a signal that the Government of Canada does not care about them. During the Conservatives' time in government, we consistently supported the RCMP, CSIS, and public safety agencies by modernizing legislation and increasing their budgets to ensure that these forces had the right tools to keep Canadians safe.

Right now, the RCMP is contracted to provide police services to eight provinces and over 150 communities. As the representative of the constituents of Brandon—Souris, I represent several such communities. I know first-hand the quality and professionalism that many RCMP officers of my riding bring to the job every day. We depend on them to keep us safe and are grateful to them for their service.

Not only would the officers in my riding have fewer democratic rights as a result of an unamended Bill C-7, but the communities that pay for their services would experience great hardship if labour costs dramatically increased. If our small communities cannot afford policing, nobody wins.

I echo my colleagues in supporting an amendment to this legislation that would explicitly allow RCMP members the right to vote on whether to unionize through a secret ballot.

● (1320)

Ms. Joyce Murray (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am struck by how much repetition there is from the Conservative members. I take that to be a huge compliment to the bill itself, because the basic premise of their concerns has to do with the secret ballot or mandatory vote regimes. In their previous attempt to undermine and weaken the union movement, they were foisting that method.

What our bill does, in fact, is provide the board with great discretion in determining the very best method to satisfy itself that a majority exists to certify a bargaining agent, whether that method is a vote or a card check. There is greater flexibility. The bill increases the democratic rights of our RCMP members and in fact makes it possible for the situation to be considered.

I would like to ask the member if it is not possible that there might be employer interference in a secret ballot or mandatory vote regime, which neither we nor the RCMP members themselves would want to have? Would the current board flexibility not actually address that by giving them the choice of applying either a card check or a secret ballot?

Mr. Larry Maguire: Mr. Speaker, I think my colleague makes my point in regard to why we would like to have a secret ballot.

It does not matter whether we are on the union side or the employer side: if there is a secret ballot, the people can make up their own minds. That is very clearly why we are spending so much time on this side of the House in dealing with the right to a secret ballot. It takes away interference from either side, and individual officers can make up their own minds after listening to both sides. It takes away the intimidation that was referred to by my hon. colleague across the way.

I did say in my opening remarks, and I know some of my colleagues agree, that the bill has some worthwhile and necessary provisions in it. That was the first comment I made. Let me say again that the bill does need improvement, which would be achieved by allowing RCMP officers to have a secret ballot if there is a union to be formed among them.

Government Orders

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I enjoy working with the member on the Standing Committee of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region. He mentioned that the RCMP serves eight provinces, but it also serves three territories. I want to make that clear. We often get left out. I was making the point at a meeting of tourism people yesterday that my riding has the highest percentage of GDP of any territory or province in the country related to tourism.

I understand the point that the member would like amended. To make sure I am clear, is the member in favour of the rest of the bill?

Mr. Larry Maguire: Mr. Speaker, I as well like working with the member in the Arctic areas that we have been in, and I stand corrected. I certainly know that the RCMP are in our three territories as well.

We would have to consider the bill further if there were an amendment put forward. I would urge the member to bring that forward himself and have it as an amendment to the bill.

• (1325)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Greg Fergus (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Don Valley East. I would like to thank you for giving me the opportunity to rise today to support Bill C-7.

It is an honour to participate in this debate and take a stand on behalf of the members and reservists of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

Today's bill seeks to uphold the constitutionally guaranteed freedom of RCMP members and reservists to engage in meaningful collective bargaining. Collective bargaining is a right that other police officers in Canada have enjoyed for many years. RCMP members and reservists have been denied that right, despite the significant contribution they have made to our proud, strong, and free nation over the past 143 years.

This bill would remedy that situation. It is a clear and reasoned response to the decision rendered by the Supreme Court on January 16, 2015. The court indicated that section 2(d) of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms protects a meaningful process of collective bargaining that provides employees with a degree of choice and independence sufficient to enable them to determine and pursue their collective interests. The court also stated that the current RCMP labour relations regime denies RCMP members that choice, and imposes on them a scheme that does not permit them to identify and advance their workplace concerns free from management's influence.

I thank the Supreme Court for this ruling, and I am pleased to support this bill today, which would give RCMP members and reservists freedom of choice and independence from management, while recognizing their unique operational reality.

This bill was carefully developed from the results of consultations with key stakeholders. The initial consultations were held with regular members of the RCMP. The next round of consultations were held with the provinces, territories, and municipalities that have police service agreements with the RCMP.

There are some important features in Bill C-7. First and foremost, it gives access to independent, binding arbitration when the bargaining dispute resolution process reaches an impasse. Members of the RCMP bargaining unit will not have the right to strike, which is in line with the practices of other police forces across the country. Those who participated in the online consultation expressed a strong preference for this provision.

The bill will also create a single, nation-wide bargaining unit composed of RCMP members appointed to a rank as well as reservists. In order to be certified, an RCMP bargaining agent must have as its primary mandate the representation of RCMP members. Once again, regular members have shown strong support for these provisions. The bill also provides for the exclusion of officers at the inspector level and above from representation.

Lastly, the Public Service Labour Relations and Employment Board will act as the administrative tribunal for matters related to the RCMP bargaining unit, as well as grievances related to the provisions of the collective agreement.

This bill is in line with the government's efforts to restore fair and balanced labour laws in this country.

• (1330)

Consider, for example, Bill C-5, which repeals division 20 of Bill C-59, the bill to implement budget 2015, introduced in April of last year by the previous government.

That bill gave the government the power to unilaterally override the collective bargaining process and impose a new sick leave system on the public service.

The Public Service Staff Relations Act was first introduced in 1977 in order to give public servants the right to organize and to bargain collectively. Guaranteeing collaborative efforts among the parties is crucial, as is increasing the capacity of the public service to serve and protect the public interest.

Our government has made it abundantly clear that it will not adopt an approach that does not take into account the bargaining process between an employer and a group of employees who want to reach agreements on employment conditions.

By repealing these provisions of Bill C-59, we are demonstrating our respect for the collective bargaining process. We believe in collective bargaining. Today's bill is a testament to our belief in that right.

We also believe in fair and balanced labour relations. Unfortunately, over the past few years, many basic labour rights have been undermined. Consider Bill C-377 and Bill C-525, for example, which will change how unions can be certified or decertified and will impose new financial reporting requirements on them.

Those bills were passed without the usual consultation process involving employers, unions, and the government, which was used during the reform of the Public Service Staff Relations Act. As a result, it is now harder for unions and employers to bargain in good faith.

Government Orders

Instead we must ensure that workers are free to organize, bargain collectively in good faith, and ensure safe workplaces for themselves. To make that happen, the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour introduced a bill to repeal Bill C-377 and Bill C-525.

Bill C-4 restores the bargaining agent certification and decertification processes that were in place before June 16, 2015. Bill C-4 also amends the Income Tax Act to get rid of unnecessary requirements imposed on labour organizations and labour trusts with regard to releasing certain financial information.

As hon. members know, legislative measures are already in place to ensure that unions make that financial information available. Under section 110 of the Canada Labour Code, unions are required to provide financial statements to their members upon request and free of charge, which makes these requirements to produce extra reports unnecessary.

In conclusion, the bill being introduced today is consistent with our belief in fair and balanced labour relations. Every other police force in Canada has had the right to engage in collective bargaining for quite some time. This bill respects that right, while recognizing the particular circumstances of the RCMP as a national police force.

It is time for us to give RCMP members and reservists the respect they deserve. To that end, I am calling on all hon. members to show their support for RCMP members and reservists by voting in favour of this bill.

• (1335)

[English]

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as has been stated, the NDP supports this bill at second reading, but we are concerned that while very important changes are being proposed, an imperfect proposal in terms of labour relations going forward with respect to the RCMP is also part of the bill.

A particular concern we have dealt with on many occasions in the House is what happens when we deal with harassment allegations, particularly the kinds of very serious allegations that have come out in recent years with respect to women working in the RCMP who have not been heard and have, in fact, been re-victimized as a result of the failure of the RCMP to deal with their cases. We are concerned that there is the potential for submitting procedures to deal with harassment allegations to the collective bargaining process and that could undermine the neutrality, stability, or reliability of the RCMP fundamentally.

Does my colleague see a problem in the potential for that and what does the government propose with respect to the very serious issue of dealing with sexual harassment allegations in the RCMP?

Mr. Greg Fergus: Mr. Speaker, I know the member for Churchill—Keewatinook Aski takes this issue very seriously. I am very happy to hear of the support from the hon. member for, as we say in French, *les grandes lignes de ces projets de loi*. I am pleased to hear there is that kind of support.

The question she asked with regard to the harassment procedures is also a very important question and one which I would like to address.

First, as I said in my speech, the bill would provide the opportunity for the RCMP, its officers and reservists, to acquire collective bargaining rights, but it is narrowly circumscribed to deal with last year's court ruling.

With regard to harassment issues, which I know the hon. member takes very seriously and which we all in the House take seriously, there are procedures in place and ways in which we can deal with that outside of the legislative process. Our efforts should be to improve those procedures to ensure senior officers in the RCMP have the opportunity to address those issues internally. That is beyond the ambit of what we as legislators can actually draw together and provide in the bill.

We will take those issues seriously and we will be very supportive of the efforts of senior RCMP officers to address those questions.

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it has been widely debated today, and I think the Conservative Party stance is widely known.

I want to ask the hon. member opposite a question. In making these decisions, moving forward with this bill, and, ultimately, the potential unionization of the RCMP, these costs will also be borne by the municipalities and communities from coast to coast, in the eight provinces where the agreements are in place. I would like to know whether the government has taken steps to address that or to focus on that in the upcoming budget, which will be presented later today, or in future budgets as we move forward, and what the cost implications will be.

• (1340)

Mr. Greg Fergus: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member's question is a good one. That is one of the reasons why the scope of this bill allows for a single national collective bargaining unit and not several collective bargaining units, which could have an effect in how the negotiations would happen with the municipalities and the provinces. That is the reason this was carefully taken into consideration. That is why the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, based on consultations not only with the RCMP but with officials and learning from other experiences of police forces across the country, came up with this model to ensure we do not take that into account.

Sometimes there is a cost to inaction. There is a cost to inaction by not allowing the RCMP to have the same kinds of collective bargaining rights that other police forces have enjoyed across the country. It is really important at this time to address this issue now, rather than allow this to lead to a crisis situation.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to have the opportunity to speak in support of Bill C-7, a new labour relations framework for RCMP members and reservists.

This legislation marks a significant milestone in the history of both the RCMP and Canadian labour relations. With the passage of this bill, for the first time RCMP members and reservists would have the same collective bargaining rights as other police forces in Canada. They would be able to choose an employee organization to represent them in labour negotiations with their employer, the Treasury Board of Canada.

Government Orders

Specifically, this bill proposes to amend the Public Service Labour Relations Act and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Act to create a new labour relations regime for RCMP members and reservists.

There are a number of particularly noteworthy aspects of this legislation that I would now like to highlight.

The bill would give RCMP members and reservists the right to have an independent bargaining agent of their own. It would provide for a single national bargaining unit for reservists and RCMP members appointed to a rank. In order to be certified as the bargaining agent for the RCMP bargaining unit, an employee organization would be required to have the representation of RCMP members as its primary mandate. Moreover, the process provided under the Public Service Labour Relations Act would be used to exclude other managerial and confidential positions. This means that the bill would exclude officers at the inspector level and above from representation.

As well, the Public Service Labour Relations and Employment Board would be the administrative tribunal for collective bargaining matters related to the RCMP bargaining unit, and grievances related to collective bargaining would be addressed. The board would be required to take into account the unique operational reality of the RCMP. As members know, due to public safety and security considerations, RCMP regular members are not permitted to strike. This would continue under the new regime. Instead, the dispute resolution mechanism would be binding arbitration, which is consistent with other police forces across the country. That is the essence of the bill.

The bill is a targeted response to a Supreme Court of Canada ruling, and is meant to address its decision. As a government, we respect the Supreme Court and are committed to providing the RCMP with legislation that brings its labour regime in line with the Supreme Court ruling.

Let me provide a bit of background.

The bill is the end result of a decision of the Supreme Court of Canada issued more than year ago in January 2015. At that time, the court ruled in the legal case cited as *Mounted Police Association of Ontario v. Canada (Attorney General)*. It found that some federal legislation and regulations relating to RCMP labour relations were unconstitutional because they prevented the formation of an independent RCMP employee organization. As such, they contravened the freedom of association guarantee enshrined in paragraph 2 (d) of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, according to the Supreme Court.

The Supreme Court gave the Government of Canada until January 16, 2016, or 12 months, to consider its options and respond with a labour relations framework that is compliant with the charter. The government took steps to bring the law into compliance with the Supreme Court ruling.

This past summer, the Treasury Board Secretariat engaged an independent consultant to survey regular members of the RCMP. The purpose of these consultations was to canvas the RCMP regular members' views on the potential elements of a labour relations framework that would allow them to choose their representatives and bargain collectively.

● (1345)

The process consisted of a survey and town hall meetings. More than 9,000 regular members completed this survey, and more than 650 participated in town hall meetings. Their feedback was then compiled into a report, which was posted on the secretariat's website on December 7, 2015. This report was helpful in contributing to a legislative framework that would be in line with the Supreme Court's ruling.

We have taken a fair and reasonable approach to examining this complex matter. This necessitated careful consideration of the next steps, including consultation with regular members of the RCMP, and with the provinces and territories with RCMP police services agreements. Now, after more than a year of consideration and consultation with the RCMP regular members, and within the Canadian jurisdictions that contract for RCMP services, the government has acted on what it has learned.

The bill we have tabled today is the next step. It would give RCMP members and reservists greater independence from management and freedom of choice in labour relation matters. This is indeed a historical occasion for our national police, and I am proud to speak in support of this carefully considered piece of legislation.

The bill is very much in keeping with our belief in fair and balanced labour relations. Engaging in collective bargaining is a right long since exercised by other police forces in Canada, and we think it is time to extend that right to the RCMP.

I urge all members to support this bill and ensure that those Canadians who dedicate themselves to defending the law have their constitutional rights defended by the law.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to stand with other New Democrats in support of the general direction of this proposed legislation. I commend the court for giving the direction, and I commend the government for taking it up. As far as it goes, we are in support, and we want to talk about it in committee.

The members opposite support improved workplace safety and finding a resolution to the unresolved issue of sexual harassment complaints by members of the RCMP to the RCMP commissioner. It is a very high profile issue that is unresolved, and the process is not working. Also, there are unresolved issues of workplace safety in relation to rural officers in particular. Both in Mayerthorpe and Moncton, there was terrible loss of life of RCMP members, and there are remaining issues as to the extent they were protected.

These men and women stand up for us, and we should stand up for them. Therefore, will the members opposite support the inclusion in the collective bargaining process of the workplace safety issues of sexual harassment and member safety? It seems at this point that these are excluded, and this is the perfect time to include them as a collective bargaining matter.

● (1350)

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite's question is a very important one, because sexual harassment in any workplace is not acceptable.

Government Orders

Workplace safety for all is part of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. However, the collective bargaining in this new bill is really to address the issues around what the Supreme Court has ruled.

This bill will go to committee, and I think further discussion is important. The committee's input is critical to making the bill better.

Ms. Joyce Murray (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is with respect to the commitment of the Government of Canada to supporting the dedicated women and men of Canada's national police force, and also the unique circumstances in which RCMP members work. I would ask the member to comment a bit more on the requirement that any employee organization seeking to certify as a bargaining agent for the RCMP must have the representation of RCMP as its primary mandate and that it could only associate with other unions that also have police officers as their primary mandate.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Mr. Speaker, it is important when we are going into labour negotiations or wanting the participation of the RCMP that the chair of the labour relations board includes at least two members of the RCMP so that the board understands the unique nature of the job that the RCMP does and there is bargaining in good faith.

The Deputy Speaker: Before we recognize the hon. member for Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan, I will let him know there are only about six minutes remaining in the time before we go to statements by members at 2 p.m. I will give him the usual signal ahead of time and, of course, he will know that he will have his remaining time when the House next gets back to debate on this question.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, members in this place who know me and who know me well know that I am an unabashed supporter of the RCMP.

I come by that support honestly, I believe. I have many friends currently in the RCMP whom I still consider to be very close to me, I have many retired members of the RCMP whom I see frequently, and unfortunately I have had many friends in the RCMP who have since passed.

As I am a representative from Saskatchewan and have lived most of my life in the city of Regina, home of Depot, one can understand my affinity for the RCMP and the work it does on behalf of all Canadians. However, to me it is more than just the friendships and the relationships I have gained over the years with members of the force. It is far more personal than that to me. My mother's first husband was an officer of the RCMP who was killed on duty at Depot. That has stayed with me my entire life. It reminds me, and I think it should remind all members in this place, of the inherent dangers that RCMP members face each and every day in the course of their duties.

I, unfortunately, have attended far too many funerals of members who have lost their lives in the course of their day-to-day duties. I was in Edmonton 11 years ago to attend the funeral of those brave officers who died in Mayerthorpe. I can say without equivocation that it is still the most emotional ceremony I have ever attended.

I take no pride in saying that I have attended these ceremonies. It is with great sorrow that I make mention of them, because it reminds me again that we as Canadians, and particularly as parliamentarians, should be doing everything that we can to support the RCMP in all of their endeavours.

The RCMP is iconic. Many members before me have spoken of that. They have spoken of the international acclaim rightly accorded the RCMP. It is the brand that I think most Canadians take pride in. In fact, a survey done not too many years ago indicated that the RCMP had the strongest brand of any organization in the world, second only to Coca-Cola. I would suggest to the House, as I have suggested to many officers within the RCMP, that the brand is so enduring because of the exemplary work that it has done over the years, starting in 1873 with the North-West Mounted Police and continuing on until 1920, when the RCMP, the modern-day RCMP as we know it, was formed.

This national police force of ours is, in my estimation, one of the best, if not the best, police force in the world. Notwithstanding the challenges that the RCMP has faced over the last number of years, most recently about sexual harassment within the workforce, the force continues to be a thriving and very necessary force in our lives. It is part of our culture. That is why I am so pleased to be able to speak on Bill C-7, which fundamentally affects the way the RCMP organizes and goes about its business.

Before I get into some of the details of Bill C-7, let me also say that I have a great background in and a great knowledge of the union movement in Canada. There may be members on the benches opposite who will accuse me and some of my colleagues of being anti-union and say that we are not supporting Bill C-7 because we are fundamentally and ideologically opposed to unions. I can say from my standpoint that this statement is certainly not true.

I was born and brought up in a union household. My father was formerly the head of the western Canadian division of the United Steelworkers of America. In fact, he mentored the current national director of the United Steelworkers, Ken Neumann. I still see Ken very often in the airports. We talk fondly about my father and the influence my father had on Ken and the work he is doing today. I can absolutely say without hesitation and without equivocation that I understand the role and, I would suggest, the necessary role that the union movement and the labour movement has in Canada.

However, there are many aspects of that movement and of unions themselves with which I have very fundamental and profound disagreements. With the Speaker's permission, I will get into those disagreements and into the content of Bill C-7 shortly after question period concludes.

• (1355)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan will have 15 minutes remaining for his remarks when the House next resumes debate on the question.

*Statements by Members***STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS***[Translation]***INTERNATIONAL DAY OF LA FRANCOPHONIE**

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the International Day of La Francophonie was on March 20. La Francophonie represents 220 million francophones in more than 70 countries on five continents.

Quebeckers and members of francophone and Acadian communities in Canada have long been waging an ongoing battle. We have achieved much, but there is still much to be done.

Although we hear all kinds of lip service in the House, the assimilation rate of francophones outside Quebec has increased from 27% to 39% in the past 40 years. French is on the decline in Quebec, and francophones are now a minority in Montreal.

The federal government has failed in its responsibility to francophone and Acadian communities and is contributing to the anglicization of Quebec.

The only way to promote the French language and secure its future in Quebec and North America is for Quebec to become independent.

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*[English]***SHINING THROUGH CENTRE FOR CHILDREN WITH AUTISM**

Mr. Francesco Sorbara (Vaughan—Woodbridge, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the United Nations has declared April 2 World Autism Awareness Day to highlight the need to help improve the quality of life of those with autism.

I stand today in advance of that important date to recognize the good work of the Shining Through Centre for Children with Autism. The Shining Through Centre was started in 1999 in my riding of Vaughan—Woodbridge, and it is a leader in the area of autism therapy, research, and education.

Since the opening of its first centre in Woodbridge in 2001, the Shining Through Centre has expanded to include facilities in North York and Mississauga and has supported hundreds of children and their families.

Through the tireless efforts of president and co-founders Fred Santini, John Dibartolo, Umberto Martini, Val Girardi, and Ted Leider, the Shining Through Centre has raised millions of dollars, including at this year's 17th annual gala, which was attended by over 1,500 people.

I humbly ask my colleagues to join me in thanking the Shining Through Centre for giving children with autism a chance to shine.

● (1400)

SASKATOON CITIZEN OF THE YEAR

Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to rise in the house today to honour Dr. Jay Kalra, who was named Citizen of the Year in Saskatoon.

Last Friday at a luncheon I had the opportunity to speak about the accomplishments of Jay Kalra. He is an award-winning researcher and academic who gained international acclaim for his innovative work in pathology and health care delivery.

As a cultural and diversity ambassador, Dr. Kalra has served our city, our province, and our nation with pride. Dr. Kalra has received numerous honours, including being named as one of the top 25 Canadian immigrants in 2013.

In every community that Dr. Kalra has been a part of, from the University of Saskatchewan to the medical profession to his volunteerism, he has made Saskatoon a better place.

Congratulations to Dr. Jay Kalra on being named Saskatoon Citizen of the Year for 2015.

* * *

HARRY VERRAN

Mr. Colin Fraser (West Nova, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute and respect to Mr. Harry James Verran of Annapolis County, Nova Scotia, who passed away October 18, 2015, at the age of 85.

Mr. Verran was a member of Parliament for South West Nova from 1993 to 1997 and served his constituents proudly as a member of the Liberal Party of Canada.

Mr. Verran was not only a politician: he was a member of the Royal Canadian Navy for 20 years, a premier long-distance runner, a photographer, a businessman, and a coach. He was truly a pillar of his community.

Most important to Mr. Verran, though, was his family. He was devoted to Connie, his loving wife of 61 years, and their seven children and many grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Our community and our country are richer because of Harry Verran, and we treasure his enduring legacy. We will remember him with much fondness and affection. I thank Harry for a life well lived.

* * *

WORLD WATER DAY

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, New Democrats strongly believe that access to clean water is a human right. In 2010, the United Nations General Assembly recognized that clean drinking water and sanitation are essential to the realization of human rights.

Today is an opportunity to recognize and learn more about water-related issues, to be inspired to tell others, and to take action to make a difference.

Statements by Members

This has been happening in my riding, where the people of Shawnigan Lake have been fighting a noble battle to protect their watershed from contamination.

Furthermore, 73% of first nations communities in Canada are living with water systems that are medium to high risk, which is an absolute national shame for a country that boasts 20% of the world's fresh water.

On this World Water Day, I call on the government to enact meaningful environmental protections so that every person in Canada has access to clean water.

* * *

STATUS OF WOMEN

Ms. Anju Dhillon (Dorval—Lachine—LaSalle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week, I was proud to be a part of Canada's delegation to the 60th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, led by the Minister of Status of Women.

[*Translation*]

Canada was clear about the empowerment of women and girls; the equality of indigenous women and girls; the elimination of gender-based violence; the health of women, children, and adolescents, including sexual and reproductive health and rights; and the elimination of early forced marriage.

[*English*]

Over and over, people told me how excited they were that Canada was back on the world stage and that our gender-balanced cabinet was an inspiration to them and to the citizens of their countries.

Our Prime Minister's very active participation, his being named a leader of the HeForShe global campaign, and the fact that we are seeking election to the UN Commission on the Status of Women all underscore our government's renewed commitment to gender equality at home and around the world.

* * *

● (1405)

EVENTS IN BRUSSELS

Ms. Dianne L. Watts (South Surrey—White Rock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of my constituents in the riding of South Surrey—White Rock and all residents to stand in solidarity with the people of Brussels. This morning, 31 innocent people were murdered and over 100 were injured in a series of attacks. I want to acknowledge the work done by the Belgian military, police, and first responders, who have been working tirelessly since this incident occurred.

This kind of deadly tragedy has unfortunately become far too commonplace around the world. As these terror attacks continue to impact us all, we must stand strong together and united with our allies.

Our thoughts and prayers are with the families and friends of those murdered and injured in Brussels today. Their lives will be forever impacted.

As well, I would like to extend my condolences to the Ford family on the passing of the former mayor and a colleague, Rob Ford. He led a colourful life, loved his community, and will be missed by all who knew him.

* * *

ARMENIAN COMMUNITY CENTRE OF TORONTO

Mr. Geng Tan (Don Valley North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Armenian Community Centre of Toronto, located in my riding of Don Valley North, is welcoming 1,080 privately sponsored Syrian refugees, making it one of Canada's leaders in resettling newcomers.

I salute the hard work and dedication of the Armenian Community Centre. It is heartwarming to see its generous members helping so many individuals and families that have suffered severe conflict and loss.

Several of these families now have children enrolled in the school attached to the centre. Parents once again see smiles and hear laughter as their kids play together in the centre after school.

I wish to express my deepest gratitude to the members of the Armenian Community Centre for helping Canada resettle 25,000 newcomers in communities across this country by March 1, 2016.

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[*Translation*]

EVENTS IN BRUSSELS

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Louis-Hébert, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as president of the Canadian branch of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie, I was going to rise this afternoon to talk about the International Day of La Francophonie, which was on Sunday.

However, today La Francophonie is in mourning for one of its own. Earlier this morning, Belgium was attacked by cowards, criminals who attacked Brussels with unspeakable violence.

I want our Belgian friends and cousins to know that we on this side of the Atlantic are standing with them and praying for them.

* * *

[*English*]

WORLD THEATRE DAY

Hon. Peter Van Loan (York—Simcoe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, March 27 is World Theatre Day, and around the world people will be celebrating the value that live theatre brings to their community. World Theatre Day honours and acknowledges the power of theatre.

Theatre can entertain us. It can challenge us, urging us to question situations. It gives us insight into human relationships. It has the power to foster dialogue and connections, leading to greater understanding and tolerance. It tells stories and helps us to know ourselves and build our identity.

In Canada, we are fortunate to have a rich array of theatre. We have signature companies like the Stratford and Shaw Festivals in Ontario, and Neptune Theatre in Halifax. We enjoy grassroots community theatres, including the Queensville Players and South Simcoe Theatre in my community. Our towns and cities are richer and more vibrant thanks to theatre.

Statements by Members

In today's world, quality of life is increasingly linked to economic success. Theatre is an important part of enriching the experience of living in or visiting a community and strengthening its economy.

As we celebrate World Theatre Day, I wish to recognize all those Canadians who work in and contribute to theatre across our great country.

* * *

WORLD WATER DAY

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, World Water Day is a welcome reminder that water is vital to human health and to the health of our natural ecosystems.

Water is also fundamental to the economy. From the earliest days of the agricultural and industrial revolutions to today's digital age, water is a staple input in the production process.

We all recognize and understand water's all-encompassing role in our lives.

[*Translation*]

However, our challenge remains to harmonize the policies of all the different jurisdictions, such as the watershed areas, municipalities, provinces, first nations, the federal government and the international community, which govern and influence the use, protection and conservation of our drinking water resources.

• (1410)

[*English*]

On this World Water Day, let us reaffirm our commitment to making water a public policy priority, especially for the sake of those who are without the clean water they need to lead healthy and prosperous lives, and for future generations who will be living in a water-stressed world.

* * *

ROB FORD

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Spadina—Fort York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to remember Toronto city councillor and former Toronto mayor Rob Ford who passed away this morning. Today our thoughts are with his family and in particular his two young children. The Fords are a strong family. Today we wish them even more strength.

As a former council colleague and as a journalist who had a front row seat to his career, Rob, and everyone in Toronto knew him as Rob, was a force to be reckoned with.

To see his life force extinguished so suddenly only underlines how horrid cancer is, how united we must be in fighting this disease, while we also stand and support the people and families living with cancer.

Rob can be remembered many ways, but there is a singular image that anyone who spent time at Toronto City Hall can recall very easily. It is an image of Rob with a clutch of pink phone messages calling back his constituents. As a public servant, he took this responsibility seriously and approached it with a passionate dedication that few have equalled.

Serving the public defined Rob, so did coaching football. It is how I remember him today and forevermore.

* * *

ROB FORD

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, like my friend, I rise in the House today to offer deepest condolences on behalf of the House to the Ford family on the passing of Toronto city councillor and former mayor Rob Ford.

Today the Ford family lost a father, a husband, a brother and a son to cancer, and the city lost a passionate servant.

Years ago, I met Doug Ford Senior when he worked alongside my father as a member of provincial Parliament at Queen's Park. Like many sons and daughters who inherit their parents' passion for public service, like you did, Mr. Speaker, Rob Ford continued his father's dedication to Etobicoke and the city of Toronto by serving the public, first as a city councillor and ultimately as the mayor of Toronto.

While his term as mayor was often a difficult time, nobody could dispute Rob Ford's passion for the city and what he thought was best for it. He was legendary for phoning people personally on issues and for visiting people to see their challenges first-hand.

Today the Ford family lost one of their own and the city of Toronto lost a passionate booster. He will be dearly missed.

* * *

EVENTS IN BRUSSELS

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon (Kanata—Carleton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, like all Canadians, I was shocked and saddened to hear of the terrorist attacks in Brussels this morning.

[*Translation*]

People at the airport and on the subway were victims of attacks carried out by terrorists who do not share our values of freedom, democracy and respect for humanity.

Today, I offer my sincere condolences to the people of Belgium, especially the families, friends and communities of those who were killed or injured.

[*English*]

As many of us know, Brussels is not only the capital of Belgium, but it is also the home of the European Union and NATO.

Having spent four years serving with NATO myself, I know the amazing work being done every single day by these great organizations which the people of Belgium host and support with generosity and much good will.

As allies and friends, Belgians should know that all Canadians are standing shoulder to shoulder with them today.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

MARCELLE ROBIDOUX

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for International Women's Day my team organized a consultation in order to identify women who are role models in our society and should be depicted on our bank notes. I am pleased to inform the House that the outstanding women activists Thérèse Casgrain and Madeleine Parent were the most popular choices. I would like to thank everyone who participated.

However, I must say that many exceptional women have recently left Longueuil—Saint-Hubert. I was sad to learn this very day of the death of Marcelle Robidoux, who managed, with love and authority, Maison de jeunes, located on King-George Street in Longueuil. However, the youth in that area will still be in good hands because her daughters will continue the tradition of generosity established by their mother and their grandmother, Antoinette Robidoux.

Marcelle Robidoux left us to join another great lady on Montreal's south shore, another tireless model of social action and dedication, Gisèle Auprix-St-Germain. Longueuil—Saint-Hubert has lost two inspiring women at the start of this year, women who pioneered social causes in our area. We must remember their kindness and dedication, so that they continue to show the way for a long time to future generations of volunteers.

* * *

●(1415)

[English]

EVENTS IN BRUSSELS

Mr. Andrew Scheer (Regina—Qu'Appelle, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians awoke today to tragic news from Belgium. Several shocking and horrific terrorist attacks in Brussels killed dozens of innocent civilians going about their daily lives.

These attacks, whether they occur in Brussels, Paris, or in Ottawa, are attacks on our way of life. People from all over the world move to western countries because of our open and welcoming societies that value individual rights, equality, and principles of natural justice.

These terrorists have taken advantage of our values and our openness by committing these heinous acts. All freedom-loving nations need to stand shoulder to shoulder to fight the threat of those who want to replace our open societies with one based on radical jihadism.

These attacks are not isolated events. They are not the acts of a small group. They are part of a systemic and worldwide attack on everything our civilization stands for.

Our thoughts and prayers go out to the victims and their families. I know all Canadians stand with me in denouncing these attacks and offering our condolences to the people of Belgium.

[Translation]

EVENTS IN BRUSSELS

Mr. Michel Picard (Montarville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are all outraged and deeply saddened by the attacks that took place this morning in Brussels. We offer our sincere condolences to the families and friends of those killed, and we hope for a fast recovery for all those who have been injured.

These attacks once again remind us of the importance of the work that our national security agencies and their international partners are doing to help prevent and combat terrorism and to ensure that those responsible are brought to justice.

We would also like to remind members that Canada needs to be a world leader in the fight against radicalization and that we are working with communities to address this problem.

Canada's solidarity with and friendship for Belgium are unwavering at this difficult time. Terrorism and hatred will never have a place in our free and open societies.

The message we would like to send to the people of Belgium comes from their national anthem, *La Brabançonne*, which says:

We swear with one cry—You shall live!
You shall live, so great and beautiful

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

EVENTS IN BRUSSELS

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the eyes of the world are currently focused on Brussels, Belgium, where our friends and allies have been the victims of a terrorist attack. Our thoughts and prayers are with the victims and their families.

Can the Prime Minister give Canadians an update on the most recent developments in Belgium and can he tell us whether any Canadians were involved in this terrorist attack?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the Leader of the Opposition for her true and meaningful words. I am sure that all of my colleagues in the House will want to join with me in expressing Canadians' absolute solidarity with the people of Belgium and our determination to defeat terrorism, which only grows stronger with each attack of this kind. Terrorism is a dead end that cannot succeed. We are going to combat terrorism and, today, we will do it with the people of Belgium.

*Oral Questions**[English]***PUBLIC SAFETY**

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on that note, during the election campaign, the Prime Minister and the Liberal Party campaigned to get rid of certain anti-terrorist measures that the Conservatives brought in to disrupt and prevent terrorist networks. Our security forces have now said that they have used these tools successfully to disrupt terrorist activity here in Canada.

Will the Prime Minister reverse his position and ensure that we maintain these tools, so our security forces can keep Canadians safe from terrorism?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, during the election campaign, the commitment was very clear that we would do everything in our power to make sure that our security and police services were effective in keeping Canadians safe and, at the same time, that Canadian values, rights, and freedoms were thoroughly and properly respected. There is no contradiction between those two positions.

* * *

• (1420)

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Jason Kenney (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the genocidal death cult of ISIL has claimed responsibility for today's terrible attacks in Brussels, leading French President Hollande to say that Europe is at war with ISIL.

Is Canada also at war with ISIS, and if so, why did we end our combat operations against that terrorist organization?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have had this debate, and I think it has been very clearly expressed that we may have different views about how optimally to fight this awful Islamic State. We concluded that the best way was to triple our efforts for training, double our intelligence service, strengthen our development aid, and to extend our efforts to not only Syria and Iraq but also Lebanon and Jordan. It was well received by the coalition, and today is not a day to make politics about that.

Hon. Jason Kenney (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I hope the minister is not suggesting that President Hollande was making politics in stating that Europe is at war with ISIL.

ISIS is also engaged in a campaign to eradicate the ancient indigenous peoples of Mesopotamia, the Assyrian Yazidis, and other people. The previous Conservative government recognized this as a form of genocide, an example followed by the EU Parliament, the U.S. Congress, and the Obama administration.

Why has the Liberal government reversed Canada's position recognizing the genocide of ISIS against the indigenous peoples of Mesopotamia?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very sorry to say to my colleague that the former government did not recognize genocide with the actions of the Islamic State. It did not rush to this decision.

As I speak today, Canada recognizes five genocides in the history of the world. If we have to recognize a sixth one, it will be done properly with the view of the international organizations appropriate for that. I remind the member that this is also the view of the United States, of the EU, and of the United Nations. Our fight against ISIL has nothing to do with this debate about the definition.

Hon. Jason Kenney (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as a member of the former government, I assure the minister that he is mistaken, that I and other ministers did recognize the genocidal nature of what is happening. The five genocides to which he refers were recognized by motions of this House. We are asking the government, as an executive action, to recognize this reality.

[Translation]

The European Parliament, the U.S. Congress, and the Obama administration have done so. Why, then, has this Liberal government reversed Canada's position? Why is it denying the genocide against these Middle Eastern peoples that is happening right now?

[English]

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our determination to fight terrorism is very strong, anyway, but the decision to call it a genocide is not only a declaration that the minister may have made. His government did not do it. If he had done it, it would be an act somewhere, and we would know it. A declaration made by the minister is not sufficient to do so.

Secretary Kerry said that we need to do additional research on it and to work with the international bodies. It is what Canada is asking for and it is what we are asking for.

* * *

*[Translation]***THE BUDGET**

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals spent the election campaign promising people the sun, the moon, and the starlit sky, but now, just hours before delivering the budget, they are trying to lower the huge expectations that they themselves created for people.

Can the Prime Minister confirm that he will keep every one of the solemn promises he made to Canadians during the last election campaign?

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, during the campaign, there were two clear visions presented to Canadians. One was based on growth, investments, and jobs. The other one, supported by the member, was based on balanced budgets, massive cuts, and job losses. Canadians supported our growth agenda, and that growth agenda speaks to historic investments in infrastructure, reducing the tax burden for middle-class Canadians, and helping enhance the Canada child benefit, which would help bring hundreds of thousands of people out of poverty.

We have a plan, we have made those commitments, and I am confident the Minister of Finance will be presenting that in the budget very shortly.

• (1425)

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, with just hours until its first budget, the Liberal government has been leaking like previous Liberal governments, and all the leaks point to the same thing. The Liberal budget will not include many of the Liberals' campaign promises. We know the minister is legally bound not to share the contents of his budget, but can he simply tell Canadians which of their campaign promises will not be in the budget?

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have a plan to grow the economy and to create an environment for businesses and people to succeed. That is why we are making these historic investments. All these commitments that we made during the campaign were well received by the Canadian public. They have been discussed extensively by our government, and I am confident that the Minister of Finance, the Prime Minister, and our government will make sure we execute our platform commitments to grow the economy and create jobs from coast to coast to coast.

* * *

ETHICS

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): That would be from the heart out, Mr. Speaker.

Federal infrastructure money flowed to Saskatchewan for the Global Transportation Hub, where there are serious allegations of massive overspending on shady land purchases that benefited the ruling party's bagmen. When asked yesterday if he would look into whether federal tax dollars were wasted, the Treasury Board president was arrogant and dismissive; so let us try again.

Why is the Liberal government protecting the Saskatchewan Party?

Hon. Scott Brison (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was asked this question a couple of weeks ago and, in fact, I spoke with cabinet colleagues earnestly in order to determine what the federal role would be today in this issue. The reality is that it is a provincial issue.

I know the hon. member has some experience in provincial politics, and I remind him that now he is in federal politics and he ought to stick to federal politics, particularly during electoral periods

provincially. On this side of the House, we will not interfere in provincial elections.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in fact it is federal government money. The infrastructure minister's office announced just last month that Saskatchewan will get millions more in fast-track federal infrastructure spending. Therefore, despite the fact that the Treasury Board president claims it is not a problem, actually it is a federal issue, and the people in Saskatchewan want to know what happened to the money spent by Ottawa in Saskatchewan.

Will the government immediately call in the RCMP to look at how Canadian tax dollars were spent in the Global Transportation Hub land scam?

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are proud to say that we are making historical investments into infrastructure to support municipalities and provinces. We will continue to work with all provinces, respect the local economy, and respect the local decision-making process. That is how we do business here.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Liberals cited Canada's membership in the International Criminal Court to excuse its reluctance to join our allies in characterizing the barbaric actions of ISIS as genocide. There is a specific international definition of genocide. The European Union, the United States, and the Vatican recognize that definition and explicitly accuse ISIS of genocide. Why are the Liberals so reluctant to do the same?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to quote what Secretary Kerry has said, to be sure my colleagues understand that, to decide if an awful atrocity is a genocide, is something that must be done according to a process; it is not only a declaration from a minister. It is not enough to say that the former government recognized it as a genocide only because one minister made a declaration.

I do not have the time to give the quote. However, it is clearly the case that, if I have other questions, I will do so.

I just want to say that today is the day to think about these atrocities and to stand shoulder to shoulder with our friends in Belgium.

• (1430)

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is unacceptable. Genocide is a crime in Canada, and we incorporate the international law definition of genocide.

A year ago the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights concluded that there is evidence of war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide. Since then, ISIS has done nothing but continue its deliberate slaughter and extermination of those who oppose it.

Oral Questions

Why are the Liberals so afraid to call this genocide?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is the quote by Secretary Kerry. That may be my quote also. Each of these words I support.

He stated:

Ultimately, the full facts must be brought to light by an independent investigation and through formal legal determination made by a competent court or tribunal. But the United States [and Canada] will strongly support efforts to collect, document, preserve, and analyze the evidence of atrocities, and we will do all we can to see that the perpetrators are held accountable.

That is well said.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our thoughts and prayers are with the families and the victims of the horrific terrorist attack by ISIS in Brussels this morning. It is another tragic reminder of the extreme danger posed by terrorism.

The Liberals continue to ignore the threat of terrorism. In fact, one of their very first pieces of legislation was to return Canadian citizenship to convicted terrorists. I would like to remind the Liberals that a terrorist is a terrorist is a terrorist. Why will the Prime Minister not take the fight against terror seriously and put Canada back in the combat mission against ISIS?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think we can agree that we all agree on defeating ISIL and we just have a difference of opinion on how it is going to be done.

I took the time to talk to the troops. I have talked to the commanders on the ground. I do have, actually, considerable experience in fighting the enemy, having done it myself. Therefore, I am going to make sure that, with respect to any future threats that we face, we will be working with our coalition partners and making sure that our aim remains the same, which is to defeat ISIL.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are not in combat; we are now just trainers.

Last week the American government condemned the actions of ISIS as genocide. Rather than working with our allies to destroy this barbaric terrorist group, our Prime Minister has taken Canada out of the fight. The Liberals are ignoring Canada's responsibility to protect the most vulnerable citizens who are targeted by ISIS. Why is the Prime Minister afraid to fight terrorism head on and stop the ISIS genocide?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this question is simply shameful.

Everybody knows that every member of this House is fighting terrorism. No Canadian who was chosen by the Canadian people is afraid to fight terrorism. We may have a democratic difference of views about how to fight it.

I would like my colleague to listen to what the Leader of the Opposition said when she asked her question. It was very dignified, but this one was not.

[*Translation*]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, during the election campaign, the Prime Minister mocked the Conservative stance on terrorism.

After this morning's attacks, the Minister of Foreign Affairs stated, "Hearing the screams of children in the smoke of the Brussels metro only strengthens our resolve to combat terrorism in all its forms".

Does the Prime Minister agree with his Minister of Foreign Affairs, and what will he do to combat this threat in Canada?

[*English*]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, here at home the Canadian police services and security services are vigilantly doing their job every day. Obviously on a day like this when they redouble their efforts to ensure that Canadians are safe, they have examined the threat level in this country, as they do on a continuous basis. They have determined, to this point in time, there is no reason for adjusting that threat level. It remains at medium where it has been since October 2014.

● (1435)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, terrorism is a constant threat to the west.

After the attack on a Canadian Forces recruitment centre in Toronto, we realized that our military personnel were not adequately protected.

What concrete steps has this government taken to protect Canada's military bases and the people who work there?

[*English*]

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, regrettably, I was travelling in Ukraine and Poland, visiting our troops when the attack happened.

One of the first places I went was actually to visit the recruiting centre. I was briefed personally that measures had been taken from incidents in the past. I got to see the measures. The actions that were taken were quite commendable, in how they were able to take down the perpetrator.

When it comes to threats and force protection, it is an ongoing situation. We adjust accordingly. For obvious reasons, we do not make it public.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

FOOD SAFETY

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadian Food Inspection Agency inspectors are sounding the alarm. After years of massive cuts, the CFIA is no longer able to play its role. This is a matter of urgency because the health of Canadians is at stake.

For years, the NDP has been calling on the government to assess the adverse effects of the Conservatives' cuts and reinvest in the food inspection system.

Can the government tell us what it plans to do to secure Canadians' food safety today?

[English]

Hon. Jane Philpott (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to ensuring the safety of food for all Canadians. I have been meeting on a regular basis with my colleagues in the Canadian Food Inspection Agency.

The hon. member opposite may be aware that our government ran on a campaign to increase our investments in food safety. We are expecting the announcement of a budget imminently, and we look forward to announcing further measures that we will undertake to ensure the safety of food for all Canadians.

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians deserve to know that their food is safe, and they deserve to know that now, not years from now.

Seventy-one percent of Canada's meat inspectors report that staffing levels are now so low, they cannot adequately ensure the safety of the products on Canadians' tables.

The Liberals promised to reverse the Conservative cuts to food inspections. Will the government act immediately, before we have another food safety disaster that endangers the health and safety of Canadian families?

Hon. Jane Philpott (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have already announced that we will be making further investments in the safety of food on the matter of inspectors, whether it is for federal staff or industry staff, food safety inspectors on the ground at all times in every federally registered plant in Canada.

The CFIA continues to ensure that all required tasks are met at every establishment. I have absolute trust in the professionalism of my colleagues in the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. We look forward to further supporting them with appropriate measures.

* * *

FINANCE

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brantford—Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, deficit day has finally arrived. The Liberals promised they would borrow \$10 billion this year. They broke that promise. The Minister of Finance claimed he would balance the books by 2019. He quit on that one too. He then promised that the debt-to-GDP ratio would not go up. He cannot even hit that target.

Given all these broken promises, why should Canadians believe anything presented in the budget?

Mr. François-Philippe Champagne (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me be clear once again. We will take no advice from the Conservatives when it comes to deficits.

Today is a great day. As the Minister of Finance and I went across the nation, we listened to Canadians from coast to coast to coast. Canadians have asked us to invest in families, invest in Canadians, and invest in growth.

The only ones who do not understand that seem to be these people, because the Conservatives left us with a deficit. What the IMF is saying is that when interest rates are low, we should invest in the economy. That is what the OECD says. That's exactly—

The Speaker: Order please.

The hon. member for Brantford—Brant.

● (1440)

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brantford—Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, spending borrowed money on pet Liberal projects is not a jobs plan. The Minister of Finance has been all over the map. He is abandoning his campaign budget promises. His spending targets keep changing, and he is constantly floating new ideas to raise taxes on businesses.

Private sector investment has fallen off a cliff since the finance minister arrived. What is the plan to get businesses—not government, but businesses—investing in our economy again?

Mr. François-Philippe Champagne (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said, the Minister of Finance and I went from coast to coast to coast. We did something the Conservatives never did. We listened to Canadians. What Canadians have been telling us is to invest in the economy now and invest in growth.

In just about an hour, that is exactly what we are going to present to Canadians.

* * *

[Translation]

REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we do not get the feeling that this government is terribly interested in the economic development of our regions.

When it comes to the Portneuf wharf in my riding, for example, I have tried more than 20 times to get an update from the Minister of Transport's office in order to help the people involved in this issue. I have not had a single response, which only confirms that this government has no plan.

Will the Minister of Finance use his budget to create the right conditions, such as tax relief, to encourage our constituents to develop our regions and make them prosperous?

Mr. François-Philippe Champagne (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for the question.

As I said, the Minister of Finance and I went to every region in Canada, and we listened to Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

Oral Questions

I know that my hon. colleague is anxious to see what is in the budget being brought down later today. He has to wait for just one more hour. We will present our plan for Canadians, a plan that will grow the economy and invest in Canadians and growth.

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals plan on borrowing a lot of money. They should not spend money they do not have. Canada must become an economic leader, as it was under the former government.

Our businesses should not be subjected to administrative red tape and tax hikes. This government must create jobs without wasting public money or having Canadians foot the bill.

Will the Minister of Finance promise to put in place the measures Canadian businesses need, so they can believe in the economic future of our country?

Mr. François-Philippe Champagne (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for his question. However, he seems to be the only one who does not understand.

Canadians understand that when interest rates are low, that is precisely the time to invest in the economy. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the International Monetary Fund, it is time to invest in the economy.

We have the lowest debt-to-GDP ratio in the G7. Now is the time to invest, and that is what we are going to do. That is what Canadians asked us to do.

* * *

ETHICS

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, wealthy Canadians are buying yachts and sailboats without paying any tax. These privileged few are using a scheme to pass through customs with impunity and without ever paying their fair share.

The deputy minister of public safety, who is responsible for border services, is among them and apparently ensured that this scheme could continue. Liberals, ships, and tax havens. Does that ring a bell?

Will the government put an end to this scheme? Most importantly, will it investigate the deputy minister of public safety?

[*English*]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the deputy minister has engaged with the Ethics Commissioner on this file, and she will provide any advice that is necessary.

With respect to tax policy and the taxation rules that are applicable to particular transactions, that is within the purview of the Minister of Finance and the Minister of National Revenue.

* * *

CANADA REVENUE AGENCY

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, here is another Liberal broken promise. The Conservatives signed a deal to implement FATCA and hand over private financial information of a million Canadians to the United States. During the

campaign, the Liberals said that the deal violated privacy rights and might even be unconstitutional. However, now in government, the Liberals have handed over private information of more than 155,000 Canadians so far, without even understanding the impact.

How can the government be so careless with its promises and so careless with the privacy rights of up to one million Canadians?

• (1445)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government takes privacy very seriously. We will continue to work with the United States to ensure that all security safeguards are being followed.

We remind members that our countries have a long tradition of responsible fiscal co-operation dating back to 1942. I assure all Canadians that any exchange of information with the United States is done in compliance with privacy laws.

* * *

[*English*]

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Randeep Sarai (Surrey Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, many of my constituents and people across British Columbia continue to be concerned for the well-being of the people of Fiji who have been hit by Cyclone Winston. As many as 32,000 homes have been damaged or destroyed, and 350,000 people have been displaced as a result of this devastating natural disaster.

Can the Minister of International Development inform the House on the additional steps this government has taken to help the people suffering from the lasting damages of this storm?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of International Development and La Francophonie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his interest in Canada's response to Cyclone Winston.

After initial support of basic supplies for 5,000 Fijians, our government has made additional contributions to the Red Cross and UNICEF of \$1 million to improve health, food, and education of 350,000 people affected by the cyclone, including 120,000 children.

We continue to assess the situation and ongoing needs.

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ETHICS

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Benjamin Bergen was the campaign manager and executive assistant to the current Minister of International Trade. Now he has a new job as a lobbyist. How did he get this job? It was by stating he has an extensive network among senior public sector officials that would be of benefit to his new organization. Clearly, he is counting on his connection with the minister to get ahead.

Oral Questions

How will the Prime Minister address the growing problem of insiders getting special access to their Liberal ministers?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, and for the second time in two days, the members opposite are looking for stories where there are none.

I will repeat, Ben worked in my constituency office and never worked in my ministerial office. It is his role to check with the ethics office, which he is doing and has done.

However, I do want to emphasize something important. I have met with innovators and entrepreneurs from across the country in the past. I will continue to do so, and I am proud to be doing that.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we obviously have a very busy Ethics Commissioner working right now.

We see a pattern of unethical behaviour by the Liberals. While the Minister of International Trade brushes aside her relationship with Benjamin Bergen, she cannot deny that their relationship helped him get the position he currently holds. In fact, Mr. Bergen is openly bragging about his extensive connections with senior public officials. The only reason he now has his position is because of his blatant conflict of interest.

Does the Prime Minister intend to just sit idle while Liberal insiders continue to enjoy special access to the Liberal ministers?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do know if something is wrong with the hearing on the other side of the House, but I think I am just going to have to repeat myself.

As I said, Ben Bergen worked in my constituency office. He never worked for me in my ministerial capacity.

I really want to underscore for any Canadian innovators and entrepreneurs who are listening today that I am proud to have met many Canadian innovators and entrepreneurs in the past. I will continue to do so. That is my job as Minister of International Trade.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the conflict of interest code states that we are prohibited from using our position to further another person or entity's private interests. The justice minister previously protested against the Site C dam project, and now the minister is on cabinet and will decide whether this project will go forward or not. That will certainly further her previous entity's interests.

Will the minister do the right thing and remove herself from all cabinet discussion about the Site C dam project?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what we have said many times in the House is that the Minister of Justice and all ministers, and in fact all reporting public office-holders, will be governed at all times by their responsibility in the Conflict of Interest Act and the code that applies to members of Parliament.

We take our advice on these issues from the independent Ethics Commissioner, and we will always follow that advice.

• (1450)

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Yes, Mr. Speaker, and so I went to the page of the Ethics Commissioner, and the Ethics Commissioner stated that the justice minister can no longer perform some of her duties because of a conflict of interest. That is due to her husband lobbying the Liberals. Now we have the Site C dam decision, which places her in another conflict.

Is the Minister of Justice going to establish yet another ethical screen to deal with this conflict as well?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member does no service to members of the House, or anyone in public life, by making a series of false allegations. The Ethics Commissioner at no time has made reference to the Site C dam and any imagined conflict of interest that the member opposite is making up.

If the member had the courage of her convictions, she would step outside. There are a lot of cameras there today. She should feel free to make that same allegation outside.

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CANADIAN COAST GUARD

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last week the member for New Westminster—Burnaby and I visited the Comox marine communication centre, where staff shared their concerns about the pending closure. We are very worried too.

This month, the fisheries committee heard recorded evidence of the poor quality of the so-called new technology that the minister claims will replace life-saving search and rescue capacity.

Will the minister see reason, abandon the foolhardy Conservative plan, and commit to keeping the Comox MCTS station open?

Mr. Serge Cormier (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we welcome the study by the parliamentary committee. We will listen to the concerns being expressed.

Centres across Canada are equipped with radio communication technology that has been regularly tested and is safe. The Canadian Coast Guard analyzed the recording of the garbled message presented to the committee on March 10. This transmission reflects some of the earliest problems experienced in 2013 with the new communications software.

The new technology is working. When something is old, we need to change it. This is the right choice for the new centre.

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FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, recent events in Honduras are of grave concern.

Berta Cáceres and Nelson Garcia, two indigenous environmental and human rights activists, have been assassinated. As a result, the Dutch development bank and the Finnish investment fund suspended all activity in Honduras.

Will the government condemn these murders and call on the Honduran government to hold an independent international investigation?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, will my colleague permit me to reiterate what we have said?

We call on the government of Honduras to respect human rights, and in this specific case to do the right thing. It is completely unacceptable what has happened. Canada is there to protect the victims of this unacceptable gesture.

[Translation]

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the new political adviser to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Jocelyn Coulon, once said that NATO was amplifying the Russian threat to Ukraine and Europe simply because it wanted member states to increase their military budgets. He wrote, “They use any argument, even the stupidest, to advance their rearmament agenda.”

Does the minister agree with his political adviser that the Russian threat to Ukraine, among other countries, is not all that serious and is just a pretext for boosting NATO military budgets?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will leave my colleague to his interpretations, but the facts speak for themselves.

Canada just strengthened sanctions against Russia. We are doing so in solidarity with Ukraine and in concert with our allies. Instead of acting alone and being the only ones to use an empty chair tactic against Russia, we will engage with Russia in order to speak out on behalf of Ukraine and in favour of peace in the region.

[English]

Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

In light of the many and frequent jihadi attacks throughout Europe, including today in Brussels, does the minister agree with his senior policy and political adviser who said that the threat of ISIS is without a doubt, greatly exaggerated?

• (1455)

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today is certainly the day to say that the threat of terrorism is a terrible danger to humanity.

All human civilization should be all together to fight terrorism, and today the people of Canada are shoulder to shoulder with the people of Belgium.

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the adviser to the Minister of Foreign Affairs not only accused NATO of amplifying threats, which are already serious in Ukraine, but he also invited Israel to reach out to Iran, the same country that wants to destroy the only democratic state in the Middle East.

Oral Questions

Can the minister tell us if he advises his Israeli counterparts to unconditionally embrace a country that is threatening to destroy their nation?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, I will leave my colleagues to their twisted interpretations.

One thing is certain: Canada is a friend to Israel. It was not serving Israel in the least to completely cut off all ties to Iran and use the Italian embassy to engage with Iran. Such a policy made no sense, and we put an end to that nonsense. One thing that will never end is our support for Israel and our determination to impose sanctions when Iran steps out of line.

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SCIENCE

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Louis-Hébert, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, supporting science and research has to be one of the pillars of the government's strategy to grow the economy in a sustainable way and to ensure Canada's success in a knowledge-based economy.

Can the Minister of Science tell the House about the initiatives she is taking to promote research, more specifically with regard to Université Laval, which I am extremely privileged to have in my riding of Louis-Hébert?

Hon. Kirsty Duncan (Minister of Science, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada research chairs is one of the most effective programs for attracting and retaining the most accomplished and most promising researchers in the world.

[English]

Recently I announced 305 new and renewed Canada research chairs at over 50 post-secondary institutions across Canada, an investment totalling \$619 million, including \$28 million at Université Laval in my colleague's riding.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal orgy of spending continues. Canadians want to know how much it cost to fly, wine, and dine hundreds of the Prime Minister's friends at the Paris climate change conference. New information shows that the Liberal junket will cost taxpayers well over \$1 million.

Now the environment minister is refusing to divulge exactly who went to Paris with her. She gave us a list of 155 people, but no names attached.

Why the secrecy, and what is the minister hiding?

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in fact my hon. colleague should know who was there because I was glad that he was able to join me.

Oral Questions

I was very pleased by the effective role that Canada played, that we brought members opposite, that we brought indigenous leaders, that we brought youth, and that we brought environmental NGOs.

As the U.S. said, the Canadians in Paris were very effective.

* * *

[Translation]

CBC/RADIO-CANADA

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, under section 48 of the Broadcasting Act, CBC/Radio-Canada cannot sell a building valued at more than \$4 million without the approval of the governor in council. That means that CBC/Radio-Canada cannot sell the Radio-Canada tower in Montreal without cabinet's approval.

Will the minister step up and halt the fire sale of the Radio-Canada tower and ensure that real public consultations are held?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for the question.

First, I am very much aware of the socio-economic impact that CBC/Radio-Canada has in Montreal and the federal government's historical responsibility in the region. Again, I understand that CBC/Radio-Canada, which operates at arm's length, is assessing the different scenarios that are currently on the table.

As I have said many times in the House, I hope that CBC/Radio-Canada can work with the employees, the unions, Montreal's political players, as well as—

• (1500)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Brampton North.

* * *

[English]

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have consistently heard my constituents in Brampton North speaking of unacceptable wait times and processing of immigration cases, in particular out-of-country spousal reunification. Married individuals are sometimes waiting for up to two years to reunite and start their lives together. We also see situations of spousal applications where children have been born, and, still, the application remains pending.

Would the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship inform this House what he is doing to improve the situation for my constituents, and all Canadians?

Hon. John McCallum (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is true that over the last 10 years, these Conservatives starved my department of money and diverted resources from families, to the point where it takes an unacceptable two years for a husband and wife to be reunited.

We are putting more money in. We are learning from the Syrian experience to do things faster. And first and foremost, my objective is to clean up this big fat Conservative mess.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am going to try again. My question is for the Minister of Environment. I would remind her that had there not been a lone Conservative in Paris at the climate change conference, think of the billions of dollars more that would have been spent on the Prime Minister's foreign vanity projects. It now appears that mine is the only name that she has disclosed as being part of that delegation to Paris.

So, again, the question: Why is the minister now refusing to tell Canadians exactly how much this Liberal boondoggle—

The Speaker: Order, please.

The hon. Minister of Environment.

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again I would like to thank the member opposite for joining our delegation in Paris. It was actually a historic opportunity where we reached an ambitious agreement. Unlike the party opposite, which did not believe in working with all sorts of groups, we were there with indigenous leaders, with business, with environmental NGOs, and with members opposite. We worked very hard to get an ambitious agreement to tackle climate change, and I am happy that at least one person on the other side actually believes that climate change is real.

* * *

[Translation]

FORESTRY INDUSTRY

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the government will present its first budget in just a few minutes. Unfortunately, its signals to Quebec's forestry industry, such as when I asked the Minister of International Trade and the Minister of Foreign Affairs questions in the House, have been very disquieting.

I would like to remind the government that all the Quebec Forest Industry Council wants is to restore free trade with the United States. The organization's president and CEO, André Tremblay, sounded the alarm when he said that, "It's now or never. It's time to stand up for Quebec", because this is no more or less—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of International Trade.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her very long question, but I did hear it clearly.

*Points of Order***POINTS OF ORDER**

ORAL QUESTIONS

We have made it clear from the beginning that this issue is an absolute priority for our government and for me personally. I am pleased to announce that the Prime Minister and the President expressed their interest in a long-term softwood lumber agreement during our visit to Washington. Our objective remains maintaining stable access to the U.S. market for Canada's softwood lumber industry.

* * *

THE BUDGET

Mr. Simon Marcil (Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the federal budget has a direct impact on major sectors of Quebec's economy. The government has already said that there is nothing in the budget to help Aveos workers and Bombardier workers. The Liberals refuse to commit to providing any compensation for dairy and cheese producers for lost revenues associated with the Canada-EU trade agreement.

Since the workers in Quebec's economic sectors are being ignored once again in this budget, does this mean that nothing has changed and government MPs from Quebec still have very little influence on decisions made by the Canadian government?

• (1505)

Mr. François-Philippe Champagne (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question.

It is not true that we did not consult people. We consulted Canadians all over the country. I come from the Mauricie region, and I can assure this House that we consulted the people in Trois-Rivières. To say that we did not consult Quebecers about the upcoming budget is folly. We listened to all Canadians, because what we are trying to do is build an economy that works for all Canadians from coast to coast, and that is exactly what we will be presenting in a few minutes.

* * *

*[English]***PRESENCE IN GALLERY**

The Speaker: I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of the Honourable Chris Collins, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick,

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: I would also like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of the recipients of the 2016 Governor General's Awards in Visual and Media Arts: Edward Burtynsky, Marnie Fleming, Philip Hoffman, Jane Kidd, Wanda Koop, Suzy Lake, Mark Lewis, and William Vazan.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Speaker, as you know, it is customary in the House when a minister of the crown inadvertently misspeaks or misleads the House that there is an opportunity to correct the record.

Earlier today, the President of the Treasury Board, in response to a question from the leader of the third party, said that the government never interfered in provincial elections and provincial affairs. However, in the House, all of us, especially the member for Whitby, remember the Prime Minister's jet-set trip to Whitby, Oshawa to stand alongside the premier. Therefore, I would like to request unanimous consent to table the document outlining—

The Speaker: Order, please. It sounds like this is debate of course, but the member has asked for unanimous consent to table a document. Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Hon. Scott Brison (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I very much appreciate the question from the hon. member in response to the question from the NDP earlier today. I think the hon. member would agree with me that there is a difference between supporting of provincial candidates who share values and alleging—

The Speaker: Order, please. I think we are well into debate on both sides here. I am glad to see that the point of order that the member for Regina—Qu'Appelle wishes to raise is about the Standing Orders because it suggests that he actually has a real point of order, I hope. We will see.

Mr. Andrew Scheer: Mr. Speaker, it is a real point of order.

Pursuant to Standing Order 84(1), today is the day that has been designated for the motion that the House approve in general the budgetary policy of the government. In order to help frame the debate and help parliamentarians understand, I wonder if I can table the "Fiscal Monitor" that—

The Speaker: Order, please. I appreciate the hon. member's effort to tie that debate point to the Standing Orders, very much. I believe the official opposition House leader is asking for permission also to table a document. Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, if we are in the business of fabricating points of order, I could perhaps find one, but I do not think it is necessary.

• (1510)

The Speaker: I appreciate that.

*Government Orders***GOVERNMENT ORDERS***[English]***PUBLIC SERVICE LABOUR RELATIONS ACT**

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-7, an act to amend the Public Service Labour Relations Act, the Public Service Labour Relations and Employment Board Act and other Acts and to provide for certain other measures, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Speaker: Order, please. I encourage members to take their discussions behind the curtains. In fact, I encourage the whips to encourage their members to take their discussions behind the curtains.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate your assistance in trying to get the chamber a bit more organized and a little more quiet. It is surprising, because normally when I stand to speak, members opposite hang on every word. Therefore, it was a little disturbing to find out here were actually people in here who did not want to hear what I had to say.

When I concluded my remarks prior to question period, I was in the midst of telling all members about my history both with the RCMP and the union movement in Canada.

In particular, with the union movement, I mentioned that my father had been a senior member of the United Steelworkers of America. In fact, he was the western Canadian head of the United Steelworkers of America. He trained Ken Neumann, who is now the national director of the United Steelworkers of America. Therefore, I have an intimate knowledge of the union movement.

I recall my father taking me on many occasions to union meetings when I was extremely young. I was never quite sure why he did that. It was either (a) an obligation to his babysitting commitment to my mother, or (b) he was trying to groom me to become a labour representative or a union representative such as himself. I suppose, in retrospect, if it was (a), he succeeded admirably and if it was (b), he failed miserably. Nonetheless, I was able to observe many things from these meetings, these union gatherings that I went to.

One of the things that struck me then, and it certainly continues to strike me now, was the fact that in the vast majority of cases whenever there was a vote to be cast at a union meeting, whether it would be a local union or a larger gathering of several locals, the votes were always public. I could not understand that because it was obviously something I believed, even at a young age, should be done in private.

However, I also saw the opposite side of the coin. Back in the early 1960s, when my father tried to organize a potash mine in Esterhazy, Saskatchewan, he would go down there with sign-up cards and get a number of the workers in the potash mine to sign those cards indicating their preference to unionize. Then mysteriously many times those same members who signed the cards would no longer be employees of the potash mine. That was pure and simple intimidation.

I have seen intimidation on both sides of the ledger. I have seen union members try to intimidate or at least pressure some of their fellow co-workers into voting in a particular manner. I also know from first-hand experience that there has been pressure or intimidation from the management side to try to influence the vote of certain workers. Quite frankly, that is unacceptable. I think most Canadians would feel that it is as an affront to natural law, justice and absolute fairness in our country.

The way to get over that is to have secret ballots. If union members were able to vote freely according to their own beliefs in a secret ballot environment, intimidation would not play a part in this whole process. Management would be unable to successfully intimidate employees and union members would not be successful in their attempts to pressure or intimidate their co-workers. A secret ballot provides the assurance that each and every union member would be able to vote according to his or her conscience and beliefs.

For example, I have seen strike votes where unions get together in a public environment and have to vote in favour or against a strike by a show of hands. I have experienced first-hand some very serious pressure and intimidation. If union leadership wanted a strike to occur, many members who may not want to go on strike because they could not afford to take a reduced salary or no salary at all because they had mouths to feed at home were pressured into voting in favour of their union boss' belief that a strike was necessary. That is just as unacceptable as it would be if a management member tried to intimidate a union member or a non-union member into voting against certification.

• (1515)

Secret ballots are the absolute solution and remedy to intimidation factors and tactics, yet the government feels otherwise. For some reason, it feels that Bill C-525, which allowed for secret balloting in either union certification or decertification, should be eliminated, and that changes to the Canada Labour Code should be enacted to go back to the old system. I just cannot agree with that.

Although I believe that Bill C-7 is on balance a worthwhile piece of legislation containing many provisions that I agree with, the single provision that does not allow for secret balloting on union certification or decertification makes it impossible for me to support this particular piece of legislation.

One could present an argument that the system that had been in place for many years, whereby petitions could be circulated and cards could be signed, was appropriate, but that certainly has not proven to be the case in the majority of provinces across Canada. In fact, in the majority of provinces in Canada, provincial legislation deems that secret balloting must take place in determining either certification or decertification of a union, and it has worked well.

I could also share from personal experience conversations I have had with many rank-and-file union members, who have expressed the same concern that I am expressing here. That is the concern that their right to vote freely has been impugned because of the public nature of voting within many unions.

Government Orders

Let me simply say that while Bill C-7 contains many solid provisions that support the RCMP and allow its members to determine their own fate when it comes to unionizing and enjoying collective bargaining, and while many of those provisions we heard earlier in debate today protect them on many other fronts, the single fact that the government does not see fit to allow one of the most fundamental tenets in democracy, that being secret ballots, makes the bill absolutely unacceptable to me and, I am sure, to all my colleagues on the Conservative benches.

What is the solution? Frankly, we have heard many times before, particularly from the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, that committees should take a stronger and more active role in determining legislation in the House. That is a position that I quite frankly agree with and support, so we are simply asking that an amendment be considered at committee that would allow this legislation to include the provision of secret balloting before being presented to the House in its final form for third reading.

I do not know whether or not that is going to happen. I could assume that we will be able to move an amendment at committee and engage in debate, but I sense quite strongly that despite the nice words from the parliamentary secretary to the government House leader, their committee members will be whipped and instructed to vote against any amendment that the official opposition brings forward in relation to secret ballots.

Once again, I find it extremely difficult to stand in this place and completely understand how the government can defend that position. Every one of the members of this place was elected by secret ballot. The Speaker of this chamber was elected by a secret ballot. Why is that the case? Why is it the case that in almost every democracy in the world, secret ballots have been accepted as the norm?

The government seems to be swimming upstream. Why is it doing that? Quite frankly, Liberals made a number of commitments during the election campaign to try to gather support from the union movement in Canada. One of them was the commitment to repeal Bill C-377 on union transparency. Another was the commitment to repeal Bill C-525, which allowed for secret balloting in certification and decertification votes. I suppose on the one hand they are keeping their commitment to their election campaign platform, but it flies in the face of any democratic institution that we know of.

• (1520)

There is one other point I would like to make. It has been mentioned several times in today's debate, primarily by the member for Spadina—Fort York, that Bill C-7 does not disallow the RCMP from determining their own fate when it comes to a secret ballot. He says they are able to vote for certification or non-certification by secret ballot if they so choose. That is factually incorrect. Because of the provisions in Bill C-4, which would change the Canada Labour Code, the RCMP would not be able to choose a secret ballot even if the majority of their members wanted to.

I would point out to the member for Spadina—Fort York that what he is attempting to state in the House as fact is absolutely just the opposite. It is factually incorrect. Because of Bill C-4, the RCMP would not have the ability to vote for union certification, should they desire, in a secret ballot environment.

I would suggest to all members of this place that if one were to poll rank-and-file members of the RCMP and simply ask them if they would be in favour of a secret ballot process for certification, the overwhelming majority of non-union members would state yes, they want a secret ballot.

I have spoken with a great many RCMP members. I have spoken in the House of my close relationship with many members, both present and past. Almost to a person, when speaking about the certification process, these members say they would prefer to have a secret ballot.

I firmly believe that whenever the vote is taken, RCMP members will vote to unionize. I have that sense. However, they should be allowed to do so in a secret ballot environment. They should be allowed to cast their ballot knowing full well that no one else will know how they voted. That is something we hold dear in our country, yet the Liberals seem to be reversing the democratic will of the people by forcing public notification of union certification votes. That is unacceptable.

I can assure the House that on this side, unless an amendment is brought forward to reverse the secret balloting provisions and allow for secret ballots in union certification votes, members on the Conservative side will be voting against Bill C-7, and for good reason.

• (1525)

Ms. Joyce Murray (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have good news for the member for Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan. Under this legislation, Bill C-7, the Public Service Labour Relations and Employment Board will have both tools available—either a secret ballot or a card system—and it can apply the one it believes will give the fairest and most representative outcome.

I do not even want to say how many times the member has made allegations that are simply not true. This is available, and it will be a neutral board. There will not be employer interference or other interference. A neutral board of up to 12 members would determine which of the tools would be appropriate.

I want to ask the member this question. Bill C-525, which he was saying such nice things about, was brought forward by the Conservative government with no consultation, yet with evidence from their own research—which they hid—that suggested that bill was going to undermine labour relations and unions. That was on the one side.

On the other side we have Bill C-7, which would give a neutral board options for how to have the votes held so that they can do it in the interests of the RCMP members and there has been full consultation by RCMP members.

Which one is the more democratic? Which one gives the most freedom of choice of those two options?

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Madam Speaker, it is quite obvious. The most democratic way to approach this is by secret ballots.

Government Orders

Would the member opposite suggest that in her position as a member of Parliament, she be elected by a show of hands or the signing of a petition? I suggest not. Why, then, should union members be forced to avoid and abandon a secret ballot environment? Why should union members, and only union members, be forced into an anti-democratic position? That is exactly what this is.

Bill C-525 simply allowed union members to determine their own fate by a secret ballot. The most democratic way to approach any vote should be by secret ballot to avoid intimidation tactics.

I would point out to the member opposite that if she is talking about true democracy, the Liberals are going about it in exactly the wrong manner.

Mr. Erin Weir (Regina—Lewvan, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan for his kind words about RCMP Depot, which was in his former riding and is now in my riding. I share his sense of pride in representing this iconic Canadian institution.

I would also pay tribute to the member's remarks about his father's role in building the steelworkers union in Saskatchewan. I have inherited some books signed by his father, from my time with that great organization.

It seems that the member is arguing that, because the Conservatives do not like the certification process in the Canada Labour Code, members of the RCMP should be denied any access to collective bargaining. That is kind of like throwing out the baby with the bathwater.

If that actually is the Conservative position on this issue, I guess I would have to ask why the previous Conservative government did not extend collective bargaining rights to members of the RCMP when it had its preferred mode of certification in effect in the Canada Labour Code.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Madam Speaker, I thank my friend from Regina—Lewvan for his kind words about my father.

There is one point I will make to him, and I say this in all seriousness. I am not trying to be flippant or rude, but he should know, now that he represents it, that RCMP Depot is pronounced “deh-po”, not “dee-po”. If he speaks with any members of the RCMP, current or past—and we have members in this place—they will make that distinction very clearly. He would be insulting members of the RCMP if he went onto their grounds and spoke about the great work that dee-po does, because it is not dee-po; it is deh-po. That is point number one.

Second, I would just simply point out to my friend and colleague that we are not saying we are against collective bargaining whatsoever. We are just saying that whatever votes should be taken should be done in a secret environment. What is wrong with determining whether or not members want to be unionized by letting them vote in a secret environment?

Let us get rid of the intimidation. We can probably share stories, on both the management side and the union side, of intimidation and pressure tactics that have been used over the years. We are both very familiar with that. To avoid that is a simple solution: allow members

to determine their own fate by a secret ballot. That is all we are saying.

That is all Bill C-525 did. It was to amend the Canada Labour Code to allow members to determine their own fate for collective bargaining by a secret ballot. Absolutely nothing is wrong with that, in my view.

• (1530)

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am clearly not speaking enough, as it were.

It is amazing that here in the 21st century there are still some people who do not think we should have a secret ballot. We give secret ballots in every other situation. We, on this side of the House, would say that they should be available for working men and women as well.

The parliamentary secretary talked about having a choice of a secret ballot being left to an external panel. What about the guarantee of a secret ballot, a guarantee that every elector has in every other kind of election? Does the member not think that a worker should have not just the possibility of a secret ballot but a guarantee that a secret ballot will actually take place?

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Madam Speaker, I can assure my hon. colleague, who is new to this place, that he is having adequate time to speak, and I am sure over the intervening years we will become very familiar with his presentation skills.

I agree totally with my friend and colleague. It should be a right, not a privilege but a right, to be able to vote in a secret environment. For the life of me, I cannot understand how members in this place could take any other position.

I point out, again, the patently obvious: every single person in this place was elected by a secret ballot. Do they think it would be appropriate to go into a federal general election and stand in a crowded room and ask people to please stand up and be counted, letting people see exactly how they are going to vote? That is absolutely unthinkable.

Apparently, according to the government, in a union environment, that should be the norm. I could not agree with my friend and colleague more. Secret balloting should be a right, not a privilege, not an option.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, let us recognize why we have Bill C-7 here today. The Supreme Court of Canada made a decision, which in essence said that the RCMP, an institution we all hold very dear to our hearts, needed to be afforded the opportunity for a free collective bargaining process. As a result, we have legislation now that has been introduced by the Government of Canada in recognition of how important it is that we bring it about in a timely fashion.

I understand the passion with which the member talks with regard to Bill C-7, with respect to the secret ballots. I heard many of the very same arguments with regard to Bill C-4.

Government Orders

I would suggest to the member that he allow these pieces of legislation to go to committee—as Bill C-4 has done and, hopefully, Bill C-7 will do too, in a timely fashion—recognizing what we really want to do is to set the framework, something that RCMP officers from coast to coast to coast have been asking for: that is, the ability to have negotiations, free negotiations, which is something in which the Supreme Court has concurred.

I wonder if he could say something positive about the legislation, in terms of answering the call of the RCMP officers in responding to the Supreme Court of Canada.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Madam Speaker, as I said many times in my earlier remarks, we believe that the majority of provisions contained in Bill C-7 are good. In fact, I think if the member took the time to really do a lot of research, he would find out very quickly that some draft legislation that our previous Conservative government was planning on introducing, but we got caught up by time, was eerily similar to the provisions contained in Bill C-7, except for one major provision, which is that the government does not want to allow secret ballots; we would allow them.

• (1535)

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (London North Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am thankful for the opportunity to rise today in the House in support of Bill C-7. In my riding of London North Centre we have the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Ontario headquarters, as well as the RCMP London, Ontario, detachment. Combined, these two offices have approximately 165 regular members. Many of these individuals are my constituents, I am proud to say.

I am also very proud of the work these men and women do in keeping Canadians safe every single day. With that in mind, it is an honour to be part of this debate and take a stand on behalf of these men and women, the members and reservists of the RCMP.

The bill before us today would uphold the constitutionally guaranteed freedom of RCMP members and reservists to engage in meaningful collective bargaining. I emphasize that point. Collective bargaining is a right that other police officers in Canada have enjoyed for many years, but it is a right that has been denied to the members and reservists of the RCMP, individuals who over the last 143 years have contributed so much to our proud, strong, and free nation. This bill would rectify that issue.

This bill is a clear and reasoned response to the Supreme Court ruling of January 16, 2015. The court affirmed in that decision that subsection 2(d) of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, “protects a meaningful process of collective bargaining that provides employees with a degree of choice and independence sufficient to enable them to determine and pursue their collective interests”. The court also determined that, “the current labour relations regime denies RCMP members that choice, and imposes on them a scheme that does not permit them to identify and advance their workplace concerns free from management’s influence”.

It is, therefore, my pleasure to support this bill today, a bill that would provide RCMP members and reservists with freedom of choice and independence from management while still recognizing their unique operational reality. The bill in question is a product of careful consideration of the result of consultations with key stakeholders, the first with regular members of the RCMP and the

second with provinces, territories, and municipalities that have policing agreements with the RCMP.

Bill C-7 has a number of important features, and I will now go over those briefly.

It would provide for independent binding arbitration as the dispute resolution process for bargaining impasses. Consistent with other police forces across this country, the members of the RCMP bargaining unit would not be permitted to strike. This was the strong preference of those who participated in the online consultation.

The bill would also provide for a single national bargaining unit composed solely of RCMP members appointed to a rank and reservists; and the RCMP bargaining agent, should one be certified, would have as its primary mandate the representation of RCMP members. Again, regular members showed clear support for these provisions. The bill would also exclude officers appointed to the ranks of inspector and above from representation. Finally, the Public Service Labour Relations and Employment Board would be the administrative tribunal for collective bargaining matters related to the RCMP bargaining units, as well as grievances related to a collective agreement.

The bill before us today is consistent with our government's efforts to restore fair and balanced labour laws in this country. Take, for instance, Bill C-5, which would repeal division 20 of Bill C-59, the 2015 budget implementation bill, tabled last April by the previous government. It gave the government the authority to unilaterally override the collective bargaining process and impose a new sick leave system onto the public service.

The Public Service Labour Relations Act was originally passed in 1967 to give public servants the right to unionize and bargain collectively. It is fundamental to ensuring collaborative efforts between the parties and to improving the ability of the public service to serve and protect the public interest.

I have many public service employees in my riding of London North Centre. In fact, I had the privilege of meeting with some of their leadership last week and they made their voices heard.

• (1540)

The actions of the previous government, to unilaterally impose a new sick leave system while ignoring the collective bargaining process, were unfortunate and disrespectful. Our government made it clear that we would not be party to an approach that disregards the process of negotiation between an employer and a group of employees aimed at reaching agreements on the terms and conditions of employment. By repealing those provisions in Bill C-59, we are demonstrating our respect for the collective bargaining process.

Government Orders

We believe in collective bargaining, and the bill before us today honours our belief in this right. We also believe in fair and balanced labour relations, yet over the last few years, many fundamental labour rights have been rolled back. We can just look at Bill C-377 and Bill C-525, which would both have changed how unions could be certified and decertified, and would place new financial reporting requirements on them.

These bills were passed without the traditional employer, union, and government consultation process used for labour relations law reform. The result has been that it is now more difficult for unions and the employer to bargain collectively in good faith. We need, instead, to ensure that workers can organize freely, bargain collectively in good faith, and work in safe environments. To that end, the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour has also introduced legislation to repeal Bill C-377 and Bill C-525.

Bill C-4 would restore the procedures for the certification and the revocation of certification of bargaining agents that existed prior to June 16, 2015. This bill would also amend the Income Tax Act to remove the unnecessary requirements on labour organizations and labour trusts for the public reporting of financial information.

As hon. members are well aware, legislation is already in place to ensure that unions make such financial information available. Section 110 of the Canada Labour Code, for instance, requires unions to provide financial statements to their members upon request and free of charge, rendering these additional reporting requirements unnecessary. The bill before us today is very much in keeping with our belief in fair and balanced labour relations.

Engaging in collective bargaining is a right long exercised by all other police forces in Canada. The bill would respect that right while recognizing the particular circumstances of the RCMP as a national police force. It is time for us to give RCMP members and reservists the respect they are due.

I again would like to thank those members and reservists of the RCMP for their dedicated service to our country. I am proud to have such a strong RCMP presence in my riding of London North Centre, and I commend RCMP members for going to work each and every day with the safety of all Canadians and all Londoners at the forefront of their minds.

To that end, I ask all members to show their support for members and reservists of the RCMP by voting in favour of this bill.

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Madam Speaker, certainly there are many things in the bill, particularly support for the RCMP and recognizing inherent rights, which I think are important parts of this discussion. However, I want to raise a question and a concern.

I have heard from mayors, both large- and small-city mayors in my riding, who are concerned about the taxpayers' ability to pay for emergency programming. This is usually in relation to fire departments and whatnot, because the collective bargaining process often recognizes that these are very dangerous roles, and often gives them increases that are more than the rate of inflation. I would like to hear what the member's thoughts are, because British Columbia is one of the provinces that actually contracts from the RCMP directly.

One of the things I am concerned about, and these mayors have raised, is that if the emergency service budgets continue to rise in places like British Columbia, what that will do to rural policing, and what that will do to the RCMP in provinces like British Columbia.

Again, I have no answers. I am simply asking for the member's thoughts.

• (1545)

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Madam Speaker, the Liberal Party has a record throughout its history of fiscal responsibility.

As for the concerns about the ability to pay and the ability of this government to take into account costs that the hon. member raised, I point to the fact that under the Liberal Party, Canada has prospered in great ways in terms of financial management.

As far as collective bargaining goes, we have to pay attention to it. It is a fundamental issue in any democracy. We will continue to consult throughout this process with stakeholders throughout this country, whether municipalities, provinces, and certainly the RCMP.

This is a party that believes in consultation and that respected consultation when it came to this particular legislation.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is encouraging to see that the new Liberal government is supporting collective bargaining. What is unfortunate is that it is not supporting true collective bargaining. The government is not extending the usual rights in this legislation, which is the inclusion of collective bargaining on harassment, staffing, and discipline.

It is clear that the Mounted Police Professional Association of Canada specifically requested that at the bargaining table they be able to deal with disciplinary measures and the allocation of resources.

Could the member speak to why the government is reducing the actual rights of collective bargaining to RCMP members? Could the member tell us what issues on harassment have to do with security?

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Madam Speaker, the primary intent of the bill is to respond to the Supreme Court of Canada's decision of 2015. That is what the bill is about. We have recognized the importance of the Supreme Court decision, and we are acting in that regard. When the Supreme Court of Canada speaks, the House has a duty to listen. That is what the bill intends to achieve.

Ms. Joyce Murray (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the comments by the member for London North Centre about respecting the work of the RCMP, and about respecting its unique and particular circumstances as Canada's national police force. The member also talked about fair labour relations and the respectful process and content of this legislation.

Government Orders

Given that my colleague has an RCMP headquarters and a detachment in his riding, could he speak a bit more about the individual women and men of the RCMP and why they are deserving of the respect of the House through this legislation?

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Madam Speaker, public safety has to be at the very core of what any government promotes, and respecting the RCMP speaks to that. Having the ability to stand up and recognize officers who every day put their lives on the line for our safety is a moment of pride for everyone in the House.

The hon. member asked about my experience and my feelings with respect to the Ontario division of the RCMP being headquartered in my riding. It brings me incredible pride. I know many of the members. I have had the opportunity to chat with them about issues relating to the matters we are discussing in the House today. They are looking forward to changes that respect and reflect what the Supreme Court of Canada has asked us to do, and that is what we are doing here today.

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have a point of clarity. Earlier the member opposite failed to answer the question from the hon. member for Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola. I asked the same question earlier. This is neither a comment for or against the unionization of the RCMP, or a comment for or against the Liberals' ability to balance budgets.

In going forward, has the government considered the financial ramifications that this will have on municipalities from coast to coast, or in the eight provinces? Whether in this budget or future budgets, has that been taken into account?

• (1550)

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Madam Speaker, I find it rather puzzling that Conservative members opposite would raise sympathetic concerns now about municipalities. Under the previous government, we had a decade of federal-provincial-municipal relations that left a lot to be desired. Considering it is budget day, I will be positive.

Going forward, consultation will be at the core of what we do as a government. We take that seriously. Of course, we care about the plight of municipalities, provinces, and the RCMP in that process.

Mr. Anthony Housefather (Mount Royal, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I congratulate my colleague from London North Centre for his excellent speech.

I also want to salute the RCMP. All of us on this side of the House, and throughout the House, care about the men and women in the RCMP. Whatever our perspectives are on this law and the flaws or merits to it, we all agree that the RCMP does a great job.

I ask the hon. member to talk to us a little bit, philosophically, about the importance of collective bargaining and why it is important to bring the right of collective bargaining to the RCMP in response to the Supreme Court judgment.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Madam Speaker, collective bargaining is at the core of any democracy. Any democracy will be reflective of particular interests and concerns. These are interests and concerns that often divert. Therefore, if we do not respect the collective bargaining process in any labour relations realm, then we are not living up to that recognition, the recognition that diverging interests, when not taken into account, can lead us astray as a society.

We have to get back to a path of respecting the fact that we all have a particular stake in this society, that we need to be on the same page, and that we can move toward that through collective bargaining.

It is an enshrined principle in any democracy, and I am glad that this government is taking its cue from the Supreme Court of Canada in proposing this particular legislation.

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Madam Speaker, I certainly appreciate what the member has said about making sure that everyone is onside and supportive.

Before I get to my question, I want to make a comment on something the member said earlier about the previous government not respecting municipalities, not caring for them. When the Liberals were in power for 13 long years, they only provided \$1.5 billion to British Columbia in infrastructure funding. In eight of the almost ten years that we were in power, we gave British Columbia \$4.5 billion, tripling what the previous government had done in less time.

The question I ask is, has this member respected municipalities by asking stakeholders, like municipalities, on their opinion of the bill?

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Madam Speaker, consultation is ongoing. As far as the record of the previous government goes, I have a number: \$150 billion in debt. I rest my point on that.

Ms. Sheri Benson (Saskatoon West, NDP): Madam Speaker, I will be splitting my time.

As the labour critic for the New Democratic Party, it is my pleasure to rise in support of Bill C-7. However, as the labour critic, it is also my duty to rise to point out important aspects of the bill that I see are missing and need to be addressed.

Like many opportunities I have had to stand and speak to labour bills, I commend the Liberal government for moving forward, but I would ask it to move forward a bit faster, sooner, and to address issues that are missing.

The RCMP members have been prohibited from collective bargaining since 1918, and to this day remain the only police force in Canada without the benefit of a collective agreement to regulate and protect their working conditions. As we have heard in the House, 2016 is a good year for many things, and it is a good day for collective bargaining and the rights of working men and women in this country.

For our police officers working in the RCMP, the wait is finally over. Unfortunately, this group of police officers had to fight all the way to the Supreme Court to get this right, a right that their fellow officers and working men and women have had for a very long time. Like many victories, it is bittersweet, but it is a victory for these working men and women all the same.

The Budget

In January 2015, a Supreme Court ruling found that the government had failed to establish permission for meaningful collective bargaining for the RCMP members that would not disrupt the stability of the police force or affect the public perceptions of its neutrality. Therefore in its ruling, it declared that the prohibition of collective bargaining for the RCMP members to be in violation of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and gave the previous government one year to modify the legislation. I feel that the previous government showed its disrespect for these workers and this decision by not moving on this, leaving little time after the election to respond. Now we find that the Liberals are looking to push the bill through before the May 16 deadline.

The Supreme Court said that the limits on collective bargaining should be acceptable, if it could be shown that those limits are reasonable, demonstrably justified, and necessary to achieve the goal of maintaining an independent and objective police force.

This, of course, brings us to today and Bill C-7, and to my point about what is missing in the bill for working men and women in the RCMP. We have heard from others who have risen to speak and support the bill, but also from my colleagues on this side of the House, of our need to point out the important things that we feel are missing from Bill C-7 and need to be addressed.

They include a number of issues that most working men and women include in their collective bargaining, have a right to be involved in, and have as rights within their workplace. We feel that the most important exclusions are issues around staffing, deployment, unfortunately harassment, and discipline. These issues have the largest impact on the health and safety of RCMP members and are central to most of the public complaints that RCMP members have made about their workplace.

It would not come as a surprise that people would know that as the labour critic and a member of the New Democratic Party, we support and have supported the collective bargaining of the RCMP members. We have always recognized workers' rights to meaningful collective bargaining, and that those issues extend beyond the issues of pay and benefits alone. Good collective bargaining and good collective agreements also include a discussion and decisions with the employer and the employees on important issues around workplace safety and health issues. These can sometimes be as important, if not more important, to employees in bargaining.

As we know from the RCMP members, and from what we know about what is going on within the police force, these are some of the most pressing issues for these particular workers. They are very much linked to their working conditions around deployment, harassment, and discipline.

• (1555)

Instituting a collective bargaining system—

The Speaker: Order, please. I think we should suspend as we are getting ready for the budget speech.

The member will have five minutes remaining in her speech when we renew.

The hon. member for Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte has a point of order?

Mr. Alexander Nuttall (Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as you know, the Conservatives left a very generous surplus, which is going to be turned into a deficit today. Pursuant to Standing Order 32, I would like to set the context and table, in both official languages, the November “Fiscal Monitor” from the Department of Finance, and ask for unanimous consent.

• (1600)

The Speaker: Does the member have unanimous consent to table the document?

Some hon. members: No.

The Speaker: It would appear there is no unanimous consent.

SITTING SUSPENDED

The Speaker: The House will suspend for a few moments.

(The sitting of the House was suspended at 4 p.m.)

• (1605)

SITTING RESUMED

The Speaker: I would remind those in the galleries that they are not permitted to make a noise or applaud in the House.

Order. The House will now proceed to the consideration of Ways and Means Proceedings No. 2 concerning the budget presentation.

(The House resumed at 4:05 p.m.)

* * *

[*Translation*]

THE BUDGET

FINANCIAL STATEMENT OF MINISTER OF FINANCE

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.) moved:

That this House approve in general the budgetary policy of the government.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I rise before this House today to table budget documents for 2016, including notices of ways and means motions.

[*English*]

The details of the measures are contained in these documents. I am asking that an order of the day be designated for consideration of these motions. I also wish to announce that the government will introduce legislation to implement the measures in the budget.

I would like to start by acknowledging the tragedy in Brussels today, and say that our hearts and our minds go out to the families in Belgium who are experiencing such a difficult time.

Today, we begin to restore hope for the middle class. Today, we begin to revitalize the economy. Today, we begin a long-term plan that will use smart investments and an unwavering belief that progress is possible to ensure that Canada's best days lie ahead.

The Budget

I know that this can be done. Canadians have done it before. After the dark days of the Great Depression and the Second World War, Canadians believed that the future could be brighter. They believed that if they worked hard and saved, they could get ahead. They could buy a car and a house. They could send their children to college or university. They could look forward to a decent retirement. They could hope that their children would do even better than they did.

Confidence inspired investment. Investment inspired confidence.

In the post-war years, Canadians built the St. Lawrence Seaway and the Trans-Canada Highway. They constructed new airports, subways, pipelines, and communication networks. They created new colleges and universities, and parents sent their children to those institutions in record numbers.

These investments made the workforce skilled and educated. They connected communities. They improved access to markets. They made the flow of people, goods, and services faster and cheaper. The economy grew rapidly. Canadians prospered. Hope and hard work were rewarded.

Well, Canadians are not so optimistic today, and that is understandable. The decline in the price of oil and other commodities has hurt whole regions and provinces. Economic growth has slowed. The average family's wages have not grown since the 1970s.

I want members to imagine an ordinary middle-class Canadian family, with two parents and two kids in university. The parents have been working for 25 years, but only the bills are growing. There is nothing left at the end of the month. They do not know if they will ever be able to afford a decent retirement.

It is no surprise that many Canadians feel they are worse off than their parents were at the same age, and that they feel the next generation will do even worse than their own.

A fundamental change must happen. Canadians need to believe that hope and hard work will be rewarded again. To make that change, we first have to see good reasons to be confident about our future.

•(1610)

[*Translation*]

The global economy is evolving rapidly. Digital technology has already transformed how we live and work. These changes will accelerate. For example, clean technologies are improving at an astonishing rate thanks to a torrent of investment and ideas. Markets in Asia present significant business opportunities.

Canada can be a leader in this new environment. Our people are highly educated and skilled. The diversity of our population connects us globally and is a wellspring of innovation. We are at the forefront of scientific research. There will always be those who claim that we should fear change. The reality is that we stand before a historic opportunity to shape and lead this change.

[*English*]

However, to shape the future, we must invest in the future. We must do for our children and our grandchildren what our parents and our grandparents did for us. Fortunately, circumstances for

investment are ideal. Wise management of the nation's finances back in the 1990s restored Canada's fiscal health, giving us a debt-to-GDP ratio today that is by far the lowest of any G7 country. At the same time, our interest rates have never been lower, so we can borrow on excellent terms, as governments are being urged to do by everyone from the OECD to the IMF to the G20. Our plan is reasonable and affordable. By the end of our first mandate, Canada's debt-to-GDP ratio will be lower than it is today. The government will make the investments needed to boost the economy over the long term.

We know that balancing kids, careers, and personal goals is not easy. People work hard. They expect that their government and their economy will work hard for them in return. This budget puts people first and delivers the help Canadians need right now. However, it is about much more than this moment. It is an essential step in a sustained, strategic effort to restore prosperity and optimism. The fate of the middle class and the fate of the country as a whole are one. Canada will not prosper if the middle class does not prosper.

In the short term, the collapse of the price of oil and other commodities has strained families and communities in many provinces. To ease the burden, the government is extending employment insurance benefits in affected regions, including parts of Alberta, Saskatchewan, northern Ontario, and Newfoundland and Labrador.

However, the government must do more for families than merely help them through challenging times. That is why earlier this year the government cut taxes for middle-class Canadians everywhere. Since January 1, nine million people have seen more money in their paycheques than they have ever received before. To help pay for this middle-class tax cut, we raised taxes on the top 1%. It is only fair to ask those who can afford it to pay a little more so that we can help those who need it, and to strengthen the economy for everyone.

However, more needs to be done, and with this budget we will do more—much more. I am proud to announce the introduction of the new Canada child benefit. This is a plan to help families more than any other public policy since universal health care.

•(1615)

[*Translation*]

I am proud to announce the introduction of the new Canada child benefit, a plan to help families more than any other social program since universal health care.

*The Budget**[English]*

Families with children under 18 will receive the benefit starting in July. The size of each cheque will depend on the family, but nine out of ten families will get more help than they do under existing programs.

A single mom with one child under the age of six and earning \$30,000 a year will receive an annual benefit of \$6,400 tax-free per year.

A family with two children earning \$90,000 will receive \$5,650 annually, an increase of \$2,500 from the current system.

That is money in the pockets of mom and dad, money that can go directly to eating healthier food, paying the rent or buying the clothes for going back to school.

[Translation]

It will lift hundreds of thousands of kids up from poverty.

[English]

Our country has a long and proud history of big, bold and transformative public policies, programs like universal health care, old age security, and the Canada pension plan. Now we proudly add the new Canada child benefit to that honourable list.

As important as government help is, what the middle class in Canada now needs most is strong economic growth. That is why the government will make new investments into infrastructure from coast to coast to coast.

We all benefit when infrastructure is improved. New roads and bridges allow us to get around faster. Waste treatment plants, sewers and water mains keep water clean. Broadband connects us digitally. Social housing delivers affordable housing and affordable homes.

These benefits are obvious, but people do not always realize that infrastructure is vital to strengthening the economy and growing the middle class.

Consider something as simple as traffic jams. Everyone knows they are annoying, but they also slow the movement of people, goods and services. They actually hurt the economy. That is why an investment in mass transit does much more than make life more pleasant; it boosts the economy and helps the environment, not just for today but for years and decades into the future.

Studies consistently show that when there is slack in the economy and interest rates are low, for every dollar a government spends on infrastructure, substantially more than one dollar of economic activity is generated. These are good investments. Some are urgently needed and require the government to act quickly. However, in every case, investments will be made with a focus on long-term value so Canadians will reap the benefits far into the future.

To help families and communities struggling right now, the first phase of our infrastructure plan invests \$11.9 billion over five years to modernize and rehabilitate public transit, water and waste water systems, provide affordable housing, and to protect infrastructure systems from the effects of climate change.

We are also investing \$3.4 billion over five years to help maintain and upgrade national parks, harbours, federal airports, border infrastructure, and support the cleanup of federal contaminated sites across the country.

Over the course of the next decade, we will invest more than \$120 billion in infrastructure. These investments will accelerate our transition to a low-carbon clean growth economy, make traffic flow more smoothly, bring high-speed Internet to more rural communities, and deliver so many other benefits for Canadians.

It means a father will make it to his daughter's soccer game on time. It means a small business owner in rural Manitoba will get his or her website up and going, and our communities will be better places to live. Most of all, they will deliver a long-term boost to the Canadian economy.

We know the global economy is going through an extraordinary time of change. One thing, however, will never change: the people, companies and countries who create the next economy will prosper. Canadians can be those people, create those companies and build that country. To get there, we need to invest in innovation.

Within the next year, the government will put forward a new innovation agenda which will outline a new vision for Canada's economy as a centre for global innovation, renowned for its science, technology, resourceful citizens, and globally competitive companies.

● (1620)

Underpinning the innovation agenda will be our plan for real change, but we are not waiting to move ahead. Today I am announcing several new, important measures that will boost our capacity to innovate and to grow our economy.

We start with post-secondary education.

[Translation]

Parents understand that their children's future depends on the education and skills they get and that post-secondary education has become an important factor in our children's future success. However, every parent knows that post-secondary education is becoming increasingly expensive. The government must do its part to make post-secondary education more accessible.

[English]

We will increase Canada student grants by 50%, from \$2,000 to \$3,000 per year for students from low-income families and from \$800 to \$1,200 per year for students from middle-income families.

From across the country, 250,000 students from low-income families, 100,000 students from middle-income families, and 16,000 part-time students will get more help each and every year as a result of these measures, and that matters. It can be the difference between getting a degree and dropping out, and that can change a life.

The Budget

[Translation]

To help these students gain experience, we will create up to 35,000 additional jobs for young Canadians in each of the next three years under the Canada summer jobs program.

Through the youth employment strategy, we will make new investments to create clean jobs. We will also strengthen co-op and job opportunities for young people after graduation.

[English]

Canada's universities, colleges, and research institutions attract the best and the brightest from around the world to create both hubs of discovery and innovation, hubs that help companies to grow and to compete in the new economy.

To support these centres of excellence, our government will provide the highest annual funding increase in over a decade for discovery research through Canada's granting councils—an additional \$95 million per year.

I am also very proud to announce that we will invest \$2 billion over three years for a new post-secondary institution strategic investment fund to modernize on-campus research, commercialization, and training facilities.

This fund is an example of an immediate investment that can make a real difference now while preparing for future success. Colleges and universities will be able to modernize research labs, retrofit buildings used for advanced training, and expand on-campus incubators that support start-ups as they grow their businesses. It will create cleaner and more modern campuses today and more economic opportunity for tomorrow.

These investments all reflect our core belief that the advancement of basic science and the development of intellectual capacity is the foundation for innovation.

Science, innovation, and insight tend to develop in clusters. The most famous of these clusters is in Silicon Valley.

Everyone knows Silicon Valley is the world's capital of digital technology, but I will tell hon. members that everyone in Silicon Valley knows that Canada's own Waterloo region is home to some of the most brilliant and innovative minds and companies in the world.

This is a model that Canada can and must build on. We believe that businesses, post-secondary institutions, governments, and other stakeholders can work together to accelerate economic growth. We will invest \$800 million over four years to support innovation networks and clusters designed to increase collaboration and create value through innovation.

●(1625)

We need to connect people and their ideas. These clusters are where innovation will happen, innovation that will ensure that Canada is at the forefront of technological advancement in the 21st century.

[Translation]

Innovation and economic growth are not only good in themselves. They are essential in our struggle against global climate change.

Thanks to the efforts of the Prime Minister and the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Canada is once again a champion of sustainable economic growth and the transition to a low-carbon economy.

Our government is determined to work together with our provincial and territorial partners on a new Canadian framework on sustainable growth and climate change, which will include carbon pricing.

[English]

Some believe we must choose between a strong economy and a clean environment. Well, they are simply wrong. We are at a turning point in world history, with the International Energy Agency reporting that the global economy has grown while global carbon emissions have not. The IEA credits the widespread adoption of clean energy. This is just a glimpse of the future, a future we want Canada to lead.

I want members to think about what is coming. Wherever the sun shines and the wind blows, farmers and landowners can become energy producers, particularly for rural regions hurt by falling commodity prices. The opportunities for economic diversification are enormous.

[Translation]

Forestry and agri-food are good examples of sectors where the government can help to facilitate the shift toward a cleaner economy, and ensure good jobs in rural areas.

We will invest in clean technology projects that will have a direct impact on climate change and air, water, and soil quality, and we will support the provinces and territories in their efforts to significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

[English]

We are expanding eligibility for accelerated capital cost allowances in two important emerging areas: power for electric vehicles and electricity storage. We will also launch regional discussions to identify the most promising electricity infrastructure projects to reduce greenhouse gases.

As announced by the Prime Minister at the first ministers meeting in Vancouver, the government will create a new \$2 billion low-carbon economy fund.

However, our concern for the environment is not limited to fighting climate change. Our government is investing to expand protected areas, develop new national parks, and fund ocean and freshwater science.

We are all blessed to live in a country of unique and spectacular natural beauty. The trails we hike, the mountains we climb, the beaches we swim and, yes, as the Prime Minister knows, the rivers we paddle, give Canadians a special connection to the natural world, and a special responsibility to steward nature's many gifts.

The Budget

Our national parks are the most beautiful places on this planet, from Cape Breton to Gwaii Haanas, from Kluane to Point Pelee. We will invest in them as our gift to ourselves and the world on the occasion of Canada's 150th anniversary in 2017. Together we will share these national treasures with a whole new generation of children and capture the spirit of the great Canadian road trip.

● (1630)

[*Translation*]

Believing in innovation is also believing in the talent and in the creativity of Canadians. We must do more to support our artists and the cultural community in Quebec and across the country. Our cultural industries represent a key sector of our economy.

Culture is synonymous with creation. It also creates a collective wealth that goes beyond economic benefits and statistics.

CBC/Radio-Canada is a vital national institution that brings Canadians together and promotes our two official languages, while supporting creation and culture.

Today, I am announcing that our government will invest \$675 million over five years to modernize and revitalize CBC/Radio-Canada in the digital era. I am also proud to announce that our government will invest a total of \$1.9 billion over five years in the arts and culture sector. These targeted investments will be provided to, among others, the Canada Council for the Arts, Telefilm Canada, the National Film Board, and unique programs that will allow our artists once again to shine on the international stage.

[*English*]

Good policy is impossible without good data. If we are to lift children out of poverty, we must first understand the cause. If we are to provide quality health care for seniors, we must know how many seniors there are and what services they need. If we want to protect minority languages, we need to know where they are spoken. Literally nothing that governments do can be done well without good data. That is why, led by my colleague the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, our government wasted no time in bringing back the long-form census.

We are going to do more. Too often, when we ask for the evidence needed to make informed decisions, we find that it just does not exist. For example, we know that many Canadians, especially British Columbians, are concerned about the effect of foreign ownership on the housing market. Unfortunately, the problem is not well understood. More information is needed. To fill this data gap and so many others like it, we will support Statistics Canada, so that it can improve our understanding of important problems and help us to make better decisions.

However, growing our economy is not enough if that growth is not shared by the middle class and those working hard to join it. Inequality is on the rise. To thrive, the middle class must be diverse. It has to represent us all: seniors, people living with disabilities, new Canadians, LGBTQ, rural Canadians, urban Canadians. All must benefit from the growth we create together. We are working on that.

Canadians overwhelmingly treasure Canada's publicly funded universal health care system. Parents do not fear that treating a sick child will bankrupt them, and seniors know that they will not be

turned away at the hospital. This is a source of national pride. It reflects our values, our generous nature, and our commitment to helping each other in times of need. It also provides economic security and boosts productivity. As an immediate step, the government will make new investments to support a healthier Canada, further supporting the work of Canada Health Infoway and the Canadian Foundation for Healthcare Improvement to identify and introduce innovations in the health care system.

As our population ages, more of us will depend on our health care system and on timely access to quality care, regardless of where we live or our ability to pay. Protecting the integrity of our health care system is of utmost importance to our government. We know that innovation, collaboration, and partnerships are a critical part of the solution. As part of the boost in new annual funding for discovery research, we will provide an additional \$30 million per year to the Canadian Institutes of Health Research.

● (1635)

The Minister of Health is actively engaged in discussions with territorial and provincial ministers of health, health sector stakeholders, and Canadians on how best to invest in our system for long-term benefit. Home care and a patient-centred approach are part of these discussions, and our government is committed to providing the federal leadership needed in health care for the benefit of all Canadians.

[*Translation*]

An integral part of the middle class dream is a secure and dignified retirement. For too many Canadians, it has become impossible to save enough before reaching retirement age.

Too many seniors live in poverty, and this is particularly true for single seniors.

[*English*]

We will help the most vulnerable seniors by increasing the guaranteed income supplement for single seniors by up to \$947 annually. This enhancement more than doubles the current maximum top-up and represents a 10% increase in maximum benefits that will improve the financial security of about 900,000 single seniors across Canada.

To help more Canadians achieve a secure retirement, I am personally committed to reaching an agreement with my provincial and territorial counterparts before the end of the year to enhance the Canada pension plan.

The Budget

Our veterans have dedicated their lives to the defence of their country. They deserve our gratitude, our respect, and our support. We made a solemn promise that they will have it. We intend on keeping that promise. We will increase the disability award for illnesses or injuries resulting from military service, and align it with other new veterans charter benefits by indexing it to inflation.

We will expand access to higher grades of the permanent impairment allowance to better support veterans who have had their career options limited by a service-related illness or injury.

We will increase the earnings loss benefit to provide income replacement of 90% of pre-release salary for injured veterans, and index this benefit so that it keeps pace with inflation.

Canada's veterans have also earned access to more in-person government services right in their communities. With this budget, we are providing additional funding to Veterans Affairs Canada so that it can reopen service offices recently shuttered in Charlottetown, Sydney, Corner Brook, Windsor, Thunder Bay, Saskatoon, Brandon, Prince George, and Kelowna. We are also planning to open a new office in Surrey, B.C., and to expand our outreach in northern Canada.

To help veterans in their rehabilitation process, we will enhance front-line services by hiring additional case managers to reduce the client-to-case manager ratio to no more than 25:1.

I am also proud to announce today that we will increase the funding of Status of Women Canada to increase the agency's capacity to support gender-based analysis across the federal government and expand their regional presence to support local organizations working on women's issues and gender equality.

I recently appointed the government's advisory council on economic growth that will advise us as we build a long-term growth strategy for the country, and I am proud of the fact that the majority of the experienced business and economic leaders that we appointed were women.

• (1640)

[*Translation*]

To meet the continuing and growing demand for affordable housing across the country, I am proud to announce that the government will double the amount that it provides to the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation's affordable housing initiative.

Thousands of families will benefit from the measures contained in this budget to support affordable housing.

Our government will also invest an additional \$112 million over the next two years in the homelessness partnering strategy to help the various segments of the population that are directly affected.

[*English*]

Over the next two years, we will fund and support the construction or renovation of over 3,000 shelter spaces or transition homes for victims of violence. This is the largest single investment in support of victims of violence in our country's history.

We simply cannot claim to be successful as a country as long as indigenous peoples are not given every chance to succeed. In

economic terms, the arguments are irrefutable. With an aging population, the Canadian economy needs more workers. The indigenous population is young and growing. It could help, but that cannot happen until first nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples have a path to prosperity, and that means investments.

I have met with indigenous leaders and community members on several occasions, including during pre-budget consultations in Winnipeg. I commit to maintaining this relationship throughout my tenure as finance minister.

I am so honoured, on behalf of the government, to announce historic investments of \$8.4 billion over the next five years to ensure indigenous peoples share in Canada's prosperity. This is in keeping with the spirit of the Kelowna accord, concluded in 2005 thanks to the inspired leadership of former Prime Minister Paul Martin.

Over half of that money will be invested in education. We will build schools. We will hire teachers. We will ensure that indigenous children get the education they need and deserve.

Housing is also an urgent need. The government will invest nearly \$555 million over two years in housing. So is health care. The government will invest to repair and build nursing stations and residences for health care workers in indigenous communities.

Finally, we will put an end to the unconscionable crisis of boil water advisories on reserves. Our government will invest nearly \$2 billion in water and waste water infrastructure and drinking water monitoring over five years so every Canadian child has access to clean drinking water, no matter where he or she lives in our country.

Last November, the government committed \$678 million over six years, starting in 2015-16, to resettle 25,000 Syrian refugees by February 29, 2016. Today we are committing new funding to resettle an additional 10,000 government-assisted Syrian refugees over the course of 2016.

This is an issue that is very close to me personally, having been involved in efforts to provide education and opportunity to Somali and South Sudanese girls in the Kakuma Refugee Camp over the past decade. I have been moved by the warmth, caring, and resilience of people who have given up so much to flee conflict in search of a better life for themselves and their families.

The Budget

•(1645)

This fall, I was doubly moved, as we all were, by the outpouring of support and the welcome that Canada reserved for Syrian refugees. I believe that the world saw the best of Canada in our response to this crisis, and I thank the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship for his leadership.

We know that newcomers are vital to the Canadian economy, and so our government will welcome 300,000 new permanent residents in 2016.

We believe that families belong together. Family reunification contributes to the well-being of all Canadians by contributing to our collective wealth, in both socio-cultural and economic terms.

By stepping up our efforts in this area, we anticipate 20,000 admissions under the parent and grandparent program, bringing celebration and hope for thousands of Canadians who for too long have been living apart from their loved ones.

The government is steadfast in its commitment to providing greater security for Canadians. Led by the Minister of National Defence, we will conduct an open and transparent process to create a new defence strategy that will deliver a modern, more agile, and better-equipped military.

Over the course of 2016, we will seek the input of Canadians, experts, allies, and partners, as well as Parliament, on a new defence strategy.

The government is committed to renewing the major equipment of the Canadian Armed Forces, including Canada's aging fleets of CF-18 fighter aircraft and maritime warships.

To ensure that funding is available when key capital acquisitions will be made, we will reallocate funding for large-scale capital projects from the 2015-16 to 2020-21 period into future years, so money is available when it is needed. This funding is being shifted to align with the timing of major equipment acquisitions.

[*Translation*]

Our voice is now heard loud and clear on the international stage. Since November, we have signed an historic greenhouse gas emission reduction agreement in Paris.

We have renewed and revitalized our relationship with our most important partner, the United States, and signed a new continental energy and environmental agreement that includes Mexico.

We have significantly increased our contribution to the multi-national coalition against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria.

Lastly, we have led the charge on the need to invest in order to boost economic growth at international economic forums such as Davos and the G20.

•(1650)

[*English*]

We believe the time has come to invest to build a strong and prosperous country.

Today, we are seizing the opportunity to invest in people and the economy to prepare Canada for a brighter future.

Of course, this is only the beginning. Today we have taken some first steps in a long journey. We have much work ahead of us.

As we do that work, we remember that while we may act in the present, we do not act for the present. We act for the decades and the years to come. We act for our children and for our children's children. We act so that they may inherit a more prosperous and a more hopeful Canada.

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Milton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the fine officials at Finance Canada today provided their independent analysis and have reported that for the April 2015 to January 2016 period, the government actually posted a budgetary surplus of \$4.3 billion.

In other news, the finance minister has introduced a budget today that, quite frankly, is a betrayal of the middle class. We see a \$1.3-billion increase in personal income taxes; we see increased taxes on students; we have seen families stripped of the children's fitness tax credit and the children's arts tax credit; the Liberals have broken their promise to small business and are not decreasing their taxes and, indeed, have increased the payroll tax today; they have increased taxes on charities; and, most unconscionably, they have raided the defence budget to the tune of \$3.7 billion on a day when men and women in this country don a uniform and put themselves in harm's way just because of that fact. However, they still need to borrow.

On page 51 of this document, the minister writes that the government remains committed to returning to balance, but every projection through 2021 still says "deficit".

Would the minister please let us know, when will the government stop borrowing, especially since he is doing it on the backs of Canadians to pay for the projects of their Liberal friends?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Speaker, I think this is a wonderful day for Canadians. We are very proud of the budget we put forward to help Canadians.

It is only five months ago that Canadians elected the government and asked us to do two things. They said, "Help me, my family, and grow the economy." That is exactly what we are doing with this budget. We are helping the middle class. We started on January 1 with a reduction in taxes on Canadians. As a result, nine million Canadians now have more money in their pockets than before.

With this budget, we are moving to introduce the Canada child benefit. It is a simple tax-free monthly benefit that will add \$2,300 to the average family, to the nine out of 10 Canadian families who will get it.

We are proud of this budget. It helps the middle class.

The Budget

• (1655)

[Translation]

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the budget is about choices, but as they say, the devil is often in the details, especially when we start comparing what is in the budget to what was in the election platform.

Compared to the Liberal platform promises, the budget falls short by \$230 million for first nations education and by \$130 million for first nations child services.

Compared to the Liberal platform promises, the budget falls short by \$300 million this year and \$200 million next year for seniors.

Compared to the Liberal platform promises, the budget falls short by \$170 million for youth.

The budget breaks a fundamental Liberal platform promise to cut taxes for small and medium businesses to 9%. They will be freezing taxes at 10.5%.

If we look at other choices they made, it is clear that they decided to leave one measure intact: the one that allows a tax loophole for stock options, which leaves \$800 million in the pockets of the rich.

How can the Liberals justify breaking so many promises to the most vulnerable members of society while letting the rich get off scot-free?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Speaker, we are very proud of our budget. Five months ago, Canadians asked us to do two things: help them and their families and grow the economy.

Today, we started to keep our promise by doing things for the middle class. We already cut taxes for the middle class. By doing so we are helping nine million Canadians. Now they will have more money in their pockets.

We made some other very important choices. We introduced our Canada child benefit. This will help nine out of 10 families with children. They will have more money for their families. That will start in July. We also did other things. We added measures for veterans and seniors, in addition to improving the situation for seniors.

We are very proud of our budget. It is very good for the middle class and will help improve their situation.

[English]

Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is certainly an exciting day for Canadians as the Minister of Finance has shared our plan to grow the economy and strengthen the middle class.

As I knocked on thousands of doors during the recent election campaign, many hard-working middle-class Canadians in my riding of Scarborough Centre consistently told me that they wanted an economy that worked for them.

In his speech a few moments ago, the Minister of Finance discussed the Canada child benefit, a new program contained within his budget. Could the minister explain for the House the details of this benefit and how he believes it will help Canadian families?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Speaker, the member's question gives me the opportunity to say more about the Canada child benefit, which is an important policy that is going to fundamentally change the situation of families in Canada.

Canadians asked us to help the middle class, and we are delivering on that. This program would help nine out of ten Canadian families with children. They will get one cheque monthly, and it will be tax-free. On average, for the nine out of ten families with children who receive it, it will be \$2,300 more per year. On top of that, it will help thousands of children to be lifted out of poverty, giving families the opportunity to possibly get into the middle class.

This is good for those families. It is certainly good for those children, and it is good for the Canadian economy.

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brantford—Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us just do a quick fact check between the Liberal election promises and what is in the budget.

In their election platform document, the Liberals projected and promised no more than a \$25 billion deficit. It is now at \$100 billion. They promised a 27% debt-to-GDP ratio in four years. It is now projected at 31.6%. There is no jobs plan for the 100,000 or more recently unemployed people in the oil and gas sector. Unemployment is rising.

What is the government's plan to provide incentives to businesses? What is the government's plan to create jobs? What is the government's plan to not tax job creators more, as this budget would do? What is the long-term plan?

• (1700)

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Speaker, as I said, the Canadian people asked us to do two things: help the middle class and grow the economy. Our plan to grow the economy will make a significant difference for Canadians. We are making new investments into the economy that this year will be roughly \$11.5 billion and almost \$15 billion next year. These investments will have important impacts in helping to grow the economy. We will see an increase in economic growth of 0.5% this year and 1% next year, and that is only the beginning: over the long term, we intend on growing the economy through a long-term infrastructure plan as well as an innovation agenda that will make a real difference for Canada.

[Translation]

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals are carrying on their long tradition of using money from the EI fund for purposes other than helping the unemployed.

The Budget

That is not all. They also decided to create a program, a pilot project, to give five additional weeks of benefits in regions in need. Good. We agree with this measure. However, it excludes 12 regions where the program previously existed, including in Atlantic Canada, where the pilot project had been eliminated by the Conservatives.

Why are the Liberals creating a two-tier pilot project for extended benefits?

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Speaker, we are very proud of our employment insurance policies.

We made some very important decisions for Canada. We started by making a change that will allow people who need employment insurance to qualify with fewer hours than before.

Furthermore, we decided to give quicker access to employment insurance in 12 regions across Canada that have higher unemployment rates. These very important changes will help people in Alberta, Saskatchewan, Newfoundland and Labrador, and all across the country.

[*English*]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on a day like today, faced with this big borrowing, big

spending Liberal government, I think of our good friend, the fiscally responsible Jim Flaherty, who was named the world's best finance minister.

The Conservative government left the Liberals with a surplus, and they have ignored the advice that Jim gave when he said in his 2014 budget, "a return to surplus is not a licence to spend recklessly".

When I conclude my remarks tomorrow, I will point out how the government misled Canadians in the last election, and how it consistently miscalculates, mismanages, and misunderstands the Canadian economy.

However, until then I move:

That the debate be now adjourned.

(Motion agreed to)

The Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 83(2) the motion is deemed adopted and the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m.

(The House adjourned at 5:05 p.m.)

CONTENTS

Tuesday, March 22, 2016

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Committees of the House

Citizenship and Immigration

Mr. Wrzesnewskyj 1871

Scrutiny of Regulations

Mr. Albrecht 1871

Environment and Sustainable Development

Mr. LeBlanc 1871

Motion 1871

(Motion agreed to) 1871

Petitions

The Environment

Ms. May (Saanich—Gulf Islands) 1871

Public Transit

Mr. Davies 1872

Canada Post

Mr. Davies 1872

Child Care

Mr. Davies 1872

Housing

Mr. Lamoureux 1872

Questions on the Order Paper

Mr. Lamoureux 1872

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Public Service Labour Relations Act

Mr. Brison 1872

Bill C-7. Second reading 1872

Ms. Murray 1872

Mr. Blaikie 1873

Mr. Barlow 1874

Mr. Vaughan 1874

Mr. Picard 1874

Mr. Blaikie 1875

Ms. Leitch 1875

Mr. Vaughan 1876

Mr. O'Toole 1876

Ms. Murray 1878

Mr. Davies 1879

Mrs. McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo) 1879

Mr. Picard 1879

Mr. Blaikie 1880

Ms. Murray 1882

Ms. Boutin-Sweet 1883

Mr. Longfield 1883

Mr. Lamoureux 1884

Mr. Doherty 1886

Ms. Malcolmson 1886

Ms. May (Saanich—Gulf Islands) 1886

Ms. Murray 1887

Mr. Poilievre 1887

Ms. Murray 1889

Mr. Lamoureux 1890

Mr. Whalen 1890

Mr. Kmiec 1891

Mrs. McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo) 1891

Mr. Graham 1891

Ms. Malcolmson 1893

Mr. Maloney 1893

Mr. Bagnell 1893

Ms. Murray 1893

Mrs. McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo) 1893

Mr. Picard 1894

Ms. Murray 1895

Mr. Maguire 1895

Ms. Murray 1896

Mr. Bagnell 1897

Mr. Fergus 1897

Ms. Ashton 1898

Mr. Doherty 1898

Ms. Ratansi 1898

Ms. Malcolmson 1899

Ms. Murray 1900

Mr. Lukiwski 1900

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

International Day of La Francophonie

Mr. Beaulieu 1901

Shining Through Centre for Children with Autism

Mr. Sorbara 1901

Saskatoon Citizen of the Year

Mr. Waugh 1901

Harry Verran

Mr. Fraser (West Nova) 1901

World Water Day

Mr. MacGregor 1901

Status of Women

Ms. Dhillon 1902

Events in Brussels

Ms. Watts 1902

Armenian Community Centre of Toronto

Mr. Tan 1902

Events in Brussels

Mr. Lightbound 1902

World Theatre Day

Mr. Van Loan 1902

World Water Day

Mr. Scarpaleggia 1903

Rob Ford	
Mr. Vaughan	1903
Rob Ford	
Mr. O'Toole	1903
Events in Brussels	
Mrs. McCrimmon	1903
Marcelle Robidoux	
Mr. Nantel	1904
Events in Brussels	
Mr. Scheer	1904
Events in Brussels	
Mr. Picard	1904

ORAL QUESTIONS

Events in Brussels	
Ms. Ambrose	1904
Mr. Dion	1904
Public Safety	
Ms. Ambrose	1905
Mr. Goodale	1905
Foreign Affairs	
Mr. Kenney	1905
Mr. Dion	1905
Mr. Kenney	1905
Mr. Dion	1905
Mr. Kenney	1905
Mr. Dion	1905
The Budget	
Mr. Mulcair	1905
Mr. Bains	1906
Mr. Mulcair	1906
Mr. Bains	1906
Ethics	
Mr. Mulcair	1906
Mr. Brison	1906
Mr. Mulcair	1906
Mr. Sohi	1906
Foreign Affairs	
Mr. Kent	1906
Mr. Dion	1906
Mr. Kent	1906
Mr. Dion	1907
National Defence	
Mr. Bezan	1907
Mr. Sajjan	1907
Mr. Bezan	1907
Mr. Dion	1907
Public Safety	
Mr. Paul-Hus	1907
Mr. Goodale	1907
Mr. Paul-Hus	1907
Mr. Sajjan	1907

Food Safety	
Ms. Brosseau	1908
Mrs. Philpott	1908
Mr. Davies	1908
Mrs. Philpott	1908
Finance	
Mr. McColeman	1908
Mr. Champagne	1908
Mr. McColeman	1908
Mr. Champagne	1908
Regional Economic Development	
Mr. Godin	1908
Mr. Champagne	1908
Mr. Godin	1909
Mr. Champagne	1909
Ethics	
Mr. Dusseault	1909
Mr. Goodale	1909
Canada Revenue Agency	
Mr. Julian	1909
Mrs. Lebouthillier	1909
International Development	
Mr. Sarai	1909
Ms. Bibeau	1909
Ethics	
Mrs. Vecchio	1909
Ms. Freeland	1910
Mrs. Vecchio	1910
Ms. Freeland	1910
Ms. Gladu	1910
Mr. LeBlanc	1910
Ms. Gladu	1910
Mr. LeBlanc	1910
Canadian Coast Guard	
Ms. Blaney (North Island—Powell River)	1910
Mr. Cormier	1910
Foreign Affairs	
Ms. Hardcastle	1910
Mr. Dion	1911
Mr. Gourde	1911
Mr. Dion	1911
Mr. Allison	1911
Mr. Dion	1911
Mr. Généreux	1911
Mr. Dion	1911
Science	
Mr. Lightbound	1911
Ms. Duncan (Etobicoke North)	1911
The Environment	
Mr. Fast	1911
Ms. McKenna	1911
CBC/Radio-Canada	
Ms. Laverdière	1912

Ms. Joly	1912
Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship	
Ms. Sahota	1912
Mr. McCallum	1912
The Environment	
Mr. Fast	1912
Ms. McKenna	1912
Forestry Industry	
Mrs. Gill	1912
Ms. Freeland	1912
The Budget	
Mr. Marcil	1913
Mr. Champagne	1913
Presence in Gallery	
The Speaker	1913
Points of Order	
Oral Questions	
Mr. Brison	1913

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Public Service Labour Relations Act	
Bill C-7, Second reading	1914
Mr. Lukiwski	1914
Ms. Murray	1915
Mr. Weir	1916

Mr. Genuis	1916
Mr. Lamoureux	1916
Mr. Fragiskatos	1917
Mr. Albas	1918
Ms. Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona)	1918
Ms. Murray	1918
Mr. Doherty	1919
Mr. Housefather	1919
Mr. Albas	1919
Ms. Benson	1919
Mr. Nuttall	1920
Sitting Suspended	
(The sitting of the House was suspended at 4 p.m.)	1920
Sitting Resumed	
(The House resumed at 4:05 p.m.)	1920
The Budget	
Financial Statement of Minister of Finance	
Mr. Morneau	1920
Motion	1920
Ms. Raitt	1926
Mr. Caron	1927
Mrs. Zahid	1927
Mr. McColeman	1927
Mr. Caron	1927
Ms. Ambrose	1928
Motion	1928
(Motion agreed to)	1928

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