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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Thursday, May 28, 2015

—

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, May 28, 2015

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1000)

[*English*]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's responses to 21 petitions.

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INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1), I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian delegation of the Canadian Section of ParlAmericas respecting its participation at the 11th Plenary Assembly and 35th meeting of the ParlAmericas Board of Directors held in Santiago, Chile, on September 24-27, 2014, and the 36th meeting of the Board of Directors of ParlAmericas and the Inter-Parliamentary Meeting on Transparency, Summit of the Americas, held in Panama City, Panama, on April 10-11, 2015.

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COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Mr. Gordon Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the 13th report of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage in relation to Bill C-597, an act to amend the Holidays Act (Remembrance Day). The committee has studied the bill and has decided to report the bill back to the House with amendments.

CREATION OF SMALL BUSINESS IMPACT ASSESSMENT ACT

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-682, An Act to amend the Department of Industry Act (small businesses).

She said: Mr. Speaker, it is my honour today, along with my colleague from Thunder Bay—Superior North, to present for the consideration of the House a bill to, for the first time, create a system of orderly consideration of the impact on small businesses of legislation, regulations, and policy.

This is loosely based on something I first heard about from colleagues in the Green Party in the European Parliament, where they have what they call “think small first”, a lens that looks at the policies being undertaken by the European Parliament to see what impact, unintended, there might be on small businesses.

This act would require the Minister of Industry to consider whether measures require that analysis. It is essentially similar to an environmental impact statement, only this would be a small business impact statement so that small and medium-sized enterprises would not inadvertently have further hurdles put in their way through unintended consequences of government policy.

I hope that this bill will receive support at first reading and proceed to second reading and that it will eventually become the law of Canada.

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

* * *

• (1005)

[*Translation*]

PETITIONS

CANADA POST

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is truly an honour for me to present three petitions on the same subject from different provinces: Ontario, Quebec and Saskatchewan.

Dozens of people want to maintain home mail delivery. I am pleased to present these petitions today. I think it is in the public interest. There is no reason for Canada to be the only G7 country that can no longer deliver mail to people's homes.

Routine Proceedings

[English]

CONCUSSIONS

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present eight petitions on the need for comprehensive action on concussions in Canada.

The petitioners call on the government to enact a pan-Canadian concussion awareness week to promote understanding of the injury; a strategy to address prevention, diagnosis, and management; and the development of a centre of excellence for concussion research.

[Translation]

THE SENATE

Mr. Alain Giguère (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition to abolish the Senate signed by several hundred people.

It has become abundantly clear that the Senate is failing to uphold Canadian values, and the vast majority of Canadians agree with me on that. Several hundred of them decided to take action and officially call for the abolition of that institution. Nearly half of its members will be facing reprimands, reimbursements and even prosecution.

I think that these Canadians are absolutely right to be calling for the abolition of an institution that is so undemocratic, not to mention plagued by scandal. I am therefore pleased to present this petition.

[English]

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have over 300 names from Trail, Castlegar, and the Beaver Valley of folks who are upset about paying additional fees so that they can pay their bills. This especially hits seniors unfairly.

The petitioners are calling on the Government of Canada, its agencies, ministries, and departments to employ the measures at their disposal, appropriate to their jurisdiction, to prohibit the charging of customers for receiving a monthly bill or statement in the mail.

PALLIATIVE CARE

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to present this petition regarding the inclusion of palliative care in the United Nations sustainable development goals, specifically recognizing that hospice and palliative care is an essential component of national health systems.

The petitioners would like to see the Government of Canada call for the inclusion of hospice and palliative care in the United Nations sustainable development goals.

TAXATION

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present petitions on behalf of hundreds of Canadians across the country on the cessation of taxes on menstrual hygiene products.

Clearly, a tax on feminine hygiene products is a gender-specific discriminatory tax, and we need to end it. The petitioners are calling for the Government of Canada to extend a 0% GST rate to menstrual hygiene products.

[Translation]

AGRICULTURE

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to present a petition signed by 800 residents of the riding of Richmond—Arthabaska calling on the government to respect the rights of small family farmers to store, trade and use seed. More specifically, they want the federal government to adopt international aid policies that support small family farmers and to ensure that policies and programs are developed in consultation with them.

I want to thank the people from Development and Peace in the Victoriaville and Richmond regions who met with me and brought this to my attention. I am presenting this petition on their behalf.

[English]

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, GP): Mr. Speaker, the World Parks Congress long ago recommended that 20% to 30% of all ocean habitat be protected from fishing to actually help fishing outside of those areas.

Canada established marine protected areas. There are 161, but 95 were intended to be areas free from harvesting. However, that has not happened. Only one has happened. There are 11 classifications for marine protected areas included by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

The petitioners are calling on the Department of Fisheries and Oceans to actually close some of these areas to harvesting and to work with other relevant branches to make the system work.

• (1010)

[Translation]

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I also wish to present a petition signed by about a hundred people from Longueuil calling on the government to respect the rights of small family farmers to store, trade and use seed.

[English]

TAXATION

Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I too have a petition calling on the government to extend a 0% GST rate to menstrual hygiene products.

We note that the government has agreed, by voting with the NDP, on the elimination of the GST. We are in the middle of a budget debate, and we could very easily, successfully, reduce the GST on feminine hygiene products to 0% in this round of Parliament.

CANADA PENSION PLAN

Mr. Kennedy Stewart (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today I rise to present a petition signed by dozens of residents from across British Columbia.

Government Orders

The death benefit allowance provides a one-time lump sum payment to a deceased CPP contributor's estate. The maximum entitlement was reduced to \$2,500 in 1997 and has not been increased since.

The petitioners call on the federal government to review and increase the death benefit allowance and to bring it in line with consumer price indexing adjustments, as is done with old age security payments.

I urge the government to consider this motion.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition today from residents of Saanich—Gulf Islands who are concerned about accountability within the overseas development assistance budget and the activities of what used to be CIDA but what is now part of DFATD.

The Official Development Assistance Accountability Act was passed in 2008 and requires that development assistance contribute to poverty reduction and take into account the perspectives of the poor to be consistent with international human rights.

The petitioners are calling for these criteria to become the fundamental principles of our ODA budgets and operations and that the minister responsible for development assistance and the Minister of Foreign Affairs once again be of parallel status.

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QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

PORT STATE MEASURES AGREEMENT IMPLEMENTATION ACT

The House resumed from May 7 consideration of the motion that Bill S-3, An Act to amend the Coastal Fisheries Protection Act, be read the third time and passed.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, before I start, I would like to note that I will be sharing my time with my hon. colleague, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment and Social Development.

Illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing is a serious problem in many parts of the world. It is one of the main barriers to the achievement of sustainable fisheries worldwide. Illegal fishing affects some of the poorest countries, where dependence on fisheries for food and livelihoods is high.

By its nature, illegal fishing is not a problem for one country to solve on its own, because the problem respects no boundaries. These

exploitive activities put pressure on the sustainability of all fish stocks and marine wildlife and distort the price of fish on world markets.

In recent years, the international community has been working to develop global tools to prevent, deter, and eliminate illegal fishing activities. Improving the control of foreign fishing vessels through a global standard for action that can be taken in ports is one tool to stop illegal fishing. In short, if criminals cannot land their illegal catches, they will not be able to continue their operations.

I am proud to say that our government is part of this movement. As a nation with a well-regulated fishing industry, Canada has a strong interest in protecting fish stocks and in ensuring that fishing regulations are respected around the world.

In 2009, Canada and other countries approved the port state measures agreement that had been negotiated at the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. Canada signed this agreement in 2010 to signal the importance of taking strong action in ports to prevent illegal fishing, and today we are taking a step towards ratifying this important agreement. So far, 11 nations have ratified. The United States is in the process of passing ratification legislation, and it is expected that other countries will soon follow suit.

Before Canada can ratify this new global standard, we must address areas where our current legislation differs from the international agreement. These are the amendments we are discussing today through Bill S-3.

Through our current legislation, the Coastal Fisheries Protection Act, Canada already has a rigorous port control system for foreign fishing vessels. The proposed changes contained in Bill S-3 will make this system even stronger.

The proposed amendments to the act can be grouped into three broad categories. The first category concerns authorities related to foreign fishing vessels. The port state measures agreement generally promotes a country's ability to refuse port entry to fishing vessels that are suspected to have engaged in or supported illegal fishing. However, there may be situations when the country responsible for the fishing vessel will want Canada's assistance to conduct an inspection and gather necessary evidence against the suspect ship.

The proposed changes will create an enforcement permit that will apply when a foreign fishing vessel has been directed by its flag state to enter a Canadian port for inspection. In this case, Canada would issue a specific entry permit for the sole purpose of inspection and enforcement. This is important, as the current system requires that the vessel itself request a permit to enter a Canadian port. Naturally, those who would commit illegal fishing activities are unlikely to seek permission to land in a country with as rigorous an inspection system as Canada's. This amendment will allow Canada, in partnership with the flag state, to direct a ship to port so that our officers can catch the criminals.

Government Orders

The proposed changes will also give our Canadian fishery protection officers greater authority to take enforcement action in such circumstances. When that foreign fishing vessel is directed to port under the new permit system, these powers will allow Canadian fishery protection officers to inspect and search the vessel and seize any illegal catch.

The second set of proposed changes relates to information sharing. To meet the requirements of the port state measures agreement, these changes provide clarity on the authority to share information with our enforcement partners. The proposed changes cover both the type of information and with whom it would be shared.

●(1015)

These proposed changes would clearly outline that the minister could share information regarding the inspection of a foreign vessel, the denial of entry to port, any enforcement action taken and the outcome of any of those proceedings. They would also outline the international partners with which such information could be shared. Applied globally, this effort would make illegal fishing operators easier to identify and facilitate the denial of entry at ports for those bandits throughout the world.

For our officers at home, the proposed changes would clarify the ability of Fisheries and Oceans Canada and the Canada Border Services Agency to share information related to the importation of fish and seafood products.

The third major category of proposed changes concerns import prohibitions. Under the proposed changes, it would be an offence to import illegally caught fish into Canada.

The amendments would also give authorities new tools to enforce these prohibitions. For example, Bill S-3 would expand the powers of fishery protection officers to inspect any place, including containers, warehouses, storage areas and vehicles. These inspections could also be conducted in all ports of entry. This would be an important change since, currently, such powers are limited to fishing vessels and wharves. The amendments would also allow fishery protection officers to seize illegally caught fish in these places and seek their forfeiture in the event of a conviction.

Illegal fishing is a global threat to sustainable fisheries and to the management and conservation of our marine environment. Regional fisheries management organizations are increasingly requiring documentation for high-value species that are targets of illegal fishing. Canada can play its part in preventing economic gains going to illegal operators by preventing the import of fish and fish products that do not have the required documentation. If a court finds the person guilty of an importation offence under the act, significant fines would apply. In addition, with these amendments, the court could also order an additional fine equal to the financial benefit the defendants gained from committing the offence. This would ensure that fines are not able to be factored into the criminal's operating costs and would provide a real deterrent to these operations.

In addition to these three broad categories, the proposed amendments would also change several definitions, in order to be consistent with the port state measures agreement.

The amended definition of "fishing vessel" would include any vessel used in transshipping fish or marine plants that have not been previously landed. The scope of this definition is limited so that it would not include vessels that merely ship across the sea, such as those transporting grain. The proposed changes would also redefine the term "fish" itself. In keeping with the port state measures agreement and the Fisheries Act, "fish" would come to include fish, shellfish and crustaceans, whether processed or not. The amendments would also add a definition of "marine plant".

Bill S-3 would strengthen the Coastal Fisheries Protection Act, aligning it with the new global standard of the port state measures agreement.

As part of meeting our international obligations, the bill would allow us to protect the livelihoods of fish harvesters in Canada more effectively by limiting the amount of illegal fish that enter global markets.

I urge all hon. members to join with me in supporting these critical amendments to the Coastal Fisheries Protection Act.

●(1020)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to take the opportunity to pose a question to the minister. When we think of our coastal regions, there is a great deal of concern with respect to overfishing, quotas and so forth. Canada, traditionally, has played a fairly strong role internationally in demonstrating leadership in protection and conservational-type attitudes in what we can do to promote healthier fish stocks.

I wonder if the member would provide some insight, in terms of how the legislation would impact inland fisheries. I am thinking specifically of Lake Winnipeg. We have a lot of healthy freshwater fishing industries in Canada. I wonder if she would provide some comment with respect to whether the legislation would impact freshwater fishing.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is 100% right that Canada has always played a leading role when it comes to protection and conservation and doing the right thing when it comes to protecting our fisheries.

We are a major exporter of fishery products and because of that we are not immune to the economic impacts of illegal fishing in international trade. As I said in my remarks, this is indeed an international issue, and that is why Bill S-3 is being put forward. We do want to continue with our excellent role that we have been playing globally. We do want to be able to take part in the port state measures agreement.

To do that, we need to have the amendments that are being put forward in Bill S-3. We want to be able to continue to prevent illegal fishing and we want to be a part in setting the global standard for actions when vessels do seek to enter a port and they should not be.

Government Orders

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite certainly laid out what this bill would do, but I am left with a number of questions about future plans for the current government. In particular, we know that in order for this international treaty to be ratified and implemented we need 25 countries to sign on to ratify the agreement.

I wonder what our government is doing in terms of taking a leadership role in working with those other countries to sign and ratify the port state measures agreement. I wonder if our government is actually taking a leadership role, specifically with some of our trading partners, like Mexico, Spain and Panama, whose fishing vessels we know are engaged in IUU, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. This is a serious issue where Canada should be seen to take a leadership role, and I do not see any evidence of that happening.

●(1025)

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Mr. Speaker, we do know that there have to be 25 member countries ratify this agreement before it comes into force. As of this date, I believe 11 countries have ratified it. We have two others that are very close to ratifying. Of course, Canada is moving forward with the amendments proposed in Bill S-3.

We certainly do not want to be the last country ratifying this agreement. We have always taken a leadership role when it comes to conservation and when it comes to trying to protect our fisheries. We want to be able to continue to do that. There are meetings constantly with other countries and we are certainly promoting that other countries do take part in this ratification.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am concerned that there has been little mention of our third coast on the Arctic.

My questions for the hon. member are these. Where in the budget, and in successive budgets, are we seeing stepped-up dollars to actually move forward on building these ships that will ply our waters and protect our fisheries? What measures have been taken, including through the Arctic Council, to ensure that we have better monitoring of what fishery is in our Arctic waters; and what measures should we be taking in co-operation with other nations to ensure that those fisheries are protected as well in our Arctic coastline?

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Mr. Speaker, certainly Canada plays a very strong role when it comes to protecting all of our shores. We know we have wonderful services in Vancouver on the west coast. It has full Coast Guard capacity there. It is doing all kinds of great work.

Bill S-3 would apply to all ports, so it is not just a bill that would apply to the east coast if that is what the member's concern was.

Mr. Scott Armstrong (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be here today to add my support for amendments to the Coastal Fisheries Protection Act. As we have heard the last time this bill was debated, members from both sides of the House recognized the importance of this bill moving forward. Unfortunately, the suggestion of my colleague, the member for Yukon, for a vote on this important bill was not supported by the opposition.

As a Nova Scotian, this issue is particularly important to the economy of my province and the economy of the riding I represent. It is certainly my hope that we will be able to pass this legislation quickly so that we can continue to focus on protecting fisheries at our ports with the new tools contained in this legislation.

The proposed changes we are discussing today would bring our already rigorous system in line with new international standards for combatting illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing as outlined in the port state measures agreement. As my colleague noted, in 2010, Canada signed this important agreement.

The agreement points the way towards practical, cost-effective solutions that will deter and stop illegal harvesting operations. It would do this by requiring some practical standards for ports around the world. For example, it spells out that vessels involved in illegal fishing activities would be refused entry into a port or the use of that port's services. It also sets minimum standards for information that vessels must provide to obtain entry into a port for the inspection of vessels and for the training of inspectors. Also, it allows for greater co-operation and exchange of information between jurisdictions.

It will require at least 25 ratifications for this agreement to enter into force. As my colleague mentioned, currently 11 members of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations have taken this step. Some 20 others, including Canada, have indicated that they are moving towards ratification. In doing so, these measures would support the global fight against illegal fishing and would help us protect the livelihoods of our hard-working fish harvesters here at home in Canada.

Our government is committed to supporting the efforts of our hard-working fishermen. As part of economic action plan 2015, our government is increasing the lifetime capital gains exemption to \$1 million for owners of fishing businesses. This means that fishers and their families would have more money in their pockets.

On the topic of supporting our fishers, I would like to take a moment to speak to the economic advantages of approving these proposed legislative changes.

Canada currently enjoys one of the most valuable commercial fishing industries on the planet. Around 85% of Canadian fish and seafood products are exported internationally, to the tune of over \$4 billion annually in export value. We are a major global player in the international seafood market. In fact, Canada is the world's seventh largest exporter of fish and seafood products, and we believe that this is going to grow exponentially. Of course, in order to ensure that this industry continues to provide strong economic opportunities to future generations, we are devoted to responsible fish harvesting practices. We closely monitor fishing within our own waters as well as the activities of Canadian fish harvesters as they conduct their craft on international waters.

With the current Coastal Fisheries Protection Act, Canada already has the tools to carefully monitor and regulate activities by foreign fishing vessels in Canadian waters and in specific areas of the high seas, but what about fish harvesters who do not act responsibly? What about those who try to bend or break the rules? The economic impact of those operations is very serious.

Government Orders

A 2008 study estimated that illegal fish harvesters are potentially siphoning off up to \$23 billion from the global economy each year. By refusing to follow the rules and regulations, illegal fish harvesters can reduce their own operating costs, selfishly. This puts legitimate fish harvesters in Canada and around the world at an economic disadvantage.

Fish are one of the most globally traded food commodities. When we consider the volume of Canadian exports each year, it is clear that illegal fishing in other parts of the world does great damage to our economy.

• (1030)

Members should consider for a moment the impact of illegal fishing on our trading relationship with Europe. Between 2010 and 2012, the European Union imported an average of \$25 billion annually in fish and seafood. Canada's share of that total was \$400 million annually. With the upcoming comprehensive economic trade agreement between Canada and the European Union, our industry stands to have unprecedented access to the European market for our fish and seafood products. That is good news for Canadian fish harvesters and processors. When this agreement comes into force, it will lift 96% of tariffs on Canadian fish and seafood products, and remaining tariffs would disappear over the next seven years. We want to protect these economic opportunities for our fish harvesters from the detrimental impacts on prices caused by illegally caught fish.

Of course, these rules and regulations are in place not just to protect the livelihoods of legitimate fish harvesters, but they are also meant to safeguard our marine resources for future generations. When illegal fish harvesters break the rules that ensure global fish stocks are sustainable, they damage the ecosystems that the fish depend upon. Therefore, for both economic and environmental reasons, we must join our international partners to take comprehensive action to stop these devastating illegal fishing activities. That is exactly what we would do with Bill S-3. We would strengthen our already rigorous system and support this global action to protect the world's fisheries.

For example, our existing legislation, the Coastal Fisheries Protection Act and its regulations, gives the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans the discretion to authorize foreign fishing vessels to enter Canadian fisheries waters and Canadian ports. In other words, the act prohibits foreign fishing vessels from entering Canadian fisheries waters unless they are already authorized to do so by the act, regulations, or other Canadian law. The act also prohibits any person or crew member aboard a foreign fishing vessel from fishing in Canadian waters without proper authorization.

It is important to stress that Canada's legislation already serves us well. We are among the world's leaders in responsible fishing. Nevertheless, there are a few areas where our legislation could be strengthened before Canada meets the requirements of a new standard approach. This approach is outlined in the port state measures agreement. Today's debate is not only about strengthening the Canadian approach to our port control measures; it is also about supporting a global effort to fight illegal fishing. These two goals go hand-in-hand to protect and support both our industry and our environment.

To that end, Bill S-3 proposes several important changes that would make it possible to share information among federal departments and with our trusted international partners. These amendments would also allow Canadian authorities to take enforcement action against foreign fishing vessels that are directed to our ports by their flag states for inspection and enforcement purposes. These changes would make it illegal to import fish and fish products that are sourced through these criminal activities and would prevent their entry into our market.

Together these changes would create the conditions to ratify the port state measures agreement, an important tool in the global arsenal to fight illegal fishing.

Canada's fish and seafood industry is a mainstay of economic life in coastal and inland communities around the country. My riding is a prime example of this. Currently, the fishing industry employs 80,000 Canadians in jobs nationwide, ranging from fishing wild stocks to aquaculture harvests. With our government's ambitious trade agenda, these industries would benefit directly and see Canada's world-class seafood products on dinner plates across the globe.

We are already seeing some of these improvements and advantages taking place in industries like the lobster industry in Nova Scotia. However, in this global context we must continue to support the fight against illegal fishing, for both economic and environmental reasons. To that end, I am urging all hon. members to support changes to the Coastal Fisheries Protection Act to protect our industry and our environment, and to ensure that we continue to protect this vital industry and economic resource for Canada's economy.

• (1035)

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the same question for my colleague opposite as I did for his colleague who spoke before him. I do not see any evidence of government wanting to take a leadership role on this.

This bill was first introduced in 2012. Here we are quite a few years later, and it still has not been passed by us here in Canada. I want to know this. Once we finally put this piece of legislation to rest and it is passed, will the government urge other countries in the international community to sign and ratify the port state measures agreement?

Beyond that, when we are looking at leadership internationally, would the government consider some regulation that is similar to the regulation we see in the EU, which would require all fish and seafood products entering the Canadian market to be certified and have their origins traceable? Those are really the next two steps here if we are to tackle this issue and be serious about it.

Government Orders

Mr. Scott Armstrong: Mr. Speaker, that is a good question. As I said in my remarks, it would take 25 countries internationally to ratify this agreement to put it into force. Currently, 11 have done so. Canada is one of 25 other nations that are getting the legislation in place and moving toward ratification. As members can see, we are all moving together as an international global community to protect our fishing industry and our fishing environment.

As we ratify the agreement in Canada, we will continue to encourage our allies and our colleagues across the international community to put this measure in place. It would bring in international regulations that would have to be followed from one end of the globe to the other. We encourage all other nations to get on board, make sure we pass this legislation, and make sure we protect our industry and our environment.

• (1040)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to repeat the question I asked the member's colleague. Does the legislation in any way whatsoever have an impact on inland freshwater fishing? It is a significant industry within Canada. That is a question on which I would really appreciate an answer.

The second question is in regard to the timetable. Looking at it, the first question I put forward dealt with the strong role Canada could and should be playing on the international scene. I would ask the member why he feels it has taken so long just to get the legislation to the point it is at. Were they working with different stakeholders? Why has it taken this long to get us to this point?

Mr. Scott Armstrong: Mr. Speaker, as I said, so far 11 countries have ratified the agreement and 25 more are moving toward ratification. Canada is in this cohort of 25. We are working with our international partners to make sure we not only have this legislation in place moving forward, but we actually include as many countries as possible.

This is an international piece of legislation. It has to be ratified by many countries, 25 at least, to make it come into force, so we are working not only with the 11 countries that have already ratified but with other countries to encourage them to make sure we ratify this as quickly as possible.

We need at least 25 countries for it to come into force. We would be one of the next countries to ratify this, if all things go as planned, with the support of the opposition parties as well as this side of the House.

Things are progressing the way they should. International legislation sometimes takes longer than domestic legislation, simply because so many different parliaments have to use so many different regulations to pass this legislation. However, we are moving in the right direction. It is good legislation and we appreciate the opposition's support.

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, before I begin, I would like to note that I will be sharing my time with the member for Rivière-des-Mille-Îles.

We have Bill S-3, which is the current incarnation of this bill. I believe it was Bill S-13 before prorogation, so we have started it again. I will start by talking a little bit about the history, how we got

to where we are, and the issue of illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing, or IUU fishing.

In the early 2000s, there was a small group of ministers and directors general of international NGOs who decided to take the lead on this issue of illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing. This group included ministers from Australia, Chile, Namibia, New Zealand, the U.K., and Canada. In 2003, they came together and established the High Seas Task Force to advise them and finalize an action plan. The aim was to provide political leadership to drive forward some very badly needed practical initiatives about IUU fishing that could be implemented immediately. That word "immediately" is important. This was in 2003. Members are going to see that we are really far behind on this issue.

Why would they have come together on this issue of IUU fishing? IUU fishing is a very serious international problem. It is a global problem. It is increasingly seen as one of the major obstacles to the achievement of sustainable world fisheries, something toward which I think everyone in the House wants to work.

The result of the task force included a 2006 report called "Closing the Net: Stopping illegal fishing on the high seas". It is a fantastic report, and it found some basic facts. For example, it estimates that the worldwide value of IUU catches is between \$4 billion U.S. and \$9 billion U.S. a year. Of this, \$1.25 billion comes from the high seas. The remainder is taken from exclusive economic zones of coastal states—for example, where Canada has the exclusive right to fish along its coast.

IUU losses are borne particularly by developing countries, believe it or not—actually, it is probably easy to believe—which provide over 50% of all internationally traded fishery products. This is why I have been asking the Conservatives about the idea of having mandatory labelling for seafood, because we do not know where these products are coming from, and we do not know if they have been caught legally or not.

Losses from the waters of sub-Saharan Africa, for example, amount to \$1 billion U.S. a year. That is roughly equivalent to a quarter of Africa's total annual fisheries exports. We can see the gravity of the situation. The Pew environmental group notes that fisheries scientists estimate that illegal fishing accounts for up to 40% of fish caught in west Africa. That is a staggering number. IUU fishing, therefore, imposes significant economic costs on some of the poorest countries in the world, where dependency on fisheries for food, livelihoods, and revenues is very high. Moreover, it effectively undermines recent efforts by these countries to manage natural resources as a contribution to their growth and welfare.

Government Orders

IUU, or illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing does not respect national boundaries. It certainly does not respect international attempts to manage high seas resources. It really thrives where we see weak governance arrangements, and it is encouraged by the failure of countries—and we might put Canada on that list—to meet their international responsibilities. It puts unsustainable pressure on our fish stocks, on marine wildlife, and on habitats; it subverts labour standards; and frankly, it distorts markets. There is a lot at play here with IUU fishing.

It has proven to be incredibly resistant to recent international attempts to control it. Its persistence is due both to economic incentives, fuelled by demand, overcapacity, and weak governance, and to the lack of global political resolve to tackle its root causes. I will get back to that resolve in a few minutes.

This report, “Closing the Net”, states:

An extensive framework of international measures has emerged with the aim of resolving...[this issue], but a central difficulty has been to garner the political resolve to carry forward targets and declarations already agreed.

● (1045)

That is the situation we are in now. Many states are reluctant to adopt measures aimed at controlling their fishing vessels on the high seas. Even where they have adopted such measures, enforcement, which is key, is patchy at best.

Thanks to the work of the High Seas Task Force, another international work, the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization created the 2009 agreement on port state measures to prevent, deter and eliminate illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. This is where we are today. The bill would effectively enact that agreement. It would implement that 2009 agreement in Canada by amending the Coastal Fisheries Protection Act.

I want to emphasize how important it is that Canada live up to its UN obligations and that Canada be a world leader in combatting IUU fishing. We have the ability to do so and we are pleased to see that the government is taking action on this issue with Bill S-3.

Illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing is not only an environmental concern, and of course a concern for our marine ecosystems, but it undermines the sustainable practices of legitimate fishing operations, including those in Canada, and it presents unfair market competition to sustainable seafood. The changes in the bill would help protect fishermen and their communities from unfair competition, which is important to the fishermen in the area around Halifax as well as across Canada. While the bill represents a small step in the right direction, it comes on the heels of decades of Conservative and Liberal mismanagement, taking Canada in the wrong direction.

I will point out that after years of experience as the environment minister in Quebec, the NDP leader understands the important relationship between environmental protections and a thriving fishing industry in Canada. Canadians can trust the leader of the NDP to grow the economy, while protecting the environment. That is the situation we have here, where we want to grow the economy and grow our fishery, yet ensure its sustainable, it is legal and it is regulated. This is the balance that needs to be struck.

We have heard about the dire situation when it comes to illegal fishing globally. The time to act is now. The bill means that Canada can ratify the FAO's 2009 agreement. Once Canada has fully ratified the port state measures agreement, Canada needs to advocate internationally for other countries to do the same. As we have heard from other speakers, we need 25 countries if we are to realize this agreement internationally, so time is of the essence.

The bill was passed in the Senate in 2012, and it has only been recently brought to the House of Commons and sent to committee. While we support the bill, we support it so it is actually passed. However, what has been happening? Why has the government been dragging its feet on the bill? We have heard all this talk about IUU fishing and our international pledge to ratify a bill in 2012, yet we are in 2015, three and a half weeks before the House rises, and now we finally see the bill.

Remember that the worldwide value of IUU catches is between \$4 billion to \$9 billion a year, yet we waited year after year to ratify this, not to mention the ecological devastation that comes with illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing.

We are not alone in wondering what the heck the delay has been. Patrick McGuinness from the Fisheries Council of Canada was at committee. He said:

The problem that has emerged in trying to address this IUU through an international agreement, the port states agreement, is that it's taking so long. It took a long time to negotiate and it's going to take a long time to be ratified by a significant number of countries to be able to attest that this is the right thing in addressing the IUU fishing issue that has been identified.

● (1050)

The New Democrats support this legislation. I wonder why it has taken so long to bring it forward, especially when its ratification means so much because of the need for 25 countries to sign on before it becomes enforceable.

I have other questions about the legislation, and I have asked some of them of Conservative members, but I will save the rest for later.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member made reference to the leader of the official opposition doing some good on the environment. At the time he was part of a Liberal government as minister of the environment and he did some good things, but that was in the capacity of a Liberal cabinet, No doubt, that likely contributed to some of the work he did.

The question I have for the member is with regard to the treaty. She really put some emphasis on it, and we are inclined to agree with her on that. The government has not been diligent and has definitely not been proactive in getting this legislation through the House in any form of an expedited fashion. Maybe the member could provide further comment on this. She is right in the sense that the government has not demonstrated leadership.

If we take a look at the role that Canada as a nation should be playing, I suspect there is no other country in the world that has as much coastline as Canada. I could be wrong, and I may be a little biased in favour of my country. However, it should have been playing a much stronger leadership role.

Government Orders

Ms. Megan Leslie: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for raising the fact that the leader of my party was a cabinet minister in a federalist party. That is really important to underline.

I agree with the member that we have not seen any kind of leadership. It is not just on this issue, though. The Conservatives are very good about saying, internationally, that they are going to talk the big talk and sign onto this and onto that, but it is the actual implementation. That is really important.

A very good example of that is this. My colleague from New Westminster—Coquitlam brought forward a bill that would ban shark finning in Canadian waters. We have a ban, but it is not legislated. We also have no law to prevent the importation of shark fins. Therefore, my colleague thought we should take action. As legislators, that is what we should do. He brought forward this bill and it was defeated, 143 to 38. How can we tell the world that we do not agree with shark finning, yet not have legislation to enforce that ban or prevent the importation of shark fins? They do not exactly come into Canada with labels on them to say where they come from.

It is all about putting our money where our mouths are or, as we heard in the House the other day, putting our mouths where our money is. I am confused on that one. No, we have not seen any action.

• (1055)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, NDP): Mr. Speaker, first I wish to congratulate my colleague on her speech. We all know how dedicated she is to protecting our planet in several areas.

I am learning about a file that I was not very familiar with, since I do not eat much fish myself. I am allergic to it, so unfortunately I do not eat it very often.

It is nevertheless very important for Canadians to talk about this issue, especially given that it seems to be a global problem, if you listen to the debate and read a little bit about it. This is about a living, wild resource, specifically fish that live in international waters.

Would my colleague like to talk about what a challenge it is, on a global scale, to coordinate quickly on this issue and make it as much of a priority as climate change is?

Ms. Megan Leslie: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question.

Indeed, this is a global and international challenge and all countries around the world must work together, much like the NDP, on climate change and fishing.

[*English*]

We need to take action with our international partners if we are to achieve this, and the time to act is now. This is not pie-in-the-sky hopefulness. We really can do this if we look at the economic benefits that could come if we decide to tackle climate change. The fact is that there are real economic opportunities for us in the green energy economy.

The issue of international illegal fishing is about the environment, the ecosystems and the damage that kind of illegal fishing does, but

it is also about the economic damage. IUU fishing is illegal, unregulated and unreported, so the regulation is really key. We need to work internationally and work with other countries.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Laurin Liu (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House to speak to Bill S-3. It is a real pleasure to rise after the hon. member for Halifax. I had the opportunity to work with her previously, as the deputy environment critic. We were both members of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development.

That was at the time when the government completely gutted the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act. This government is not interested in striking a balance between the economy and the environment. The NDP understands that these two things are not mutually exclusive. We know that we can develop policies that help and protect our environment while protecting our industries.

Today, we are talking about the fishing industry, since we are talking about Bill S-3, which deals primarily with illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing. This bill is essential. It is largely an administrative bill to allow Canada to ratify a United Nations agreement that we signed in 2010, the Agreement on Port State Measures to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing.

We will support this bill, and we congratulate the government for bringing it forward. Unfortunately, there are only four weeks left in this parliamentary session. We saw that this government hesitated to take action. It has really dragged its feet on addressing illegal fishing.

Illegal fishing is a global issue that affects countries all over the world. According to a 2008 study, the global economic loss due to pirate fishing ranges from \$10 billion U.S. to \$23 billion U.S. a year. Illegal fishing yields between 11 million and 26 million tonnes of seafood every year, and it can account for up to 40% of the entire catch of certain fisheries. There is one last statistic that I would like to mention: commercial fishing, aquaculture and the processing of fish and seafood in Canada contributes \$5.4 billion to our total GDP. Therefore, it is a significant part of our economy. For that reason, we must fight illegal fishing in order to protect legitimate fishers and the fishing industry in Canada.

Another problem with combatting illegal fishing around the world is the fact that a number of countries have rules or regulations in place to combat illegal fishing but they have a hard time enforcing them. There is a lack of inspections and resources to ensure compliance with these laws, regulations and international agreements. That is very concerning.

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Canada must play a role in the world to encourage other countries to sign the agreement. We need 25 countries to sign the United Nations agreement on combatting illegal fishing. Canada must take a leadership role on the world stage to encourage other countries to get involved. We need to get other countries to ratify this agreement as quickly as possible. Unfortunately, Canada's international reputation and image are not the same as they were 10 or 15 years ago. They have changed a lot under the Conservatives.

In 2011 I had the opportunity to go to Durban, South Africa, for the UN negotiations on climate change. I was there with the minister of the environment at the time, although he had not included any opposition members in the government delegation.

• (1100)

During these negotiations on climate change, Canada was the laughingstock of the international community. Many delegates from other countries told me that they thought that Canada had negotiated in bad faith, particularly since the Prime Minister did not even allow the environment minister at the time to go home after getting off the plane from Durban before announcing that Canada would be withdrawing from the Kyoto protocol. The minister made the announcement as soon as he got back to Canada from Durban.

Those delegates from other countries were right because Canada did not announce its intention to withdraw from the Kyoto protocol during the negotiations in Durban. It did so in December when very few people are following federal politics. It was done on the sly, without consultation.

I would like to reiterate that Canada must play a leadership role and that it has a lot of work to do to rebuild its reputation in the international community, particularly when it comes to environmental issues and illegal fishing.

The government could have acted more quickly to implement the United Nations agreement. Patrick McGuinness, from the Fisheries Council of Canada, summed up that idea very well when he testified in committee. He said, and I quote:

The problem that has emerged in trying to address this IUU through an international agreement, the port states agreement, is that it's taking so long. It took a long time to negotiate and it's going to take a long time to be ratified by a significant number of countries to be able to attest that this is the right thing in addressing the IUU fishing issue that has been identified.

This is not at all a priority for this Conservative government, which has been slow in introducing this legislation in the House.

Personally, I am proud to be part of a team that has expertise on the environment and this industry. We have members such as the member for Halifax, who spoke before me, and we also have a caucus leader, the leader of the official opposition, who was Quebec's environment minister. During his career in provincial politics, he showed that he is a man of conviction. He cares deeply about protecting the environment, but he also knows how to balance Canada's environmental and economic priorities.

I am therefore convinced that the captain of our team is the right man. He is excellent. When the NDP becomes Canada's next government, we will solve this problem. By playing a leadership role in the international community, we will fight illegal fishing at the international level.

We want to emphasize how important it is for Canada to fulfill its obligations to the UN and that Canada can be a leader. Once the bill is passed, the government will have fully ratified the port state measures agreement.

I would like to reiterate that we will support this bill, but the government must take preventive action against illegal fishing. The Government of Canada has been dragging its heels on this issue for a decade now.

• (1105)

Even though we are pleased with this bill and support it, the federal government still has a long way to go. There is no doubt that leadership is not the Conservatives' strong suit.

[*English*]

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill Gordon (Miramichi, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons.

I am pleased to rise in the House today to support Bill S-3, An Act to amend the Coastal Fisheries Protection Act. This bill would give Canada additional tools to combat illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing activities more effectively and support global efforts to stop illegal fishing.

As a maritimer, I am keenly aware of the critical importance of sustainable fisheries for coastal communities. Illegal fishing is a worldwide problem. Unfortunately, these criminal operators have been able to move around, seeking out opportunities for profits in areas where enforcement is lacking or is difficult to undertake.

Over the last several years, the global community has been developing tools to ensure that illegally harvested fish do not make it to the global market. The goal of these efforts is to remove the economic profits from illegal fishing. By removing the monetary incentive from these illegal fishing operations, which are so detrimental to our environment and to the sustainability of marine species, we can hopefully eliminate these activities.

As a country that exports 85% of our fisheries harvest, we are mindful of the serious impact illegal fishing in other parts of the world can have on our industry too. By ratifying and implementing the port state measures agreement, we are working with our international partners to prevent illegal harvest from being traded around the world. We are making a commitment to support a fishing industry in Canada and abroad that follows the rules.

What kinds of species are targeted by illegal fishing ventures? They are the high-value species: bluefin tuna, toothfish, and so on. In many cases, the reason these fish are so valuable and so attractive to these criminals—their scarcity—is the same reason they are in such dire need of protection from unsustainable fishing practices.

Illegal fishing is not a new problem. In fact, there is a growing trend to require proof to ensure that imports of fish and seafood have been harvested legally. This proof usually takes the form of a document attesting that the fish harvesters followed national or regional fisheries management rules when catching the fish. Such documents must be supported by effective monitoring, control, and surveillance activities so that the importing country can confirm that the proper procedures have been followed.

Depending on the area, fishing requirements in international waters may be set by regional fisheries management organizations, such as the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization, or NAFO. Through our membership in NAFO, our government is standing up for the interests of Canadian fishermen and sustainable fisheries. We have consistently called for measures that promote sustainability, address overfishing, and protect important marine ecosystems.

For example, at the 2014 annual meeting, Canada successfully pushed for further measures to strengthen catch reporting by all member countries. Some countries have started requiring catch documents for some or all seafood that is landed or imported into their markets. For example, the European Union has required all fish and seafood imports to be accompanied by a catch certificate since 2010. All countries who export to the European Union, including Canada, must demonstrate that they are able to ensure that their certificates are backed by strong fisheries enforcement.

Many regional fisheries management organizations take the same approach. These organizations have been focusing on creating catch documentation requirements for valuable species that are often fished illegally. For example, some organizations have documentation requirements for tuna species. These include regional management organizations that Canada is a member of, such as the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas and the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission.

● (1110)

We also import fish and seafood from areas around the world where we do not harvest. In many of these areas, regional organizations exist to manage prized species, such as tuna. Organizations, including the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission and the Commission for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna, also require catch certification documents to ensure that fish are caught legally.

Under the amendments proposed in the bill before us, Canada would be able to make it an offence to import tuna from these far-off regions without the required documents. This bill creates the necessary protection between Canada's seafood market and the illegal fishing operations that want to cash in on the high demand for these species.

Import documentation requirements can have a real impact on illegal fishing operations. One example is another species at great risk from illegal fishing operations, the Patagonian toothfish, often sold under the trade name "Chilean sea bass". This species, living in the world's far southern oceans, is managed by the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources. All vessels fishing for toothfish in these waters must follow conservation measures and obtain a catch document to show that their catch was sustainably harvested. Since this catch documentation requirement

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was implemented in 2000, the amount of illegally caught toothfish entering global markets has dropped by half.

Canada does not fish these species, but this species is imported into our country. Much as is the case with tuna, the amendments before us in Bill S-3 will provide clear legal authority for Canada to adopt and implement such certification requirements for our imports.

Outside of catch certification documents designed by regional fisheries organizations, the amendments made to this bill in committee would allow Canada to determine, on our own, whether other fish and seafood imports should require specific documentation and what that the documentation should contain. The requirements would be set out in the regulations.

The amendment adopted in committee is important as it will allow Canada to react quickly with new requirements for fish imports when we learn of new species being targeted for illegal fishing.

The continued threat of illegal harvests was highlighted by the recent case of the fishing vessel called *Thunder*, which was tracked for months while fishing with illegal nets in Antarctic waters. In this instance, co-operation between Interpol, several states, and the organization performing surveillance left the vessel with no viable safe harbour for its illegal catch. This case clearly demonstrates that when the global community works together, we can stop these criminals and protect our oceans.

I urge all hon. members to join me in supporting the passage of this bill as reported by committee. These amendments to our Coastal Fisheries Protection Act would ensure that Canada's port state measures regime is consistent with this important international agreement and with standards shared by our international partners.

I am proud to be part of a government that is taking action on this important matter. I hope the opposition will do the right thing and vote for this bill.

● (1115)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Laurin Liu (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to reassure the member opposite: the NDP will support this crucial bill.

I would like to ask the member if the government is prepared to appeal to other countries around the world to sign and ratify the port state measures agreement.

I would also like to know how the government plans to put an end to illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing in Canada.

[*English*]

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill Gordon: Mr. Speaker, I am happy to know that the opposition will be supporting this bill, because it is very important. It will greatly help our economy.

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We need to take measures to put a stop to illegal fishing, and this is what these amendments will do. The bill will give our fisheries officers a bigger role to play. We certainly know about and appreciate the hard work these officers do.

This is an important bill for our economy, and I am so proud to be part of a government that is taking action to help stop illegal fishing in our country and in many waters.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we too will be supporting the bill, but we do have some concerns about it. One is the limit of a \$500,000 fine. Illegal fishing, in some cases, could amount to millions of dollars in profit. However, for some reason, and the government would not allow the proper witnesses to come forward, it has limited the fine to \$500,000. That to me, for a government that claims to be tough on crime, will not really be very tough on what will be, after this bill is implemented, an international crime.

Could the member explain why her government is so reluctant to impose the penalties necessary on large or massive fishing vessels that take these illegal measures? Why is it just \$500,000?

• (1120)

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill Gordon: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member opposite for his question, and I am happy to learn that he too will be supporting our bill. It will certainly have a great effect on our economy.

We will be leaving much work in the hands of our officers, and it certainly is a lot of work for them. We value the excellent and dedicated work they all do.

As we all know, Canada is taking a leading role, and I am so happy to be part of a government that sees the importance of sustainable fisheries for coastal communities. I am proud to be part of this great government that not only sees the need but is standing up and taking action. Not only does our government see the need to combat illegal fishery activities, it is taking action. I am very happy that the opposition is going to support us.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I spent a number of years on the fisheries committee when I first arrived here in 2006. My background is in conservation, law enforcement, and fisheries management. Therefore, I have a very active and keen interest in this. I am very pleased that the government is moving forward through Bill S-3.

I wonder if the hon. member, being from Atlantic Canada, can give us an update on what the fishermen and folks in Atlantic Canada think about this particular piece of legislation.

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill Gordon: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for his question. I too, when I first came here, was a member of the fisheries committee. It certainly was a great learning experience.

I know that our fishers are in favour of the bill and realize the benefit to our economy. They are glad that our government is taking action.

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to speak about Bill S-3, an act to amend the Coastal Fisheries Protection Act, which is a particularly important bill. It is designed to combat illegal fishing

and to do so in the context of working with our international partners. This is important for Canadians from a number of perspectives.

Obviously, the fishery is of tremendous economic importance. There are many thousands of families that depend one way or another on the fishery. We have seen in past decades the havoc that can be wrought by foreign overfishing, which has seriously harmed our economy and undermined the fishery in terms of the cod fishery, for example, which has yet to fully recover from that. This makes it particularly important that we implement the measures included in this particular agreement.

It is from that perspective, the economic one, that it is important to the families involved in the fishery, but it is also important from a Canadian sovereignty perspective. This is a further way for us to properly assert our sovereignty over our resources and territory, and that is something I think Canadians support.

Finally, it is, of course, of greater and greater environmental significance. There is a broad recognition that the fisheries are somewhat at risk internationally. There are parts of the world where overfishing has been dramatic, and we have only a vague sense in some parts of the world of the potential impact. Canada can be proud of having been a leader in that regard by taking action to further prevent illegal overfishing and to allow proper management not just of our resource but of the very important natural ecosystem. That is what we are talking about here. It is very important legislation from an environmental perspective.

Economically, sovereignty-wise, and from the environmental perspective, this is a very important bill to support.

* * *

• (1125)

DIGITAL PRIVACY ACT

BILL S-4—TIME ALLOCATION MOTION

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I also want to address another issue, which I raised in a notice to the House yesterday, and that is that I would like to propose the following motion, seconded by the Minister of Industry. I move:

That, in relation to Bill S-4, an act to amend the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act and to make a consequential amendment to another act, not more than one further sitting day shall be allotted to consideration at the report stage and second reading stage of the bill and one sitting day shall be allotted to consideration at the third reading stage of the bill; and

That, 15 minutes before the expiry of the time provided for Government Orders on the day allotted to the consideration at the report stage and second reading stage of the said bill and on the day allotted to consideration at the third reading stage of the said bill, any proceedings before the House shall be interrupted, if required for the purpose of this order, and in turn, every question necessary for the disposal of the stage of the bill then under consideration shall be put forthwith and successively, without further debate or amendment.

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Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order and would appreciate your guidance on this, but it is a question of relevance. I understand that the government House leader can at any point rise to put forward such a motion as the one to put time allocation, yet again, on another government bill. However, I find it to be offensive to the principles of examining Bill S-3 to then, in the pretense of speaking to Bill S-3, which is an important piece of legislation to ratify global action on our fisheries, slide into a completely different matter.

On the point of relevance, I think the hon. government House leader should not have pretended to be speaking about Bill S-3 in order to put time allocation on Bill S-4.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The member for Saanich—Gulf Islands identified herself that what the government House leader did is actually within the Standing Orders. There is no requirement in the Standing Orders that when a motion is moved, it must in any way be relevant to whatever matter is before the House at that time. Consequently, while it is not common, what the government House leader has done is in fact well within the Standing Orders of this place and is in order.

Pursuant to Standing Order 67(1), there will now be a 30-minute question period. I invite hon. members who wish to ask questions to rise in their places at this time so the chair has some idea of the number of members who wish to participate in the debate.

I see significant interest. I would ask that all hon. members limit their questions to about a minute, as is the case usually in questions and comments, and that the minister responding to do the same thing.

Questions and comments, the hon. member Terrebonne—Blainville.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Charmaine Borg (Terrebonne—Blainville, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am extremely disappointed that a time allocation motion has been moved in the House for the 97th time. Frankly, it is an insult to our democracy.

What I find even more shocking is that not only is the government imposing a gag order at report stage and second reading, but it has already imposed one for third reading, even though the House has not yet begun that debate. This is really rich. Once again, it is an insult to our democracy.

The government is invoking the urgent need to pass this legislation. I agree that it is really important to protect Canadians' personal information and take action, but this government dragged its feet for years. It had four years to do something. There were some bills in the past that were simply never introduced in this House.

We had plenty of time to amend the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act. Once again, the government dragged its feet on this issue.

Now all of sudden there is a sense of urgency, when we had countless opportunities to update the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act. I introduced a bill that the House could have passed into law already. Instead, the government is making this an urgent matter at the last minute. It is despicable.

Why did the government take so long to act on this and then turn around and say that this is an urgent matter? It makes no sense.

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is not the urgent matter that my colleague is making it out to be. We think it is very important to pass this bill, and as my colleague knows, the House will stop sitting in about three weeks.

We have already had a debate on this very complex bill. In my opinion, we have been very respectful of the members of the House of Commons and the opposition parties. We involved stakeholders from outside the House of Commons.

The Privacy Commissioner is on board with this. Mr. Therrien supports this bill and commends the government's approach in this bill.

It is truly essential that we move forward with this commitment and this approach for the sake of Canadians' privacy, in a world that is more digital than ever. We want this bill to become a reality for the sake of Canadians.

• (1130)

[*English*]

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, the hon. Minister of Industry is here in an unenviable position in that the government House leader moves time allocation on bills over and over again. This has the effect of reducing the ability of smaller parties, such as my own, as the leader of the Green Party, to speak. It is very rare that we have an opportunity to give a 20-minute or even a 10-minute speech in different parts of the legislative process. In a normal review, under parliamentary process, when time allocation does not take place, members such as me or others who are independents or in one of the three smaller parties would have an opportunity to debate legislation.

The government House leader lowers the boom and says that we are not going to have time to debate this and leaves the Minister of Industry to defend reducing the rights of members of Parliament in this place, reducing democracy, over and over again through the use of time allocation.

Therefore, my question is not really directed to the Minister of Industry. We would like to discuss the substantive aspects of the bill. We agree that it represents some progress but falls short in disappointing areas.

My main reason for rising here again this morning is to decry the excessive use of a limitation on debate. It is unprecedented in the history of this constitutional democracy, constitutional monarchy, and Westminster parliamentary democracy, where at least in principle, all members of Parliament are supposed to be equal.

Hon. James Moore: Mr. Speaker, I know this is a very well-articulated and long-standing concern of the leader of the Green Party on this matter.

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With regard to Bill S-4, the time in the House is precious. I personally have the view that I would like to see Parliament sit later into the evenings. Parliament is going to go from a 308-seat House to a 338-seat House, so affording more members of Parliament the opportunity to speak on more bills is an admirable goal. I would hope the Standing Orders in the next Parliament might reflect that.

If we look at other jurisdictions, for example, the U.S. Congress sits very late into the evening, but it also has an approach where it has fixed times for debate of specific bills. It allots to all political parties specific speaking slots and it is done a very different way. Perhaps this conversation needs to be had, given that the House will grow in size by 30 seats this coming fall.

There are other ways in which the government could accommodate, in a meaningful way, people's views on government legislation.

With regard to Bill S-4, which is a technical bill, as well as with the Copyright Modernization Act and other legislation that I have had the responsibility to steer through the House, I suspect the opposition parties would concede that we have tried to approach this in a pretty non-ideological, non-partisan way to draw in opinion from the private sector, from academics and from those who are interested in digital policy and privacy policy to arrive at legislation that would be as effective as possible and would move the country forward in a significant way.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I find it interesting that the Minister of Industry is talking about a Parliament that will have 338 members. It is difficult enough to speak with 308 members in the House. I am not looking forward to what will happen when there are 338 members. My colleague should not be proud in the least about a 97th time allocation motion, a gag order to prevent members from speaking, in this case at all stages. This 97th time allocation motion is really one of a kind.

We are hearing that the committee's work was short-circuited and that no proposals were accepted. The exercise of democracy is at stake on the eve of an election campaign that is going to be pretty tough for the government, according to what we are hearing on the ground.

Is he not concerned about how the government is curbing democracy in our country and not just because Bill S-4, as important as it may be, is a Senate rather than a government bill?

• (1135)

Hon. James Moore: Mr. Speaker, the fact remains that half the legislative process in the Parliament of Canada is conducted in the Senate. I know that the NDP wants to abolish the Senate. However, the Supreme Court says that that is impossible, so the NDP's policy is clearly pointless. Bill S-4 did originate in the Senate, but that is because we wanted an efficient approach to the process in order to ensure that both houses of Parliament would have the time needed to do their homework and act responsibly with regard to a bill as complex as this one. That is why we took this approach.

[*English*]

Certainly, in legislation as important as this, the personal information protection and electronic documents act reform, Bill

S-4, which is quite technical, it is important that we have a thorough process. It is mandated that Parliament do this review and, as Minister of Industry, it is my responsibility.

I know the industry committee did a thorough study of this. We had all kinds of views that were incorporated prior to us tabling legislation, during the legislative process and deliberation at the committee stage. It happened on the Senate side as well. This legislation is something of which I am quite proud. It is very important for our country. Reporting of data breaches, accountability, the implication of support of the Privacy Commissioner with regard to data breaches, the penalties that are in place for firms that do not inform people about data breaches that take place, all are important. This would be a big step forward for Canada.

Again, it was arrived at after a great deal of consultation, in a non-partisan way, to draw in ideas. We arrived at legislation that would strike an effective balance. When the legislation is adopted and moves forward, the country will be very well-served.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, with all due respect, I am concerned. The minister has stated that we need to move forward with the bill because the government has great respect for the Privacy Commissioner. It did not have much respect for the Privacy Commissioner when he wanted to testify on Bill C-51, which would deal with many similar issues. All of a sudden, the government has this newfound high regard for the Privacy Commissioner, and that troubles me.

It also troubles me that the government continues to bring forward important bills through the Senate, the unelected Senate, and then bill comes to the House, this elected House, and it cuts off debate. This is a pattern the government follows over and over again.

Yes, it is an important bill, so why did the government wait until almost the close of this session to bring forward the bill, with the excuse that we were running out of time, that we needed to move forward with this important bill?

Frankly, I know my constituents will find this deeply offensive, as they found the process on Bill C-51 offensive

Hon. James Moore: Mr. Speaker, with respect, the bill has been before the House a number of times. We actually thought we had deals in the past with the NDP, for example, to allow the debate on this legislation to collapse so it could go to committee for a thorough study. However, the New Democrats kept putting up speaker after speaker who read the exact same speech, with no new information, no new opinions, and offered nothing to the conversation so they could drag out the debate and make self-righteous statements at moments like this about the government ending the debate. It was a circular game being played by the New Democrats.

Government Orders

We want to move forward with protecting the privacy of Canadians. That is why the current Privacy Commissioner has said this about the legislation:

—I am greatly encouraged by the government's show of commitment to updating PIPEDA and I welcome many of the amendments proposed in this Bill. Proposals such as breach notification, voluntary compliance agreements and enhanced consent would go a long way to strengthening the framework that protects the privacy of Canadians...

Chantal Bernier, the interim privacy commissioner, said the same thing. She said "I welcome the proposals". This bill contains "very positive developments". She also said, "I am pleased that the government has heard our concerns and has addressed issues such as breach notification".

I hope this is not news to the member opposite. I know the New Democrats aspire to be government, but when governments actually propose legislation, it has to pass the House and it also has to pass the Senate. Therefore, having had the legislation approved through the Senate process, it is now before the House. The legislation has been before the Parliament of Canada for consideration, debate and a great deal of discussion for well over a year. It is time to move forward, it is time to protect Canadians, and it is time to update the PIPEDA legislation with the digital privacy act.

• (1140)

Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Speaker, could the minister please tell us what the government is doing to give the Privacy Commissioner increased power to ensure that companies play by the rules when dealing with the private information of Canadians?

Hon. James Moore: Mr. Speaker, from 2006, when we first formed government with our first piece of legislation, Bill C-2, and a number of measures since then, we have provided more tools, larger budgets and more responsibilities to independent officers of Parliament in order to hold not only Parliament but also agencies and firms beyond government accountable for their responsibilities and duties to protect Canadians.

This legislation would give the Privacy Commissioner and individual Canadians increased time of up to one year to take an organization to court if it broke the law, instead of the current 45 days. Very often data breaches happen and people may not be informed or may not be fully aware of the consequences that have happened with respect to data breaches and violations of their privacy online.

Currently, there is only a 45-day window when an individual Canadian can take an institution or a firm to court in order to get remedy with respect to the data breach that has taken place. We opened that from 45 days to one year, including empowering the Privacy Commissioner to take action on behalf of Canadians on an individual case or on a broader, more complex file. This is very important.

We want to ensure that the Privacy Commissioner has this kind of power and kind of latitude to take action because 45 days is far too narrow a window. These are the kinds of powers that the Privacy Commissioner asked for, we listened and we have included them in this legislation. This would go a very long way to providing Canadians with greater certainty in a digital world.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Éloise Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, earlier, I found it interesting to hear the minister express his concern about MPs having the opportunity to participate in debates in the House. It is rather ironic to see him rise in the House and be forced to defend the decisions of the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons. I also find it ironic to hear him making disparaging comments about what members from the other parties are saying.

I am going to be more respectful than he was and refrain from commenting on some of the speeches I heard from the members opposite that were written by the Prime Minister's Office. Quite frankly, they were not very good.

Has the minister ever told his colleagues or the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons how uneasy he is with the situation that some members are facing, namely the fact that they are not being allowed to speak? He clearly stated in the House that he was concerned about this, given that the House will have even more members after the election. Has he ever expressed those concerns to his colleagues or to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons? Also, has he ever considered the impact that the repeated gag orders imposed by his government is actually having on the work that parliamentarians can accomplish in the House?

Hon. James Moore: Mr. Speaker, as the Speaker and a member of the House of Commons, you are well aware that this is always a very important discussion to have at the beginning of each Parliament.

In the future, it will be very important for every one of us to discuss the serious nature of our work in the House of Commons and the way that we are all going to participate in debate that is respectful to our constituents. We need to have that conversation not just here in the House, as an institution, but also within our political parties.

That discussion will be even more important when the number of seats in the House of Commons goes from 308 to 338 this fall. This is always a topic of discussion within the parties, particularly with regard to the House of Commons.

In my opinion, our government is very serious about meeting the needs of Canadian taxpayers and having effective and respectful debates about the content of our bills. That is what we have done with Bill S-4.

• (1145)

Mr. Alain Giguère (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to stress the word "debate", since the minister always talks about debate, but that implies some sort of exchange. In this case there is no debate, which unfortunately is nothing new from this government.

Government Orders

I would like the minister to tell us how many times the government accepted amendments and listened, analyzed and took action, instead of just exchanging words. On occasion, the opposition has admitted that some bills were good and that they could be improved. Bill C-51 was a prime example of a failure. Even the government's witnesses said that it was not a good bill. However, the government systematically issues gag orders and shuts down debate. It shuts down the opposition, it shuts down disagreement and it shuts down any possibility for amendment.

Why does the minister use the word “debate” when this government systematically shuns debate?

Hon. James Moore: Mr. Speaker, I completely disagree. That is what we did with Bill S-4. We had a very respectful and serious debate. We spoke about this bill in depth and talked about the implications of a bill as complex as this one.

In the debate in the House and in committee, and outside the House of Commons, we have had respectful exchanges with the government's partners that are affected by this bill, such as lawyers, representatives of the private sector and the Privacy Commissioner. We carried out analyses, we took part in debate, and presentations were made to the government. We made decisions after truly listening to the people who had concerns about the status quo.

We listened to them and that is why the chamber of commerce, former privacy commissioner Chantal Bernier and Daniel Therrien support this bill. I have a long list of people who support the bill. A large group of Canadians pointed out that our government listened. We did our analyses, we did our homework and we came up with a balanced bill that not only meets the interests of our commercial and electronic future and Canadians' needs, but also meets the government's need to have a really effective bill on Canadians' privacy.

That is what we did. There was debate here, in the House, at committees and outside the House of Commons, before we introduced the bill and while it was before the House. We continue to follow an approach that is democratic and effective, as part of a process that truly achieves results.

[*English*]

Mr. Terence Young (Oakville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, could the minister expand on how the government will help to protect the personal information of Canadians by mandating that organizations inform their clients when their personal information is lost or stolen?

Hon. James Moore: Mr. Speaker, the amendments in this legislation introduce requirements for organizations to report potentially harmful breaches of information security safeguards, like data breaches. For example, if there is a data breach on credit card information on a website, they have to report that information to the Privacy Commissioner immediately and also notify the affected individuals. It is a dual track of accountability. If someone involved in e-commerce is purchasing something on a website and that website may have been hacked and the person's information has been potentially lost or stolen, there is an immediate responsibility for the firm that has lost the information to report it directly to the Privacy Commissioner and also to the people who are affected. There is a dual track of accountability, and this is essential.

Failing to report these kinds of data breaches to either the individuals or the Privacy Commissioner would result in facing a penalty of up to \$100,000 per offence. If there is a data breach of, say, a few hundred customers whose credit card information may have been stolen and that data breach is not reported to both the Privacy Commissioner and the individuals, in every single instance, there is up to a \$100,000 fine. That is a stiff penalty, but we think it is necessary.

As more and more Canadians are migrating their businesses and academic pursuits online, we need to make sure information is being protected, not only by the government but obliquely by firms, and that they take their privacy obligations very seriously, stay ahead of the technological curve, and stay ahead of those who would want to steal people's information and use it for violations of their privacy and self-interest.

• (1150)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Laurin Liu (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to correct some of the false information the minister has spread. First, he said that we had enough time to debate Bill S-4 on Canadians' privacy. Unfortunately, we had just one day to debate this very complex bill that Canadians consider controversial. We have unfortunately not had enough time to study this bill thoroughly in the House.

In his speech he showed contempt for the official opposition. He is wrong: all of the recommendations were proposed by the official opposition. This is not how our Parliament should work. He also mentioned the Information Commissioner. There has been a flagrant lack of respect for the Information Commissioner during this Parliament.

Not only did the government not accept any of the recommendations that the Information Commissioner made during the study of Bill S-4, it also prevented the Information Commissioner from testifying before the committee during the study of Bill C-51, a bill that, as we all know, is even more controversial than Bill S-4.

This is the 97th time they have invoked closure in the House of Commons. That is not something to be proud of. The government keeps breaking records when it comes to gag orders in the House.

[*English*]

Hon. James Moore: Mr. Speaker, with respect to my colleague, quite frankly, I do not agree.

With respect to the Privacy Commissioner, I consulted with the interim privacy commissioner at the time, Chantal Bernier, before we tabled the legislation and I also had time to speak with Daniel Therrien. I had a good, long substantive meeting, one on one, with both of these commissioners, as did my officials and my staff, before we tabled the legislation. We did listen, and we did consult prior to tabling the legislation.

Government Orders

With a piece of legislation such as this, as complicated and far reaching as this, we do not arrive at the legislation on our own, sitting in the dark, working away, and trying to guess at what the best balance would be. We consult broadly. We consulted with the Privacy Commissioner before we tabled this legislation, and we have arrived at what is an appropriate balance, in my view, which is why the Privacy Commissioner said about the legislation:

...I am greatly encouraged by the government's show of commitment to updating...[this legislation] and I welcome many of the amendments proposed in this Bill. Proposals such as breach notification, voluntary compliance agreements and enhanced consent would go a long way to strengthening the framework that protects the privacy of Canadians...

This legislation is supported by the Privacy Commissioner because we were respectful of the process, because we consulted before we tabled the legislation, and we were able to go forward. Equally, I know that the NDP critic on this matter, the member for Terrebonne—Blainville, when we tabled this legislation, said, “We have been pushing for these measures and I'm happy to see them introduced”.

We were very pleased to see the NDP support this bill when we first tabled it, and I hope that the NDP will vote in favour of its sentiment when we began this process over a year ago.

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for attempting to continue debate on the actual bill during this question and answer period, which is really not about the bill itself but about the fact that the government has moved time allocation. The government has moved a motion to stop debate on a bill for the 97th time in this House. That is what this debate right now is about.

Sure, the minister may have had consultations with the Privacy Commissioner before bringing forward the bill, but after the bill was brought forward, the Privacy Commissioner brought forward amendments, which the government has chosen to ignore.

The official opposition New Democrats and experts have proposed amendments to the bill because it is ill conceived. The government chose to ignore all of those, so let us not go to debate on the bill right now, because that is what we are trying to have, actual debate on the bill. The government is stopping debate on the bill, yet once again, stopping debate on yet another bill.

My question to the minister is this. Why do the minister and the entire government seem to have absolutely no respect and complete disregard for parliamentary process?

• (1155)

Hon. James Moore: With respect, Mr. Speaker, I am happy to debate the bill as much as the opposition would want to. This is a 30-minute time for debate, of back and forth, basically a 30-minute question period on this legislation. If New Democrats want to use that time to ask rhetorical partisan questions, they are free to do so. I am happy to stand here and talk substantively about any section of the bill for this half an hour.

Equally, I was before the industry committee for a two-hour period, answering questions of great substance from the hon. member's colleague, whom I know has spent a lot of time on this legislation in a good-faith effort to contribute to public policy and to talk about it there. I have appeared before the industry committee,

including this week. I was before the committee for an hour; there were no questions from the NDP on this legislation. I was before the committee on three other occasions. There were no questions from the NDP on this legislation.

The member opposite could easily have come to the committee. Other members were there. She could have come and asked me questions on this legislation. She was not there. Equally, the member for Terrebonne—Blainville—

Ms. Charmaine Borg: I asked a question. I was there.

Hon. James Moore: Fair enough, Mr. Speaker, but the member opposite could have, of course, on any other occasion asked questions about this legislation, which she chose not to, and that is her prerogative.

However, equally, the member who just asked this question and others who have been in this House who claim to be so amped up about the importance of this legislation and having a meaningful discussion in a non-partisan way have never contacted me, have never sat down with me, have never reached out to me to get a briefing on this legislation or talk about it. Here we are, after more than a year of this bill being before Parliament, and these members have never, ever engaged in debate on this subject.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore: Mr. Speaker, I clearly heard the minister mention the absence of my colleague from Terrebonne—Blainville in his answer. I believe we are not allowed to mention the absence or presence of members. Could you please clarify that?

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The rule prohibiting references to the absence of members specifically relates to members being in the House at this time. It does not apply to general comments in terms of what has gone on in the House.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Wetaskiwin.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I certainly appreciate the comments the minister has made. I will just use my time to ask a substantive question about the piece of legislation.

When I sat on the ethics and privacy committee for a number of years, we did have substantive debates about these kinds of issues. We have had previous versions of this legislation, which has come forward in previous sessions of this Parliament.

I am very glad to see the government moving forward in getting the bill passed. It has already been through the Senate and is now here in the House. We have the opportunity to have this debate and get this legislation passed in a timely fashion.

As a parent, something that concerns me is the amount of time my children spend online and the lack of rules and regulations in some instances that we know are there, some of the risks and some of the issues that are online, and the lack of clarity and the lack of standardization. We know full well some of the issues that pertain to that.

I am wondering if the minister could speak to how Bill S-4 actually improves the online world insofar as protecting young people, vulnerable people, and especially children.

Government Orders

Hon. James Moore: Mr. Speaker, I am happy to talk to my colleague about the substance of the bill at any time.

I would just say to my colleagues that this legislation has been before Parliament now for well over a year. A lot of people on all sides of this House have contributed greatly to the debate and the substance of this legislation. We think we have the right balance.

I appreciate the support of the Privacy Commissioner as well as a number of organizations that recognize that this legislation is very much needed in Canada. It brings us up to an international standard of privacy protection for Canadians, and I am looking forward to the passage of this legislation.

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: Order. It is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith the question necessary to dispose of the motion now before the House.

● (1200)

[*English*]

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

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

Some hon. members: Nay.

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

And five or more members having risen:

The Deputy Speaker: Call in the members.

● (1240)

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

(*Division No. 409*)

YEAS

Members

Ablonczy	Adler
Aglukkaq	Albas
Alexander	Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Ambler	Anderson
Armstrong	Ashfield
Aspin	Barlow
Bateman	Benoit
Bergen	Bernier
Bloch	Boughen
Braid	Breitkreuz
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Butt	Calandra
Calkins	Cannan
Carmichael	Carrie
Chisu	Chong
Clarke	Clement
Crockatt	Daniel
Davidson	Dechert
Devolin	Dreeshen

Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	Dykstra
Eglinski	Falk
Fantino	Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)
Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)	Fletcher
Galipeau	Gallant
Gill	Glover
Goldring	Gosal
Grewal	Harper
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)	Hawn
Hayes	Hillyer
Hoback	Holder
James	Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)	Kenny (Calgary Southeast)
Kent	Kerr
Komarnicki	Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lake	Lauzon
Lebel	Leef
Lemieux	Leung
Lizon	Lobb
Lukiwski	Lunney
MacKay (Central Nova)	MacKenzie
Maguire	Mayes
McColeman	McLeod
Menegakis	Miller
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	
Moore (Fundy Royal)	
Nicholson	Norlock
O'Neill Gordon	Opitz
O'Toole	Paradis
Payne	Perkins
Poilievre	Preston
Raitt	Rajotte
Reid	Rempel
Richards	Ritz
Saxton	Schellenberger
Seeback	Shea
Shipley	Shory
Sopuck	Sorenson
Stanton	Strahl
Sweet	Tilson
Toet	Trost
Truppe	Uppal
Valcourt	Van Kesteren
Van Loan	Wallace
Warawa	Warkentin
Watson	Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to
Sky Country)	
Weston (Saint John)	Wilks
Williamson	Woodworth
Yelich	Young (Oakville)
Young (Vancouver South)	Yurdiga
Zimmer — 137	

NAYS

Members

Angus
Aubin
Bellavance
Bevington
Blanchette-Lamothe
Borg
Boutin-Sweet
Brison
Caron
Chicoine
Choquette
Cleary
Cullen
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Dewar
Dionne Labelle
Doré Lefebvre
Dubourg
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Eyking
Garneau
Genest
Giguère
Gravelle
Harris (St. John's East)
Hughes
Julian

Government Orders

Kellway	Lamoureux
Lapointe	Latendresse
LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)	Liu
MacAulay	Mai
Marston	Masse
Mathysen	May
McCallum	McGuinty
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)	Michaud
Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)	Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)
Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)	Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)
Mourani	Nantel
Nicholls	Nunez-Melo
Papillon	Péclet
Pilon	Quach
Rankin	Ravignat
Raynault	Regan
Saganash	Scarpaleggia
Scott	Sitsabaeslan
St-Denis	Stewart
Stoffer	Sullivan
Toone	Tremblay
Valeriotte	Vaughan— 98

PAIRED

Nil

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

WAYS AND MEANS

NOTICE OF MOTION

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Minister of State (Western Economic Diversification), CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 83 (1), I wish to table a notice of a ways and means motion to amend the Excise Tax Act. Pursuant to Standing Order 83(2), I ask that an order of the day be designated for the consideration of the motion.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

PORT STATE MEASURES AGREEMENT IMPLEMENTATION ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill S-3, An Act to amend the Coastal Fisheries Protection Act, be read the third time and passed.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak on Bill S-3, an act to amend the Coastal Fisheries Protection Act. This enactment would amend the Coastal Fisheries Protection Act to implement the port state measures agreement, to prohibit the importation of fish caught and marine plants harvested in the course of illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and to clarify certain powers in respect of the administration and enforcement of the act.

The Liberal Party of Canada supports this bill because it would enable Canada to combat illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, acts which undermine the livelihood of legitimate fishers and the fishing industry in Canada. The bill would also help to meet our international obligations as laid out in the United Nations Food and

Agriculture Organization Agreement on Port State Measures to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing.

Illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing leads to the depletion of fish stocks, unfair competition with illegal fish products and price fluctuations created by an unpredictable supply that can be caused by illegal fish products in foreign markets. Illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing undermines the livelihood of legitimate fishers, as I said earlier, both within Canada and around the world. It is estimated that it costs the global economy about \$10 billion U.S. to \$23 billion U.S. annually.

Liberals believe in the vital role that the fishing industry plays in Canada's economy and culture. It contributes roughly \$5.4 billion and 71,000 full-time jobs to the Canadian economy. We believe that the federal government must play a strong role in cracking down on this type of fishing, and to protect fishing livelihoods, fisheries conservation and the Canadian economy.

While we welcome the measures in this bill, the government has elsewhere undermined surveillance and monitoring programs for foreign offshore fishing vessels. The Conservatives cut \$4.2 million and 23 full-time equivalent jobs in Canada's offshore surveillance of foreign fishing vessels, which will result in a reduction of Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization air hours from about 1,000 to 600, and NAFO sea days from 785 to 600. That is a serious undermining of the ability of those organizations to do their jobs and protect the Canadian fishery.

We are also concerned, because it was evidenced during the study of this bill in the House of Commons committee, that the government is seriously lacking information on the amount of possible illegal fishing happening, both within and outside of Canada's 200 mile limit, and on IUU products that may currently be entering Canadian ports. The lack of this information is made even more concerning when combined with the government's cuts to offshore surveillance. We believe that this is vital information that should be available to the Canadian fishing industry and to parliamentarians.

The port state measures agreement would contribute to harmonized port state measures and enhanced regional and international co-operation, and block the flow of illegal, unreported and unregulated caught fish into markets both domestic and abroad. It would also add to the Coastal Fisheries Protection Act new prohibitions related to importing illegally acquired fish and marine products, as well as clarify in detail some of the act's administration and enforcement provisions.

Bill S-3 was previously introduced during the first session of the 41st Parliament as Bill S-13.

● (1245)

Bill S-13 was adopted by the Senate and was awaiting second reading in the House of Commons when it died on the order paper with the prorogation of Parliament on September 13, 2013. Bill S-3 was introduced in the Senate on October 23, 2013.

Government Orders

In addition to the government witnesses who appeared before the Standing Senate Committee on Fisheries and Oceans, the two non-governmental witnesses were supportive of the bill. The Senate committee reported Bill S-3 without amendment on December 9, 2013. The bill then came to this House and was supported on all sides by the committee. Witnesses at the House committee were also supportive of the bill.

The fisheries committee reported Bill S-3 with some amendments on April 29 of this year. The amendments that the government made were mostly to close some loopholes that the original wording had missed.

These amendments gave authority to make regulations to require those who may belong to a regional fisheries management organization to which Canada is not a party to provide documentation or trade tracking requirements upon entering Canadian ports, to apply the fine and punishment to that section should the proper documentation not be provided, and to authorize the court to order the forfeiture of illegal goods related to illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing seized in a place other than the fishing vessel itself.

While the amendments were supported for the most part by members of the committee, the fact is that committee members had questions about details surrounding these amendments, but the government could not or would not provide the answers or bring in the appropriate officials who would be able to answer the questions that committee members had.

For example, we would like to know just how much illegal fishing activity is taking place both within and outside Canada's 200-mile limit. We have had no answers to those questions, and the government should be providing those answers. Could the government provide some detailed answers on this question? It is very important for Canadians to have answers. It is especially important for all those in the fishing industry, for the fish and seafood sector, and for anyone who lives in small coastal communities, such as the people I represent in the riding of Malpeque.

Also, are the fines of \$100,000 for a summary conviction and \$500,000 for a conviction on indictment really enough of a penalty? I raised this question earlier today. If a massive fishing vessel operating under a flag state is making millions of dollars in profits from illegal fishing activities, is a \$500,000 fine enough? I do not believe so. Is there flexibility to allow the courts to look at the situation and levy a higher fine if it is warranted? We do not know, and the government has not answered.

A \$500,000 fine in terms of the millions that can be made in profits from illegal fishing is really only a slap on the wrist for some of the major illegal fishing operations. That is not exactly what I would call tough on crime, coming from a so-called tough-on-crime government. The fines are clearly not high enough, and we do not know, nor has the government informed us, whether the court has the ability to expand that fine for those illegal activities in certain situations.

The government would not provide a legal expert or legal analysis to the fisheries committee, so perhaps it has the proper legal

information and could provide it to the House through its spokesmen later today.

● (1250)

I have other concerns as well. On the one hand, the government is taking these steps to ratify the port state measures agreement to deter illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing, which really sounds good, but at the same time, on the other hand, the very same government is slashing the Department of Fisheries and Oceans' budget for offshore monitoring and surveillance.

Conservatives have taken \$4.2 million out of the budget for offshore monitoring and surveillance. It will mean very significant reductions in air and sea monitoring off our coasts. On the one hand, the government seems to be showing it is doing something, and on the other it is actually reducing the money that is needed to do what it claims it wants to do. That is not unusual for this government. We have seen that happen many times in many areas.

In the Liberal Party we have a proud tradition of standing up against illegal and foreign overfishing, and I am very proud of that. I have served as the chair of the fisheries committee, which I will admit was one of the highlights of my time in Parliament. It was a committee that worked well, with all parties working together to make many recommendations. Even government members moved motions that were hard on government. We do not see that any more today. That is the way committees should work in this place.

For a time, I also served as parliamentary secretary, and I was always proud to represent the fishing industry and the fishing community.

In terms of the Liberal Party and our time in government, whether was establishing the 200-mile fishing zone that protected fishermen from foreign trawlers; extending the Coastal Fisheries Protection Act to extend its application to the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization regulatory area; the turbot war; or being an active member of the High Seas Task Force, an international task force that was committed to stopping illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing in parts of the ocean that are not under the exclusive control of foreign states, Liberals have stood up for our fisheries against illegal and foreign fishing.

Many will recall how former fisheries minister Brian Tobin took that point to the global community. That was a government that would take action on behalf of fisheries. We did not just give the impression that we were doing so; we would actually provide the money and take the action to get the job done.

It is vitally important for the Government of Canada to take action in the fishing industry. It is so important for the area that many of us here come from, Atlantic Canada, because so many livelihoods depend on a healthy fishery. I know we all feel this is a very serious issue, and it is very important for the people we represent on all sides of the House, for that matter.

Government Orders

Again I would refer to what I said in the beginning, and I re-emphasize this point: Liberals believe in the vital role that the fishing industry plays in Canada's economy and culture. It contributes \$5.4 billion and 71,000 full-time jobs to the Canadian economy, and over \$4 billion in fish and seafood products are exported every year.

In fact, not long ago the fisheries minister was at the International Boston Seafood Show. Many of us have attended this event over the years, and Canadian fish products are certainly profiled at that show in the Boston area. It has attendance from all around the world and it is a great opportunity for Canadians to profile the kind of high-quality fish products that we produce and export out of this country.

• (1255)

I am glad to see the government take some steps in putting this international agreement in place. I know the Conservatives are not big fans of international agreements, so it does come as somewhat of a surprise. They are not big fans of the United Nations. However, it is good that after so many years of sitting on this bill, they are finally moving it forward.

I wonder if further spokesmen from the government side could provide the House with details on when they expect the port state measures agreement to enter into force, how many countries are still needed to ratify it, and what countries are not overly interested in ratifying this agreement. I come back to the point that the committee did not allow enough time and did not allow enough witnesses to get answers to those simple questions. Whether those orders came from the executive branch or elsewhere I do not know, but it was not through the fault of opposition members,

This information is important, and it is important for Canada to do everything it can to ensure that all countries around the world and all regional fisheries management organizations are taking steps to ensure fishing is done in a proper manner. I know that here in Canada, bluefin tuna is a major species that has many benefits for many coastal communities. It is a well-managed hook-and-line fishery, and that is the proper way for this fish to be caught. Hook-and-line tuna fishing is sustainable and it is good for the health of the resource. However, not all countries use hook and line to catch tuna. Some countries use very large boats and nets, or the longline method, or other unsustainable methods that are devastating for tuna stocks. It is a highly migratory species. We need to be doing all we can to ensure each country around the world is fishing in a sustainable and responsible way.

Many stocks, such as tuna, are migratory. These migratory fish could be caught somewhere else through the use of an illegal or improper method, and that for a certainty would hurt the tuna fisheries in our own waters. Ensuring sustainable and legal fisheries around the world will benefit our fishermen here at home, as well as the countries and colleagues with whom we operate in coordination. We need that information, and we need the clout to make those involved in improper and illegal fishing methods stop what they are doing and practise responsible fishing. This bill would help in that regard.

The bottom line is that this bill should provide help for the fishermen that we all represent. It should be good for our entire fish and seafood sector and for the future of all fisheries, both global and

domestic, and it should be good for the Canadian economy and the environment.

In closing, I am glad that the government has finally moved forward with this piece of legislation. I and our party are happy to support it, but we wish the government would provide the details and information that members have been asking for. We are disappointed that the government has been cutting the budget for offshore surveillance monitoring, not to mention the many other cuts at DFO in areas such as science and research, oceans management, and enforcement.

In summary, this bill would prohibit the importing of illegally caught fish and marine plants, extend Canadian control over foreign fishing vessels seeking access to Canadian ports, and give Canadian fisheries protection officers greater authority and power of enforcement. As well, it would allow the minister to share information with regard to the inspection of foreign vessels and provide for greater sharing of information between Fisheries and Oceans Canada and the Canada Border Services Agency in relation to the importation of fish and fish products.

I want to reiterate that we will be supporting this bill. We fully understand how serious this issue is and we welcome the passage of the bill in this House.

• (1300)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his speech and ask if he would elaborate on the impact that this kind of fishing has on the inshore fishery here in Canada, in his own riding.

Does my colleague not think that creating a traceability and certification system for seafood products, as the European Union has done, would be worth considering?

[*English*]

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, the process they have in place in the European community, or that they are trying to implement in terms of traceability, is indeed a good one. However, this bill, in and of itself, is a major step forward, because first and foremost, even with traceability, illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing still has a very damaging impact. We have to take it a step at a time. This is a major step forward, as long as we can get it ratified and get other countries around the world to ratify it. It is for that reason we support the bill.

In terms of the question he asked, those are next steps, I believe, that are important. I come out of the agriculture sector. We have tried traceability in the agriculture sector, and in some commodities it has worked and in some it has not, but it is certainly worthy of consideration by a future government.

Government Orders

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to reiterate the comments made by my colleague. I had the opportunity to serve on the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans when my colleague, the member for Malpeque, chaired that committee. I think the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore sat on it over that period of time as well. In six years, we did something like 16 or 18 studies, and almost all of them were unanimous. I think there was one with a dissenting report. However, that was back when committees actually functioned and committees worked together for the benefit of those the studies would have the greatest impact on. We do not see that today.

I know that the recommendation from my colleague is to support the legislation. However, I know, particularly in the fisheries, that the current government has brought forward legislation and made announcements in the past, to much fanfare, only for us to find that there was really nothing behind it. I think back in particular to when the lobster fishery in Atlantic Canada had such a tough year three years ago. The government came forward and made a big announcement about \$50 million in support for the lobster fishery. When it came, I think it was \$8 million that was disbursed. The criteria set up were so stringent that it helped very few. Another one was the big deal with China on seal products. Our sealing industry was going to get such a big shot in the arm, only to see nothing happen with the deal with China.

Especially with the limited amount of time the committee had with this bill, what gives my colleague the assurance that this time is going to be different?

• (1305)

Hon. Wayne Easter: As you would know, Mr. Speaker, the government's track record on what it claims it will do or even on what it announces it will do is that it is not always that good at getting it done. That even relates to my critic portfolio. The Conservatives talk tough on crime, but they are certainly not smart on crime.

In terms of the fisheries, which is what the member's question really relates to—

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Crime and fish, what a connection.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, there is a little heckling from the other side. There is one thing the Conservatives are adverse to, and that is evidence-based decision-making and facts. They do not like to hear the facts. However, the fact is that when it comes to announcements, they really do not mean much. They are more political spin for a little while, but the dollars do not always follow suit.

I come back to the point the member raised about the former fisheries committee. Why it does not work as well today in the House and at the committee level is that in a previous time, members of the fisheries committee were actually there to work for the industry and to take direction from the industry. The problem now is that the members who sit on the government side believe that their direction should come from the executive branch, and that is so wrong. Members who enter this place should work for the industry, not the PMO.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth (Kitchener Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in fact, the fisheries program continues to recruit new

talent to protect our fisheries. The government's approach to fisheries protection and enforcement is working. Over the past three years, fisheries officers have issued 5,529 charges, issued 2,638 tickets, obtained 2,972 convictions, and issued \$6 million in fines for both charges and tickets.

I would like to know if the hon. member will stand with us in the House and commend our fisheries officers for their great work.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, there is nothing I would like to do more than commend the fisheries officers for the great work they do.

I hear a lot of applause from the other side, and I am glad to hear it. It is fisheries officers we are talking about. However, when it comes to government policy fostered by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and the cabinet, that is an entirely different story.

Conservatives are slow getting to the plate. How long did it take this bill to get here? It took years and years. They still cannot answer questions on how many countries have yet to ratify the agreement, what countries are unwilling to ratify, and when the agreement will be in place. We will be passing a piece of legislation, but the government failed to provide the witnesses at the committee level to give us those kinds of answers.

I say to my hon. friend on the other side that maybe some spokesmen on that side, as soon as they get some direction from the PMO, could give us those answers during the rest of the debate today.

• (1310)

Mr. Stephen Woodworth (Kitchener Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, before I begin, I would like to note that I will be sharing my time today with my hon. colleague, the hard-working and principled member for beautiful Langley, British Columbia.

I rise today to also provide my support for amendments to the Coastal Fisheries Protection Act. It appears that we have the support of many other members on this critical piece of legislation. It is my hope that the opposition will not only talk the talk but walk the walk and join us in voting this bill through quickly.

As a former member of the parliamentary fisheries committee, and as the longest-serving member of the parliamentary environment committee, I understand the critical importance of defending sustainable fisheries from damaging activities.

As we are all well aware, it is difficult to estimate precisely the total catch from unlawful fishing. It is an illegal market, and estimates are therefore naturally unreliable. However, studies indicate that the global figure could be from 11 million tonnes to as much as 26 million tonnes every year. As my hon. colleague mentioned earlier, this represents a significant portion of the world's total catch.

Illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing is a wide-ranging problem with serious impacts on marine environments and law-abiding fish harvesters.

Government Orders

By illegal fishing, we mean contravention of the conservation and enforcement measures of international fisheries management organizations. Unreported fishing refers to fishing activities that have not been reported or that have been misrepresented by vessels to the relevant enforcement authority. Unregulated fishing is self-explanatory. It includes fishing activities that are not adequately regulated or controlled by any responsible flag state. Of course, from a criminal perspective, this kind of fishing operation can be highly attractive. They do not pay licence fees, taxes, or duties on these catches.

Developing countries are at particular risk of having their resources illegally exploited. Canada has built its own capacity to effectively enforce its rules, but by supporting international efforts to cut off port access for these high-seas bandits, we can help countries that are still building their critical infrastructure.

When customers around the world order fish in a restaurant or buy it in a store, they probably assume that it was legally harvested. Once illegally caught fish enter the supply chain, there are very few ways to tell how it was harvested. Therefore, these amendments to the Coastal Fisheries Protection Act will further strengthen our controls on the import of fisheries products into Canada that are suspected of being illegally harvested. This will not only help our Canadian harvesters protect their economic interests but will also assist those in other countries in the protection of their fish stocks.

Turning to the subject of port controls, it is important to note that stemming the trade in illegal catches is complicated by the fact that not every vessel needs to enter a port to land its catch. Smaller fishing vessels can offload their catches onto larger ships with refrigerated holds while still at sea. This is known as trans-shipping. It can be used by criminals and can serve to disguise the origin of illegally caught fish. Through Bill S-3, Canada will address this issue by expanding the definition of a fishing vessel to include all of these types of container ships.

Another feature of the problem of illegal harvests is that vessels operate under so-called flags of convenience. Some countries allow foreign fishing vessels to operate under their flags but then take little or no responsibility for the activities of those vessels. It is in response to this gap in flag state enforcement that other measures, such as the port state measures we are discussing today, have been proposed as a highly effective option in the fight against illegal fishing.

• (1315)

The issue of illegal fishing has been on the global radar for years. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations adopted the code of conduct for responsible fisheries in 1995, and that was endorsed by around 170 member states, including Canada. In 2001, the organization adopted an international plan of action to prevent, deter and eliminate illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing.

Under this framework, member states agreed that a concerted approach by all port states was needed to make it more difficult for illegal fishing vessels to land their catches without fear of any serious repercussions. The agreement on port state measures to prevent, deter and eliminate illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing is a treaty that promotes this coordinated global action.

Some regional fisheries management organizations now maintain illegal fishing vessel lists containing details of vessels that have supported illegal fishing activities within that region. This name-and-shame policy is another means to make it difficult for criminal fishing vessels and their support ships to find ports in which to offload their catches. However, the amendments that would be made to the act by Bill S-3 would provide enhanced clarity for our fisheries officers to share information on those who committed illegal fishing offences with the Canadian Border Services Agency and with our international partners.

No single measure on its own will succeed in eliminating illegal fishing. All possible avenues must be explored, otherwise strong market demand and high prices, especially for the world's most sought after species, will continue to attract illegal fishing operations to the long-term detriment of the world's fish stocks. Therefore, Bill S-3 would further deter illegal operators with new powers for the court to order to significant financial penalties upon conviction.

It is clear why all of this matters to Canadians and to our fishing industry. First, as a responsible fishing nation, we need to ensure that we are part of the solution and a leader in combatting illegal fishing, which is also an important priority for our key trading and enforcement partners. Second, the aspects of illegal fishing that I have mentioned put our industry at a competitive disadvantage, and we have to do what we can to level the playing field. Third, we all have an interest in protecting the health of the world's oceans.

Bill S-3 would strengthen the Coastal Fisheries Protection Act, aligning it with the new global standards articulated in the port state measures agreement.

Of course, states are free to take more stringent measures than those outlined in the agreement, and as part of meeting our international obligations, this bill would enable us to further protect the livelihoods of law-abiding fish harvesters, not just in Canada but all around the world, by supporting global efforts to prohibit the entry of illegal fish into international markets.

The amendments to the act contained in Bill S-3 would allow Canada to ratify the port state measures agreement and to improve our already robust control measures in regard to illegal fishing and the products derived from this destructive activity.

Government Orders

This is a necessary, important step for Canada to take. I urge all hon. members, not just to talk about this problem but to join me in supporting these critical amendments to the Coastal Fisheries Protection Act, and vote for Bill S-3.

●(1320)

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I used to serve on the environment committee with the member, and I can attest to the fact that he was very active on it.

I understand that this proposed law was originally brought forward in September 2013, but died because the government prorogued Parliament. Therefore, if there has been any delay in bringing forward legislation to implement this international agreement, it is certainly the fault of the other side, not here. We simply want to debate the bill to ensure it is strong legislation, which is our responsibility as elected members.

I raised this question with some of the member's colleagues, and I note he mentioned there would be a requirement for regular inspections. What is the government doing to move forward with finally procuring and building the necessary ships to do the enforcement? What discussions are under way through the Arctic Council to ensure this inspection also occurs for any future fishery activity in the Arctic?

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Mr. Speaker, I cannot respond very adequately to the question about the Arctic Council. The Arctic Council is dealing with a vast variety of issues involving borders, land claims, pollutant controls and other issues. I confess that I cannot say whether the Arctic Council has specifically dealt with this issue of illegal fisheries.

As to the question of boat procurement, I know the member opposite, who is thoughtful about environmental issues, at least will understand the necessity to proceed in a manner which avoids some of the fiascos of the past and which in fact carefully costs out the options and looks for ways to maximize the benefit of the shipbuilding program economically to Canadian communities.

In the meantime, as I have mentioned, our fisheries officers work with a very robust enforcement program. In the last three years they have issued 5,529 charges. They have issued 2,638 tickets. They have obtained 2,972 convictions, with \$6 billion in fines for both charges and tickets.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I know the member has a keen interest in sustainable issues. Maybe he could spell out how important it is in this area? I do not think there is any other industry that is as affected by the migratory movement of fish around the world and the distances they travel than the fisheries industry. I mentioned earlier in my remarks the tuna industry as a prime example, where we have a hook and line industry here and other areas may not.

Could the hon. member mention how important strong enforcement under this legislation is where other countries apply sustainable practices as we try to do in the long-term future of the fishery and our own economy in those coastal communities?

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Mr. Speaker, I compliment my colleague, the member for Malpeque, on raising an important issue. In fact, what he points to is the real necessity for Canada to work

collaboratively on a global basis with our partners around the world. He is quite correct about that. These issues are not confined to a single coastline or a single area of the high seas; they do cross borders.

In point of fact, the legislation would allow Canada even to cooperate with distant conservation authorities, of which we are not members, to adopt their standards and to work with them in enforcing their measures against illegal fisheries. We are on the right track.

●(1325)

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to speak to Bill S-3.

The amendments proposed in the bill are very important to ensure that we are able to do all we can as a global leader to fight illegal fishing and the damaging impacts it has on our ocean resources. These amendments would strengthen our current robust system by controlling our ports and seafood imports, and would enable us to support the efforts of like-minded nations in the protection of the world's fisheries.

As a British Columbian, I appreciate the great importance of the bill for both the protection of economic interests of law-abiding fish harvesters and the environmental necessity of doing all we can to ensure all fisheries are sustainable.

Today, we have been discussing one of the greatest threats to the survival of the global fish stocks, which comes from illegal, unreported, unregulated fishing. It is in everyone's interest for the global community to co-operate with one another toward the long-term conservation, management and sustainable use of the world's fish and other marine resources. These key resources are critically important, providing livelihoods and food security for millions.

The fight against illegal fishing occurs on many fronts. Effective and coordinated steps need to be taken by the coastal states where this fishing occurs, by port states where the suspected fish may be landed for sale, by flag states of the vessels to ensure that the rules are enforced, and by the home states of the owners and masters of vessels who are fishing illegally.

In particular, port state measures are considered an effective and cost-effective way of preventing illegal fish harvesters from profiting from their activities. There is a recognized need for countries, individually and through regional fisheries management organizations, to continue to develop and implement effective state port control measures that are consistent with international law.

Canada is already an active participant in the global efforts to curb and ultimately eliminate illegal fishing. Canada closely monitors domestic fishing activities within our own waters as guided by the Fisheries Act, as well as the activities of the Canadian fish harvesters in international waters.

Through the Coastal Fisheries Protection Act, Canada also carefully monitors and regulates fishing and other activities by foreign fishing vessels in Canadian waters, and in certain areas of the high seas.

Government Orders

Internationally, Canada is an active partner in fisheries protection with Interpol. Fisheries and Oceans Canada officials participate in the Interpol Environmental Crime Programme and the Fisheries Crime Working Group.

In this group and in other international organizations, Canada continually advocates for more responsible control of vessels in the states that register these flag ships, and for improved enforcement against those that facilitate the sale of illegal products. Canada is widely recognized for its expertise in intelligence-led fisheries enforcement, including advanced technologies, such as digital forensic analysis.

We are committed to working with other countries to share this expertise and thereby help to build up the global capacity in the fight against illegal fishing.

Earlier I mentioned the importance of implementing effective port state measures as a deterrent to illegal fishing operations. Canada already has a robust regime for port control measures regarding foreign fishing vessels. These enterprises already avoid Canada as a location to land their catches due to our extensive monitoring and enforcement programs.

However, not all countries have as strong and effective a system as Canada. Real international coordination is needed if we are to make illegal fishing an unattractive business proposition.

With this mind, the international community came forward and together negotiated a treaty that would set standards of action for all countries to take regarding foreign fishing vessels in their ports. The result of this process is the agreement on port state measures to prevent, deter and eliminate illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing.

• (1330)

For the port state measures agreement to anticipate possible loopholes, the negotiators attempted to ensure that even situations that may not arise often or in all regions of the world would be addressed in the treaty. It should not be surprising, therefore, that in reviewing the Coastal Fisheries Protection Act, we found that some sections addressed in the port state measures agreement need to be aligned with our domestic legislation. The bill before us today, Bill S-3, would make the necessary amendments to coordinate our existing legislation with this key treaty.

Even without the need to ratify this treaty, the measures in this bill would strengthen and modernize our legislation in ways that benefit Canadians. This would be accomplished by strengthening controls on our fish and seafood imports from other regions of the world, by providing broader enforcement powers to our dedicated fisheries protection officers in the performance of their duties, and by ensuring that Canadian fisheries officers have the legal authority to share intelligence regarding illegal fishing activities with domestic and international fishery enforcement partners.

By updating our already robust port state measures regime, Canada would be setting an example for other nations that still have further steps to take in order to bring themselves into compliance with the treaty. It would demonstrate that we continue to be committed to maintaining the pressure on illegal fishing operations around the globe, and encourage other countries to follow suit. It

would also help to level the playing field for our industry, which must contend with the unfair practices and price distortion of illegal fishing operators.

As we all know, this is a very serious issue. By blatantly disregarding the rules, illegal fishing causes untold harm for the world's marine environment, negatively impacts the profits of law-abiding fishermen, and jeopardizes the safety of those aboard the vessels. I urge all members in the House to join me in supporting Bill S-3 so that we can ratify this important agreement and continue our tradition of leadership in global fishery protection stewardship.

To protect the sustainability of our fisheries and safeguard the economic interests of our global communities and coastal communities, we must take action now, today.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc-André Morin (Laurentides—Labelle, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a question.

Only 11 countries have ratified the agreement. The government likes to brag about having signed free trade agreements with 38 countries. I am just wondering how many free trade agreements it has signed with non-signatory countries. Has it not missed out on an opportunity to put some pressure on those countries to ratify the agreement?

[English]

Mr. Mark Warawa: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member brings up a very important point. When we became government in 2006, there were 4 international trade agreements, and now there are 47, I believe. There has been a dramatic increase in trade, which gives opportunities to Canada and creates jobs and a strong economy. Part of that is making sure that international agreements include the protection of our fisheries.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as the member said, this is a very important issue and we need immediate action. The same thing was actually said in 2005 by a task force of which Canada was a part, saying that illegal, unreported, and unreported fishing “will persist unless immediate action is taken”. That was in 2005. In 2007, this treaty was passed. We are now dealing with our own legislation in 2015.

What action does Canada plan to take? Only 11 countries have ratified this treaty, yet 25 are needed to make it law. What are Canada's immediate plans to ensure that this treaty is ratified and put into force?

• (1335)

Mr. Mark Warawa: Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that it is prudent to set a good example. Canada changing its domestic laws to align with this international treaty would set a good example to those who have not yet done this. As the member points out, it is very important that the other countries do follow Canada's example of excellence in protecting our fisheries.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have an opportunity to speak to Bill S-3, a bill to amend the Coastal Fisheries Protection Act, the port state measures agreement implementation act.

Government Orders

The port state measures agreement is actually the United Nations food and agriculture organization agreement of 2009. It was the first global treaty focused specifically on the problem of illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing. It was a landmark in a sense. It was a response to the need to stop the devastation of unregulated, unreported, and illegal fishing, which is a worldwide scourge and is doing awful damage to the sustainability of fisheries throughout the world. In fact, it is estimated that between \$10 billion and \$23 billion is the cost of this kind of fishing, which needs to be stopped.

I just mentioned the urgency that was identified back in 2005 by a task force of which Canada was a part. It was known as the ministerially led task force on illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing on the high seas. Its report was called "Closing the Net". That was an important step along the way. Following that, there was this treaty in 2007. Talking about the importance of immediacy, here we are in 2015, nearly 10 years later, seeking to pass regulations about this, important though they are.

We support the bill. I want it to be clearly on the record that the New Democratic Party, the official opposition here, supports the bill because we recognize that illegal, unreported, unregulated fishing undermines the sustainable practices of legitimate fishing operations, including those in Canada, and presents unfair market competition to sustainable seafood.

The changes that are being proposed here would actually help protect fishermen and their communities from unfair competition, but it is really only the first step in preventing illegal fishing. Upon ratification of the port state measures agreement, we must then take on a leadership role in encouraging others to move forward on the agreement as well.

The previous speaker talked about leading by example. We waited eight years to get to this stage. If we are leading by example, I do not think this is a very good example. We need a government that is prepared to take a leadership role to encourage other countries, in the most forceful way we can, to take seriously their responsibilities as stewards of our Earth.

We are talking mostly about fishing on the high seas here, but we are also talking about the necessity of ensuring that all countries do a very significant job in enforcement of the regulations where they exist, internally in their own waters, in shared waters, or in waters where we have overlapping species.

We have seen some failures by the government in enforcement procedures. We know under the NAFO agreement that Canada has an important role in surveillance and enforcement. However, have seen in recent years a reduction in the number of surveillance aircraft hours from 1,000 to 600 annually. That is a 40% reduction. We have also seen the number of sea days devoted to surveillance activities cut by 25%. This is an indication of a failure to take seriously the importance of illegal fishing, both in our waters and in the NAFO areas, as well as in the areas where we have straddling fish stocks that move between international waters and the regulatory areas. It is extremely important to be on the water and in the air to conduct the surveillance in order to ensure these problems are encountered and to have an enforcement regime that is credible and believable and acts as a deterrent to people who wish to break the law.

● (1340)

We in Newfoundland and Labrador know all too well the consequences of having a devastation of the fish stocks. I think it is worth reminding everyone in Canada about the history of the cod moratorium, which commenced in 1992, and the devastating effects of that, caused by overfishing, unreported fishing, and illegal fishing. It had a devastating effect throughout the entire Atlantic region, but particularly in my province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

I can say that on the northeast coast of Newfoundland and Labrador, as a consequence of the cod moratorium in 1992, there was a reduction of 500,000 tonnes of groundfish in Atlantic Canada and a loss of employment for 12,000 fishermen and 15,000 plant workers. There were 25,000 people who lost their employment and incomes as a result of the collapse of the cod fishery in 1992. I see my colleague across the way is listening carefully. This was a devastating loss in a province like Newfoundland and Labrador, a coastal area with small communities.

Just imagine the consequences of an equivalent devastation to the auto sector in Ontario, for example, taking away the livelihoods of that many people as a result of one single event, which in this case was the collapse of the cod stock. It resulted in a depopulation of much of Newfoundland and Labrador, particularly the parts where people were heavily dependent upon that fishery. There was a decline in population on the northeast coast of Newfoundland, particularly the Great Northern Peninsula. The effects are still being felt to this day because those codfish stocks have not recovered.

This legislation is very important because it actually moves the ball forward. As I said at the beginning, it is long overdue, but we are not getting the sense of urgency that it deserves. This was first brought to the Senate in 2012. I do not know why it was not brought to the House of Commons, where the elected people would perhaps have insisted on giving it the urgency it deserved. It is here now, in 2015. It was introduced in the Senate first in 2012, and in 2013 it reached third reading in the Senate, but then there was prorogation and the bill disappeared. It was reintroduced and passed in the Senate and not introduced in the House of Commons until February of 2014.

Government Orders

New Democrats see some important changes. We are pleased to see that the provisions are being changed that would provide for inspections to try to prevent the entry of unreported, illegal, and unregulated fish into the ports of the states that ratify the treaty. It would give powers of inspection and surveillance and would also attempt to set up a worldwide reporting system to monitor the actions of ships and states that are engaged in illegal fishing. These are important steps, but they need to be carried out with the co-operation of all countries of the world, particularly those with a history of failing to properly enforce fishing laws on their own citizens, which we have a problem with in this country, particularly in the NAFO area, but we had a problem historically in the offshore until the 200-mile limit was established, and even since.

• (1345)

The devastation of the offshore cod stock off Newfoundland and Labrador and the whole northeast coast has been well documented. A very fascinating book was written in 1983 by a gentleman named William Warner, called *Distant Water*. It talked about how the development of the factory freezer trawler starting in the fifties and going on until the early eighties, took 11 million tonnes of codfish out of that whole northeast coast. The development of fishing methods that were essentially clear-cutting the oceans, taking away the breeding stock, fishing inside the ice off the Labrador coast, going all the way down to the United States as well, caused a major devastation of this huge biomass, which is an extremely important protein source for the world.

We are now in a situation where the population of the world is growing. We need to have a sustainable fishery throughout the world. We need to have international co-operation on the high seas as well, to ensure the sustainability of domestic fisheries like those in Africa, which are suffering because of the failure of enforcement. There needs to be co-operation on this level. There needs to be a sense of urgency and we need to hear from the government, and I am not hearing it from the other side. Perhaps somebody will tell us in a comment on this speech that there is a program, that there is a plan to use whatever influence Canada has.

My colleague just asked a question about we only have 11 nations ratifying this treaty and 25 are needed to bring it into force. Conservatives brag about the number of trade agreements that they have negotiated with countries since they came into office in 2006. In how many of them has Canada said, “We want to trade with them and do business with them, but we also want, as a fishing nation, as a coastal nation, as a nation that is interested in international co-operation on matters such as this, if they are going to be partners with us in trade, we want them to ratify this treaty so that this can be in force”?

This is the kind of leverage that we could expect a Canadian government to engage in if it believed that this was an urgent international problem as well as one that provides for the sustainability of our own fisheries here in Canada. The fisheries are very valuable to Canada, to Newfoundland and Labrador and to the west coast, Quebec regions and the Great Lakes, although that is not necessarily the subject of the bill, the inland waters. We have to have respect for the oceans and we have to have respect for the sustainable nature of the fisheries and we have to have measures in place to make that work.

That is all I have to say right now, except that we support this legislation. We want to see it passed, but we really also want to see significant action on the part of the government to try to get this ratified by the 25 nations and we want to see Canada play a leadership role in that regard.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Laurin Liu (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech. He is always so well informed about the issues. I also know that this issue affects his riding and that he consulted fishers and the fishing industry in order to have an informed opinion.

I would just like to ask the hon. member for more information on the fishing industry in his riding and in Canada.

What are the spinoffs from this industry? Why is this bill so important for protecting this industry in Canada? I would also like him to speak to the important role Canada needs to play in the international community to ensure that other countries ratify this agreement.

[*English*]

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Speaker, it is important to note that Canada's involvement in fishing and aquaculture contributes \$5.4 billion in total GDP to the Canadian economy and 71,000 in terms of full-time equivalent jobs to the country's economy. This is extremely important in my province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

The *raison d'être* of the settlement of Newfoundland and Labrador going back 500 years was based on the abundance of codfish, in particular, off our shores, so it is a matter of great existential importance to the communities, the economy and the future of our province. It is extremely important that we value this type of legislation and this approach.

I will give one quote back to the member, from the Fisheries Council of Canada, which said:

The problem that has emerged in trying to address this IUU through an international agreement, the port states agreement, is that it's taking so long. It took a long time to negotiate and it's going to take a long time to be ratified by a significant number of countries to be able to attest that this is the right thing....

This is clearly the problem here, that we have taken a long time to get this far and we are going to have to do a lot of work as a country in order to ensure that other countries follow suit and make this the enforceable pact that it is supposed to be since 2007.

• (1350)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, given the importance of the fishery to my colleague's riding, I would like to know whether many people, young people in particular, are concerned about the future of fishing. Does the hon. member think that his constituents would have liked to see this bill put back on the table much sooner? I believe this bill died on the order paper with the dissolution of Parliament in 2011.

Government Orders

In the hon. member's view, would people have liked this bill to be reintroduced much sooner? This parliament is winding down. It would have made sense for us to address this sooner for the sake of our coastal regions. I would like my colleague to comment on that.

[English]

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Speaker, of course it is very important. What the people in my province and my riding are concerned about is the fact that the fisheries do not seem to rank as very important to the Government of Canada and this Conservative government. We are very concerned about that. As I have noted, I have seen a reduction in fisheries science and in surveillance of the offshore. People are concerned about the lack of urgency and priority being given to these issues. As I mentioned, this agreement was negotiated in 2007 under the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. It is important that speed is of the essence. We should be moving faster than we are and I think people are concerned about that. Clearly, it is important, and we want to see measures to improve the fishery, not let it languish.

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the conservation and protection program provides excellent compliance and enforcement services to protect Canada's fisheries. The program continues to recruit new talent to protect our fisheries. Our approach to enforcement is working. Over the past three years fisheries officers have issued 5,529 charges, 2,638 tickets, 2,972 convictions and over \$6 million in fines in both charges and tickets. Would the member join us in commending these incredible fisheries officers for their good, hard work?

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Langley for his interest in this issue and the statistics that he provided in terms of prosecutions. I am not sure whether he is talking about everything from angling to fishing on the high seas. It sounds like he is including an awful lot in these statistics. I do not hear those kinds of numbers when we are talking about illegal fishing on the high seas or elsewhere. However, I know that we have a lot of dedicated fisheries officers who surely should be commended for their work.

The issue here is how important a ranking is this being given by the government in terms of involving other nations in trying to ratify this treaty and getting it working internationally so that we have a sustainable fishery throughout the world.

• (1355)

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our efforts to protect Canada's fisheries are working. We take fisheries extremely seriously. For example, we have modernized our approach with extensive catch monitoring and forensic intelligence. When it comes to the valuable Atlantic halibut fishery, over the past five years our efforts have resulted in over \$1 million in fines and 164 convictions. When will the opposition members recognize our modernized approach is working and take the protection of fisheries seriously?

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Speaker, I know the member is a long way from my end of the country. It is encouraging to see that the member from Manitoba would be interested in ensuring that we have an effective fishery. I think my constituents might be heartened to hear that this is of great interest in his riding. I thank him for that.

Obviously, we recognize the importance of enforcement. The concern we have, particularly when it comes to foreign overfishing,

the straddling stocks that we have and NATO enforcement, is that there is not a sufficient level of enforcement. There is a 25% cutback in the number of sea days devoted to monitoring fishing and overfishing offshore. There is a cutback of 40% in the number of flying hours that are used for aerial surveillance to keep an eye on what is going on in a vast ocean. We have a very vast ocean out there and one has to be on the water or over the water to be able to see what is going on. Cutbacks in that are seen in my part of the country, in my riding and my province, as being a dereliction of duty.

[Translation]

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his excellent speech and for the work he does to protect our fishery resources.

A 2008 study estimated that the economic loss, worldwide, due to pirate fishing ranges from \$10 billion U.S. to \$23 billion U.S. This pirate fishing has some serious repercussions. We need to focus on protecting our fishery resources. Illegal fishing undermines conservation and management efforts by Canada and other countries.

I would like to ask my colleague whether he thinks that the Conservative government is doing enough in Canada to put an end to illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing.

[English]

Mr. Jack Harris: In a word, Mr. Speaker, no, I do not think the Conservative government is doing enough to stop illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing, and it is a devastating issue throughout the world. It is particularly difficult, for example, along the African coast.

The African countries need the support of strong regulations and the encouragement of countries like Canada to ensure this treaty gets ratified so that it can be put into effect and help these countries develop their own fisheries and know that they will be protected.

The Deputy Speaker: Resuming debate.

Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

Statements by Members

(Bill read the third time and passed)

[English]

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

• (1400)

[English]

MEMBER FOR OKANAGAN—COQUIHALLA

Mr. Dan Albas (Okanagan—Coquihalla, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as this is my last scheduled Standing Order statement of the 41st Parliament, and as we have many colleagues who will be departing this place—many voluntarily, I might add—I want to take a moment to say thanks.

Many Canadians see us only during question period highlights. I believe most would agree that this is only a very small part of the work that happens here in Ottawa. There are good people here on all sides of this place, and I know everyone gives greatly of their time as we all work to build a better Canada.

Obviously I am biased when I say that this 41st Parliament is the best one ever, as it is the only one I have ever known. However, let us never forget what we have gone through these past four years.

To those members who are retiring, the good people of Okanagan—Coquihalla would like me to pass on their thanks for your service. I also thank the House of Commons staff. They have served us so ably and have done a remarkable job in keeping this place running smoothly.

* * *

[Translation]

SPORTS IN DRUMMOND

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Mr. Speaker, sports are big in Drummond.

Young swimmers from the Requins de Drummondville swimming team have posted good results and are rising in the ranks of Quebec swim clubs.

The Nixines de Drummondville synchronized swimming team brought home four medals from the Coupe du Président competition.

In tumbling, athletes from Drummondville represented Quebec at the 2015 Eastern Canadian Championships.

For running fans, the popular “des Chênes-toi” race was once again a huge success, with more than 8,000 participants. There is also Raimbault-Courons, a festive family sports event that I participated in to encourage young people to stay in school.

Looking ahead, I invite the public to come to Drummondville to participate in the Triathlon FBL, which will take place on June 13.

Once again, Drummondville is the place to be if you are into sports.

THE HOLOCAUST

Mr. Mark Adler (York Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the systematic murder of over six million Jews stands in the annals of human history as the most horrific crime ever perpetrated. The ghettos, slave labour, selections of who shall live and die, babies torn from their weeping mothers' arms, the transport and gassing of men, women, and children—all are seared into the memories of those who survived.

However, with the passage of time we are seeing the disturbing appearance of something else. As survivors pass, some are leaving behind artifacts they had held on to for over 70 years. Items like yellow stars and striped concentration camp outfits have found their way to Internet sites for sale, rather than to museums where they truly belong.

That is why, on May 13, I introduced a private member's bill to amend Canada's Criminal Code to make it a crime to sell or purchase personal property that was owned by or was in the possession of a victim or survivor of the Holocaust. The message must be clear: profiting from the Holocaust is wrong.

* * *

[Translation]

DANY LAFERRIÈRE

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today, a Canadian is being inducted into the Académie française for the first time since Cardinal de Richelieu established the institution in 1635. Voted in by his peers on the first ballot, he will be welcomed into the prestigious academy. Dany Laferrière, the great Canadian, Québécois and Haitian writer, will now be one of the 40 immortals.

We can count on the author of *The Return* to promote both the elegance and the vividness of the French language. In between novels, Mr. Laferrière, a man who writes thought-provoking, stimulating and exciting works, will be celebrating not only the universality of the French language, but also its multiple realities, and reflecting its precision, but also its creative and sensitive side. He is a man of great contrasts who is curious about everything.

Mr. Laferrière will inherit the chair that once belonged to Montesquieu, the author of *The Spirit of the Laws*, and will be able to share with his fellow immortals how it feels to bask in the Caribbean sun and live through a Canadian winter.

Congratulations, Dany Laferrière. Canada owes you a great debt of gratitude.

* * *

[English]

MEMBER FOR CALGARY—NOSE HILL

Hon. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, “famous last words” is a well-known phrase. I will soon leave this place after two decades. What words come to mind?

Statements by Members

It has been an honour and a privilege to serve. I have met amazing people, people who are smart, hard-working, and dedicated to Canada. Many will be lifelong friends.

The opportunity to make even a small contribution to building this great nation is humbling. We all owe so much to our families. They have sacrificed normal togetherness for this.

I give heartfelt thanks to the people who supported me, and to those who did not support me but put up with me kindly anyway.

Finally, at the end of the day, it is not about the blue team or the orange team or the red or the green; it is about our country and its wonderful people. It is about giving them the best, most secure, and brightest future possible.

I pass the torch. May it be held high.

God bless Canada.

* * *

●(1405)

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday this House had the opportunity to take a substantive leap forward toward ending violence against women. Sadly, all Conservative members but one chose to vote against my motion to create a national action plan to end violence against women. In doing so, they sent a clear message, a shameful message, to the women they represent: “Your safety is not a priority for this government. Your equality does not matter to this government. Your rights are not something that this government is willing to stand up for.”

Why is ending violence against women a partisan issue?

For the NDP, this is about answering the call made by women in our ridings and across the country, including the voices of the most vulnerable: indigenous women, racialized women, disabled women, LGBTTQ women, and refugee and immigrant women.

We will continue to fight for them. We will continue to fight for a national action plan, even when their Conservative representatives do not.

* * *

AGRICULTURE PRODUCERS IN ALBERTA

Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this past Saturday I hosted a round table at the Innisfail Auction Mart in my Red Deer riding to address the issues facing local livestock producers.

We had a frank, open discussion about how our government can help central Alberta producers and the agriculture industry as a whole. We were able to discuss the new CETA deal, a deal that would allow unprecedented trading access between Canada and the EU.

One of the many benefits recognized as a result of this deal is that of the EU's more than 9,000 tariff lines, nearly 98% would be duty free for Canadian goods when CETA comes into force.

Optimism was also expressed regarding our recent trade victory at the World Trade Organization regarding U.S. country of origin labelling. We look forward to a quick resolution.

The passion of these participants made me extremely proud of what our central Alberta agriculture producers have done to advance their industry and our goals as a nation. I look forward to hosting many more in the future.

* * *

ROBERT HUSKINSON

Mr. Gordon Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I rise to honour the memory of Robert Huskinson, late of Brockville, Ontario, in my riding of Leeds—Grenville.

Bob, as he was known, was the longest-serving council member in that city, serving for 26 consecutive years before retiring in 2006. He passed away May 3, at 77 years of age.

Bob was in municipal politics for the same reason that most of us choose to serve the public. He saw a problem that needed fixing—in this case, a collapsing roof on the community centre while he was coaching minor hockey—and decided to do something about it.

Colleagues and friends have noted that he was always passionate, honest, and a straight shooter who had the good of his community at the heart of everything that he did. He is remembered as a tireless worker for his city.

One person mentioned that he was Brockville's version of Winston Churchill.

On behalf of us all, I offer condolences to his wife Janice; his sons Craig, Rick, and Rob, and their wives; his brother Brian; and his many grandchildren, friends, and supporters.

* * *

RELATIONS WITH THE NETHERLANDS

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to welcome King Willem-Alexander and Queen Máxima of the Netherlands to Canada.

Yesterday the people of Ottawa were very proud to welcome them to our city. Ottawa has a long, proud tradition of friendship with the people of the Netherlands, most famously as the home of the Dutch royal family and birthplace of Princess Margriet during the Second World War. It is a pleasure and an honour to welcome the royal family back to Ottawa.

I also want to take this opportunity to congratulate a colleague and a friend.

Earlier this month, our very own member for Sackville—Eastern Shore was appointed by the King of the Netherlands as a Knight in the Order of Orange-Nassau.

With this member's strong record of advocacy for veterans and his passionate promotion of relations between Canada and the Netherlands, I am sure all members will join with me in congratulating the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore.

Statements by Members

Although the appointment does not come with a formal title, to us he will now always be known as “Sir Buddy”.

* * *

• (1410)

TAXATION

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadian middle-class families know they are better off with this Conservative government. We have introduced the family tax cut and the universal child care benefit to ensure that Canada's middle class remains one of the strongest in the world.

What is worrying is the opposition's schemes to take all this away. The leader of the Liberal Party wants to take away the universal child care benefit, take away income splitting, and take away tax-free savings accounts.

On top of all that, yesterday the Liberal leader announced a major payroll tax hike is in his platform. He said, “We're looking at an expansion and a mandatory expansion of the CPP of the type that Kathleen Wynne put forward in Ontario.”

He is saying he supports a payroll tax hike that would cost someone earning \$60,000 a thousand dollars in take-home pay.

The Liberal leader proposes to raise taxes on the middle class. We cut taxes.

* * *

ALEXIE DALLAIRE-VINCENT

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, people in the region of Timmins—James Bay are mourning the death of 22-year-old Alexie Dallaire-Vincent, who was killed underground in a haulage accident at a St. Andrew Goldfields mine in Timmins. Her death marks a terrible milestone as the first woman to die underground in Ontario.

Women have played such an important role in breaking down barriers in mining. They are beginning to take their rightful place in the well-paying jobs on the surface and underground. This transformation is good, and it will continue. What we need to learn from her death is how to ensure that such accidents do not happen again. We have had too many young miners killed recently in the north.

On behalf of Canada's Parliament, I offer my deepest regrets to her husband Travis and her relatives in the Vincent, Dallaire, and Mercier families. Alexie was worth more than all the gold that will ever be dug from that mine. As we mourn her loss, let us organize to prevent such tragedies in the future.

* * *

TAXATION

Mrs. Susan Truppe (London North Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this last month has taught us a lot about what the leader of the Liberal Party is planning for the middle class.

First the Liberal leader said that benefiting all families is not what is fair. Yesterday the Liberal leader announced the next major policy in his platform. Surprise, surprise: it is a massive payroll tax hike on

Canadians. He said, “We're looking at an expansion and a mandatory expansion of the CPP of the type that Kathleen Wynne put forward in Ontario.”

Someone earning \$60,000 would lose \$1,000 in take-home pay because of the Liberal leader's plan. This is in addition to the Liberal leader promising to take away the universal child care benefit that many of my constituents are looking forward to in London North Centre, take away income splitting, and take away tax-free savings accounts.

The Liberal leader's plan is, very simply, tax hikes on the middle class.

* * *

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians have spent decades building a reputation as one of the best countries in the world for newcomers. Canadians are rightly proud of that reputation.

However, we learned yesterday that for the first time Canada has dropped out of the top five countries for immigrant integration. We are failing because the current government has attacked family reunification and citizenship. Wait times to sponsor a spouse or children to this country have skyrocketed, up more than 70% since the government took office. The wait to sponsor parents or grandparents is up a staggering 500%.

The Minister of Citizenship and Immigration tried to explain his government's terrible track record this week and failed. Instead, he attacked the credibility of his own department's statistics.

All Canadians, both newcomers and those who have been here for generations, deserve far better than this.

* * *

TAXATION

Mr. Bryan Hayes (Sault Ste. Marie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians can trust only our Conservative government to help families save more of their own money for their priorities. The New Democrats and Liberals have said that their focus is to raise taxes and kill jobs. The leader of the Liberal Party has even said that “benefiting all families is not what is fair.”

He demonstrated this by pledging to scrap our universal child care benefit, scrap income splitting, and take away tax-free savings accounts. He wants to replace our family tax cut with a family tax hike. Yesterday he even announced that he will hit Canadians with a massive new payroll tax. He said, “We're looking at an expansion and a mandatory expansion of the CPP of the type that Kathleen Wynne put forward in Ontario.”

The Liberal leader's plan would cost someone earning \$60,000 over \$1,000 in take-home pay. The Liberal leader's assault on the middle class is simply unacceptable.

Oral Questions

•(1415)

*[Translation]***WORKERS' RIGHTS**

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government never misses an opportunity to attack workers, but this time it has gone too far.

The Conservatives want to go back in time to expunge workers' landmark battles for their rights from the record. For example, the Winnipeg general strike exhibit will be removed from the Canadian Museum of History.

On the opposition side, the Liberals are pretty much the same with their questionable attacks against the collectively bargained rights of workers on the Hill. The Liberals believe that workers are not entitled to a union to stand up for their rights, a safe work environment, or compensation for overtime.

The Conservatives and the Liberals are on the same side. They are the same old worn-out parties.

In 2015, workers across Canada will finally be able to choose a government that will stand up for their rights: an NDP government.

* * *

*[English]***TAXATION**

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals have made the choice abundantly clear. Do middle-class families want our low-tax plan or do they want a high-tax, high-debt plan proposed by the leader of the Liberal Party? I think not.

He has stated, “benefiting all families is not what is fair”. He, indeed, wants to make it more unfair by dramatically hiking payroll taxes for all Canadians, so that a family earning \$60,000 will pay a whopping \$1,000 more in higher taxes. He will make it more unfair by taking away the universal child care benefit, taking away income splitting and taking away tax-free savings accounts.

Being prime minister is not an entry-level job, and the leader of the Liberal Party has proven time and time again that he is clearly not up to the task.

Under our Prime Minister, Canadians can count on more money in their pockets.

ORAL QUESTIONS*[Translation]***ETHICS**

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, since the Prime Minister still refuses to answer any questions, Canadians learned from the police that the Prime Minister's Office had doctored the report on Senator Mike Duffy's expenses seven times. For example, the PMO erased passages that proved that Senator Duffy's residence was, in fact, in Ottawa.

How does the Prime Minister explain that his office altered such important parts in the Mike Duffy report?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not accept such statements from the NDP.

The reality is that Mr. Duffy is before the courts for his own actions and he will be judged on those actions. The government will continue to co-operate with the Crown and the RCMP in that particular matter.

[English]

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Dean Del Mastro, Michael Sona, Peter Penashue, Saulie Zajdel, these are Conservatives who have been convicted in a real court, with a real judge. This is not to mention the Conservative senators who plead guilty to violating the Elections Act, and all of the other charges still to come shortly.

The Prime Minister's Office has been accused of orchestrating a coverup and whitewashing the Deloitte audit to remove the conclusion that P.E.I. was not Conservative Mike Duffy's primary residence. Will the Prime Minister now confirm that the Prime Minister's Office tampered with this report as part of a backroom deal with Mike Duffy?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, coincidentally, Mr. Duffy is before the courts on his own actions. That is what is before the court. He will be judged according to those actions, and we will continue to assist the Crown in that matter.

It is really rich to hear the House leader of the NDP slight certain Conservatives when we have over 60 NDP members of Parliament improperly taking parliamentary funds for the purposes of financing a political party. This is completely forbidden under the rules. It is almost \$3 million worth of taxpayer funds. The NDP should do the right thing and pay it back or face the consequences.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we have 78 Conservative members of Parliament involved in the Duffy diaries, including the Prime Minister's own parliamentary secretary, on page 135, when Mike Duffy campaigned with the parliamentary secretary to the Prime Minister. I have good advice for all of them. In a real court, they will have to tell the truth.

We have the Prime Minister's Office playing fast and loose with residency rules and then falsifying audits. The Liberals, of course, kept evidence out of the Gomery inquiry. Will the Prime Minister now agree to stop invoking privilege to keep an internal Senate residency audit out of the Duffy trial?

Oral Questions

• (1420)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, the facts are that none of the individuals the NDP member cites are charged with anything or accused of anything at all. Whereas the reality is that we have 5 dozen, close to 70, NDP members of Parliament who have taken money, explicitly contrary to the rules of the House, nearly \$3 million worth of taxpayer money, to use to finance political party operations across the country. This is completely wrong, completely contrary to the rules and completely illegal, and the NDP should pay it back or it will face the consequences.

* * *

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the housing shortage in first nations is at crisis levels. In communities in northern Manitoba, there are housing shortages of up to hundreds of homes, but the Conservative response, as we saw yesterday, was ideological rhetoric and a failed program.

According to the chair of the government's flagship fund, the program was actually never intended to provide homes for those who needed them most.

Will the minister admit to the government's failed policies and will the government redirect funding immediately to build homes in first nations?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government continues to take concrete steps to support first nations in providing safe housing. Every year significant resources are allocated to first nations to help them meet their housing needs, for which they are responsible.

Since 2006, close to 12,000 new homes have been built and there have been renovations to 22,000 existing homes in first nations. We will continue that good work.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are talking about redirecting funding, a \$344 million fund to provide much needed housing on first nations beyond the rhetoric that we are hearing from the government.

[Translation]

The Prime Minister's official apology in 2008 regarding residential schools must be more than just lip service. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission will be reporting its findings next Tuesday, and we will be there. However, the Prime Minister needs to show some leadership. Will he at least attend the event marking the closing of the commission?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government is delivering on its promises with respect to the agreement that was reached. We will continue our work in close collaboration with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The government will be represented at all of the events held here in Ottawa. We hope the public will also want to take part, because this is another important step in reconciliation between all Canadians and this country's first nations.

[English]

EMPLOYMENT

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance is in Germany where he is now advocating an overhaul of Canada's labour laws.

Today's media report states:

[The finance minister] said one way to boost growth was to relax labor laws and make it easier for firms to lay off workers, while acknowledging "that's what gets people demonstrating in the streets".

Does the Prime Minister agree with his Minister of Finance that making it easier to fire Canadian workers would be good for the Canadian economy?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Of course, Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance was saying no such thing. He was talking about the situation in Greece where, because of out of control deficits and out of control spending, we are seeing massive tax hikes, massive layoffs, terrible cuts in services. In fact, it is the very thing the Liberal government did in the 1990s because of its own financial mismanagement.

Now in our country we have balanced budgets, lower taxes and more money is going to the things that people care about.

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, balancing the books and paying down debt is not mismanagement. It is the way we should run an economy. It is not the way the Conservatives run the economy. They have added \$150 billion to Canada's national debt.

At a time when the Canadian economy has flatlined, we have a Minister of Finance who actually believes that firing workers is good for growth. We need more jobs, not more job vacancies.

Why would the Prime Minister support a Minister of Finance who actually believes it is good for growth to lay off workers?

• (1425)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance said no such thing, but it is interesting to hear a member defending the Liberal economic record that he actually got elected to the House opposing.

Here is something else, while he is on his feet, he can try to defend. The Liberal leader said yesterday, "We're looking at an expansion and a mandatory expansion of the CPP of the type that... Kathleen Wynne put forward in Ontario". That is a \$1,000 pay cut for every Ontario worker who is earning \$60,000 a year. That is just from their own pockets, in addition to that paid by their employers. Canadians did not ask for that. They do not want it and they will never accept it.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, according to certain sources, the Minister of Finance said that one of the solutions for spurring growth is to loosen labour laws to make it easier to lay off workers. He did acknowledge, however, that this could lead to riots in the streets. We already knew that this government was not really concerned about the middle class, but this statement takes the cake for insensitivity.

Did the minister really make this sorry statement, and does the Prime Minister agree with him?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance said no such thing. He said the contrary.

He was talking about Greece, where liberal policies resulted in job cuts, higher taxes, and reduced services for the public. It is quite the opposite here in Canada, where we have a balanced budget.

Canadians do not want the tax hikes recently proposed by the leader of the Liberal Party: \$1,000 out of the pocket of every employee who earns only \$60,000 a year.

Canadians want more money in their pockets, not less, like the leader of the Liberal Party is proposing.

* * *

SENIORS

Ms. Isabelle Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are going to take up to \$30,000 out of seniors' pockets by forcing them to work two more years.

They are now proposing to study a voluntary savings plan—yet another expensive study—even though this is something they rejected outright in 2010. Even Jim Flaherty said that it would not work and that the CPP would not be able to administer this new component.

Why are the Conservatives dangling this prospect in front of our seniors when they themselves do not even believe in such a plan?

[English]

Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, both the New Democratic Party and the Liberal Party would dramatically hike payroll taxes. In fact, the Liberal leader said yesterday, “We’re looking at an expansion and a mandatory expansion of the CPP of the type that Kathleen Wynne put forward in Ontario”. For someone who earns \$60,000 a year, that is an extra \$1,000 tax hike.

While we are letting middle-class Canadians keep more of their money in their pockets, that party would take more out.

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, living on a fixed income is not easy. It grinds people down, and far too many Canadian seniors are struggling just to get by. Conservative cuts to OAS will make things even worse, taking more than \$13,000 out of every senior's pocket. Now, after a decade of ignoring struggling seniors, Conservatives are trying to pretend that they have changed, but the former finance minister said their new idea “will not work” and was rejected unanimously.

Do the Conservatives really think seniors will fall for their phony change of heart?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, through the tax-free savings account, the increase in the guaranteed income supplement, and other low-tax measures, we have put more money in the pockets of seniors, but the Liberals and NDP would do the opposite.

I quote the Liberal leader, who said that he supports “a mandatory expansion of the CPP of the type that Kathleen Wynne put forward in Ontario”. That means a \$1,000 tax increase for a worker earning only \$60,000 a year. The small business that employs that worker would have to pay the same tax, which would kill jobs. We will oppose the Liberal leader's proposed tax increase on workers.

● (1430)

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that was not the question.

The truth is that the Conservatives have a low-income plan for Canadian seniors. Millions of Canadians rely on CPP as their main pension income, scraping by on just \$640 a month. The last time the government promised to increase benefits, the Conservatives actually blocked all progress. Now they have a new promise about which the former minister of state for finance said, “The verdict was unanimous. This was not a good idea”.

How do Conservatives expect Canadians to believe them when they do not even believe in their own so-called plan?

Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us be clear. Canadians know that the New Democratic Party and the Liberal Party stand for higher taxes.

Let me remind members what the Liberal leader said yesterday. He said, “We’re looking at an expansion and a mandatory expansion of the CPP of the type that Kathleen Wynne put forward in Ontario”. Again, for someone who is earning \$60,000 a year, that is an extra \$1,000 tax hike.

While we are letting middle-class Canadians choose how they spend and save their money, Liberals would raise taxes. That is their policy.

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NATIONAL DEFENCE

Ms. Mylène Freeman (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Royal Military College is facing another sexual assault allegation. This allegation follows on earlier incidents and a scathing report, which found that the Canadian Forces has a culture where harassment and abuse are overlooked. Earlier this week, Major General Whitecross even admitted that there is no consensus from military leadership on the gravity of the problem.

Will the minister finally show leadership and put an end to sexual harassment and sexual violence in the military?

Oral Questions

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of National Defence and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can inform the House that the incident in question that was raised just now is under investigation by the National Investigation Service. As the commandant of the Royal Military College of Canada has made clear, there must be zero tolerance at that place for sexual misconduct. That college is developing a strategy to echo that of the Canadian Armed Forces in response to Madam Justice Deschamps' report, of which all 10 recommendations have been accepted in principle.

The newly elevated Lieutenant General Christine Whitecross has been tasked by the CDS with the implementation of that report throughout the Canadian military.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Mylène Freeman (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is obvious that this government does not recognize how serious the situation is.

We learned this morning that there is an investigation being conducted into a new case of sexual assault at the Royal Military College. In their workplaces, their communities and their homes, too many women are still victims of violence.

Yesterday, the government had the opportunity to take action, but it chose to vote against the NDP motion to move forward with a national action plan and end violence against women.

When will the government understand that action is urgently needed and come up with a real strategy?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of National Defence and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the strategy is in Ms. Deschamps's report, which was ordered by the Chief of the Defence Staff.

The 10 recommendations have all been accepted in principle by the military. Lieutenant General Christine Whitecross has been tasked with implementing this report. The incident in question at the Royal Military College is under investigation by the Canadian Forces National Investigation Service.

Clearly, we will never tolerate sexual assault within the Canadian military.

Ms. Éline Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this new case of sexual assault reported at the Royal Military College clearly shows that sexual violence and harassment are structural problems in our military institutions.

Canada cannot allow those who serve our country to be treated like that. The facts are undeniable. However, the army still does not agree on how serious this situation is.

What is the Minister of National Defence waiting for? When will he demand that practical measures be taken to put an end to this problem now? He must not wait until investigations have been conducted. He must do something now.

• (1435)

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of National Defence and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, allegations of criminal behaviour have been made. As a result, the Canadian Forces

National Investigation Service has launched a criminal investigation. Does the member think we should not conduct a criminal investigation into these serious allegations? I certainly hope not.

The issue goes deeper than that. The military has accepted the 10 recommendations made by Justice Deschamps, who was appointed by the Chief of the Defence Staff to write this report. Lieutenant General Christine Whitecross is responsible for implementing all of those recommendations.

Ms. Éline Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is nonsense. The victims have waited long enough. The government needs to act now.

Let us talk about another file that has been just as badly managed. The Conservatives now have a new committee to manage the army's supply system. That means more delays and more red tape.

The government still has not made up its mind about the short-term renewal of our fleet of supply ships, and the Davie shipyard still has not heard anything back about its proposal.

Can the minister explain how he thinks that more red tape is really going to correct 10 years of utter mismanagement?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of National Defence and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are going to ensure that the Royal Canadian Navy has the equipment it needs to do its job, including supply ships.

That being said, if the NDP was in charge, the military would not get any new equipment. For as long as it has been around, the NDP has voted against additional resources for the Canadian military. The NDP is the best supporter of the Canadian military's interests.

[*English*]

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we vote against bad projects.

The government has taken almost a decade to realize that its so-called military procurement strategy is nothing but a failure. From the F-35 debacle to the Cyclone helicopter, fixed-wing SAR, and the joint support ships, the Conservatives have left a trail of failures, delayed and over-budget projects, and under-performing equipment for our military. However, instead of taking responsibility, the minister is proposing yet another committee to oversee this mess.

Would the minister explain how more bureaucracy with no single line of ministerial accountability would do anything to fix their abysmal procurement record?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of National Defence and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first, I should have said that the NDP is the worst supporter of the Canadian military's interests.

[*English*]

Let us be clear. Our government will ensure that the Royal Canadian Navy has the equipment it needs to do the job we ask of it, including support ships, supply ships, now and in the future.

Oral Questions

Let us be clear. The NDP, through its entire history, has always voted against additional resources for the Canadian military. We know that if it were in office it would hack and slash the military budget. The difference is that it does not even want to use our military prudently to help save lives and promote Canadian security around the world. It could not have it more wrong on the military.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thought the minister was at our committee the other day when we voted in favour of the estimates for his department. He must have missed that.

Our forces need the right equipment to do their jobs, and taxpayers need value for money. However, the Conservatives cannot deliver either. Today we learned that the critical joint support ship project may be delayed yet again. Now ships may not be ready until 2020, or later, at least eight full years after they were supposed to be in the water.

These Conservative delays threaten shipbuilding jobs and prevent our military from getting needed equipment. How can the minister allow these unacceptable delays to multiply?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of National Defence and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is the government that acquired the C-17 Globemasters, the new C-130J Super Hercules, the new Chinook helicopters, the new howitzers for the army, the fully refitted LAVs, the huge modernization project of the Halifax-class frigates. This is the government that has launched the single largest peacetime shipbuilding program in the history of the Canadian military, a \$36 billion program, including two new joint supply ships.

On every one of those measures in our budgets, the NDP has voted against that new equipment for our men and women in uniform. Shame on them.

* * *

• (1440)

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in 2008, the government promised that a \$300 million first nations market housing fund would generate 25,000 housing units over 10 years.

The reality is 99 homes in 7 years. In 2011, the government's own report revealed a shortage of up to 35,000 homes on reserve. The response was not a penny of new money in any budget since. In fact, the government has diverted \$500 million promised for first nations infrastructure.

How can the Conservatives continue to ignore the desperate housing crisis in first nations communities?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have already said, our government continues to take concrete steps to support first nations in providing safe housing throughout first nations across the country.

Every year significant resources are allocated to first nations to help them meet their housing needs for which they are responsible.

Since 2006, the government investment for on-reserve housing has resulted in the construction of 12,000 new homes, and more than

22,000 homes have been renovated. We will continue in that direction.

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[*Translation*]

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada is no longer one of the top five countries for immigrant integration. One of the reasons for our decline is that wait times for family reunification keep increasing.

According to the department's own website, between 2007 and 2014 there was a 146% increase in wait times for families, a 546% increase for parents and grandparents, and a 73% increase for spouses and children.

Is the minister denying these staggering figures? They were taken from his own department's website.

Hon. Chris Alexander (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, everyone knows that the backlogs we have been fighting for nine years are a Liberal legacy. Everyone knows that, were it not for this government's actions, parents and grandparents could be waiting up to 10 or even 12 years in 2015.

In contrast to their approach, we have taken measures to reunite families, and that is why we are very proud of the fact that 75,000 parents and grandparents will immigrate to Canada over the next three years.

[*English*]

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are talking about a 70% increase for children and spouses, a 500% increase for parents and grandparents, and these are from the department's own numbers. He cannot blame the numbers.

These are increases dating from when the government came to office. He cannot blame a Liberal government that left office nine long years ago. No, he is the one who created this mess. How is he going to clean up his own Conservative-created mess?

Hon. Chris Alexander (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of National Defence and his predecessors have regrettably had to remind Canadians over and over again about a decade of Liberal darkness on defence matters: mismanagement, lack of spending, lack of procurement.

On immigration, we on this side have to remind Canadians now about decades of Liberal mismanagement of our immigration system. We inherited a system with backlogs on every front, and we have reduced every one of those backlogs.

Immigrants are getting to this country, getting approval to come to this country as economic immigrants in weeks. Parents and grandparents are here in larger numbers than ever before, thanks to the—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Burnaby—Douglas.

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INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Kennedy Stewart (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is nice to hear them argue about who was the worst government.

Cities are also paying for Conservative politicking. After abolishing the community infrastructure plan in 2014, the Conservatives are now shamefully rushing through a new program, with tight deadlines, as part of their election campaign.

In British Columbia, communities have less than a month to submit proposals. Yesterday, Derek Corrigan, the mayor of Burnaby, testified in committee and said, “It smacks of politics to me”.

Our municipalities need infrastructure investments. Why are the Conservatives, yet again, putting their partisan interests above everything else?

Mr. Peter Braid (Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this Conservative government will achieve a number of important objectives with the Canada 150 infrastructure program.

We will, of course, celebrate the 150th birthday and the history and heritage of this great nation. We will also provide support to communities across this country to help them renovate existing recreational infrastructure, and we will do all of this by delivering the Canada 150 community infrastructure program.

• (1445)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in their rush to redeem themselves after 10 years of mismanagement, the Conservatives created a new fund for community infrastructure upgrades, right before the election. However, bad habits pop up after 10 years of mismanagement.

The minister, a former mayor, forgot to do his homework. Municipalities in Quebec are the only ones that will not be eligible.

Will the minister sit down with the Government of Quebec and sign an agreement?

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Braid (Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our Conservative government will achieve a number of very important objectives as we deliver the Canada 150 community infrastructure program. We, of course, in Quebec and across this country, want to celebrate our nation's 150th birthday. We will also find opportunities to renovate and expand existing community recreational infrastructure, and that includes some not-for-profit organizations. We are getting the job done.

Oral Questions

[*Translation*]

CBC/RADIO-CANADA

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, NDP): Mr. Speaker, another appointment to the board of the CBC has just been made. The newest member is none other than a former treasurer of—surprise, surprise—the Conservative Party in Nova Scotia. It is pathetic. This is just another one of the Prime Minister's lackeys sent to destroy Radio-Canada and the CBC.

With so many talented people working in the area of culture in this country and our public broadcaster facing so many challenges right now, how can the minister ostensibly responsible for culture in this country defend her appointment process, which is simply shameful and repulsive?

[*English*]

Hon. Shelly Glover (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what I find despicable, frankly, is when any member in this House attacks a Canadian with a record like what Mr. Jeffery has. In fact, Mr. Jeffery is a highly respected chartered accountant with many years of experience, formerly as the director of taxation at Sobeys and senior manager at Deloitte and Touche. He has extensive governance experience with the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nova Scotia, Acadia University, and Big Brothers and Big Sisters of Greater Halifax. He is also an instructor of various professional development taxation courses.

I would encourage that member to apologize to this fine example of a Canadian.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it takes a tired, scandal-ridden government to get so touchy about its insider pals.

Pork-barrel patronage seems to have become this Prime Minister's favourite pastime. Let us take the former Conservative Party treasurer of Nova Scotia. Presto, he is now a board member for Radio-Canada. Taking prestigious posts that serve the public interest, they are using them as personal favours to give out to failed candidates, party donors, and pals.

What happened to this Prime Minister? He promised to clean up Ottawa. Instead, he dove head first into the pork trough. What happened to him?

Hon. Shelly Glover (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Once again, Mr. Speaker, I would remind members in this House that we have a duty to honour what we consider to be honourable behaviour towards not only one another but towards Canadians as a whole.

I would repeat that Mr. Jeffery comes to this board with a considerable amount of talent and skill. In fact, the appointments process is done in a transparent way that, frankly, relies on the competencies and skills of those names put forward. As I said earlier, Mr. Jeffery comes with a tremendous amount of skill to provide to this board.

*Oral Questions***PENSIONS**

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Liberal leader announced a payroll tax hike on middle-class Canadians. Can the Minister of State for Finance tell the House the government's position on the mandatory expansion of the Canadian pension plan?

Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, yes, it is true. The Liberal leader said yesterday: "We're looking at an expansion and a mandatory expansion of the CPP of the type that Kathleen Wynne put forward in Ontario".

For someone earning \$60,000 a year, the Liberal leader's policy is an extra \$1,000 tax hike. A middle-class family with two income earners would be paying thousands of dollars extra in taxes.

While we are letting Canadians keep more of their money and make the decisions on how they would spend and how they would save for their retirement, the Liberal policy is clearly one of taking more money out of the pockets of Canadians.

* * *

• (1450)

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Weland, NDP): Mr. Speaker, bees play an essential role in pollinating crops such as corn, soybeans, and canola. In fact, one-third of our diet depends on pollinated plants. But for the past decade, bee colonies have been under stress, with higher than average losses. In fact, in the province of Ontario, 58% of the bee population died over the winter of 2013-14.

President Obama has actually announced plans to reduce bee losses in the United States, but here in Canada, the government is doing nothing. Where is the plan?

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am not sure where the member has been. We have actually financed some major significant investments in bee health going forward, but here are a few stats he may have missed.

The country's total number of bee colonies has increased by 136,000 since 2008. Canadian beekeepers are producing almost 26,000 more pounds of honey than five years ago. Honey farm cash receipts have increased by \$65,000 per farm since 2008, and in 2012, beekeepers produced 90 million pounds of honey worth \$173 million, so those are some pretty good stats.

[Translation]

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is nonsense.

We lost over 25% of our bees last winter. In Quebec alone, losses have doubled in the past 10 years. All of our crops rely on pollination. The problem is that bee populations are shrinking at an alarming rate in North America.

The United States has a plan. The European Union has banned insecticides and pesticides. Even Ontario has reduced the use of those products.

My question is simple: Where is the government's plan to protect the health of our bees?

[English]

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the opposition could not be more wrong. They continually are on the wrong side of the issue. Of course, the European Union has a moratorium, not a ban.

As I said, the country's total number of bee colonies has increased by 136,000 hives since 2008. Production of honey has gone up by 90 million pounds, worth some \$173 million.

As much as year to year there are variances in bee populations, of course overall we need bees to pollinate our crops. Farmers are the environmentalists on the front lines of this, and there is no way they would intentionally harm those little bees.

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*[Translation]***INTERNATIONAL TRADE**

Ms. Francine Raynault (Joliette, NDP): Mr. Speaker, during my most recent meeting with the UPA, everyone around the table had the same question on the tip of their tongue. Everyone wanted to know whether supply management was on the negotiating table for the trans-Pacific partnership. We know that the Conservatives were not shy about sacrificing certain parts of our system for the agreement with the European Union.

Can the Conservatives tell us whether supply management is on the negotiating table for the trans-Pacific partnership?

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of State (Small Business and Tourism, and Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to inform my colleague that we will be signing a free trade agreement very soon, I hope, with the Asia-Pacific countries, as we have done with other countries such as South Korea, while protecting and promoting supply management.

The three pillars of supply management are production control, producer pricing and import control. We have always defended the supply management system.

To my colleague, I would say that in keeping with our practice, we will continue to defend our farmers' interests.

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AGRICULTURE

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Beauharnois—Salaberry, NDP): Mr. Speaker, sacrificing supply management is not the only thing hurting all of our farmers. The Conservatives are also cutting investment in agriculture. That will hurt economic development in our regions, such as Beauharnois—Salaberry.

Many family farms are already having a hard time hiring workers and making ends meet. Now the Conservatives' financial support is disappearing, even though the agri-food sector creates one out of every eight jobs in Canada.

Why are family farms not a priority in the Conservatives' budget?

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the family farm has always been a priority for this government, and 98% of agriculture across this country is still family controlled and family run. We celebrate that. We have a complete suite of business risk programming as well as other programming that helps to incent agriculture to be as efficient and as effective as it possibly can be. We have had two record years in a row of farm-gate returns, which of course, would be decimated by a carbon tax that the NDP would put in.

* * *

• (1455)

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me give the House an example of Conservative incompetence. Members are familiar with the live-in caregiver program, a program that has helped thousands of Canadians throughout all regions of our country. This is true Conservative incompetence: in three months, 750 applicants and a 97% refusal rate. The current Conservative government does not believe in the live-in caregiver program.

My question to the minister is this: Why is it that the government does not recognize the benefits of the live-in caregiver program that has helped so many thousands of Canadians over the last number of years?

Hon. Chris Alexander (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite has just given us another example of the Liberal legacy of decades of darkness on immigration. There were backlogs in the caregiver program that resulted in caregivers being separated from their families for up to a decade. We have taken action. We are eliminating that backlog—

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Oh, come on.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Stop it.

The Speaker: Order. I can hear the member for St. Paul's almost as well as I could hear the member for Winnipeg North a few moments ago, but she does not have the floor. The Minister of Citizenship and Immigration does, and I would like to hear the answer.

Hon. Chris Alexander: It is quite telling, Mr. Speaker, that the members of that party would be heckling as loudly as they are when they claim to be interested in hearing about caregivers and the misfortune and family separation that the Liberal Party occasioned on generations of these hard-working Canadians, newcomers, and citizens. We are the first government in the history of this country to have taken action to end those backlogs, to enhance career prospects for caregivers. Caregivers are coming to Canada now faster than ever before because of our temporary foreign worker program. The statistics they cite are completely wrong.

[Translation]

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Burundi is in crisis. Dozens of people have been killed and hundreds injured, imprisoned or tortured during increasingly violent demonstrations. Over 100,000 people have fled the country. Canada is recommending that Canadian citizens leave Burundi immediately.

Why has our government not taken steps to speed up processing of family reunification and immigration applications as it did previously under similar circumstances? Also, why has the government not stopped deporting people to Burundi?

Hon. Chris Alexander (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are very aware of the difficult situation in Burundi right now, and that is why we are working to enhance our refugee repatriation programs and monitoring the situation closely.

Some 30,000 new immigrants will benefit from our humanitarian programs this year. We are still focusing on the continent of Africa. We are concentrating on the Great Lakes, Rwanda, Burundi and other countries in that region.

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*[English]***FINANCE**

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative finance minister has stepped in it again, and yet again, the Prime Minister refuses to hold his accident-prone minister to account.

The Conservatives just do not seem to get it. Strong labour standards lead to a strong economy. Making it easier to fire workers is not an answer in Europe and it is certainly not an answer in Canada.

Will the Prime Minister now apologize for his finance minister's insulting and misguided comments?

Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, the finance minister was referring to the situation in Greece. Obviously, our government has a strong record of job creation, with 1.2 million net new jobs created. We have a balanced budget. We have a low-tax plan to create more jobs and growth. However, it is the NDP members who would kill jobs and take Canada down the path of Greece with their high-debt, high-tax plan.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, once again, the Prime Minister is refusing to correct his Minister of Finance's absurd statements. In Germany today, the Conservative Finance Minister said, and I quote: "relaxing labour laws to make it easier to lay off workers would help spur economic growth".

That is the true face of the Conservatives. They do not understand anything. A strong economy requires a strong middle class, good jobs and good salaries. Giving people the boot is not a solution in Greece, Europe or Canada.

Oral Questions

Will the Prime Minister apologize for the inappropriate remarks made by his Minister of Finance?

• (1500)

[*English*]

Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance is in the EU and in Germany commenting on the situation in Greece. Again, our government has taken a different road than many other countries around the world. That is why we lead the G7 in job creation with over 1.2 million net new jobs created.

We have a balanced budget. We have a low-tax plan to create more jobs and to help build economic prosperity. It is the New Democrats who would mislead Canadians and the New Democrats who would take us down the path of Greece.

* * *

TAXATION

Mr. Mark Adler (York Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Employment and Social Development.

Middle-class families across the country are talking about the very important work our government is doing to ensure all Canadian families are able to save as much as they can to spend on their own priorities. Can the minister update this House on his work to ensure that every family with kids takes advantage of these benefits?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think that member for his very hard work on behalf of taxpayers across Canada.

We disagree with the statement of the Liberal leader yesterday, who said that he supports "...a mandatory expansion of the CPP of the type that...Kathleen Wynne put forward in Ontario". That plan would raise taxes by \$1,000 on every worker earning \$60,000 a year. We reject that.

Our approach is a low-tax plan for a secure retirement. That is why we brought in the tax-free savings accounts for 11 million hard-working Canadians.

* * *

[*Translation*]

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I asked the minister to delay or extend the moratorium on deportations of Haitians and Zimbabweans, which will expire on Sunday. This affects more than 3,000 people, and community organizations that are helping them are truly overwhelmed.

Today, I am asking the minister whether he has held discussions with his Quebec government counterpart and whether he has consulted his department about considering the request by the Liberal Party and the Government of Quebec concerning these deportations.

Hon. Chris Alexander (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this moratorium has been in effect for 10 years. We all agreed in December to lift it in June. Many Haitians have applied for permanent residency, and the door is still open.

Why do the members opposite say one thing in private and another in public? I do not understand that.

One thing is certain: no immigrant in Canada will support the Liberal Leader, who wants a mandatory expansion of the Canada pension plan, similar to what Kathleen Wynne of Ontario is proposing. That will not attract immigrants.

* * *

[*English*]

CANADIAN COAST GUARD

Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last week, a marine communications blackout in B.C. left ship traffic dangerously adrift. Thankfully, nothing disastrous happened, this time.

Imagine an airport without an air traffic controller. Vancouver is one of the busiest ports in Canada, but the current government continues to close marine communications centres and cut Coast Guard emergency response services, putting lives and our environment at risk.

When will the government reverse its reckless cuts to Coast Guard and marine safety?

Mr. Randy Kamp (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with respect to marine communications and traffic service centres, this member seems to think that the highly qualified Coast Guard employees are looking out a window. However, it does not work that way and has never worked that way. They use technology and, in fact, we are investing in state-of-the-art modern technology and using strategically located centres to connect that with a network of telephone towers. None of that is changing, and we are confident that we are going to be able to provide even better service to mariners with this new program.

* * *

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Mr. Ted Falk (Provencher, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week I had the privilege, together with the President of the Treasury Board, of announcing funding in my riding through the connecting Canadians program. This will, for the very first time, bring affordable, high-speed Internet to over 4,500 homes in the riding of Provencher.

Can the Minister of Industry please update this House on what our government is doing, and our plans to continue to bring affordable, high-speed Internet to rural and remote communities?

• (1505)

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Provencher understands very well that what none of us should ever forget is the size of this country and the importance of making sure that we are all connected and have full access to the opportunities of the Internet, from e-commerce to educational opportunities and health services, that are bound together with access to the Internet.

We made a commitment as a government to connect 280,000 Canadian households to the Internet, and we have exceeded that by 76,000. We have done that. We are 40% under budget in connecting Canadian families.

The long-standing hope of this country for a few decades now has been that all Canadians have access to high-speed Internet. Because of this government and this Prime Minister, we have achieved that goal.

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I would like, through you, to ask the Prime Minister this question. If he could cast his mind back to when he was an opposition leader, imagine a prime minister, maybe a Liberal with a majority, who decided to practice legislative alchemy to magic away a law that was already under investigation as an offence to retroactively eliminate the law and, thus, eliminate the offence, and to do so through an omnibus budget bill.

What would that leader have said to this abuse of power?

Ms. Roxanne James (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC): Mr. Speaker, obviously, we reject any claim that the RCMP did anything wrong by following the express will of Parliament to destroy the data from the long-gun registry. Let me be very clear. Our Conservative government fulfilled its commitment to end the wasteful and ineffective long-gun registry for all, and we will make no apologies in the House for ensuring that the will of Parliament is followed.

* * *

[Translation]

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, any day now, Enbridge could get permission to send 300,000 barrels of oil a day through line 9B, which is 40 years old and passes through many municipalities, close to homes, schools and day care centres. Given the contradictory information the National Energy Board has been providing, we still do not know whether it will require that hydrostatic testing be conducted. Nevertheless, that is the most reliable type of test for determining the condition of the pipeline.

If the National Energy Board does not want to do its job, will the Minister of Natural Resources do his and require that these tests be conducted, as called for by the municipalities and the Quebec Committee on Agriculture, Fisheries, Energy and Natural Resources?

Business of the House

[English]

Mrs. Kelly Block (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are ensuring that Canadians benefit from world-class environmental protection and safety standards for all energy infrastructure projects. The independent national board is responsible for ensuring that a project is safe for Canadians and safe for the environment before it can be approved to operate.

This project will only move forward once the proponent satisfies the NEB's conditions and demonstrates that the pipeline can be operated safely.

* * *

[Translation]

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I wish to draw the attention of members to the presence in our gallery of this year's recipients of the Governor General's Performing Arts Awards.

[English]

For the Lifetime Artistic Achievement Award: Walter Boudreau, Atom Egoyan, Diana Leblanc and R.H. Thomson.

For the Ramon John Hnatyshyn Award for Voluntarism in the Performing Arts: Michael M. Koerner.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

I will now invite all hon. members to meet the recipients at a reception in room 216-N.

* * *

[Translation]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, first, I have bad news. The government has imposed the 97th gag order to prevent debate in Parliament. That is a sad record. As the member for Chambly—Borduas just pointed out, this government has moved nearly 100 time allocation motions. It is sad that this government will not give members the opportunity to debate bills.

[English]

However, I also have good news. I would like to thank the member for London—Fanshawe, and of course tens of thousands of women from across the country. After the extensive NDP campaign to push forward to get the government to finally stop its opposition to removing the GST from feminine hygiene products, we have succeeded. On July 1, the tax will be taken off.

My question is very simple. We have an agenda next week. What other good NDP idea will the government take on in the coming week of Parliament?

Government Orders

●(1510)

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to reducing taxes everyone knows these are Conservative ideas and Conservative proposals. In fact, when we reduced the GST from 7% to 6% to 5%, saving Canadians billions of dollars, the NDP voted against that measure to benefit Canadians. Therefore, we know who is delivering on lower taxes for Canadians.

[Translation]

This afternoon we will start the report stage of Bill S-7, the zero tolerance for barbaric cultural practices act. Needless to say, I am disappointed to see on today's notice paper some 17 report stage amendments, which, all told, would eviscerate the content of the bill. From these proposals, the opposition are clearly signalling that they do not support this Conservative government's efforts to send a strong message to those in Canada, and those who wish to come to Canada, that we will not tolerate cultural traditions that deprive individuals of their human rights. Early and forced marriages, "honour"-based violence, and polygamy will not be tolerated on Canadian soil, so Conservatives will be voting against all of these opposition amendments.

[English]

Tomorrow, we will resume the third reading debate on Bill C-42, the common sense firearms licensing act. I am optimistic we can pass the bill soon so the Senate will have adequate time to consider these reductions in red tape, which regular, law-abiding Canadian hunters, farmers and outdoor enthusiasts face.

Monday shall be the sixth allotted day. The New Democrats will provide a motion for the House to debate when we come back from a weekend in our constituencies.

We will complete the report and second reading stages of Bill S-4, the digital privacy act, on Tuesday. Earlier today, the House heard my colleague, the Minister of Industry, explain the importance of this key legislation.

Wednesday, we will see the House return to the report stage of Bill S-6, the Yukon and Nunavut regulatory improvement act. This legislation is clearly both needed and wanted north of 60. Bill S-6 would modernize regulatory regimes up north and ensure they are consistent with those in the rest of Canada, while protecting the environment and strengthening northern governance.

Next Thursday, June 4, will be the seventh allotted day, when the House will again debate a topic of the New Democrats' choosing.

Finally, for the benefit of those committees studying the supplementary estimates, I am currently eyeing Monday, June 8 as the final allotted day of the supply cycle. I will, however, confirm that designation at this time next week.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS**ZERO TOLERANCE FOR BARBARIC CULTURAL PRACTICES ACT**

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill S-7, an act to amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, the Civil Marriage Act and the Criminal Code and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, as reported with amendments from the committee.

[English]

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): There are 17 motions in amendment standing on the notice paper for the report stage of Bill S-7.

Motions Nos. 1 to 17 will be grouped for debate and voted upon according to the voting pattern available at the table.

[Translation]

I will now put Motions Nos. 1 to 17 to the House.

●(1515)

MOTIONS IN AMENDMENT

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP) moved:

Motion No. 1

That Bill S-7 be amended by deleting the long title.

Motion No. 2

That Bill S-7 be amended by deleting the short title.

Motion No. 3

That Bill S-7 be amended by deleting Clause 2.

[English]

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP) moved:

Motion No. 4

That Bill S-7 be amended by deleting Clause 3.

Motion No. 5

That Bill S-7 be amended by deleting Clause 4.

Motion No. 6

That Bill S-7 be amended by deleting Clause 5.

Motion No. 7

That Bill S-7 be amended by deleting Clause 6.

[Translation]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP) moved:

Motion No. 8

That Bill S-7 be amended by deleting Clause 7.

[English]

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP) moved:

Motion No. 9

That Bill S-7 be amended by deleting Clause 8.

[Translation]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP) moved:

Motion No. 10

That Bill S-7 be amended by deleting Clause 9.

Government Orders

[English]

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP) moved:

Motion No. 11

That Bill S-7 be amended by deleting Clause 10.

Motion No. 12

That Bill S-7 be amended by deleting Clause 11.

Motion No. 13

That Bill S-7 be amended by deleting Clause 12.

Motion No. 14

That Bill S-7 be amended by deleting Clause 13.

Motion No. 15

That Bill S-7 be amended by deleting Clause 14.

Motion No. 16

That Bill S-7 be amended by deleting Clause 15.

Motion No. 17

That Bill S-7 be amended by deleting Clause 16.

[Translation]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise once again in the House to speak to Bill S-7, which is before us today. You just read the motions that were moved by the various opposition parties, and if I am not mistaken, you did not read out any motions from the Conservative Party. That is because there probably were none, just like there were none proposed by the Conservatives in committee. Furthermore, just like all of the opposition's amendments in committee at second reading stage, all of these ones were rejected.

I obviously support the idea behind Bill S-7, which is to address violence against women and children, particularly in the context of forced marriages, child marriages and honour crimes, and also to address polygamy. This is the type of violence that Bill S-7 supposedly addresses.

The NDP, like all the parties in the House, wants to ensure that we have meaningful measures to address violence against women and children. Everyone supports that. I wanted to point that out, since some members claim that other members do not care about protecting women and children. That is an all-time low of partisanship in a debate like this one.

We also support other aspects of this bill. We are not necessarily opposed to all aspects of the bill. For example, we support the establishment of a minimum age for marriage, and we also support making it an offence to knowingly solemnize a forced marriage. We support these two measures. However, there are other measures in the bill that are worrisome and that we must review carefully.

The NDP is proposing amendments at report stage that would entirely remove certain parts of Bill S-7, because the Senate's study of this bill and that of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration brought to light a number of worrisome points related to the specific measures we are seeking to remove.

When so many experts working on the ground with the victims tell us that we are at risk of making the victims we wish to protect even more vulnerable, we must take these warnings seriously, withdraw the elements that cause serious concern from the bill, re-examine them and propose measures that will not make the situation worse for victims. So far, unfortunately, the government has not shown any willingness to consider these necessary changes.

The first clause we wish to delete is the short title, “Zero Tolerance for Barbaric Cultural Practices Act”. The NDP proposed a motion to amend it, but that motion was rejected by the Conservatives.

This title has stirred a debate among Canadians, because many people felt they were being singled out, as if they were part of a barbaric culture. In fact, saying “barbaric cultural practices” makes one think that certain cultures are in favour of violence against women and children.

In the Canadian cultural context where considerable racism, discrimination and—we must say it—Islamophobia exist, we must be careful with the words we use. If certain cultural communities living in Canada feel hurt and targeted by such a title, the simple solution is to get rid of it.

Are the practices mentioned in the bill barbaric? Indeed, they are cruel. They might be called “barbaric” or “unacceptable” but are they cultural? That is the problem. In the title of a bill, the word “cultural” does not add much.

● (1520)

How can this word prevent us from achieving the purpose of this bill? That is the question.

Julie Miville-Dechéne, president of Quebec's Conseil du statut de la femme, said:

...we need communities to be with us and not against us. That is why the title of this legislation must absolutely be changed.

If the title of a bill antagonizes the very people on the front lines who can help us solve this problem, that is problematic. That is what is happening. Associations of Muslim, South Asian and Chinese people—women—tell us that this title does not work for them. It threatens and hurts them. Why not remove that word to gain as many allies as possible in the fight against violence against women?

Yao-Yao Go, director of the Metro Toronto Chinese and Southeast Asian Legal Clinic, also said that the title invokes racist stereotypes and fuels xenophobia towards certain racialized communities. Why not change the short title of a bill when it could undermine the very purpose of the bill?

The second amendment we are proposing today also deletes a clause, clause 2, which deals with denying access to Canadian territory to persons charged with polygamy. I would like to give a little more background on this.

This targets not only people charged with practising polygamy, but also people suspected of having practised it or currently practising it, and people who might practise it in the future. Based on suspicion alone, an immigration officer can deny entry into Canada not only to people who want to live here, but also people who want to visit Canada. Officers can also deport individuals suspected of having practised polygamy or currently practising it, and people who might practise it in the future.

Government Orders

The officers' latitude of interpretation is problematic, and some people have suggested that we need to be very careful. Telling officers they can guess whether someone might eventually practise polygamy opens the door to discrimination. The last thing we want is for any particular group to be discriminated against as a result of this.

On that point, Rupaleem Bhuyan, a professor in the Faculty of Social Work at the University of Toronto, added:

The low burden of proof may lead to racist discrimination against immigrants from particular regions of the world who are considered undesirable. This provision would also put women who are spouses of polygamous men at risk of being deported or being separated from their children.

That is another problem. If we deport people who practise polygamy because we want to protect women, let us not forget that the women are also part of the polygamous relationship. If, in order to protect women, we deport them with their husband, then how exactly are we protecting them? Perhaps that was an oversight by the people who drafted this bill, but it raises serious concerns about the fact that the women we want to protect will be made even more vulnerable because of this bill.

Chantal Desloges also mentioned another problem with this provision in the bill. She said:

If there will be serious consequences such as deportation attached to this behaviour [polygamy], I think we need to draw a clear line in the sand so that people can amend their behaviour to know if they're going to be onside or offside of the legislation.

There is no clear definition of polygamy and that in itself is a problem.

We also want to get rid of the part of this bill that makes it a crime to attend a marriage ceremony knowing that one of the persons being married is being forced to do so. The NDP does not have a problem with criminalization, but the goal here is to protect the victims. If they know that by reporting the people who attended their forced marriage they are helping to criminalize them all and put them in prison, then many victims will remain silent for fear of criminalizing their entire family or community. People who work in the field tell us that this is a real danger.

• (1525)

For example, I will quote Ms. Siddiqui, the head of policy and research at Southall Black Sisters. She works in the United Kingdom, a country that has explored several approaches to criminalizing forced marriage. She says that the young girls and women she has been working with in the field for many years have told her that they want to be protected by the police, but do not want their parents or families to be prosecuted or to go to prison. These victims say that if they talked to the police and their family or community were accused of crimes, they would refuse to lay charges. When such pressure is put on the victims and secrecy is encouraged about something—forced marriage—that is already too much of a secret, there is a problem.

In short, Bill S-7 does not address our major concerns; it does not make it possible to achieve its stated goals; and it even threatens to make the victims more vulnerable. That is why we have proposed the amendments the House is debating today.

[English]

Mr. Costas Menegakis (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened attentively to the member's dissertation about the bill. The member sits on the Standing Committee for Citizenship and Immigration as the NDP critic.

We heard very compelling testimony from women who were victims of barbaric cultural practices. They spoke with passion at the committee about how their culture and their families subjected them to years of abuse in very difficult relationships. One lady had to have her jaw reconstructed. To us, on this side of the House, the most compelling testimony came from the victims themselves.

Why do the member and the NDP have such difficulty understanding that in some cultures, abuse of women, particularly at a very young age, is rooted in their particular culture? Why do they have a problem with our naming this bill "zero tolerance for barbaric cultural practices act?"

[Translation]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe: Mr. Speaker, the practices my colleague referred to are barbaric practices. However, violence against women is not unique to one culture. We find it all over the world and even in Canada's families and communities. The hon. member also sits on the committee. Of course, the victims demanded that we take action. They are asking us for the tools to better protect women and children. I agree with him on that.

I asked one of the victims who appeared before the committee if she could name one single aspect of Bill S-7 that would have protected her, as a victim. She said no, that she did not know the exact details of the bill, but she was in favour of its intent.

Many experts also appeared before the committee, people who know our Criminal Code and the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, people who have done doctoral studies specifically on the topic of criminalizing forced marriages. Their conclusion was that the measures in Bill S-7 will aggravate the problem and make the victims more vulnerable.

If this subject really is close to the hearts of the hon. member and his Conservative colleagues, they will withdraw certain elements from this bill and try harder to understand the phenomena they are trying to tackle, in order to produce an intelligent bill that really deals with the problem.

• (1530)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Pierrefonds—Dollard for her excellent work on the committee. I am in complete agreement with all her criticism of Bill S-7.

I would simply like to ask her if she thinks that the Conservatives are introducing a bill that would eliminate activities that are already illegal.

Government Orders

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe: Mr. Speaker, I cannot say why the Conservatives do one thing or another because I am not inside their heads; I think things are better that way. On the other hand, I will say that many witnesses who appeared before the committee said that the Criminal Code already makes it possible to punish forced marriage and polygamy, as well as sexual abuse or threats and physical violence. In short, the Criminal Code already contains measures that would enable us to act.

The main problem is the lack of resources on the ground. Many victims and experts told us that if we really want to protect women we have to make sure they have the resources that would enable them, first, to break the silence and second, to go through the healing process and the criminal proceedings, if that is what they want.

How many forced marriages are currently hidden in silence? What can we do to really tackle the roots of this problem? First we need to understand it and then create the tools that will really help the victims on the ground.

[*English*]

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I have never, not in all the time I went to law school and read legislation, and certainly not in the last four years that I have had the honour to serve the constituents of Saanich—Gulf Islands in this place, seen such an absurd excuse for legislation as this piece of nonsense. This law, this so-called zero tolerance for barbaric cultural practices act, is nothing more than a bumper sticker in search of an offence.

I am deeply offended that this place has had to waste its time with debating this law. It is defended by those who stand on the Conservative side of the House say how could we not act to end honour killings. If honour killings were rampant and Canada had no laws against honour killings, I would say that we are well past time, by God, to eliminate honour killings.

However, murder has been against the law in Canada for a really long time, ever since Confederation, and well before it. It is extraordinary that something that goes under the absurdly exaggerated and emotionally-laden, manipulative title of “zero tolerance for barbaric cultural practices act” could be brought to this place at all.

We are also told we must end polygamy and forced marriage. These things are already illegal. Polygamy is illegal in Canada. Kidnapping someone and forcing that person into marriage is already illegal.

This act, issue on issue, is nothing more than emotionally-manipulative nonsense.

I started thinking of amendments and I started thinking that if we wanted to have a bill like this, zero tolerance for barbaric cultural practices act, it was about time we eliminated and made it illegal to stone people in the village square. Long since time, this Parliament acted against that. Why do we not have it in our laws that it would be illegal to tie women to a stake and burn them at the stake?

The bill speaks to things that are already illegal. Therefore, what would it do to actually change the current laws?

This is where I am also indebted to the speech we have just heard from my hon. friend in the New Democratic Party who identified many of the failings in the legislation.

The legislation has had significant criticism for groups, such as UNICEF and the Canadian Bar Association. They are concerned that if this law goes forward in the absence of any public policy reason to bring forward Bill S-7 at all, it will actually do damage to the scheme of laws in our country.

I also put forward amendments at committee to try to improve the sections of this law that would do harm to the scheme of laws in Canada, to ensure that children would not be caught up in this legislation. For instance, under this legislation, anyone who assists in the celebration of a marriage could be subject to penalty, and that could include children who are present who assist in the form of a marriage, who are part of a family that is engaged in polygamy illegally. Certainly, children should not be subject to criminal activities.

My amendments to eliminate children from the celebratory observing of an illegal marriage were unsuccessful, as were similar attempts from the New Democrats.

We have legislation that is designed for election purposes. When I say “bumper sticker”, I mean it literally. It will not respond to a public policy problem. Honour killings are, of course, deeply offensive, and are against the fabric of laws in our country. They are against our values. They speak to a manipulation and suppression of women, and that is unacceptable. All of that is already illegal.

Let us look at what the law would do that could affect the lives of children.

UNICEF said this in its brief, and it is always important to go back to the testimony of expert witness:

UNICEF Canada is concerned about the risk of retribution to children implicated in a forced marriage situation that can result when a family member or an adult agent acting on their behalf is summoned to appear before a court, and possibly subject to a peace bond pursuant to proposed Criminal Code provisions.

● (1535)

UNICEF continues:

We recommend that law enforcement authorities consult with child protection specialists...to the extent possible, prior to commencing a legal process involving criminal law sanctions so that less intrusive and/or supportive alternatives to protect and assist the child(ren) and restore or preserve their familial relations can be identified...

I will skip down to another conclusion in the UNICEF brief, because it is an important evidence that an organization dedicated to the rights of children globally would have found problems with a Canadian law. I do not think I have ever seen UNICEF present a brief to a Canadian legislative tribunal committee related to legislation like this.

It recommends:

We recommend that Canada take all due legal and administrative measures to ensure the unfettered access across borders by a child or children to a parent from whom they have been separated in the context of immigration - such as where a parent dissolves a polygamous union for the purpose of emigration to Canada and leaves a child or children behind in the country of origin, or where a parent is removed from Canada due to a polygamous union, but their Canadian-born children remain in Canada.

Government Orders

The fact again is the concerns for children, and I think quite inadvertent implications for depriving children of their rights, as well, as my colleague from Pierrefonds—Dollard had already mentioned in detail, we could actually be subjecting women to greater punishment through legislation that is at least ostensibly about acting to protect the rights of women.

We have seen a number of briefs come forward that were concerned about this issue of the rights of women, and I turn to the brief from the Canadian Bar Association. It also said:

Rather than protecting women, this would go against Canada's obligation to protect the human rights of all women, particularly those forced or coerced to comply with certain cultural practices against their will. Those women will not have the opportunity to come to Canada and be afforded the respect and protection that Canadian women are offered.

I will turn to another section of the bill. In addition to the fact that the bill is unnecessary and is making illegal things that are already illegal, while trying to stir up the populace that somehow Canada is at risk from barbaric cultural practices, we see a quite unnecessary and regressive step in this legislation, and that is the change to access to the criminal defence of provocation.

As a former lawyer myself, although I did not practice in criminal law but I certainly remember my criminal law jurisprudence, the defence of provocation is not one that could ever apply in an honour killing situation. It is by definition a defence that is raised when something happens in the heat of the moment. This is when someone is overcome and lacks the ability to think through a situation because he or she is so provoked by the situation in front of him or her.

Criminal law experts spoke to the committee, and I will cite the evidence of one in particular, Mr. Michael Spratt, who was at one point in the Canadian Bar Association and head of their criminal law subsection. He is a criminal lawyer and was at one point vice-president of the Defence Counsel Association of Ottawa. Mr. Spratt spoke to the unintentional consequences, or perhaps intentional if one were to be cynical, of depriving a defendant who needed the defence of provocation in a situation where manslaughter or murder had been committed. Mr. Spratt said:

—provocation requires that there be a wrongful act or insult that would be sufficient to deprive an ordinary person of the power of self-control. Honour killings, the purported justification for the amendments to provocation in this bill, don't meet that criteria. Our courts have time and time again rejected religion and honour as a basis for provocation.

What the criminal bar goes on to point out, and this was not the only submission, is that by depriving the defence of provocation where it is needed, one could do serious injustice in other cases. Therefore, in monkeying about with the defence of provocation in the guise of eliminating that defence for someone who commits an honour killing, this will undermine the criminal law system in our country beyond the specifics of honour killing.

• (1540)

I close by saying I hope that, after October 19, we will not see any other government deciding to misuse the legislative process to invent titles for bills that are intended to excite the population, titles of bills that are invented solely for electioneering. I hope we can go back in this place to doing the people's business by identifying public policy problems, bringing the best minds to bear, and bringing forth legislation that meets a real need, not a bumper sticker.

Mr. Costas Menegakis (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the member's rampage against this particular piece of legislation. I did not heckle when she was speaking and I would appreciate it if she did not while I am responding to or asking a question on her dissertation.

I will, however, say this. This is not a piece of legislation, as the member suggests, that is created for a partisan political advantage of some sort. She mentioned after October 19, and so forth. When we are debating a piece of legislation in the House, it is good if we focus on the legislation itself and keep that kind of rhetoric out of it. I know the member wants to satisfy some of her friends by reacting in the way that she is.

There are certain things in this piece of legislation that make it illegal for anyone to knowingly participate in an act that forces a marriage on someone who does not want to get married. Specifically, it would amend the Criminal Code to introduce two new offences: celebrating, aiding, or participating in a forced marriage ceremony; and celebrating, aiding, or participating in a marriage ceremony of a person under the age of 16. These are clearly offences that are not in the act right now. These are offences that this particular bill would deal with.

Does she not see that it is important to penalize those who assist in these atrocious acts being—

• (1545)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands.

Ms. Elizabeth May: First, Mr. Speaker, I almost feel I need to rise on a point of personal privilege on this, but since I have the opportunity to respond to the parliamentary secretary's question, I would like to state for the record—and he cannot contradict this, because it is fact—that since the moment I took my seat in this place, I have not heckled any member at all, not once, never. I found it gratuitous and insulting that he would begin his question by asking that I not heckle him. I have never heckled anyone, and I plan to continue in that practice.

Second, let me read the section that the hon. parliamentary secretary glossed over. Clause 293.2 reads as follows:

Everyone who celebrates, aids or participates in a marriage rite or ceremony knowing that one of the persons being married is under the age of 16 years is guilty of an indictable offence and liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding five years.

My attempt to make sure that this only applied to people 18 years of age and older was defeated at committee. On the face of it, the language “celebrates, aids or participates” is a very broad net and would include people who could well be under 18 with no capacity to have been found guilty of an indictable offence, but here they would be.

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I find the comments from the parliamentary secretary very disturbing on this particular issue.

Government Orders

We have to look at the title. I think it has been brought to light by the speaker so far that one of the words that is very problematic is the word “cultural”. From what we have seen with Conservatives' bills, which find themselves before the courts and they lose, for the most part, it is actually inciting racism and discrimination. Maybe my colleague could speak on that. When something like that is put forward, whether it is Bill C-51 or a national inquiry for missing and murdered indigenous women put forward by the NDP, the government keeps pointing the finger at the culture as opposed to looking at the systemic problem.

We have seen in the U.K. that there is an opportunity to actually invest in services. It is the same thing in Denmark. People there say they need more services. This is the way to go.

I am wondering if my colleague can talk about how this legislation is inciting more racism and discrimination as opposed to dealing with it, as well as how important it is to invest in services that actually help victims.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, I agree entirely with my hon. colleague. This is part of a fabric. The member is certainly aware of it, as are a lot of us here, and it is disturbing.

Canada's greatness, and what makes this the best place in the world to live, is our extraordinary success in multicultural harmony. We enjoy the fact that people come here from all around the world. All of us here who are not first nations have come from somewhere else. It is not just tolerance, not just that we can put up with one another; we actually are enriched by the diversity, culturally.

Whether it was the fake controversy over a woman wearing a niqab to a citizenship ceremony, stirring the pot, or the Prime Minister in this place saying that the culture was anti-women, these kinds of comments that become anti-Muslim are unhelpful. This is unhelpful at a time when we should be, as the member suggests, investing in services, increasing the levels of communication, avoiding radicalization, and assuring those people, wherever they come from around the world, that they are welcome and respected here.

Mr. Costas Menegakis (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to participate in this important debate today.

In our most recent Speech from the Throne, our government indicated we would address the vulnerability of women in the context of immigration. The government committed to ensure that women and girls would no longer be brutalized by violence, including through the inhumane practice of early and forced marriage, on Canadian soil.

I am very pleased that our government is focused on strengthening the protection of vulnerable women in Canada's immigration system and on forcefully and resolutely supporting the rights of immigrant and newcomer women.

To do so, our government must ensure that Canada's immigration policies and practices are especially focused on strengthening the protection of immigrant and newcomer women. Indeed, it is deeply troubling that harmful cultural practices such as polygamy and

forced and underage marriage still exist as a reality for some Canadian women.

That is why I am happy to note the government's proactive approach to date toward decreasing the vulnerability of immigrant and newcomer women.

For example, regulations put in place in recent years have made it much more difficult for people convicted of crimes that result in bodily harm against members of their family, or other particularly violent offences, to sponsor any family class member to come to Canada.

Better guidelines and training have been introduced to assist front-line officers in processing requests for exemptions based on abuse or neglect and in handling sensitive information related to abusive situations.

My colleague, the hon. member for Mississauga South, introduced a motion last fall in this very place to bar the recognition of proxy, telephone, Internet, and fax marriages for immigration purposes, because they may facilitate non-consensual marriages, and our government was proud to support this motion.

While it should be noted that the practice of forced marriage can also victimize men and boys, it disproportionately affects women and girls. Women and girls who are forced to marry someone against their wishes are almost always also beset by a list of other restrictions of their human rights, restrictions that deny them an education or the opportunity to find employment and limit their mobility. These are all abhorrent to our Canadian values of individual freedom for all.

Why are immigrant women particularly vulnerable to the harm caused by these practices?

For one, they are more likely to lack proficiency in English or French, which can be a barrier to accessing social services and information on their legal rights in an abusive relationship. They may also lack the economic independence to leave abusive situations, especially if they are underage.

Under Canada's settlement program for newcomers, the government also provides funding to a variety of organizations that offer programs and services that respond to the specific needs of permanent residents, including immigrant women and their families who may find themselves in vulnerable situations.

Also, both Canada's citizenship study guide, *Discover Canada*, and the *Welcome to Canada* orientation guide were recently updated to reflect the fact that Canada's openness and generosity do not extend to harmful practices such as forced marriage or other forms of gender-based family violence.

The Minister of Citizenship and Immigration and I have devoted a considerable amount of time meeting with individuals and representatives of organizations that provide services to immigrant women, as well as with victims of abuse, at a number of round table discussions across the country.

These important discussions focused on domestic violence, polygamy, forced marriage, the immigration process, and how to strengthen the protection of vulnerable women and girls.

Government Orders

I was also proud to participate in the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration study on strengthening the protection of women in our immigration system. We were fortunate to hear from expert witnesses and victims of so-called honour-based violence; yes, right here in our own country.

These discussions, of course, strongly informed Bill S-7, the zero tolerance for barbaric cultural practices act.

● (1550)

Bill S-7 is yet another example of the government's commitment to the protection of vulnerable Canadians, particularly newcomer women. These measures would do the following: render permanent and temporary residents inadmissible if they practice polygamy in Canada; strengthen Canadian marriage laws by establishing a new national minimum age for marriage of 16 years old, and codify the existing legal requirements for free and enlightened consent for marriage and for ending an existing marriage prior to entering another; criminalize certain conduct related to underage and forced marriage ceremonies, including the act of removing a child from Canada for the purpose of such marriages; help protect potential victims of underage or forced marriages by creating a new specific court-ordered peace bond where there are grounds to fear someone would commit an offence in this area; and ensure the defence of provocation would not apply in so-called "honour" killings and many spousal homicides.

Canada is a generous and tolerant country. However, I am sure that we would all agree that Canada's openness and generosity does not extend to underage and forced or polygamous marriage or other practices that deny gender equality.

In summary, the measures in Bill S-7 would strengthen our laws to protect Canadians and newcomers to Canada from barbaric cultural practices. The measures in Bill S-7 would provide protection and support for vulnerable individuals, especially women and girls, by rendering permanent and temporary residents inadmissible if they practice polygamy in Canada, by strengthening Canadian marriage and criminal laws in order to combat forced and underage marriage, and by ensuring that defence of provocation would not apply in so-called "honour" killings, and many spousal homicides. That is why this bill is so important.

As legislators, it is our duty to uphold the equality of men and women under the law. I would go so far as to say that this is a fundamental Canadian value. Nevertheless, we must recognize that thousands of Canadian women and girls continue to be subject to violence, and barbaric cultural practices still exist as a reality for many Canadian women. By supporting these measures and ensuring that they pass into law, Parliament would be sending a strong message that we will not tolerate any practices that deprive anyone of their human rights on Canadian soil. I have no doubt that everyone in this House would all agree that in our capacity as representatives of the people of Canada, we have an obligation to always support victims of violence and abuse, and to do everything we can to prevent such practices from happening in this country.

For all of the reasons I have outlined today, I urge my honourable colleagues to support Bill S-7. With that, I conclude my remarks on this bill today.

● (1555)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would remind the parliamentary secretary that yesterday, when he had the opportunity to rise in the House to vote in favour of our motion to end violence against women, he sadly decided to vote against it.

I understand his speech, but I think it is a bit rich of him to point his finger at the NDP, which moved the motion his own government voted against. The biggest problem here is that while we are talking about victims, we are also making criminals of them.

The Conservatives did the same thing with Bill C-36 concerning prostitution. They said that women who worked as prostitutes were victims, but they forgot that their bill turned them into criminals. Then they proposed an amendment to their bill, but it still made criminals of the victims in certain circumstances.

They are doing the same thing today: they are making criminals of the people they say are victims. That does not work, and all the experts agree.

What facts or scientific studies do they have to show that making victims into criminals will improve the situation?

[*English*]

Mr. Costas Menegakis: Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, I take exception to the member's point. This bill would not do that. The zero tolerance for barbaric cultural practices act would actually send a clear message to individuals coming to this country that their harmful and violent cultural practices are unacceptable in Canada.

It is also unacceptable to have children who are born in Canada whose parents promised when they were born for them to be married to somebody. When they reach 14 years of age, they find themselves on an airplane going to a country they do not even know, or even within the community where they live, and forced to marry an individual with whom they have had no personal contact other than being promised to that individual when they were born, against their will.

These are abuses that are happening in this country. They are rooted in some cultures, and the member should be supportive of this legislation that would stop these atrocious acts from happening on Canadian soil.

● (1600)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are certain aspects of the legislation for which there is no doubt some limited support. However, there are also aspects of the legislation that have offended a great number of people. Using the combination of words "barbaric cultural" is one of the things that the government has been called to further explain. At the end of the day, it does raise some issues of some very strong racial background as to why the government chooses to use such strong wording. It would appear on the surface that the Conservatives are more concerned about having some sort of strong spun-out message coming from the Prime Minister's Office.

Government Orders

I wonder if the member could provide some explanation as to why the Conservatives felt compelled to use such strong wording in the title of the legislation, which is offending many individuals in our community.

Mr. Costas Menegakis: Mr. Speaker, I do not accept the premise of the question. The title does not, nor does the legislation at any point, name any particular culture. The fact of the matter is that certain practices are based and rooted in some cultures. We did not name one particular culture. We did not say it is a particular group that is guilty of these actions. However, these are actions that are defended by those who perpetrate these atrocious actions on their own children by pointing to their particular culture or tradition. This is why the word “cultural” is important.

In Canada, people should have the right to a consensual marriage, not something that is forced on them because they were told that it is somehow rooted in their culture.

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to speak on the bill. Since the parliamentary secretary has just referred to the word “cultural”, maybe that is a good place to begin. We in the Liberal Party proposed an amendment to remove the word “cultural” from the title, which would then read: zero tolerance for barbaric practices act. We thought it was totally unnecessary and offensive to some to include the word “cultural”. Whatever the government’s intent might be, certain communities viewed themselves as being targeted by the use of this word. The word does nothing to enhance the content of the legislation, it is not necessary in any way, yet it is offensive to some. Therefore, I see absolutely nothing to gain, but something to lose, by keeping the word “cultural” in the title of the bill.

The government, through some convoluted argument, which I have heard several times and never understood because I do not think it makes sense, did not agree to that. Therefore, the word “cultural” remains. However, that is not sufficient enough for the Liberal Party to vote against the bill, because we mainly go by the content of a bill rather than by the sometimes ridiculous Conservative title.

In terms of the content, we have reservations in some areas, which I will allude to in a minute or two. However, overall, we think there is enough that is positive in the bill that we will support it.

I will go through the four elements in the bill, which are the provisions on honour killing, and related to that, the defence of provocation; polygamy; the age of marriage; and forced marriage. I think it is pretty well self-evident, and I cannot speak for other parties, but speaking for the Liberal Party, we regard all of these practices as undesirable things that ought to be totally illegal. Therefore, if the bill in some respects can define them better or make them more illegal, then we would be in favour.

Particularly, the two substantive items in the bill that we do like are: one, for the first time we have a minimum age of marriage at 16; and second, the innovation in the bill that it would be a crime to participate in a forced marriage. We think those are both advanced and we support those two items.

In terms of reservations, we think that the defence of provocation in the context of honour killing is really just a political show, because the lawyers who testified before us made it very clear that

the defence of provocation would never be accepted by any court in this country in the case of an honour killing. Therefore, it is redundant and I think something the Conservatives brought in for political effect.

I also think that the Conservatives’ definition of what would constitute acceptable provocation is inappropriate. The crimes they listed included fairly minor things, such as theft, and we think the crimes should be more major. The minister seemed to agree with that, but he did not understand that the bill did include minor crimes. That is one thing in the bill that we would like to see changed, but it is not enough to cause us to vote against it.

On polygamy, there was some discussion as to whether there should be a definition of polygamy, because if someone is not allowed into the country because of polygamy or deported because of polygamy, it might be a good idea to have a definition as to what it is. One can see the scope for abuse of people’s rights if the offence for which they might be charged is not properly defined.

On the age of marriage, according to the bill, if a person is 16 or 17 years old, marriage would be allowed with parental consent, and parental consent alone would be sufficient. However, we thought that if we are into a world of potential forced marriages, then parental consent might not be sufficient. If it is a forced marriage, then the consent of the parent would be a part of that forced marriage scenario, which we want to stop.

● (1605)

For this reason, we propose that there be some judicial mechanism, which I believe exists in some provinces, in addition to parental consent in the case of the marriages of 16- and 17-year-olds.

In essence, what I am saying is that there is enough that we like in this bill to make us think it is worth supporting overall, but there are various things that we would add to the very long list of other things that the Conservatives have done with which we disagree. Should we become the government at some point, I suppose we would add these items to the already long list of things done by the Conservative government that we would want to undo. The list is a very long one.

Just in the immigration area, for example, approximately 99% of the content of the Citizenship Act constitutes additional hurdles and barriers that we would want to remove. However, in the case of this particular bill, we think that there is enough merit in it that we in the Liberal Party will vote in support of it.

Hon. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for a very well reasoned and sensible response to the bill. He has some good suggestions and has raised some reasonable concerns. That is the kind of debate we should have.

Government Orders

I sat on the public safety committee this morning. We heard an expert on terrorism and radicalization tell us that there are materials being distributed in Canada today that say that beating women is an act of kindness and love and that women owe a duty to their husbands, a duty that includes obedience and not withholding intimacy.

There are documented activities taking place in our country that are not only physically dangerous to women but also hostile in a very cultural sense.

I would ask my colleague why we need to avoid the world “culture” when clearly there are cultural dimensions to this danger to women.

• (1610)

Hon. John McCallum: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her comment. I also commend her for her eloquent S. O. 31 statement on the occasion of her impending departure—not too soon, but at some point. She showed that we can fit a lot of content into 60 seconds. It was a very excellent statement.

I also like the first part of her comment, when she said that some of the things that I said were reasonable—

Hon. John McKay: That is so unusual.

Hon. Chris Alexander: It is because he is supporting it.

Hon. John McCallum: Mr. Speaker, notwithstanding some reservations.

I think perhaps where I differ most acutely is on this word “cultural”, because I see it as being offensive to communities and because we do not gain anything by its inclusion.

If we look at the groups who are offending society in areas of polygamy and other bad things, we see they are not just Muslims. There were Jewish groups in the news for that. There were fundamentalist Christian groups based in British Columbia. There are a number of different religious groups or sects, or whatever we want to call them, that are guilty of these crimes, but only certain groups take offence to the use of the word “culture”, thinking that it is directed at them.

From a practical point of view, if the word offends some people but does not add anything to the final product, why put it in? I would say to take it out.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Ève Péclet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will ask my colleague the same question that I asked the parliamentary secretary because I believe that the problem here is the criminalization of victims.

We have debated a number of bills in the House of Commons describing a person as a victim, but criminalizing them at the same time. I do not understand. I know that he briefly spoke to that in his speech.

Why is it that, in some debates, the Liberals condemn the Conservatives for wanting to make criminals of the victims and in others they support the fact that the victims will be criminalized and, therefore, marginalized and unfortunately left to fend for themselves with no help?

Hon. John McCallum: Mr. Speaker, we could say that the victims are criminalized to some degree, and we could debate that. However, I have confidence in our justice system. We have special proceedings for youth, for those under 18 years of age. In that case, the system can act judiciously.

For example, take the case of a young man who is 17, and thus a minor, who participates in the forced marriage of his sister. Perhaps he should be treated as a criminal. It seems to me that we could debate the issues raised by the member. Nevertheless, we want to vote for this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Before we resume debate, it is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Québec, Consumer Protection; the hon. member for Beauport—Limoilou, the Environment.

Resuming debate, the hon. Minister of Citizenship and Immigration.

• (1615)

[*English*]

Hon. Chris Alexander (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, of course in this debate we are again hearing from the Liberals that they would like to take the word “cultural” out of the title because, as we have heard throughout many months of debate in this place and outside of it, the Liberals still accept that there is a possible defence of violence against women and girls in the name of culture.

We believe there is no such defence. We believe there is no such defence in the name of tradition or in the name of honour. Violence is violence. It is a crime, and we will not stand for that amendment or any of the others that would water down this important bill.

It is not surprising that this kind of proposal continues to come from the Liberal Party, because over 13 years in government it did nothing on these issues. Instead of waking up to the issue of human smuggling, the Liberals listed bringing exotic dancers to Canada, not in the hundreds but in the thousands, as a legitimate occupation under our temporary foreign worker program. Many of them went into the sex trade and many of them went into exploitative roles. We ended that and we are proud of it.

If I can throw members' minds back nine years, it was in 2006 that this process of reforming Canadian immigration began. We inherited backlogs and abuse. We still see an unwillingness from the Liberal Party of today to acknowledge that there had been abuse and that the residency rules for citizenship for permanent residents had been flouted. The immigrant investor program in effect brought some money as loans to provinces and territories but brought very few people to Canada, because there was an industry of consultants and lawyers who systematically sought to ensure that large populations of people could pretend they were living in Canada when in fact they were elsewhere. This was unacceptable. It was unacceptable to leave the immigration consultants' world unregulated, as the Liberals did not just for those 13 years in government but for decades.

Government Orders

That is why I am proud, as I know everyone is on our side, to be speaking to the zero tolerance for barbaric practices bill at report stage, not only because of its own merits but because it builds on a solid and wide legacy of achievement by this government over nine years.

Not only have we legislated to protect women and girls in the spousal program in our refugee streams across the board, but we have also legislated to remove foreign criminals faster from this country to make sure our asylum system is not open to abuse and to make sure that human smugglers do not have the incentive to bring people to our shores on unsafe journeys of the kind we see in the Mediterranean today, where thousands are dying every month. Those risks are unacceptable.

Canada's generosity should not be generating new risk or putting people's lives at risk in new ways. We should be saving lives. That is exactly what we have been doing since these reforms came into effect, even as we have been strengthening the value of Canadian citizenship and restoring the pride that Canadians have always had, a pride that was threatened after the reforms the Liberals brought forward in 1977.

We have reformed every economic immigration program we have. The Liberals pointed to the federal skilled worker program, our flagship program, as their top achievement in immigration, yet it took six to eight years for people to come through that program, even at the beginning of our time in government, because it was very difficult for us to act in a minority situation. We have brought it to the point where last week I met someone in British Columbia who had been processed under express entry as a federal skilled worker in two weeks. That person gained the opportunity to be selected to come to Canada through a comparison that was made of her skills and education with those of other candidates. That is the way we need to go and that is the way we have gone.

We ended the failed immigrant investor program and replaced it with a start-up visa for entrepreneurs, the first in the world. We replaced it with an immigrant investor venture capital pilot program, which is bringing larger-scale resources into the venture capital sector, which has so much potential to bring a whole new generation of start-up companies through the various stages of growth and expansion to be major employers in Canada. We also launched the action plan for faster family reunification and the super visa.

• (1620)

We will never hear a Liberal mention any of these initiatives. They deny that they even exist, that 75,000 parents and grandparents have come to Canada in only three years or that 50,000 visitors have received super visas, the right to come to Canada for up to 10 years and to be here for up to two years at a time, with health insurance paid by the inviting party. It is a revolution in the ability of families to choose the right tool to allow them to come together for family occasions, for births, for weddings, and for anniversaries here in Canada. It has been of enormous benefit, as anyone who speaks to newcomer groups knows.

We have also enhanced our refugee programs, not just by agreeing to take 10,000 Syrian refugees this year, next year, and in the following year but also by focusing on the resettlement of the most vulnerable the world over. We see that with our current target of

23,000 Iraqi refugees, many of them from vulnerable religious and ethnic minorities, over 20,000 of whom are already here.

We also launched the federal skilled trades program, which is very much needed and very much overdue, and created the Canadian experience class, which invites those who have already studied and worked in Canada, who have the experience and have proven themselves in our market, to come to Canada. Some 23,000 will do so this year.

We have also extended the provincial nominee program seven times beyond what it was under the Liberals to make sure that immigrants are going to every province and territory, to larger communities and smaller ones, to meet the needs of employers and meet the needs of this growing country.

Immigration is not an end in itself. This country is based on it, absolutely, but immigrants want to work. They want to be part of a successful economy. That is the opportunity this government has given. We have strong immigration programs because we have shown the ability to manage this economy strongly, to return to balance, to keep this a low-tax jurisdiction for jobs and growth, to attract international investment, and to open markets. That is what is attracting newcomers to this country.

We select them on the basis of their skills and experience while respecting the principle of family reunification, while being more generous to refugees than we have ever been on a sustained basis, and while strengthening the value of our citizenship. It is economic prosperity. It is the responsibilities of citizenship, which include the dedication newcomers have, in very large measure, to the rule of law and to justice in this country. It is our duty of protection to those in our immigration programs and those beyond our shores who would dearly love to come here.

What would Bill S-7 do to enhance this?

Government Orders

It would make polygamists inadmissible to Canada. Second, it would raise the national minimum age for marriage to 16. Third, it would require those marrying to dissolve all their previous unions. Fourth, it would require those marrying to give their free and enlightened consent and to ensure that it is truly enlightened. Fifth, it would criminalize active and knowing participation in forced marriage or the removal of a person from Canada for the purpose of underage or forced marriage. Sixth, it would limit the defence of provocation to cases where the defendant was him or herself the victim of a indictable offence punishable by up to five years' imprisonment. In other words, one could only cite provocation, once Bill S-7 becomes law, if one had been the victim of a serious violent crime. Seventh, it would establish access to peace bonds to prevent forced marriage, underage marriage, or removal for those purposes.

This is about the protection of women and girls. This is about ending domestic violence. This is about joining up with the work John Baird did as foreign minister to partner with United Nations agencies and countries around the world to end forced and underage marriage.

It is astonishing that the NDP would oppose every aspect of the bill. It is typical that the Liberals would be strongly in opposition to the bill at the start and then, once they saw how strongly Canadians supported it, would migrate over to our position while hiding behind the fig leaf of wanting to change a single word to show that somehow they have a principle and a policy to stand on.

Liberal ambiguity on immigration, Liberal inability to apply the rules, even of their own ill-conceived programs before 2006, gave this country a legacy of decades of darkness and abuse in immigration. This Conservative government spent nine years cleaning that mess up. We have ended abuse, we have curbed vulnerability, and we have taken criminality out of our immigration flows, and Bill S-7 is a fitting capstone to a proud legacy of achievement for this government.

• (1625)

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what he is saying is preposterous. After 10 years in office, the Conservative government is basically taking Canada in the wrong direction again.

There are already laws that make most of what he is talking about illegal. He knows that when it comes to allowing people to come to Canada, whether on visas or as permanent residents, the government already has the power to deny people. If the government knows that people are practising polygamy and it does not want them in Canada, it has the authority to do that.

Canadian criminal law provides for a lot of the actions he is talking about. Uttering threats is covered in the Criminal Code under section 264.1. Aggravated assault is under section 265 and in section 268 for bodily harm. There is sexual assault, and the list goes on and on. We already have laws. The Conservatives are just trying to pull the wool over Canadians' eyes. They are promoting discrimination and racism, as I said a while ago.

If they are so serious about dealing with violence against women, why is it that they will not call for a national inquiry into missing and murdered aboriginal women? Why are they not investing in shelters

for people? Why are they not investing in housing for people? It is shameful.

Hon. Chris Alexander: Mr. Speaker, as with missing and murdered aboriginal women, so with regard to forced marriage, polygamy, honour-based violence, and violence against women and girls across the board. We are not looking for new plans, new reports, and new exercises in reflection, where NDP supporters can come together and decide that they are going to do nothing, once again. We are looking at taking action, and that is precisely what we are doing in the bill.

The member opposite thinks that everything is fine, that the status quo is perfect. She has not even spoken to her own supporters in downtown Toronto and elsewhere across the country. Agencies funded by us, but who clearly support the opposition on almost everything, have themselves identified hundreds of cases of forced marriage and hundreds of cases of polygamy that lead to terrible cases of mental anguish and lifelong violence.

It is unacceptable for these things to be happening in Canada. It is not enough to have the law as it is. Bill S-7 will protect women and girls, and the NDP should understand that.

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister has drunk so much Kool-Aid, and there is such an air of almost total unreality to every word he says, that it is almost impossible to know where to begin.

However, the good news is that the new Canadians I see in these communities agree with me. They know from their own experience that the system is broken, and they reject the argument that it is somehow a nine-year transition period and that everything that is wrong today is because of what happened under the Liberals 10 years ago. The most elementary logic suggests that this makes zero sense.

I would like to ask the minister about two examples. Perhaps the most egregious example was in answer to my colleague in question period when he complained about the denial rate for caregivers being 97% under the new Conservative program from January to March of 2015. Somehow this was the fault of the Liberals. A program the Conservatives had just brought in in 2014-15, with a denial rate of 97%, was the fault of the Liberals.

We can also look at the processing times in 2007. They went up, up, up and dramatically up in 2011, when the Conservatives cut funding. That is the fault of the Liberals. How can the minister sustain such an entirely illogical narrative and expect anyone to believe it?

Hon. Chris Alexander: Mr. Speaker, we on this side are proud to report that we have not been drinking the same things as the member for Markham—Unionville.

We are equally proud to point out to this audience and beyond that the member who is the critic for this portfolio cannot even find a single question relating to Bill S-7 to ask in this debate. That is after opposing the bill through second reading, in public, furiously, saying that it would do no good. He has clearly come around to what works, because Conservative policies on immigration work.

Government Orders

On the caregiver program, it was established in a form that was guaranteed to provide backlogs and guaranteed to separate caregivers from their families for up to 10 years. We have changed that. The backlog will be gone within two years. A huge number of caregivers have been approved under the new program.

The Liberals will always cherry-pick the statistics they want. The reality is that hundreds of caregivers are here under the new reform. The program is working faster. They are going to have better career prospects than ever before.

●(1630)

[*Translation*]

Mr. José Nunez-Melo (Laval, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the House for giving me the opportunity to speak to this bill.

It is strange to see that our colleagues in the Conservative caucus, including the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration Canada and the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, have taken up this Senate bill here in the House.

I want to start by reaffirming what my colleague from Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasung said so well. For 10 years, the Conservative government repeatedly led Canada in the wrong direction, and this bill is just one of many others. My colleague was right to point out that there are already provisions in the Criminal Code and in the Civil Code to combat everything this bill claims to address.

To my knowledge, naturally, it is quite rare in Canada to hear about polygamy, forced marriage or early marriage, except in some very specific situations. I remember a part of the Civil Code that deals with the emancipation of minors through marriage. The provision allowed for minors who willingly entered into a marriage to be considered as adults.

I also want to explain why I am happy to be discussing this bill, despite its many problems. I am doing so to show my support for all the amendments that were proposed by the NDP caucus in committee, as well as by other opposition members.

At the beginning of today's debate, I heard that the opposition brought forward 17 motions, and the Conservatives rejected all of them in committee, right before second reading. The Conservatives did not propose any amendments. How is it that a bill can come to us from the Senate and it can be taken on by a minister and his parliamentary secretary, who both know very well that we have the Canadian Multiculturalism Act?

They say that we should pass the bill so we can protect these people, which does not make any sense, when they have no intention of taking it seriously or analyzing the contents of the 17 amendments that were brought forward.

In principle, the bill is commendable, for it is meant to combat polygamy, and early and forced marriage, which definitely should be stopped. However, the proposed approach is not the right one.

If the Conservatives had been able to support the motion and accept the amendments, we could have improved the bill and made it effective. It is our duty as legislators to introduce legislation that makes sense.

●(1635)

Once again, in the title alone, there is something unusual. As my colleague, the member for La Pointe-de-l'Île, did such a good job of explaining, the title, which is appalling, points a finger right at women from certain communities and stigmatizes certain cultures deemed "barbaric". There is something missing somewhere.

That reminds me of something that still surprises me. Just yesterday, Motion No. 444 was rejected. That was a motion to end violence against women. The entire Conservative caucus rejected it. Once again, I was surprised to see that of the 159 members of the Conservative caucus, 28 are women, which represents about 17.5%. That is not a big number, relatively speaking, but it nevertheless seems to me that those women should have taken an interest in the intention of the motion.

Getting back to Bill S-7, regardless of its appalling title, which the Conservatives never wanted to change, what we need to do is come up with a bill that really tackles the source of the problem. Of course, as I said earlier, I do not believe that this problem is particularly widespread here in Canada, except among immigrants from other cultures who engage in these practices, which seems to be the case. However, it also seems to me, as my Liberal Party colleague explained, that there are safeguards. Our Citizenship and Immigration Canada officers in visa sections in embassies have the means to detect all kinds of irregularities, and they can really be strict about saying that such practices are not allowed in Canada. It therefore has to be something that really violates what has already been established in our Civil Code or in common law on the English side.

I discovered another rather interesting situation. At the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, the members of our party tried several times to amend the bill, especially the title and certain concepts in the clauses, in order to ensure that the victims would not be penalized. That did not happen. We end up with the same situation, as usual with the Conservatives. As our opposition colleagues mentioned, the mission of the Conservative caucus is to let things drag on. The Conservatives have been in power for 10 years, and they have not really found solutions. The expression "working together" means absolutely nothing to them. They insist, with a degree of arrogance, on imposing closure and putting an end to debate.

What everyone is objecting to is primarily the title. Many witnesses who came before the committee found the title offensive and unacceptable.

Government Orders

• (1640)

[English]

Mr. Costas Menegakis (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, several times the member referred to amendments at committee. Had he taken the time to read the transcript, the minutes of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration deliberations on this particular bill, he would know that many of those amendments were ruled out of order on the advice of the House of Commons-appointed clerk on the committee. Those that were not, did not succeed and clearly were not substantive enough to substantiate a change to the bill that dealt with the issue in depth.

As I said in my speech, our government will not tolerate cultural traditions in Canada that deprive individuals of their human rights, such as forced marriage, honour killings, polygamy and so forth.

My question to the member is simple. Does he believe that acts such as forced marriage, honour killings and polygamy are actually barbaric when they are forced on innocent women and girls who do not give their consent?

[Translation]

Mr. José Nunez-Melo: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the Parliamentary Secretary for his question. He began by asking if I had read the amendments. Obviously the answer is no. I have no knowledge of these amendments because I am not a member of the committee.

With respect to his last question about the bill, what we are saying and keep repeating is that our members' suggestions in committee should help improve the bill and make it more effective. In principle, that is what should happen. Our members try to improve the bill by moving amendments. However, the Conservatives reject the amendments. They only want to keep the original, no matter how badly worded. They do not care. They want to do things their way.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in listening to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration we hear a litany of what I would classify as falsehoods indicating just how wonderfully the government is doing on the immigration file.

When I reflect on the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration's speech and when he made the statement that Bill S-7 kind of puts a cap on all these wonderful achievements, I cannot help but wonder, if only the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration had as much enthusiasm at resolving the types of problems that are in the immigration department today, let alone citizenship, if Canadians would be that much further ahead.

Would the member agree with that assessment?

[Translation]

Mr. José Nunez-Melo: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Winnipeg North for his question. He is absolutely right. The minister was bragging about the success of his management approach, but in my riding, there is a fairly high number of immigrants from different ethnic backgrounds. They come to my office to get information on topics that are directly related to this minister's management of the department. Recently, I even

approached the minister directly, in person, to ask him some questions. He has a very laissez-faire attitude. I do not see why he says that his management approach is such a success or how they are able to detect anything at all.

Although this bill comes from the Senate, it has the government's support. I do not believe that the government is really going to get members to support a bill if it imposes gag orders and forces the vote in its usual arrogant manner so that the bill passes in the form the government wants.

• (1645)

[English]

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am glad to have the opportunity to address this important piece of legislation in the House today on behalf of my constituents in the great riding of Wetaskiwin. I always stand never knowing for sure if this is going to be the last time I speak as a member of Parliament for Wetaskiwin, but I certainly take every opportunity to recognize the great people that I have been fortunate to represent for the last 10 years. The ridings are changing in Alberta and half of my riding will be lost, so it is always nice to acknowledge the folks who sent me here on their behalf. Many of them communicate to me their strong desires on certain issues. I have no doubt where the people in my constituency stand on this issue.

I am pleased to have the opportunity today to speak about Bill S-7, which is an act to amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, the Civil Marriage Act and the Criminal Code and to make consequential amendments to a few other pieces of legislation. Bill S-7 aims to ensure that early and forced marriage and other harmful cultural practices, such as polygamist marriages and so-called "honour-based" violence, do not occur on Canadian soil. It would do so by amending the Civil Marriage Act, the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act and, of course, the Criminal Code.

Today I would like to speak to the proposed amendment to the Criminal Code, the defence of provocation. The provocation defence applies only to a murder charge and, when successful, reduces a murder charge down to manslaughter, thereby giving rise to wide judicial discretion in sentencing and, in most cases, significantly lower sentences than if the person had been convicted of murder. The proposed amendment would limit the defence so that it would only apply where a person is killed in response to provoking conduct by the victim that was objectively serious and contrary to the norms and behaviours set down for all of society.

More specifically, the provocation by the victim would have to amount to a criminal offence with a maximum sentence of at least five years. The defence would continue to be available where a person loses control and kills someone suddenly upon finding that person assaulting or abusing a family member, or committing any number of other serious criminal offences. The amendment is not only intended to stop the defence from being raised in honour killings but also from being raised in spousal killing situations where it is still sometimes successful. There are situations where people who kill will often claim to have done so in response to some lawful, albeit insulting, conduct by the victim.

Government Orders

This reform responds to two decades of criticism that the defence of provocation in these cases operates to excuse male violence against women and to reaffirm men's beliefs that they are entitled to possess and control women regardless of what those women want. This, of course, is a very similar dynamic to what is seen in honour killing cases, where men, whether it be a father, a husband or brother, but sometimes also women, seek to kill women or girls in their families when they make their own choices about how to behave that are in conflict with the wishes of other family members.

Many of the commentators who testified before the committee said that the proposed provocation reforms were unnecessary because the courts have already made clear that provocation is not available in an honour killing context. This has been the case argued by some across the floor. Even if the courts are in the process of narrowing the scope of the provocation defence, it begs the question: Why are the courts, rather than Parliament, addressing problems with the law? It is Parliament's job and the job of every person in the chamber to make law and correct legal problems.

Bill S-7 is Parliament's opportunity to change the law, to say that murder is not less serious just because the victim offended the killer in the moments before the killing. Critics of this proposal also ignore the fact that our government has said on many occasions that this proposed reform is also meant to address spousal killings that are not characterized as honour killings. Many who claim the defence of provocation are men who have killed their current or former partners because the relationship ended, because there was infidelity or because of verbal insults about sexual performance, and so on.

It is true that these claims are becoming less and less successful in Canadian courts, but, nonetheless, such claims do sometimes succeed. None of the witnesses who criticized this amendment addressed the fact that men in Canada sometimes still benefit from the provocation defence when they kill their current or former partners. Instead, the critics talked only about cases in which provocation claims failed, where the circumstances were characterized as honour killings.

They seem to agree that the victims of honour killings must be treated as murder victims and those who kill them as murderers, yet they do not appear to be concerned that victims of domestic killings that are not honour killings may receive a different quality of justice and are instead sometimes treated as victims of the lesser crime of manslaughter. These killers are back on the streets within a few years in some cases.

Our government believes all persons who kill their partners in response to lawful, albeit insulting, behaviour should be convicted of murder. We also believe that it is Parliament's job to make this happen by changing the law to accord with this value. It is not enough to sit back and hope that the courts will do the right thing on a case-by-case basis. In any event, it is simply not true that the courts have ruled definitively in this area.

• (1650)

The British Columbia Court of Appeal, in the case of *R. v. Nehar*, 2004 BCCA, actually found that the cultural background of the accused was relevant to his provocation claim. This case remains binding authority in British Columbia, which means that cultural claims can be accepted in the context of a provocation defence.

Many commentators have suggested that the Ontario Court of Appeal decision in the case of *Humaid* definitely rules out the provocation defence in honour killing cases. In that ruling, the Ontario Court of Appeal made clear that the defence failed because the Crown proved that the killing was pre-meditated, so it was not of a sudden nature and, therefore, not provoked. Having found that the appeal was resolved on the grounds that the Crown proved pre-meditation, the court said it did not have to resolve the issue about whether the accused's cultural beliefs were relevant to provocation. The court discussed what the considerations would be in resolving this issue, but expressly stated:

The resolution of this difficult issue awaits a case in which it must be resolved.

That is from the Ontario Court of Appeal in *R. v. Humaid* 2006, on the order paper 1507, paragraph 94.

Where does all of this leave us? It is wishful thinking and legally inaccurate to state that provocation cannot, as a matter of law, be raised by an accused who is alleged to have killed in an honour killing context. It is true that the provocation claims in honour killing cases are likely to be rejected by judges and juries, but the critics are incorrect when they suggest that the defence cannot even be raised or considered. We have already seen that it has been considered in British Columbia, and court is awaiting a case where it can be considered in Ontario.

These claims will be made again, and they will produce more appeals, which will cost the justice system more time and energy, and which will bring more pain to the families of the victims, who have to face longer trials and appeals. We, as legislators, can stop that from happening by passing Bill S-7 as soon as possible and by declaring that no one is entitled to leniency for intentionally killing another because of any type of insult that is otherwise lawful.

Some critics are concerned about unintended consequences of limiting the provocation defence. Scenarios involving racial slurs were mentioned on a few occasions. In most such cases, both parties are drunk, both parties are insulting each other, and in many cases, both parties are also assaulting or threatening each other, which is unlawful conduct in and of itself. No cases were identified wherein a person who was minding his or her own business and was aggressively verbally assaulted with racial insults was thus provoked to kill. This is a very unlikely occurrence.

Government Orders

There are risks of retaining provocation for racial insults. A 2013 case from Ontario involved a successful provocation defence by a man who brutally killed his wife in the context of a marriage breakdown. The accused alleged that his wife made a racial slur, the contents of which were not disclosed in the court's reasons. The accused was, therefore, convicted of manslaughter, a lesser charge, not murder, and sentenced to serve only four years and four months' imprisonment, despite the sentencing judge finding the provocation to be of little mitigating value.

The danger of retaining provocation in order to show leniency to those who are racially insulted is that it can also apply in the context of a relationship breakdown, where people offer up insults in order to hurt each other emotionally with some regularity.

There are other safeguards built into our criminal justice system that should not be forgotten in the event that there is an unforeseen but genuinely sympathetic set of circumstances for which the provocation defence would no longer apply. For example, the Crown could find that it is not in the public interest to prosecute that person for murder and can accept a guilty plea to manslaughter without any need for the accused to raise the provocation defence.

In closing, to better protect women and girls in this country, the time has come for Canada to bring the law of provocation out of the 17th century and into conformity with our modern values as other like-minded nations have done. I hope that all members will support this proposal and all other elements of Bill S-7. It is time we moved forward with this very valuable legislation. We continue to stand up for victims, to put victims' needs first, and to protect those who are most vulnerable in our society, namely women and small girls.

• (1655)

Ms. Ève Péclet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Mr. Speaker, one of the problems we identified in the bill was the short title, which refers to cultural practices. The problem is that one in every three women is a victim of violence or sexual violence in Canada, no matter their background or whatever cultural definition the government has in mind when it uses the word "cultural".

My only question is this. Why add this word if we know that one in every three women is a victim of violence or sexual violence? Why identify only cultural violence? Violence is a systemic problem in our society, so why not target violence against women? What is the purpose of using the word "cultural"?

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Mr. Speaker, the word "cultural" is clearly meant to include all cultures where some of these issues are actually fairly common practice.

The witnesses who testified before the committee clearly said on the record that some of these issues are deeply rooted in their particular culture, and their testimony is there for anybody who cares to read the testimony of those who appeared before the committee that has debated and argued this particular piece of legislation. It does not make sense to ignore the obvious, while it does not do any harm to put it in.

These kinds of practices, we clearly know, are rooted in some cultures. We have not identified a particular culture, in order to be as tolerant as possible when it comes to this, but we cannot not call a spade a spade either when it comes to these particular issues.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to follow up on the member's answer. He said it is there and it is part of cultures and so forth and it applies to all cultures.

I am wondering why he would not make it even more profound in terms of saying, "culture, religions, et cetera". Why just limit it to culture?

Surely to goodness the member can recognize that just dropping that word does not do anything in terms of taking away from the legislation itself. It is the word that has offended many. Why would the government be so persistent in accepting and keeping the word when, in fact, whether the word is there or not has absolutely no impact on the legislation?

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Mr. Speaker, there we go again, seeing the Liberals standing up for the rights of the accused rather than the rights of the victims by trying to acknowledge that the perpetrators of these cultural practices, these barbaric practices, somehow need their feelings to be taken into consideration when they have done terrible and heinous things to members of their own family, to women, or to girls.

Canadians can trust that only a Conservative government will actually stand up for the rights of victims in this country and put the rights of those victims first.

None of the victims that have testified before the committee had any problem with the words "barbaric cultural practices".

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his speech.

Unfortunately, we completely disagree with several of his principles. My colleague said that the Conservatives were standing up for victims, when we see that, in a number of respects, they have no regard for victims, particularly for the aboriginal women who have been going missing for years. The government is doing absolutely nothing for these women who are the victims of violence and who have been going missing. The Conservatives are all about smoke and mirrors. This bill, which is supposed to help combat violence against women, is another example of this. There are a number of laws in place to protect women, yet the Conservatives are introducing dangerous measures that could have the opposite effect and that will not help victims.

Why is the government saying that it wants to help victims when it has no consideration for the aboriginal women in our country? Why does it not take measures that could help those women deal with the violence they are facing?

• (1700)

[*English*]

Mr. Blaine Calkins: There we go again, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member has no questions about the bill, which means that he has to ask a question about something else, which means he is in support of the bill, even though he will probably be forced to vote against it, according to his own party lines. He is trying to deflect the question, but I will be happy to address it.

Government Orders

There are a lot of legal changes that would be made in this particular bill. He says there are some things that already protect women. Of course there are, but there is no age of marriage law in Canada, so we would be changing that. There needs to be clarification on the provocation clauses, and we would be amending them. These are things that need to be amended and updated from time to time.

When it comes to missing and murdered aboriginal women, I proudly represent the community of Maskwacis in my constituency of Wetaskiwin, which has some 12,000 Cree first nations people, all very good, hard-working people who want the same things, a good quality of life, a safe place to raise their families and children. They want jobs and economic opportunities, but they also know, and the police will show this, that all the records and the information we have show that the majority of aboriginal women go missing at the hands of their spouses or partners, just as it is for any woman of any other ethnic origin in Canada.

We already know this. The time for action is now. We can do something now by passing the bill or we can follow the NDP's lead, which is to dither and delay and not take action on these measures.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is appropriate that I rise in the House today with great disappointment to debate Bill S-7, which is offensively called a zero tolerance for barbaric cultural practices act.

Yesterday, the government members of the House had the opportunity to vote to create a national action plan to end violence against women, and all but one chose to vote against a plan that would genuinely work to end violence against women. Instead, here we are faced with Bill S-7, which will likely pass and will likely inflict more violence on women.

I would like to state for the record that the crimes the government would see as "barbaric cultural practices" are found in all cultural groups and among all communities. Gender-based violence includes what the Conservatives like to call "honour killings", forced marriages, and polygamy, and all of these can be found in white, Christian homes that have been in Canada since Confederation.

What does serve to make immigrant and refugee women more vulnerable in Canada is a culture that marginalizes them, a society that racializes and stereotypes them and a political climate that places systemic barriers between them and their ability to claim the rights to which they are entitled.

Bill S-7 works to fan the flames of the Islamophobic and racist stigma that immigrant women face. It names problems that all women face as "cultural" and then, in practice, it clamps down on immigration policy that is already discriminating against refugees and immigrants from South Asian, Arab, and African states.

I, alongside my feminist colleagues from all regions, are sick and tired of having to battle against xenophobic, misogynistic legislation that masquerades as feminism in Parliament.

Alia Hogben, the executive director of the Canadian Council of Muslim Women, came to testify at the Standing Committee on the Status of Women this year when we were studying violence against women. There she said:

It is dehumanizing and degrading to label certain forms of violence as barbaric when all of it is so. Why are some politicians labelling some practices as barbaric and linking it with immigrants only? Polygamy, femicide, and forced marriages are all present in our Canadian society with one significant example of the Mormon community of Bountiful, which has been practising all of these since the 1950s. Why the blame and targeting of immigrants or visible minority groups?

Throughout my mandate as the critic for the status of women, I worked closely with a brilliant lawyer and advocate from the South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario. Deepa Mattoo has taken it upon herself to do some of the most extensive research on early and forced marriage that we have in Canada. Therefore, she is an expert on the crimes that the bill claims to address. She stands in fervent opposition to it, as do the vast majority of the advocates, lawyers, and community representatives who actually work with the victims of gender-based violence. This is what Deepa Mattoo has to say about Bill S-7's offensive short title:

Giving it a shock factor name will not eliminate the issue. Instead it will force perpetrators to take this underground, ensuring the victims and potential victims are isolated from any resources. This causes a greater risk to their safety, not to mention their emotional and mental well-being.

At its core, Bill S-7 would create dangerous conditions for women who may indeed be in a vulnerable situation. However, instead of empowering these women and girls with the culturally appropriate education, tools, and services they need to claim their rights, Bill S-7 would see them deported or denied entry into Canada. What is incredibly threatening about the language of the bill is that it says that Canada can deny entry or deport people "if they are or will be practising polygamy". This provision is problematic on every level. How can anyone deny immigration status to someone based on the suspicion that they will practise polygamy in the future? How can we start criminalizing individuals based on crimes we fear they might commit in the future? Last I checked, the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration is not empowered with telepathic powers.

The government has already passed legislation that gives tremendous powers to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, so transparency in the immigration and refugee system in our country barely exists at all anymore.

● (1705)

The NDP has repeatedly pointed out that making an individual's refugee status entirely contingent upon the discretion of the minister contravenes international human rights conventions. The government is now writing immigration law that would be adjudicated only by the discretion of the minister and would allow us to discriminate based on the suspicion of future crimes or the marriage practices of one's relatives or the practices of the community one comes from.

Dr. Hannana Siddiqui, from Southall Black Sisters in the U.K., said:

...the thing is deportation has always been a problem. It's not just for the man; it's for the women and the children. It doesn't resolve the problem of polygamy itself. It just creates discrimination, alienation and mistrust within minority communities.

I think you have to look at other ways of trying to resolve the problem.

Government Orders

When will this government understand? Deportation is never a solution to violence against women. When immigrant and refugee women are facing gender-based violence, the threat of deportation for themselves, their children, or their family will work to keep them in a violent domestic situation.

I would like to end my speech by talking in positive terms about what the Conservatives can do right now to substantially address violence against women.

First, they can listen to women themselves who have been the victims of violence. Bill S-7, along with almost all the legislation the government passes under the auspices of saving women, is paternalistic and does not benefit from any form of adequate consultation with the communities it would affect.

Second, they can listen to the experts, the advocates and service providers who are telling them that this bill is a terrible way to address violence against women and would likely create more violence in women's lives.

Third, they can take up the content of my Motion No. 444, which was in front of us yesterday, to create with all due haste a national action plan to end violence against women. This national action plan is what the advocates, experts, and service providers are asking for. This is what women themselves are asking for.

Fourth and finally, they can make substantive immigration reform that would ensure that women are never subject to deportation, detention, or removal if they are victims of violence or fear violence.

We must work to keep families together. We must inform women of their rights. We must create culturally appropriate services and shelters. We must end the threat of random, unfounded deportations, and we must work as a society and as a government to counteract racism and stigma.

This is what we can do.

Mr. Tyrone Benskin (Jeanne-Le Ber, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for a very eloquent and powerful sharing of thoughts.

We hear the title of the bill and we are told by the Conservatives that it does not mean anything, that it is not separating anybody. However, we use the terms “cultural diversity” and “cultural communities”. We are using the term “barbaric cultural practices”. People hear the word “cultural”, and there is an instinctive walk toward certain communities.

I would ask my hon. colleague if she would care to comment on whether she feels this bill would actually open the door, on an immigration level, to a certain type of profiling—cultural profiling, if you will. I would ask my colleague to comment on that.

• (1710)

Ms. Niki Ashton: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for raising the issue of the kind of explosive language that the government is using in the bill. It is the kind of language that we often see in the legislation that the government puts forward.

What is clear, what we heard from witness after witness, and what we heard in the status of women committee as well when we were looking at violence against women is that language matters. In this

case, the connection was often made between the kind of language we have seen from the current government, in Bill S-7 but in other legislation as well, that seeks to fan the flames of racism and Islamophobia in our country. It is no accident that those kinds of connections are made by the current government. It is not just in terms of Bill S-7. We have heard it in pronouncements from members of the government in various forms.

The reality is that not only are we connecting it here to a situation that stands to create more violence in women's lives, but the Conservatives are also using this as an excuse to hack away at our immigration system to make it less transparent, to leave more power to the minister, and ultimately to change the face of Canada as they see fit.

I am proud to stand with my colleagues in the NDP against Bill S-7 and against the kind of regressive and frankly misogynistic legislation that the current government puts forward time and again.

Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her comments, because they are so significant in regard to what we heard in the citizenship and immigration committee.

I was a member of that committee. I heard testimony from representatives of the Canadian Bar Association, and they advised the Conservatives to simply scrap Bill S-7 because it would do far more harm than good, since it would jeopardize the victims of violence and potentially marginalize them from their families if they came forward. It would criminalize people and make women and children open to deportation.

What on earth would happen to these women and children who are deported because they are in a polygamist situation? They would go back to a country where they have no one and nothing.

When I asked the minister on Tuesday about the recommendations from the Canadian Bar Association, his response was simply to dismiss them. He said that their representatives were just a bunch of card-carrying Liberals and it did not matter what they had to say.

I wonder what my colleague has to say in regard to dismissing the concerns of the Canadian Bar Association.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague, who was the former critic on the status of women and is an incredible feminist member of Parliament. She is outspoken on the issues that matter to women in Canada.

It is absolutely ludicrous to hear the government not just dismiss but turn around and offend the Canadian Bar Association, a respected body that came out with a very strong recommendation against Bill S-7. Unfortunately, this behaviour shocks few of us anymore. The kind of interaction and attitude we see daily at committee vis-à-vis witnesses who do not agree with the Conservative government leads to all sorts of despicable behaviour.

Government Orders

As I said in my speech, it is so important for the government to listen to the witnesses who know most about this issue. They need to move away from their ideological agenda and actually hear from the advocates and community organizations that see this issue up close and personal every day.

I think of the work of Deepa Mattoo, who has moved heaven and earth to come up with research on the issue of forced marriage here in Canada and around the world. She is a woman who deeply cares about these issues. She came out and said we should say no to Bill S-7.

It is a bill that reeks of racism and discrimination. Let us stand up to build a better Canada. I am proud to be part of a team that does that.

• (1715)

Mrs. Patricia Davidson (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today and have an opportunity to speak on Bill S-7, the zero tolerance for barbaric cultural practices act.

This bill takes a strong stance to ensure that no woman or girl in Canada becomes a victim of any violent practice that violates basic human rights. Bill S-7 sends a clear message to individuals coming to this country that harmful and violent cultural practices are unacceptable in Canada. These practices are incompatible with Canadian values and will not be tolerated.

Bill S-7 strengthens laws in Canada through amendments to the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, the Civil Marriage Act, and the Criminal Code.

We have had the benefit of hearing from a number of experts in the field during the citizenship and immigration committee hearings. Some have criticized the bill; others have been in full support. All, however, agree that combatting violence against women and girls is an important and laudable goal.

I would like to paraphrase one of the witnesses who came before the committee. Ms. Chantal Desloges, an immigration lawyer, said very aptly that this bill sends a concrete statement about Canadian values.

Within Canada, there is no room for a culture of violence against women and girls. I believe that when there are gaps in legislation that have allowed perpetrators to abuse those very people who count on them for protection or that have prevented victims from getting help, it is our responsibility to ensure that those gaps are closed.

Among other things, this bill proposes to fill gaps that have been identified with regard to early and forced marriage. These deplorable practices principally victimize young women and are often carried out by their own parents or other family members.

If I may, I will paraphrase from another witness before committee. Ms. Lee Marsh, a victim herself of a forced marriage, testified that if she had known that what her mother was doing was against the law, she might have felt better equipped to refuse that marriage.

Ms. Marsh also told the committee that this bill in isolation is not enough to combat these practices. We on the government side agree. This bill provides solid ground to give tools to law enforcement and front-line service providers to bring perpetrators to justice and to

protect victims, but in addition to the legislation, people need to be aware of Canadian laws and values. We are not ignoring the importance of raising awareness or of providing training and resources, nor are we overlooking the importance of working together with our provincial and territorial counterparts and community partners in the field. Our government, through various departments, has been working diligently for years with many different stakeholders on these very issues.

Just to give a few examples, Justice Canada and Status of Women Canada have provided funding to a number of non-governmental organizations to conduct awareness raising and training on honour-based violence and forced marriages. Justice Canada contributed funding for the development of a high school curriculum that will teach students about human rights, including those related to early and forced marriages.

Over the years, Justice Canada has organized workshops with front-line workers across the country, including child protection workers, shelter workers, community-based workers, police officers, and crown prosecutors to share expertise, create networks, and discuss risk assessments and appropriate services for victims of these horrendous acts.

Justice Canada and Status of Women Canada co-chair an interdepartmental working group on early and forced marriage, honour-based violence, and female genital mutilation. This working group is creating a federal-provincial-territorial working group on these same issues.

• (1720)

The justice department has published public legal education and information materials on family violence that include information on early and forced marriages, honour-based violence and female genital mutilation.

Justice Canada and the RCMP have also created training materials for police officers on these issues as part of their domestic violence training. This training will be updated to reflect the changes in Bill S-7.

As I have demonstrated, there are many layers to our government's approach to tackling these issues.

The bill is but one aspect of the ongoing and collaborative efforts being undertaken by this government to address these disturbing issues. It is an integral and necessary part of the government's multi-faceted approach to tackling the issues, which includes prevention, denunciation, awareness-raising, training, consultation and collaboration.

Some critics of the bill are nervous that by criminalizing these forms of violence, we risk stigmatizing people who are already vulnerable. We believe that it is imperative to recognize that these forms of violence exist and to address and denounce them. We need to send clear messages to victims that they have a right of refusal and we need to let potential perpetrators know that forced marriage is a crime. It is not acceptable to turn a blind eye to child abuse or spousal assault just because it happens behind closed doors.

Private Members' Business

Similarly, we should not shy away from denouncing early and forced marriage as forms of family violence that will not be tolerated in our society.

Bill S-7 would complement existing Canadian initiatives, both at home and abroad, put an end to barbaric cultural practices that go against Canadian values because they cause harm to women and girls and prevent their full participation in society. These practices that we have already talked about, which include early and forced marriage, honour-based violence and female genital mutilation or cutting, have no place in Canada's free and democratic society.

Canada has long been a leader in this, and these are some of the things we have done on the international stage. Canada has made ending child, early, and forced marriage, or the CEFM as it is referred to, a foreign policy and development priority and is intensifying programming and advocacy efforts to address CEFM. These are some examples, and I will just name a few of them.

Canada spearheaded the initiative to establish the International Day of the Girl Child, which focused upon CEFM in 2012, which was its first year.

Then, in October 2013, Canada announced \$5 million in new funding to address the causes and consequences of CEFM around the world. These funds were used for programs in many different countries.

In 2014, then minister Baird announced that Canada was contributing \$20 million, over two years, to UNICEF toward ending CEFM. Also, in 2014, Canada committed institutional support to the efforts of the Royal Commonwealth Society to raise awareness in commonwealth countries about the need to end CEFM. Canada contributes to efforts to combat female genital mutilation by working with UN agencies and bilaterally with other countries, supporting projects to address violence against women and eliminate harmful cultural practices.

Those are just a few of the ways that Canada has been contributing to the international field in ending these barbaric practices. I am very proud that it is this Conservative government that is sending a strong message to Canadian society and to the world that Canada will not tolerate violence against women and girls. I would strongly encourage members of the House to give Bill S-7 their full support.

• (1725)

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what the government has been doing is putting in legislation that promotes discrimination and racism.

What happens when it is a Canadian-born person from a different culture that may be practising some of these? This is the discrimination piece. The government is saying to an immigrant that he can go back home, but someone born in Canada who does this will face the Criminal Code of Canada. We have legislation to deal with these issues, so why do we not use it?

It is the same with the terrorism bill. Conservatives were saying that Bill C-51 was the be-all and end-all, yet before it was even passed, they actually arrested people they felt were going abroad to be part of terrorism.

All in all, why is the government putting in place legislation that continues to discriminate and promote racism? Why is it not investing in services that would actually assist women?

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Mr. Speaker, I am really glad that question was asked because I just went through outlining a whole lot of things Canada was doing. While I did outline many things we were doing internationally, I really did not have enough time in my original remarks to talk about everything we were doing at home. In a minute I will tell the House about a few of the things we are doing at home as well.

I want to reiterate, however, as has been said over and over this afternoon, the bill does not talk about any particular racial or cultural practices. The bill does refer to any violence against women and girls. It sends a clear message to individuals coming to our country that harmful and violent cultural practices are unacceptable in Canada. I cannot understand why any Canadian would not want to ensure that people would know these types of harmful and violent cultural practices would not be accepted in Canada.

Part of the question was why we were not doing some things. We are doing a lot of things. We are working in conjunction with many groups. Citizenship and Immigration Canada is working together with Justice Canada and the Status of Women Canada. The Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development has many programs in place, as do the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the Public Health Agency of Canada. These people are all working together. There are many programs in place, not only internationally but also domestically.

The Deputy Speaker: It being 5:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1730)

[English]

FREE VOTES

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC) moved:

That, in the opinion of the House, all Members of Parliament should be allowed to vote freely on all matters of conscience.

Private Members' Business

He said: Mr. Speaker, my motion has a number of significant points that I am asking the House to support: first, that the motion apply to every member, regardless of rank or position in the House or party, and on all matters that come before the House captured by this motion whether in the nature of private members' motions or bills, government bills, motions or other legislative initiatives; second, that members be allowed to vote freely, meaning without order or demand by party leaders, House leaders, whips or anyone else in the party structure, to vote in a certain or particular way on pain of censure or sanction if they will not; and third, that this would be so in matters of conscience.

There may be a great deal of debate and some difference of opinion on what are matters of conscience. I can, however, say with a great deal of confidence that matters relating to life, more particularly to the termination of life at any time from the point of conception to the point of natural death, would easily fall within that definition. Whether or not to terminate before death naturally occurs, or to terminate a life before it fully becomes a living being or while it has the potential to be a living being is certainly a matter of conscience, as may be a number of other matters falling somewhere between these two.

In my view, a matter of conscience would arise out of a religious, moral or ethical issue that has to do with one's inner sense of what is right or wrong. The right to freedom of conscience is represented in all international conventions concerning human rights. Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on December 10, 1948, states, "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion". There is no question that one's conscience is and ought to be sovereign.

In fact, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, commonly referred to as the charter, states, in paragraph 2, with regard to fundamental freedoms, "Everyone has the following fundamental freedoms: (a) freedom of conscience and religion". This fundamental freedom is found alongside those freedoms that we cherish: freedom of expression, freedom of the press, peaceful assembly, and freedom of association. In fact, the first words in the preamble in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms gives rise to potential conscience struggles that may occur when interpreting laws or even with respect to charter matters when it states, "Whereas Canada is founded upon principles that recognize the supremacy of God and the rule of law", is bound to bring the rule of law, the supremacy of God into conflict at times.

When it comes to matters of conscience, Sir Thomas More said it best when he had to make a decision whether to obey God's law as he saw it rather than man, that one should be most cautious not to offend his conscience than anything else in the whole world. Of course, his head was taken off and placed on the Tower Bridge in London as the price for not offending his conscience.

An email made public, sent to the member for Papineau, the Leader of the Liberal Party of Canada, by former Liberal members of Parliament also made the point well when they stated in part:

We, the undersigned, former Liberal Members of Parliament, are concerned about your recent pronouncement that people who hold a particular view on a given moral issue, as a matter of conscience, cannot be Liberal candidates for the position of M.P.

unless they agree to park their consciences at the entrance to the House of Commons and vote directly opposite to their fundamental beliefs, as directed by you.

In the House, the Conservative Party has on a number of occasions allowed for free votes, and that is the way it should be. The party policy also states very specifically in section 7 that the party believes in restoring democratic accountability in the House of Commons by allowing free votes. It states all votes should be free, except for the budget, for obvious reasons, main estimates, and core government initiatives.

On issues of moral conscience, the Conservative Party acknowledges the diversity of deeply held personal convictions among individual party members and the right of members of Parliament to adopt positions in consultation with their constituents and to vote freely.

• (1735)

The Supreme Court of Canada's decisions on the recent Lee Carter, et al. v. Attorney General of Canada, et al. decision, commonly referred to as the Carter decision, which related to end-of-life issues, and R. v. Morgentaler, commonly referred to as the Morgentaler decision, related to abortion, fall into the category where actions taken in the House should be the subject of free votes. In each case, the court relied on the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and gave the House the benefit of the court's view on the charter's application.

The Carter decision essentially referred to section 7 of the charter, which reads:

Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of the person and the right not to be deprived thereof except in accordance with the principles of fundamental justice.

The decision said that it would require legislation allowing for physician-assisted death for a competent adult who clearly consents to the termination of life and has a grievous and irremediable medical condition, including an illness, disease or disability that causes enduring suffering that is intolerable to the individual in the circumstances of his or her condition. I may not agree with the court's logic in the use of section 7, but it has said that and it has said that Parliament needs to address that.

The type of legislation, the substance of the legislation and the views of the members may vary. Many members may struggle in deciding in good conscience whether or not they should support that piece of legislation, another piece of legislation or something in between. However, when it comes before the House for a vote, it should be a free vote.

Similarly, in the Morgentaler decision, the court decided in essence that the Criminal Code provisions then existing regarding abortion offended the same section 7 rights. The court was also of the view that it was Parliament's prerogative or obligation to put forth legislation, not theirs, that would balance this right with the rest of the charter that would provide for the protection of the unborn. In fact, section 1 of the charter states:

The *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* guarantees the rights and freedoms set out in it subject only to such reasonable limits prescribed by law as can be demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society.

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It is all conditional. This clearly indicates that there must be a balancing of interests, or at least a consideration of interests, if one truly wishes to rely on the charter.

Justice Wilson, on page 183 of the Morgentaler judgment, stated:

The precise point in the development of the foetus at which the state's interest in its protection becomes "compelling" I leave to the informed judgment of the legislature which is in a position to receive guidance...from all the relevant disciplines. It seems to me, however, that it might fall somewhere in the second trimester.

She based her views squarely on the charter, so I feel that it is safe to say that the protection of the unborn is a charter consideration relating to the unborn requiring legislative action by Parliament. She specifically left open the entirely different question of whether the unborn is covered by the word "everyone" in section 7, so as to have an independent right to life under that section.

There is no doubt that members feel strongly on matters such as this, relating to issues of life. Some would feel strongly that life is sacred and that they should not be required to vote for any legislation that is against their conscience if it takes or allows for the taking of such life after conception and before natural death. These may be absolute positions, but on all matters of life, there may also be positions somewhere in between, where honest, sincere and good thinking members will, I am sure, struggle with their decision and differ in their views. Ultimately, however, they should all be free to vote with their conscience.

By allowing members to vote freely, it presupposes that members of differing points of view and different persuasions, personal convictions and religious beliefs are allowed to run for public office and to be elected by constituents. To say, as the leader of the Liberal Party, the member for Papineau, stated, that anyone who has a view other than what is commonly referred to as a "pro-choice" view cannot run for the office of a member of Parliament or, at the very least, would not be given a free vote on the same issue runs absolutely contrary to this motion, as well as the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Indeed, it would run against the fundamentals of democracy, where issues should be debated freely and then voted upon.

The very definition of "Parliament", which I have taken from *How Parliament Works*, by John Bejerimi, stems from the French *parler*, meaning "to speak" or "to discuss". "Parliament", then, or this House is a meeting place where the representatives of the people can speak, discuss, criticize, argue and express their opinions publicly on all matters of state.

● (1740)

In Canada, therefore, we have a system called "parliamentary government". It is regrettable that because of the positions taken by leaders like that of the Liberal Party, some of the press, the media, and others, we cannot have a good or reasonable debate on these issues, with contrary points of view, without it seeming to be something unusual, unacceptable, or in bad taste. It is most unfortunate. This has to change in this House. For too long we have felt that difficult issues should not be moved, debated, or discussed in Parliament, many times simply because we have strong views on the subject and do not want to entertain anything else. That is not what democracy is about.

When it comes to matters of conscience, there should be nothing that causes an MP to vote contrary to his or her conscience, for if members are forced to cross that line, they have violated who and what they are and what they believe in. I dare say that it is self-evident that no one should be required to do that. Their conscience is sacrosanct, inviolable, and should not be impinged upon, for indeed if it can be, what value is the opinion or vote of those members going forward and what reliance can be placed upon them. I think most Canadians and most constituents would expect no less from their members, even if they disagreed or had a different point or a different position. If the majority of constituents disagree, they should then elect a new member.

In fairness, these issues should not be raised time and again ad infinitum. There should be some rules around that. I personally like one of the rules that regulates whether a private member's bill or motion such as mine is votable. Does it involve issues that have already been considered in the session? If it does not, it can go forward. A new session could give rise to new debates.

Many have said that Parliament should use the charter section 33 "notwithstanding" clause to allow for an act or provision thereof to operate notwithstanding a provision included in section 2 or section 7 of the charter. Although this option is available, it is something, in my view, that ought to be used sparingly and only in exceptional circumstances. That said, we cannot cherry-pick which part of the charter we like and which to disregard.

I found it interesting that the member for Papineau and leader of the Liberal Party was quick to put forward a motion, voted upon on February 24, 2015, asking the House to recognize the Supreme Court of Canada decision in Carter, which ruled that the prohibition on physician-assisted dying violated a section 7 charter right and stated that Parliament has a responsibility to respond to the Supreme Court ruling.

I did not see that same vigour and immediacy in requesting that this House respond to the Supreme Court of Canada ruling in Morgentaler indicating that it is for Parliament to decide at what point the state's interest arises and becomes compelling so as to provide some protection for the unborn.

Indeed, the member asked that a special committee be appointed, with the usual parameters, and that the committee report on an expeditious basis to the House. Yet when the member faced the motion presented by the member for Kitchener Centre, which also asked that a special committee of the House be appointed to review the Criminal Code declaration of when a child becomes a human being and report to the House, the member for Papineau and leader of the Liberal Party voted against it.

Private Members' Business

I found it somewhat hypocritical when the member for Papineau and leader of the Liberal Party said on one hand that we need to ensure that we are charter compliant and respect the rights and privileges we may have under the charter when it comes to an issue of pro-choice but then voted against the protection of a right or privilege under the charter when he did not agree with it, as in the case where the court said that it is up to Parliament to draft legislation protecting the rights of the unborn. It is like respecting the decision of the Supreme Court when one likes it and not respecting the Supreme Court and the charter when one does not like the decision. We cannot be selective when it comes to charter rights unless we are prepared to use the “notwithstanding” clause.

In the same email sent to the member for Papineau and leader of the Liberal Party of Canada by former Liberal members, they made this point quite well when they stated:

Second, since your edict singles out the issue of being opposed to abortion, but only that issue, it clearly discriminates against a select class of people, namely those who oppose abortion, and no one else, such as those who might oppose, or be in favour of, say, assisted suicide. We believe that such discrimination is a clear violation of the spirit, if not the letter, of The Charter of Rights and Freedoms, section 2 (a) which guarantees everyone, even Liberal Members of Parliament, “freedom of conscience”, and (b), which guarantees everyone, even Liberal Members of Parliament, “freedom of thought, belief...and expression”.

• (1745)

In my view, we need to get off the premise that some subjects are off limits for debate. We should have legislation go forward, agreeing that this is precisely the place where hard and difficult decisions must be made, accepting the fact that members may have to struggle with their conscience to support a particular position. In the interest of democracy, justice and good government, we want all members to vote on these issues freely and without impediment. I am hopeful and expect that not only my colleagues on this side of the House but all members of Parliament will see fit to support Motion No. 590.

This motion is straightforward and unambiguous. Matters of conscience for obvious reasons should be subject to free votes. I think it is a timely motion, especially given the most recent Supreme Court of Canada ruling in the Carter case and the languishing ruling on the Morgentaler case, which so far parliamentarians have not been able to face head-on or even in a peripheral way.

[Translation]

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to have an opportunity to speak to Motion No. 590, moved by my colleague from Souris—Moose Mountain.

There are just three weeks left before the 41st Parliament is adjourned, so this is probably one of my last speeches. Like my colleague who sponsored this motion, I will not seek another term in October, so this speech is a very special one to me. I cannot imagine a more perfect ending than a philosophical debate.

I would like to read out Motion No. 590:

That, in the opinion of the House, all Members of Parliament should be allowed to vote freely on all matters of conscience.

I think I read in the papers that my colleague from Souris—Moose Mountain thinks this motion is quite straightforward and that he does not anticipate any opposition from the government or opposition

sides. I want to set him straight and also reassure him. Motion No. 590 certainly is short, but it is not straightforward in the least. Nevertheless, I am determined to support this motion and I think that my colleagues will do the same, based on what their conscience tells them.

Parliament's job is to pass laws for Canada. Even though a motion is not a parliamentary document with the same scope or weight as a bill, it does have to be moved in legal language. What, then, is the legal definition of conscience? My colleague provided his personal interpretation during his speech, but if we have to use a concept such as conscience, it cannot be limited to the uncertain and relativistic confines of a philosophical definition. On the contrary, it must be imbued with a clearly identifiable and established legal meaning understandable to all.

What, therefore, is the legal definition of a matter of conscience? One might say that all human beings know what conscience is, that it is unique to humans and that it is recognized automatically much like humans recognize beauty or truth. Esteemed colleagues, that is what Plato said. Even though philosophy is the noblest endeavour of humankind, our job here is to manage the federal Canadian state with just and constitutional laws, not to add new material to the western philosophical canon.

In order for that motion to be applicable and have any value at all to the parliamentary exercise that it is supposed to improve, a legal definition of the concept of conscience is crucial. Without that, this is nothing but hot air. However, we will never get that legal definition because it simply does not exist. This means that my colleague's motion could just as easily read as follows, “That, in the opinion of the House, all members of Parliament should be allowed to vote freely on all matters of beauty”. Good luck with that.

The problem here is the abstract notion of conscience. Even when we look at the substance of the motion, we come up against another question. I mean no offence to my hon. colleague, and I am surprised he does not know this already, but members can already vote freely. Nowhere in the rules of this House does it state that members are obligated to betray their values or their beliefs in exercising the mandate that they have been given—nowhere.

It is a bit embarrassing and I am disappointed at the public admission we are witnessing today, that not once during any of his terms in office was my colleague ever informed by his party that he could vote according to his conscience or, if he was, that he was not supported by his Conservative colleagues when they twisted arms and forced people to vote against their beliefs.

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I know that many Conservative MPs have a fiercely electoral view of the parliamentary system and that they are quite committed to defending personal and local values in Parliament, even if it means being dysfunctional and spending their time torturing their souls in abstract debates. They hide their discomfort very well, I have to say. I did not see anyone on the government side suffering from a crisis of conscience when they all voted in favour of Canada's involvement in the Syrian civil war in support of Bashar al-Assad. Mea culpa, I should have paid a bit more attention. However, during that time, my conscience certainly bothered me, and I mourned the human suffering that befell the people of Syria.

I can say unequivocally that at no time during the past four years did I feel oppressed at vote time. I was not unduly pressured in any way and no one ever tried to compromise my conscience, regardless of its nature. Debate within our party is lively and salutary. We try to compromise according to what is best for Canadians in general and for each one of us in particular. The NDP takes an inclusive approach. We meet every week to discuss the votes on the agenda and to decide together what position we are going to defend. Every one of us contributes to what goes on in this building and every one of us is free to express his or her opinion.

• (1750)

We never rule out the possibility of a free vote. However, in the majority of cases, my colleagues and I arrive at a consensus that is acceptable for everyone.

To maintain their commitment to the parliamentary electoral system, and for the benefit of their political base, the Conservatives often congratulate themselves for having a few dissenting voices among their members in votes on private member's bills, as though this dissent were proof of inclusion or democratic vigour. Personally, I think this inability to agree amongst themselves is not something to be proud of, quite the contrary. Belonging to a political party is also an act of will and a choice freely made. You join a party because it represents your values. Once elected, members have the right to vote as they wish in the House, and they have the duty to inform their peers of their views on any upcoming votes. If a member votes against his or her party and there are consequences, that is between the member and the party. However, ultimately everyone can vote as they wish in the House and that will not affect a member's position in the House of Commons.

We are all free men and women, with our own free will and freedom of choice. Our duty is to come to an agreement with our colleagues and not to blindly defend our personal obsessions. That is why I believe my NDP colleagues should support this motion because, in the end, all of us are already free.

[English]

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is good to speak to this motion today. First of all, let me say in speaking for the Liberal Party that in the Liberal caucus, private member's bills are free votes, as is the tradition in many other parties. Our leader, the hon. member for Papineau, has been very clear that the charter is at the heart of the Liberal conscience, and as we have long said, Liberals will always support the charter. We are the party of the charter.

I want to talk about how our leader, which the sponsor of the bill mentioned quite a bit in his speech, has led by example. In June 2013, he announced the open Parliament plan, which sought to proactively disclose travel and hospitality expenses and post them in a quarterly manner. I remember all the work my staff had to do for that. It was an extra expense and use of resources to make sure that travel and hospitality expenses were disclosed.

The Board of Internal Economy then was opened up and we expanded the performance audits of the House of Commons and Senate administration and worked with the Auditor General on public guidelines for future audits.

Liberals believe that openness and transparency are pillars of our democratic institutions, and that is why, as I just described, we became the first caucus in the House of Commons, in October 2013, to publicly post our expenses online.

Canadians have asked for openness and honesty in their elected representatives, not secrecy, not distrust, and not scandal.

The Senate, through extreme patronage and partisanship, has come to poorly serve the interests of Canadians. That is why our leader took decisive action on January 29, 2014, when he announced that the national Liberal caucus would only include elected members of Parliament and not appointed senators.

I remember that day very well, and I remember feeling that the leader was very courageous in doing that. I was somewhat taken by surprise, because there was no announcement to me before the day the leader took that action, but it was very courageous. It is a clear example of movement on the issue of the Senate and what role the Senate should play and how it could be improved to serve Canadians better.

Our leader also announced that a future Liberal government would put in place an open, transparent, and non-partisan appointment process for new senators. Our leader did more to reform the Senate in a single day than the Prime Minister has done in a decade.

At our convention in February 2014, we passed a comprehensive democratic reform motion that will help restore trust in our democracy. The motion includes a number of components, and I want to list them: open, democratic nominations of candidates; fewer whipped votes in Parliament and more free votes requiring individual MPs to assume full responsibility for their decisions; stronger parliamentary control over public finances, including an annual deadline for the budget; accounting consistency between the estimates and the public accounts; more clarity in voting on estimates; a costing analysis for each government bill; a requirement that government borrowing plans get Parliament's pre-approval; a truly independent, properly resourced Parliamentary Budget Officer; a more effective access to information regime with stronger safeguards against political interference; an impartial system to identify and eliminate the waste of tax dollars on partisan advertising; and careful limitations on secret committee proceedings, omnibus bills, and prorogation to avoid their misuse for the short-term partisan convenience of the government.

On that point, one of the things I have seen as a first-term MP right away is how the government has not respected the role of Parliament by using those things.

• (1755)

Further components include adequate funding, investigative powers, and enforcement authority to ensure Elections Canada can root out electoral fraud; proactive disclosure of parliamentarians' expenses, as I mentioned earlier, a more transparent Board of Internal Economy, and better audit rules; a truly independent Senate not based upon partisanship or patronage; and a commitment to establish an all-party process involving expert assistance and citizen participation, to report to Parliament within 12 months with recommendations for electoral reforms.

This was the resolution that was passed at the Liberal Party convention in early 2014.

In March 2014, we put forward an opposition day motion to implement the proactive disclosure of travel and hospitality expenses for all MPs by the House of Commons administration. The motion passed unanimously.

In June 2014, the leader of the Liberal Party introduced the transparency act in Parliament. The bill sought to achieve the following reforms, which I would like to list.

First of all, it would have required that meetings of the House of Commons Board of Internal Economy be open by default. Today, MPs are making decisions about the regulations that govern their own spending with insufficient public scrutiny. This is a reform initiative that the Liberal Party called for in 2013 with the Liberal Party's open Parliament plan.

The board would still have been permitted to operate in camera, for example, for confidential personnel matters, something that is often the reason for taking a committee in camera, or when dealing with contracts.

The second part of the transparency act would have been to amend section 2 of the Access to Information Act, the purpose section of the act, so that all government data and information must be made open, and not only made open but made open by default in machine readable format.

Just before I stood up to give this speech, I was dealing with a statistician who had the experience of trying to download temperature data from temperature stations in Canada, and was having trouble doing that from the temperature data stored by Environment Canada. The individual had to rely on some help from somebody inside Health Canada in order to extract temperature data from Environment Canada, and still found problems with the Environment Canada data.

It is really important to make sure that data and information are easily available by putting them in machine readable format.

Third—

• (1800)

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, I am struggling to understand how what this member is saying relates to

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the motion. I hope he will at some point make it clear how he is suggesting that these are matters of conscience.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, on the same point, if you would allow me, I would love to explain for the member, because it is a very important issue.

What we have before us today is a motion that would have a fairly significant impact on the way in which the House would operate going forward into the future.

It is completely relevant for us to be talking about the different types of issues coming before the House of Commons that will change the way the House actually conducts itself.

When the member makes reference to, for example, proactive disclosure and the impact it has on the behaviour inside this chamber, and when the member makes reference to the idea of unanimous consent, all of these types of things have a real tangible impact in terms of what is taking place inside the House.

It is a motion that should be thoroughly debated. We should not be trying to limit the scope of the debate, because by limiting the scope of the debate we are doing a disservice to the member who has introduced the motion.

In conclusion, what I would suggest to the member is that he might want to be a little more patient and little more open-minded as members try to express a different perspective, which I think is quite enlightening. Quite frankly, if the member would allow my colleague from Kingston and the Islands the opportunity to finish his comments, I am sure he would have a better understanding in terms of the relevancy—

The Deputy Speaker: Order. The member Yorkton—Melville has risen on a valid argument, but as everyone with any experience at all in this House knows, we allow for a very broad debate when relevancy is at issue.

I have to say that although it is a bit of a stretch that the member for Kingston and the Islands is pushing, the reality is that he is putting forward a number of points with regard to freedom within his own party at least, within his own caucus, that have been allowed in the past.

I think he may have some argument from other parties as to how accurate that analysis is, but he is not beyond the point of relevancy. I will allow him to finish his speech. He only has one minute and 20 seconds to finish.

Mr. Ted Hsu: Mr. Speaker, I will continue. I was discussing the transparency act put forward by the leader of the Liberal Party, who was mentioned several times by the sponsor of this motion.

The third part of the transparency act would have eliminated all fees associated with the access to information process, except for the initial \$5 filing fee. This fee would be refunded to the individual if the request was not fulfilled within 30 days, which often happens.

The fourth part would have expanded the role of the Information Commissioner by amending the mandate to include the ability to issue binding orders for disclosure, and the fifth part would have ordered a full legislative review of the access to information system.

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Unfortunately, the government voted against this important legislation.

Our leader has also committed to revealing the Conservatives' undemocratic changes contained in the unfair elections act. Liberals believe strongly in openness and transparency, and we will continue to work hard to ensure that Canadians get the government that they deserve.

When we consider different questions in this House, sometimes it is easy. When the government brings in the 99th motion to cut off debate, that is easy. However, on most votes there are different factors to juggle. On all of these votes, it is really a matter of conscience. We have to figure out what we promised to our constituents. What did my party promise? What do scientists say? What is the best evidence? What are the consequences of the vote? What did we say in debate in the House? We have to juggle a lot of things, and all these votes are matters of conscience.

When the next speakers come up, whether in support of the motion or against the motion, I would suggest that they try to put forward what they think the boundaries are on what a vote of conscience is.

• (1805)

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Oxford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to participate in today's discussion of Motion No. 590 and try to get back on track. As we know, the motion concerns free votes on matters of conscience. I think all members would agree this is an important topic and Canadians want to know where parties stand on this issue.

My colleague, the member for Souris—Moose Mountain, has continued in a recent trend in private members' business by bringing forward a motion that pertains to how we conduct ourselves and do business in the House of Commons. I applaud the member for bringing forward such a straightforward motion. It might be one of the most direct and to the point motions we have had the pleasure to debate in this session of Parliament.

It reads:

That, in the opinion of the House, all Members of Parliament should be allowed to vote freely on all matters of conscience.

I would like to spend my time today reviewing some of the history of the use of the free vote in Parliament and our government's record in that regard.

I have a quick comment on the motion itself. It is worth mentioning, given our system of responsible government and the importance of confidence convention, the member for Souris—Moose Mountain has made the important distinction of limiting the motion to matters of conscience. No one would disagree that party solidarity on confidence matters is crucial, given the important consequences.

At the other end of the spectrum, matters of conscience are those where the representative role of individual members is the most acute. I hope no one would disagree that free votes are particularly important on these matters. We have seen a number of private members' motions come forward that address issues related to how we do business in this place and also the role we play as members of

Parliament. Similarly, the motion addresses one of the most important roles we perform, and that is voting.

When I took a moment to compare the motion with some of the others we have debated in this session there was one clear difference that struck me, which I will address in a moment.

Since the start of 2014, the House of Commons has adopted Motion No. 428 from the member for Burnaby—Douglas, regarding the implementation of an electronic petitions system. We also passed Motion No. 431 from my colleague, the member for Saskatoon—Humboldt, related to the study of the process for selecting the chairs of committees of the House. The House also adopted Motion No. 489 from my colleague, the member for Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, to study the process for electing the Speaker of the House of Commons.

A common thread among those motions is that they all required a consideration of the standing orders, the rules that govern the House. As members know, the standing orders are carefully balanced based on parliamentary principles and traditions and reflect the interests of all members. They set out in detail how things such as petitions or the selection of committee chairs are handled.

It is in relation to the rules of the House of Commons that I discovered a key difference between Motion No. 590, which we are debating today, and the other three motions I just outlined. What I noted is that when one takes a close look at the standing orders, nowhere does one find a reference to a free vote. As noted on page 576 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, O'Brien and Bosc, it states:

There are no rules or Standing Orders defining a "free vote" in the House of Commons ... Simply defined, a free vote takes place when a party decides that, on a particular issue, its Members are not required to vote along party lines, or that the issue is not a matter of party policy and its Members may vote as they choose.

What we can conclude from this omission from the standing orders, and what Canadians should know, is that the principle of free votes and when they are used rests with each individual party.

How is it then that each party has used free votes in this place? As I mentioned at the outset, given our system of responsible government, I would suspect that all parties agree there is a need for party discipline when it comes to voting on such matters as, for example, the budget and main estimates. These have traditionally been matters of confidence. However, in what sort of circumstances have members been afforded freedom in how they vote? Let us look at some examples.

As stated in O'Brien and Bosc on page 577, it is not clear when the first free vote took place in the House of Commons, but that the first free vote of note took place in 1946, on the matter of milk subsidies. While voting down the government's intent to eliminate milk subsidies was not necessarily a matter of conscience, it did open the door to free votes on several key matters of government business through the 1960s, 70s and 80s. The national flag debate in 1964 was treated as a free vote.

Private Members' Business

•(1810)

Similarly, as noted by Ned Franks in his November 1997 article in *Policy Options*, the issue of capital punishment and abortion, as items of government business, were treated as free votes by the Progressive Conservative Party and the Liberal Party over those three decades. For example, there were a number of free votes on capital punishment, including the original legislation to abolish capital punishment in 1967, which passed, and a motion to reinstate capital punishment in 1987, which was defeated.

Generally, the well-publicized free votes that have taken place since 1946 have been largely limited to matters of morality and conscience. Following the significant reforms to private members' business brought about by the 1985 third report of the Special Committee on Reform of the House of Commons, known as the McGrath reforms, there has been an even greater opportunity to have free votes. The McGrath reforms resulted in more private members' business being introduced and debated, resulting in more free votes. Importantly, these are also the matters of most significance for individual members and their constituents.

We as a government are quite proud of the record number of private members' bills that have become law under our government. I would contend that our government has a demonstrated record with free votes, especially on matters of conscience. Let me highlight two examples that would back this up.

Bill C-624, introduced by my colleague, the member for Ottawa—Vanier, called to amend the National Anthem Act, which was a gender issue. The second reading vote on the member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca's Bill C-279 on gender identity is another prime example. The vote passed 150 to 132 on June 6, 2012, with 15 government members voting differently than the majority of their caucus.

What are the characteristics of our Parliament that are relevant to this debate? First, our system is modelled after what is known as the Westminster style of government; that is, after the parliamentary institutions that emerged from the United Kingdom over the past 800 years. Legislative power is vested in Parliament to become law. Legislation must be assented to by each of Parliament's three constituent parts: the House of Commons, the Senate and the Crown.

The executive powers of government, in other words the power to implement government policies and programs, are formally vested in the Crown, but effectively exercised by the Prime Minister and cabinet, which belong to the governing party. The executive function is fulfilled by the Governor-in-Council, which is, practically speaking, the Governor General acting with, and on the advice of, the Prime Minister and the cabinet. The role of the executive is an important aspect of the principle of responsible government, which is a cornerstone of Westminster-style parliaments. The Prime Minister and cabinet are responsible to, and must answer to, the House of Commons for their actions.

Another important characteristic of our parliamentary system is that our Parliament is also the forum for our representative style of government. Members of Parliament are individually elected to represent their constituents within a single electoral district, and that is their representative role. In addition, members generally have

campaigned and been elected as a member of a particular political party, and thus also have a responsibility to their constituents and parties to uphold the overall objectives of their parties.

This leads us to another key feature of our parliamentary system, which is the role of party discipline. This is the practice whereby individual members of a party are strongly encouraged to support their party's position on issues of importance to that party. This practice is not enshrined in the Standing Orders, but plays an important role in ensuring that the government of the day is held to account for its actions, making it clear to Canadians what the positions of the official opposition and other parties are in Parliament. At the end of the day, political parties are formed to accomplish certain collective goals and to represent key shared values. To do this, they require MPs to stand together so there is no ambiguity as to where the party stands.

I am proud to be a member of a party that stands for clear policies and stands up for essential Canadian values, and one of those values is the recognition that some matters are of such importance that members should be free to vote their conscience. This government will support the motion, and I expect that all hon. colleagues who respect the democratic process will do so as well.

•(1815)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was afforded the opportunity in a point of order to address at least in part the motion, and I would like to be able to continue on with a number of thoughts.

This is a very important debate here this evening, and I would trust that members will get engaged in the debate.

I have had good fortune, primarily because in my provincial days, the constituents of Inkster for a number of elections saw fit to support me. I was able to serve for just under 19 years inside the Manitoba legislature. Now in the broader, much larger riding of Winnipeg North, which is about four times the size of Inkster, I am here in the Parliament of Canada, and what a privilege it is. At any point in time, on any type of debate, to be able to stand in our place and talk about what are important issues to Canadians, to our constituents, is such a privilege. I am so grateful for the opportunity to serve in this capacity.

I have had many debates about the issue we have before us. I recall an incident that happened inside the Manitoba legislature at at time when there was a free vote. We had three members inside the Manitoba legislature, and during that free vote, one person voted against, one voted for and one abstained.

Free votes occur a lot more than most people think, and I see that as a positive. I recall having a discussion with a group of high school students about voting and what a member of Parliament should be doing and how they are obligated to vote.

People are not stupid, they understand and appreciate the parliamentary system. It is by far the best system in the world from my perspective. I might be somewhat biased, but I believe it is the most effective system. However, there are a number of things that need to be taken into consideration.

Private Members' Business

In regard to this group of students I met with, we had a very candid discussion about how members vote. Should members vote based on party lines? Should members vote the way their constituents would want them to vote? Or should they vote based on conscience? If we take a look at each and every one of those questions, it is not as simple as some might try to portray.

I do not know how many times I stood inside the chamber to talk about some really important issues for me personally. I am very passionate about a number of issues. I can talk at great length about the issue of poverty and the negligence of the Conservative government in this area.

I would ask the member who has introduced the motion, if I feel very passionate about the issue of poverty, is that not a matter of conscience? Would that mean that votes on health care or poverty should be based on one's conscience? The member was very limited in terms of what he thought were conscience votes. Are we to believe that those are the only ones that need to be taken into consideration?

I do not know how many times I have had the opportunity to talk about health care. There is a wide variety of issues within health care, and a number of votes have taken place.

One of my colleagues made reference to the budget itself. What is a budget? A budget is a document that ultimately makes decisions that affect each and every Canadian or resident in Canada. Would the member not argue that that should be based on conscience?

● (1820)

When we look at expanding into those other three areas, what about the party vote? The party vote is something that is expected in the parliamentary system. It would be very difficult if we are not able to count on fellow parliamentarians of the same political entity to be there for us on important votes, such as the budget and confidence votes. I can assure members that the Prime Minister, and I suspect even the mover of this motion, would recognize the importance of confidence votes. That is, in essence, a whipped vote. That is another aspect of votes that take place all the time.

Then there is my favourite vote, the one in which we are here serving our constituents. A good portion of them would say that we should vote along the lines that we believe constituents would vote. If 75% or 80% of our constituents say that we should vote a certain way, then we should vote that way. Would the member across the way argue for something like that? There might be some parliamentarians who would.

There are exceptions in all of these different categories.

We had a wonderful discussion with a particular group of high school students. However, it is not as simple as it might sound on the surface. In the minds of some, the way we vote should be strictly based upon our political party, and that is it. Others will say that we should vote the way our constituents want us to vote. Therefore, if 80% of our constituents say that we should be reducing taxes by 50%, then we should reduce taxes by 50%, no questions asked, not to mention the mechanisms and the manner in which it was determined that we had that high of a percentage of people saying that.

However, many would argue that no matter what, we should automatically vote the way our constituents tell us to vote. The same principle applies with conscience votes.

I would love to hear what other members have to say on those three points. The leader of the Liberal Party has been very candid on these issues. The member for Kingston and the Islands went through a litany of things in which the leader of the Liberal Party had shared with members of this chamber: private members' bills being free votes, the importance of issues such as the Charter of Rights and Freedoms that protect the individual minorities, and so much more.

There is a lot more to it than just having a quick one hour debate. It would be wonderful to see more discussion on it. I enjoy the issue of democratic reform, as did the 3,000 Liberal delegates when we were in Montreal. They voted to make changes—

● (1825)

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The time has expired for that speech.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Trinity—Spadina.

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Trinity—Spadina, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to address this issue, which lies at the heart of parliamentary democracy. We are elected by constituents and have choices every time we stand to cast a vote in the House of Commons: whether to represent our constituents' views, as we see them, configured to the majority; or to represent our party's views, as we may have campaigned on them; or to vote according to our consciences. I am unaware, having read the rules as I entered this place just about a year ago, of any prescription that tells us when we must represent the majority that we perceive to be in our constituencies, any rules that say when we must vote the party line, or any set of rules that talks about when we must vote according to our consciences. I do not know how to define the choice we have to make legalistically among those three different positions.

There are times, which I have seen in my own caucus meetings and hope others have seen it in theirs, where the caucus will debate an issue before it lands on a final position; and when members leave the caucus room, they leave agreeing to vote together to represent what they perceive as the position their party has taken. There are times when members have the right—and in my party it is a very clearly defined set of rights, around private members' bills in particular—where members have a defined right to vote as they see fit. When they do that, they have a choice. They can represent what they perceive to be the majority position in their ridings or what is in the best interest of their ridings, or they can choose to act individually based on their consciences.

Adjournment Proceedings

What constitutes an issue of conscience differs from person to person in the House. What may be an act of conscience for one person may be perceived in a totally different light by somebody else. It is framed in this debate today—abortion and capital punishment being two examples—that yes, in the history of the House, those have been examples where people have been freed by all party leaders to vote according to their consciences. However, there are also conventions in the House—budget bills being one of them, and in my party protecting charter rights being another—whereby we try to invoke some discipline, and that discipline is held to account at election time, as it should be.

The explanations that individual members give as to how they cast their votes will be tested democratically, as they should be. Did their vote represent the majority interest of a riding, was it faithful to a party position, or was it, in fact, an expression of the members' consciences? All three of those are in play at every single vote. To pretend otherwise and introduce a private member's bill that suggests otherwise—that there are other conventions and other rules that override individuals' behaviour—I think does a grave disservice and dishonour to the bravery that individuals have shown in the history of the House.

What really bothers me about this bill is that it would seek to legalize something that is already legal. It would seek to allow something that is already allowed. It is not unlike the previous bill, which tried to make illegal something that was already illegal, as though somehow making it illegal twice would make it even more illegal. It is a redundant position and a redundant bill. I would say it is not an act of conscience in this case; it is an act of rhetoric.

While I appreciate that sometimes politics plays into that, it does not actually clarify or accurately describe the freedoms we have as individual members of the House of Commons, who freely choose to associate with parties and freely choose, each and every time we stand up, to cast our ballots and show our support for particular pieces of legislation. Sometimes the way we express it is the same, but the motivations are different. We also need to respect that as well.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member will have six minutes and four seconds to complete his speech when the motion comes back before the House.

• (1830)

[*Translation*]

The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

[*Translation*]

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Ms. Annick Papillon (Québec, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this is a topic I have spoken about many times in the House, but it is an important

one. The major Canadian banks are raking in huge profits, particularly as a result of an increase in bank fees.

There are more and more new bank fees, and taxpayers are becoming overburdened. In 2013 alone, Canada's six major banks collected more than \$30 billion total in net profit.

While Canadian banks are raking in record profits every year, Canadians are racking up more and more debt. Debt has reached record highs: approximately 60% of Canadians are forced to live paycheque to paycheque, and there is no improvement in sight. Fewer Canadians are able to save money. That is worrisome.

In 1980, the ratio of household debt to personal disposable income was 66%, and now it is 164%. That is an incredible and very worrisome increase. The Governor of the Bank of Canada, Stephen Poloz, has stated that household debt in this country is a major risk factor for the Canadian economy. How can we keep the economy going when households are so far in debt?

Credit card interest rates can be as high as 18.9% for cards issued by financial institutions and 24% to 28.8% for cards issued by department stores and gas companies. That is huge.

The NDP is proposing that consumers be given reasonable access to credit cards with an interest rate that does not exceed prime plus 5%. That is reasonable. Only the NDP is proposing such measures. The Conservatives and the Liberals have never made any such proposals.

What is more, no one should have to pay \$2, \$3, \$4 or even up to \$6 to withdraw their own money from an ATM. That is another issue the NDP is tackling. Every year, Canadians pay \$420 million in ATM fees. That is completely unacceptable.

When I asked the Minister of Finance about this, he said that he had no intention of cutting into the banks' completely unacceptable profit margins. It is a bloated amount that produces profits for those on one side and debt for those on the other.

We want to cap ATM fees at 50 cents per transaction. That is still nearly double what that type of transaction costs the banks, so it is significant. Once again, this is a reasonable proposal, and we hope that the government will listen to reason. However, unfortunately, we have not seen any such measures, and that is a real shame.

Addressing the issue of bank fees would have a real impact on people's day-to-day lives and their weekly and monthly bills. If we want to help Canadians make ends meet, the first thing we need to do is cap ATM transaction fees at no more than 50 cents per transaction, as per the NDP proposal, and limit credit card interest rates to prime plus 5%, which is reasonable.

I would like to hear what the Conservatives have to say about these simple and obvious measures.

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am always prepared to reassure the members of the official opposition, especially when it comes to reducing costs for businesses and consumers. Similarly, I always appreciate the opportunity to let Canadians know how we are improving the lives of Canadians consumers and the middle class, and to a much greater extent than any other government.

Adjournment Proceedings

Let me reassure the hon. member that under the leadership of the Prime Minister, our government is standing up for consumers and saving Canadians money. We know that Canadian families work hard to make ends meet. Every dollar certainly does count.

While companies will look out for their bottom line, our government is looking out for all Canadians. When Canadians make decisions about how to spend their money, they must be assured of a voice, a choice and fair treatment. In the October 2013 Speech from the Throne, our government committed to take additional action to protect Canadian consumers.

• (1835)

[*English*]

We understand that Canadians are tired of hidden fees. That is why we have secured voluntary commitments from Canada's eight major banks to enhance low-cost bank accounts and offer no-cost accounts to vulnerable Canadians. Banks have also committed to provide free monthly printed credit card statements.

We have worked with the provinces to maintain the integrity of the framework for payday lending products and to support provincial efforts to appropriately regulate all high-interest-rate payday lending products.

However, our initiatives go beyond law-making and regulation and include public outreach and education. In April 2014, we announced the appointment of Jane Rooney as Canada's first-ever financial literacy leader. Her mandate is to collaborate and coordinate activities with stakeholders to contribute to and support initiatives that strengthen the financial literacy of Canadians. This initiative will allow the government to broaden its efforts and help Canadians make more informed choices for themselves and their families.

Let me also remind the hon. member that Canadian banks understand that they operate in a highly competitive environment and that they must be prepared to respond to the specific and often changing needs of Canadian consumers. Accordingly, the government believes that the best consumer protection framework is one in which there is competition, fees are disclosed, and consumers can exercise choice.

For example, we introduced regulations relating to credit card agreements, including lines of credit and credit cards, that came into force in 2010. These regulations limit business practices that are not beneficial to consumers. They require the provision of clear and timely information to Canadians about credit products, with particular emphasis on credit cards.

Specifically, the government has taken steps to update the existing financial consumer protection framework with several key measures, which include, for example, mandating an effective minimum 21-day interest-free grace period on all new credit card purchases when the customer pays the outstanding balance in full and requiring express consent for credit limit increases.

In November 2014, the Minister of Finance welcomed proposals submitted by Visa and MasterCard to reduce their credit card fees for merchants, which should ultimately result in lower prices for consumers.

The opposition voted against every one of these measures.

We will continue to help business and the middle class with meaningful support rather than the inaction that is too common from the opposition.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Annick Papillon: Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives have it all wrong. In fact, just recently we noticed that there are new banking fees. Now, a person has to pay a fee in order to pay their mortgage. It was not enough to pay a fee to pay a bill at the bank, now we have to pay new banking fees. Everything the parliamentary secretary just said is wrong.

It is not just the banks that are making huge profits on the backs of Canadian families, who are not asleep at the switch. Instead of addressing the problem of collusion at the gas pumps, the government keeps subsidizing the oil industry to the tune of billions of dollars.

The NDP is proposing concrete solutions yet again and we will do so by enforcing the provisions of the Criminal Code and the Competition Act, which the current government chooses to ignore.

Canadians expect to pay a fair price at the pumps and that is why, this week, I introduced a bill that provides for the appointment of the Director of the Competition Prosecution Service. The purpose of the bill is to provide the Competition Bureau all the resources it needs in order to arrest offenders as quickly as possible, particularly for collusion in the case of the price of gas.

Will this government support my bill?

[*English*]

Mr. Colin Carrie: Mr. Speaker, in economic action plan 2015 we proposed to amend the Bank Act to strengthen and modernize Canada's financial consumer protection framework to respond to the diverse needs of Canadians. For example, the financial consumer protection framework would provide improved access to basic banking services by allowing a broader range of personal identification, cooling-off periods for a greater range of products, and a new requirement that advertising be clear and accurate. These measures would benefit all Canadians, including the most vulnerable consumers.

With respect to the middle class, let us not forget our record of supporting middle-class families by putting more money in their pockets. I cannot think of a better way to help the middle class than by letting them keep their own money rather than imposing the drastic tax hikes proposed by the opposition.

Again I find myself confused at the irony of the hon. member's question here today, since the opposition continue to vote against all of our measures to protect consumers as well as all of the tax cuts that benefit all Canadians. I hope the opposition will finally get on board and support economic action plan 2015.

Adjournment Proceedings

• (1840)

[*Translation*]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I imagine that it will be no surprise to anyone this evening that I will be talking about the Port of Quebec and its problem with contamination. However, I must say that in addition to the contamination problem, there is also the issue of the expansion project that the Port of Quebec announced in very succinct terms on its website. The problem is that the expansion project became controversial when a journalist pointed out that the port was planning to export crude oil from western Canada.

Unfortunately, instead of being up front and openly answering the questions, overnight the Port of Quebec erased all mention of oil exports from its website. It also tried to do damage control by saying that the liquid bulk terminal, which could be used for oil exports, was the second phase of the controversial expansion project.

In addition, I asked a question at the beginning of the week. The entire assessment process for this project is very questionable, and even suspect, for the reasons I will outline. I would like to remind members that for almost three years, or ever since the infamous red dust incident of October 2012, I have raised the issue with the government many times. My question was about the contamination with various types of dust, including nickel dust, and the attitude of the Port of Quebec and Quebec Stevedoring, through its affiliate, St. Lawrence Stevedoring, which is the source of the problem. There was at least a small victory: the Quebec ministry for sustainable development, the environment and the fight against climate change found that St. Lawrence Stevedoring was responsible for the nickel contamination. The federal government also acknowledged this.

Now the situation is getting out of hand. The planned expansion project is not a designated project under the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act. Unfortunately, because of its status as a Canadian port authority, the Port of Quebec is both judge and jury, the absolute authority when it comes to the assessment of this project. I would like to remind members that, during the construction of the two wood pellet terminals in Anse au Foulon, the Port of Quebec released the assessment conducted by Quebec Stevedoring, the company that was building the infamous terminals, after construction had already begun. Consultation, or at least public access to the information, had been short-circuited.

Given the two extra berthing spaces and the space for additional bulk storage that are planned, the situation has not improved for residents. They are living in a dust cloud and two days after they have cleaned the outside of their houses they have to clean their patio furniture again. We do not know whether the measures that have been taken by Quebec Stevedoring and the Port of Quebec have improved the situation, and the project is likely to create even more pollution. People find it very hard to deal with the uncertainty. They have already been dealing with this problem for far too long. What is the government going to do to reassure people about the expansion project?

• (1845)

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the

opportunity to respond to the question from the member for Beauport—Limoilou regarding the expansion of the Port of Quebec.

Our government is committed to a robust environmental assessment process. That is why we increased funding opportunities for aboriginal consultations and public participation over the course of the environmental assessment and why we renewed funding for the next five years for these consultations.

[*English*]

The Canadian Environment Assessment Act, 2012 requires federal authorities, such as the Quebec Port Authority, when contemplating a project on federal lands, to first determine whether the project is likely to cause significant adverse environmental effects. If so, the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, 2012 prescribes the steps the federal authority must follow before the project can be carried out. If the federal authority determines that no significant adverse environmental effects are likely, the Canadian Environment Assessment Act, 2012 provides that the federal authority can proceed to carry out the project.

Ports, airports, crown corporations, federal departments, and agencies responsible for managing federal lands are best placed to understand these unique environments and to make responsible decisions about projects on their lands. I want to emphasize that this is a legal requirement, and port authorities responsible for federal lands cannot ignore these obligations.

The Quebec Port Authority must look at all environment effects on federal lands that may result from the project. The Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, 2012 is very clear on this requirement. Because of similar requirements that date back to 1999, port authorities have extensive experience in assessing projects on their lands. The Quebec Port Authority will bring this expertise to bear on the expansion project.

Port authorities also work co-operatively with other federal experts, such as Environment Canada, and other authorities who may also have a decision to make on a project.

The hon. member has asked for reassurance that the port authority will be transparent. I can assure him that the Port of Quebec is required to report annually to Parliament regarding its activities on federal lands that are subject to the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, 2012.

Legislation is in place to hold federal land managers accountable. We are confident that these authorities will continue to make decisions that ensure that the projects on their lands are carried out in a careful and precautionary manner so as to avoid significant adverse environment effects.

In this spirit, the Quebec Port Authority announced a new environmental impact assessment process for all projects carried out on port territory at the beginning of this very year. This is to adhere to best environmental practices and is an integral component of their sustainable development action plan for 2014-15.

Adjournment Proceedings

[*Translation*]

In conclusion, I want to assure the House that there are no deficiencies when it comes to the environmental monitoring of projects on federal land.

Mr. Raymond Côté: Mr. Speaker, I thank the parliamentary secretary for his answer, but I am obviously not satisfied.

He knows very well that the environmental assessment process was completely gutted of anything of value or of anything resembling independence. In the past, the Port of Quebec has proven that it does not take assessments seriously, as I have shown.

I want to address another topic. A few months ago I questioned the Minister of the Environment. I thank the parliamentary secretary for responding at the time regarding the National Pollutant Release Inventory, in which St. Lawrence Stevedoring and Quebec Stevedoring are nowhere to be found.

The parliamentary secretary, whom I thank again, told me that he would get back to me on that question. The answer I received described the criteria for signing up. However, unfortunately, since that time, I have not gotten any indication that Quebec Stevedoring or St. Lawrence Stevedoring have started the process of signing up to report to the NPRI.

Is that the case? Did the Minister of the Environment look into whether Quebec Stevedoring or St. Lawrence Stevedoring should comply with the inventory, in light of the scale of operations?

Mr. Colin Carrie: Mr. Speaker, this government is determined to have a strong federal environmental assessment regime.

• (1850)

[*English*]

The regime that is in place goes beyond the assessment of major projects. It also addresses projects of any size proposed to be carried out on federal lands.

Federal authorities have established credible processes for conducting this analysis. The approach and depth of analysis reflects the risk and likelihood of significant adverse environmental effects. They also put in place measures to mitigate environmental impacts.

[*Translation*]

Our government will continue to support federal authorities in the important work they do for Canada's environment.

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

(The House adjourned at 6:50 p.m.)

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