



CANADA

House of Commons Debates

VOLUME 144 • NUMBER 042 • 2nd SESSION • 40th PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, April 21, 2009

—
Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, April 21, 2009

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 response to four petitions.

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CRIMINAL CODE

Hon. Jay Hill (for the Minister of Justice) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-26, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (auto theft and trafficking in property obtained by crime).

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

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the fourth report of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights.

In accordance with the order of reference of Thursday, March 26, your committee has considered Bill C-14, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (organized crime and protection of justice system participants), and agreed on Monday, April 20, to report it without amendment.

* * *

CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. Francis Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-362, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (personal identity theft).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to stand in the House today to present a private member's bill, seconded by the member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine.

The bill would make it an offence for a person to be in possession of another person's identification without a lawful excuse. Identity theft has become one of the fastest growing crimes in Canada. Hundreds of Canadians are the victims of identity theft each month, with losses that go into the millions of dollars. Identity thieves steal key pieces of personal information, often without the victim's knowledge, and use it to impersonate the individual and commit crimes. Identity thieves manipulate information and invade personal and financial lives, leaving victims feeling very vulnerable, often devastating their lives.

It is imperative that Canada's laws reflect the changing face of criminal activity. I believe the bill is a step forward to address identity theft. I ask the support of the House for this private member's bill.

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

* * *

● (1005)

PEST CONTROL PRODUCTS ACT

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-363, An Act to amend the Pest Control Products Act (prohibition of the use of chemical pesticides for certain purposes).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Timmins—James Bay for seconding the bill.

The bill would place a moratorium on the non-essential cosmetic use of pesticides in homes, gardens and in recreational places such as parks and golf courses. The moratorium would be in effect until such time as the chemical companies could prove beyond doubt that the product was safe. The object is to reverse the burden of proof and to put the onus on the chemical companies to prove their products are safe, instead of having Health Canada and the people of Canada trying to prove that their product is harmful. The moratorium would stay in effect until such time as they could make such proof known to a parliamentary committee and lift their product from the ban.

It is a nationwide ban on the non-essential cosmetic use of pesticides, herbicides and fungicides.

Business of Supply

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

* * *

PETITIONS

SRI LANKA

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition today from Sri Lankan Tamil seniors of Etobicoke who call upon Parliament to urge the United Nations Security Council to send a special envoy to Sri Lanka to find a way to end the killing of innocent Tamil civilians; to rush humanitarian aid to displaced people in the war zone; to persuade the two warring factions, the Sri Lankan government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, to stop the war immediately and to bring them to the negotiating table to formulate a lasting peace solution under the guidance of the United Nations.

CANADA POST

Mr. Merv Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table several petitions in regard to the library book rate. I am tabling documents that were originally under Bill C-458 and are now under a new title. Basically, it is An Act to amend the Canada Post Corporation Act (library materials), protecting and supporting the library book rate and extending it to include audio-visual materials.

ASBESTOS

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions to present. The first one calls upon the House of Commons to recognize that asbestos is the greatest industrial killer that the world has ever known and yet Canada remains one of the largest producers and exporters of asbestos in the world. In fact, the petitioners points out that Canada spends millions of dollars subsidizing the asbestos industry and even blocking international efforts to curb its use.

Therefore, these petitioners call upon Parliament to ban asbestos in all of its forms and institute a just transition program for the workers who may be affected by such a ban, to end all government subsidies of asbestos both in Canada and abroad and to stop blocking international health and safety conventions designed to protect workers from asbestos such as the Rotterdam Convention.

INCOME TAX

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition calls upon the House of Commons to recognize that when Canadian taxpayers file their own tax return they must purchase a computer program at their own cost from a third party to netfile their tax return. These signatories object to this and argue that no third party should be allowed to profit from the collection of taxes.

Therefore, the petitioners call upon Parliament to enact legislation to disallow third parties from profiting in the collection of taxes and give free access to the Canada Revenue Agency's electronic income tax filing program to all Canadian taxpayers so they do not need to pay a third party to access electronic filing of their tax returns.

● (1010)

NUCLEAR WEAPONS TREATY

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to table a petition urging a NATO nuclear policy review. As everyone knows, Canada has signed and ratified the treaty on the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, or NPT, in which there is a commitment that each of the parties to the treaty will work for the elimination of nuclear weapons.

These signators call upon the Government of Canada to publicly press for an urgent review of NATO's nuclear weapons policies to ensure that all nuclear states fulfill their international obligations under the NPT, to negotiate and conclude an agreement for the elimination of nuclear weapons, and to eliminate reliance on nuclear weapons from NATO's strategic concept.

CANADA POST

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to stand and present a petition signed by hundreds of residents from the great gold mining town of Matachewan, Ontario, who are trying to draw the attention of the House of Commons to their growing frustration about dealing with Canada Post.

In January 2009, the decision was made to change the postal service without due notice or consultation. Even though public notices were subsequently posted, they contained inaccurate or misleading information. Even after they tried to meet with the Canada Post regional representatives and given assurances that they would have their postal service maintained, they still are being left out in the cold.

They are asking the Government of Canada to hold Canada Post to account to ensure that communities like Matachewan, Kenabek, South Porcupine and other regions that are dependent upon postal service and are not getting proper answers from Canada Post will be heard.

* * *

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 Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—GUN CONTROL

Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ) moved:

Business of Supply

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should not extend the amnesty on gun control requirements set to expire on May 16, 2009, and should maintain the registration of all types of firearms in its entirety.

He said: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like everyone listening to understand why we are presenting this motion. It is precisely because the government has three times extended the amnesty which allows people not to register long guns, while according to the law all firearms had to be registered.

No doubt the reaction from the other side of the floor will be that this was set out in the law under the Liberals. That is true, but at that time there was a good reason for amending the act in that way. So many people were registering their firearms at the last minute that the computer system was incapable of handling them all, and this would have meant that the people would have ended up registering too late. A decision was therefore made on the possibility of an amnesty to allow people who registered after the deadlines not to be guilty of any offence. That was the purpose of the amnesty.

When the Conservatives came to power, however, they systematically extended this amnesty when it no longer had any reason to exist. The amnesty serves just one purpose, therefore: to allow people unwilling to register their long guns to remain legal. So there is a negative outcome: the registry itself becomes less and less reliable, because there are more and more unregistered guns. By so doing, the Conservatives are hoping that the police forces,—a large majority of whom are the first to support the registry—will finally conclude that this registry is not reliable, and that will become grounds for abolishing it.

Why do we want to register guns? Because there is a direct relationship between gun control and homicide rates. There is, for example, a huge difference between the homicide rates in the United States and in Canada; the U.S. rate is three times the Canadian.

Incidentally, the U.S. homicide rate is by far the highest of nearly all western countries. No doubt it is higher in some other countries, but it is top ranking among the countries most like ourselves.

Why? Ask any intelligent American why there are so many homicides in that country, and he will tell you that the main reason is that it is so much easier to obtain firearms there. In Canada, we have had gun control for a long time, well before the registry was created. That makes us a different kind of society.

In my opinion, anyone who has travelled to the United States will have noticed that the gun culture there is not at all like the gun culture in Canada. I believe that most Canadians consider guns to be dangerous objects that should only be in the hands of responsible owners. That is the basic goal of the gun registry. And I think that most of the Conservative members support that. Guns should only be in the hands of responsible owners.

Obviously, gun control will not prevent all crimes committed with firearms. Such measures might not even have prevented certain tragic events that have hit our society hard, such as massacres. The important thing is for us to realize that there is a relationship among gun culture, lack of gun control and the homicide rate, and that is why the registry is a good thing.

The same could be said about drug laws. Drug laws do not prevent addicts from acquiring drugs illegally.

• (1015)

Does anyone think that we should therefore get rid of laws that prohibit the use of drugs? We do not want Canada to become like the United States when it comes to the prevalence of guns. We often hear people say that this will not prevent thieves from getting guns, but I want to point out that they are not the ones doing most of the killing anyway. People kill for all kinds of reasons: hatred, anger, vengeance. In one case, a lawyer killed his associate to collect the life insurance policy. People kill because they have a vested interest. In the United States, people in the middle of a fight can go out, get themselves guns, and come back to the scene of the fight. In Canada, people cannot do that. That is one thing that makes our two countries different. Guns are instruments of death. They are dangerous. The state should take charge, just as it takes charge when it comes to other dangerous objects, such as cars.

Guns are also the quickest and easiest way to kill, the one that requires the least effort. With the flick of a finger, someone's life can be endangered or he can be killed. There is no greater way to intimidate than to threaten with a gun. All firearms are inherently dangerous, therefore, and should all be subject to controls.

Our resolution deals with the consequences of the amnesty because the less guns are registered, the more uncontrolled guns there will be and the less reliable the registry will become. It is also necessary to have a firearms registry in order for certain provisions of the act to be fully enforced—an act that was passed by the House and is still supported by many of the members here. For example, a street gang member who manages to acquire a firearms licence could be prevented from buying several guns to distribute or sell to fellow gang members who could not obtain a licence.

There are also some particular uses. For example, if there is an outstanding court order forbidding someone to own a gun, the authorities can check whether he has any and how many they should go and collect from him to ensure that the order is enforced. Some provisions of the act enable the police to take action, usually in marital situations that have turned ugly, for example when a woman fears for her safety because her husband's attitude has changed completely over time and she is afraid he will turn his guns on her some day. That has already happened in Montreal. The *Fraternité des policiers et des policières de Montréal* told us about a case where the woman knew her husband had guns. She was afraid he would use them against her in one of his numerous rages, but she did not know how many he had. The police looked at the registry. Frankly, he had an entire arsenal. I have forgotten exactly how many, but it was more than 50 guns and ammunition of all kinds. Once they had obtained a court order, the police knew what to go and get. They could leave the woman's house knowing all the guns had been removed.

Business of Supply

Other provisions of the act are very effective at preventing suicide attempts. Seventy-five percent of the gun deaths in Canada are suicides. If a family sees a family member being overcome by depression and is afraid that he will use his hunting gun or another firearm but does not know what to do, the family can seek a court order.

• (1020)

The court order is issued and, again, the registry allows us to ensure that any firearms are indeed taken away from that person. That is why suicide prevention organizations are the strongest supporters of this legislation and of the fact that it covers all types of firearms. It is also important for planning police operations. That does not mean that police operations will never again end tragically, as it happens each year unfortunately, but it will allow the police to take precautions. All police forces want their officers to know how many firearms there are in a home when they respond to a call.

It must also be understood that the registry drew a lot of criticism. It was said to be a waste of money. I admit that establishing the gun registry was very costly. I will even admit that it was a fiscal scandal. But it is there and it is used every day. It would truly be a waste not to use it fully.

Would anyone think of destroying a bridge that cost 10 times the initial estimate, even if a scandal were involved, to build another one at a lower cost? Of course not. Now that we have it, let us use it.

What is the current cost of gun registration?

The RCMP tells us that it spent \$9.1 million last year to register all firearms. It estimates that two thirds of that amount was for the registration of hunting rifles. So this means that it is now costing us \$6 million to benefit fully from the law that was passed by this Parliament. No one can call that a waste. I do not want to go overboard here, but how much is a human life worth? I think that \$6 million in the federal budget is a not very much when considering the objectives it allows us to achieve.

Since 2004, it no longer costs anything for people who must register their guns, and those who did pay have been reimbursed. Where is the disadvantage? It is very easy to register one's gun. First of all, it is very easy to register it at the gun dealer at the time of purchase or at any gun dealer when a gun is purchased from a private individual. One can go to the police station or do it over the Internet. It can even be done by telephone at the time of purchase. Of course, when someone has a gun registered in their name, it is very important to transfer the registration if someone else buys the gun. This also requires a certain amount of attention. An individual will not sell their gun to just anyone, knowing that it will not be registered, in case it is misused later on. The same is true with a car. We register our vehicles and we do not entrust them to just anyone.

Obtaining a firearm licence is more complicated. That said, obtaining a licence is not the subject of this debate, but even the Conservatives are in favour of maintaining that policy. Once again, registration is necessary to ensure that guns do not fall into the wrong hands.

Now, I know we are up against some tough opposition on the ground. The National Rifle Association is one of the most powerful, well organized lobbies in the world. I know that, especially during

campaigns, members are often bombarded with objections to the gun registry and much of what is said about it is simply not true.

• (1025)

I know that these lobbies are experts at making an impression on elected representatives, having delegations go to them and say that they voted for them in the past but will withdraw their support.

This may not be a good reason, but we too believe in polls. Even at the time of the scandal over the cost of the gun registry in 2006, a survey by a major firm—Ipsos Reid, if I am not mistaken—showed that, in Alberta, the province most hostile to gun registration, 51% of Albertans supported some form of registration for gun owners. Gun owners was the expression used in the survey. In Quebec, 76% were in favour. Understandably, a member of Parliament cannot poll his or her 85,000 constituents—that is the average number—and organizations sometimes come to us trying to scare us into voting differently on an issue.

To conclude, we all agree on maintaining this cultural difference between the United States and Canada with respect to weapons and gun control. As requested by many Americans anytime violent incidents happen, gun control legislation will have to be passed, which will apply to all firearms, even though we know that a majority of people will use them wisely and prudently. That is our goal: to have registration for all firearms the same way that there is registration for all cars.

The amnesty presented is a breach of this law, which has had such good results and is the envy of other countries. The registry must continue to be reliable for the purposes of preparing police operations and applying all court orders pertaining to firearms. I spoke about how the registry could be used to prevent domestic violence before it results in death. It can also be an effective tool for suicide prevention. The registry should continue to cover all firearms in order to make it more difficult for petty thugs to obtain guns from third parties.

We must also realize that the reason given the first time for such an amnesty no longer exists. Currently, there is no backlog in the computer registration of firearms and we do not believe that there would be one if the amnesty were not renewed. This reason, if given, borders on hypocrisy.

I can understand that MPs wish to be re-elected. There is something noble about that, because it means they wish to express the will of their constituents. However, we should not be the victims of lobbies. For my part, even if 75% of my constituents were against the gun registry, I would continue to support it. My professional experience with crime—as a young crown attorney, criminal lawyer, minister of public safety and minister of justice—has shown me that comprehensive gun control is one crime prevention measure that works.

Business of Supply

•(1030)

[English]

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to my colleague across the floor as he delivered his speech. A number of issues came up and I would like to ask him how he verified the information he provided to the House.

One item in particular caught my attention. He talked about his experience, but I have a little practical experience in this field also. He indicated that 75% of suicides are caused by firearms. I would really question where that statistic came from. In addition, I would question his reasoning behind the idea that registering firearms would mean that the firearms would not be used to commit suicide. I think he has made a connection in some way and I do not believe there is anything to support it other than an opinion.

I wonder if he would explain to the House where the figure of 75% came from and how registering a firearm would prevent a suicide.

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Ménard: Mr. Speaker, first, what I said is that 75% of firearms deaths in Canada were suicides. That is the information I was given, and I can mail it to you. The research service provided it to me. I did not know this myself. I believe that information is also published by the Coalition for Gun Control.

Now I would like the other thing I said, which I repeat clearly, to be plainly understood. The law provides that you may apply to a court when a family member or someone you know is depressed and you are afraid that the person will use a firearm to commit suicide. The law provides that a court order may then be made to require that the person turn over their firearms. However, we cannot be certain that the person has turned over all their firearms, unless they are actually registered. I imagine that all honest people will have registered them.

However, if the person has not registered any firearms, and you know they still have a firearm in their home, it will be even more distressing if the person commits suicide.

•(1035)

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague from the Bloc Québécois on this excellent motion. The question I am going to ask is very important to me.

[English]

A Conservative member has presented in the House of Commons a private member's bill on which I would like to get the member's comments because I have a great deal of concern about it. It is private member's Bill C-301.

I would like to get his comment on that and also the bill that has been presented in the Senate because the bill that was presented here in the House not only deals with long guns but it also deals with prohibited and restricted weapons. In fact, it would allow things that have been illegal for many years, including allowing machine guns to be driven through communities on the way to firing ranges.

I would be interested in his comments on that bill, which is before the House, and how that impacts this motion, and second, the actions

of the Conservatives to bring a motion before the Senate instead of the House with respect to the registry. They seem to be going all over the place on this issue. I would be interested in the member's comments on those two particular items.

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Ménard: Mr. Speaker, I think we can see what the Conservatives are up to, and I do not want to be overly cynical, but it is clear that the Conservatives want to do away with registration of long guns.

The first private member's bill would, indeed, make it easier to transport weapons that are considered dangerous. However, he has indicated that he would like to remove that from his bill. We shall see whether he does so.

I think that in my speech I explained all the reasons why the law as we passed it here, regardless of what it costs, is a good law, and I believe I said that all firearms can be dangerous. Certainly it does depend on whose hands the firearms fall into. In my opinion, we all share the objective of ensuring that these weapons are always in responsible hands only. However, having them registered them strengthens enforcement of the law, particularly because we cannot say that the law will not apply to responsible people without determining that they are responsible.

We must have a law that provides what it does at present: first we have to get a possession and acquisition licence, and then we are assessed, and then go ahead. We shall see what the result will be when this bill goes before the Senate. I do not know whether this is some sort of tactic. I think the senators, who do not have to get re-elected and who are not subject to pressure from the firearms lobbies, will have a wiser and fairer perspective on this issue.

[English]

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened to my colleague's dissertation with interest. I guess I am surprised that it is coming forward today at a time of economic crisis.

It seems to me that part of the problem with gun policy in this country is continually looking to the United States. Well, the United States is not a reasonable marker for us to look at. We have to look at our own regions.

There are certain instances in our rural regions where people felt very alienated by the way guns were being spoken about. He talked about firearms being instruments of death. Of course, they are. He also called them the greatest instruments of intimidation. Well, in rural areas, people do use them.

What we see is the politicization of the gun registry, like the absurd Bill C-301, under the guise of killing the registry. When I talk with my gun owners back home and read the provisions of Bill C-301 that would allow for the transportation of prohibited weapons and machine guns, that is certainly not what rural people are looking at.

Business of Supply

I would ask my colleague in the Bloc, why is there this continual refusal to recognize the legitimate issues that people in rural Canada have about the gun registry? Why is there this continual demonization of rural people who use guns, as though they are some kind of threat that has to be contained? It seems to me that until we breach that divide between rural and urban Canada, his motion and the Conservative backbench motion are playing mischief with a very serious issue.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Ménard: Mr. Speaker, certainly I have not demonized rural people, nor do I intend to.

Rural people realize that this is the preferred approach in the cities. The law cannot be applied in the cities and not applied in the country. I am well aware that most hunters use their gun responsibly, but we must not let thugs use holes in the law or in its application to get guns more easily.

For heaven's sake, what are we asking people to do? They register their farm tractors, they register their 4x4s when they go hunting. They register their snowmobiles in winter. It costs nothing to register a gun. It is easy to do and costs nothing. Are 4x4s or snowmobiles the most dangerous instruments rural people use? It is not demonizing rural people to ask them to register their guns.

Are we demonizing them because we ask them to register their snowmobiles? Come on. They register them willingly. Registering a gun costs nothing and takes almost no effort. They need to help us protect people's safety.

• (1040)

[*English*]

Mr. Bradley Trost (Saskatoon—Humboldt, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want the hon. member to know, and maybe it was a mistake in the translation, that we do not register our tractors out in Saskatchewan, and perhaps in the rest of the country.

I also want to make a point about his insinuation that high gun ownership rates automatically lead to high crime. The province which has the lowest crime rate in Canada is Newfoundland. The province which has the highest gun ownership rate in Canada is Newfoundland. I was wondering if the hon. member would comment and explain why Newfoundland, with the highest gun ownership rate in the country, has the lowest murder rate, the lowest violent crime rate, and the lowest crime rate period?

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The hon. member for Marc-Aurèle-Fortin has time for a brief reply.

Mr. Serge Ménard: Mr. Speaker, gun ownership is not necessarily the only factor that affects the homicide rate. I recognize that the homicide rate may be lower in rural regions than in the cities, and that is why it is lower in Newfoundland or in certain communities. But the rate is different in major urban centres. People call for gun control in the United States every time there is a violent incident involving a gun.

The figures are so important. People will say—and the National Rifle Association does as well—that the homicide rate is low in certain states and very high in others. Because the average homicide

rate in the United States is so high compared to ours, there are states where it is much higher than in Canada as a whole. In addition, when you register something, you take better care of it than if you had not registered it, even though you would have taken care of it anyway.

[*English*]

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre.

I am very grateful for the opportunity to address the motion before us today which raises some very important issues related to gun control and effective gun crime prevention in Canada. Some hon. members will know that I served as a police officer for 30 years before entering politics, so today's motion is of particular interest to me as I know it is to all hard-working and law-abiding Canadians.

There is not one person in the House who does not want to make sure that guns do not fall into the wrong hands, the hands of criminals, the hands of criminal gangs, the hands of organized crime, and the hands of the mentally unstable. All of us on both sides of the House want to make sure that our streets are safe and that we continue to build safer communities for everyone. That is what our Conservative government has committed to since we were first elected in 2006. That is what we are doing and that is what we are going to continue to do through concrete and tangible measures designed to crack down on crime, and gun crime in particular, over the coming months.

That said, I would like to take the opportunity to commend the hon. member for his interest in crime prevention. Unfortunately, today's motion would accomplish neither. The hon. member has attempted to combine two very distinct concepts, that being the continuation of the one-year amnesty and the continuation of the ill-conceived and ineffectual long gun registry. These two concepts are unique to one another and not intertwined as the opposition would like us to believe.

The hon. member may not realize it, but if his two-headed motion were to pass into law, it would in fact only serve to weaken gun control in Canada by eliminating measures that the government has introduced specifically to increase the number of people who are in compliance with the law and therefore subject to the current automatic oversight provisions that exist. The motion, if passed, would also mean that we would continue to waste increasingly scarce resources on the long gun registry, something that has been proven to be a failure.

Our government's goal is to prudently address issues of crime and criminality and to use our financial resources in a responsible and effective manner. I am reminded of the words of the hon. member for Kings—Hants when he stated, “We should be getting rid of the long-gun registry. A billion dollars would have been better spent on health care or education or, for instance, in the strengthening of the RCMP, which has been underfunded for several years”. We would agree with that. That clarity comes from hindsight that makes these words more true today than when they were first stated more than five years ago.

Business of Supply

Over the last three years the Government of Canada has passed considerable legislation to tackle violent crime. We introduced mandatory prison sentences for gun crimes as well as reverse onus bail provisions for serious offences and these changes were long overdue.

I cannot escape the fact that despite having been in government for more than 13 years, the Liberal Party did little more than criminalize the actions of thousands of law-abiding hunters, sport shooters and farmers while doing nothing to deal with real criminals and real crime.

Our Conservative government has provided more money to the provinces and territories so they could hire additional police officers. The government has also committed to helping the RCMP recruit and train more personnel to which in excess of 1,500 new RCMP officers are now in a position to take up their duties all across Canada.

These two initiatives, which I know from firsthand experience, will by themselves do more to help prevent and tackle serious gun crimes in Canada, more than the long gun registry ever has or ever will. As well, the government has taken action to help young people make smart choices and avoid becoming involved in gang activities through programs funded through the National Crime Prevention Centre.

Most recently, the government introduced legislation that among other things will create a new broad-based offence to target drive-by and other intentional shootings that involve the reckless disregard for the life or safety of others. Anyone convicted of such acts would be subject to a mandatory minimum sentence of four years in prison with a maximum period of imprisonment of 14 years. If these acts are committed by, or for a criminal organization, or with a restricted or prohibited firearm such as a handgun or automatic weapon, the minimum sentence would increase to five years.

●(1045)

This government has also introduced legislation to crack down on organized crime and drugs by imposing mandatory jail time for people involved in serious drug crimes. The new legislation proposes an escalating scheme of mandatory prison sentences, where there is an aggravating or safety factor, to reflect the increasing level of threats these crimes pose to our society.

Through these measures the government has shown that it is serious about getting tough on crime, especially on gun crime.

We also need to ensure that we have a system of gun control that is both effective and efficient. That is why the government has also invested \$7 million annually to strengthen the front-end screening of first-time firearms licence applicants with a view to keeping firearms out of the hands of people who should not have them. This critical first step is essential with respect to any legislation looking to address the problems associated with gun crime and irresponsible gun ownership.

We have to ensure that our gun laws keep firearms out of the hands of those who threaten our communities, our safety and our lives. That is also why the government has undertaken a number of initiatives over the last three years to enhance compliance and public

safety while easing administrative burdens for lawful and responsible firearms owners.

We have taken steps to help nearly 11,000 gun owners with expired possession-only licences come back into compliance with the current federal firearms legislation. We have made it easier for law-abiding Canadians to comply with the current firearms legislation. We have put in place an amnesty so that those people who are taking advantage of such measures to comply with the law are not criminalized in the process.

The reason we are doing all this is quite simple. It is to protect Canadians, making sure that as many gun owners as possible are properly and lawfully licensed and therefore subject to continuous eligibility screening. It is this critically important element of the amnesty that will come to an end without the extension. Without the amnesty, it means that overall compliance will dramatically drop and many fewer gun owners will be properly licensed.

The Government of Canada is determined to maintain an effective firearms control system while at the same time combatting the criminal use of firearms and getting tough with crime. We are also committed to investing in crime prevention measures that work and to doing away with the wasteful and ineffective ones that do not, such as today's long gun registry which penalizes law-abiding Canadians on the basis of where they live or how they earn a living.

Hon. members will know that the government has recently introduced legislation in the other place to retain licensing requirements for all gun owners while doing away with the need for honest and law-abiding citizens to undergo the burden of registering their non-restricted rifles or shotguns, a burden which has proven to have had no impact on reducing gun crimes or serious criminality within Canada.

Our government's approach to gun control is both balanced and prudent. What is proposed are changes that do away with the need to register legally acquired and legally used rifles and shotguns. The record shows that a great many of these firearms are owned by the honest and hard-working Canadians living in rural or remote areas. These people have never been in trouble with the law and are fundamentally different from the gangs and organized crime that have infested a number of our municipalities. The scarce government resources should be directed toward initiatives which actually make our streets safer. That is what Canadians want. They want policies that make sense. They want crime prevention initiatives that target criminals rather than farmers and duck hunters. They want effective gun control measures that improve public safety rather than unnecessarily criminalizing law-abiding citizens.

I therefore cannot support the motion put forward by the member for Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, a motion which is both ill-conceived and contrary to the best interests of Canadians.

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•(1050)

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it was quite interesting to listen to the member opposite speak about how there are lawful owners. I would like his reaction to a letter that the Canadian Police Association sent, in which its president stated, “It would be irresponsible to suspend or abandon any element of this program now that it is starting to deliver the intended results. Bill S-5”—that is the government bill introduced in the Senate—and Bill C-301—that is the private member's bill from the member opposite—“will compromise public safety”.

The president also went on to state in his letter that while critics of the registry have characterized it as penalizing law-abiding long gun owners, primarily hunters and rural residents, he noted that of the 15 police officers fatally shot in Canada during the last decade, 13 were killed with rifles or shotguns. He also pointed out that long guns are used two times more frequently than handguns in spousal homicides and five times more in suicides. He stated that in 2005 it was a registered long gun that allowed the RCMP to actually find out who had murdered other RCMP officers.

I would like the member's comments.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to address the issue brought forward by the hon. member. Certainly the opinion in the letter from that particular individual and organization is not necessarily shared by the whole organization. I am aware of that. I am in contact with a number of police officers partly because of my history and partly because of where I am today.

I would say to the member that she only has to look at the one issue she brought up in suggesting that the tragic deaths of the four officers in Mayerthorpe by the hand of a criminal with a rifle proves the need for the long gun registry. In fact, the registry's monumental failure to prevent the tragic deaths of these police officers underscores registering firearms of law-abiding people. The criminal who committed these crimes was in illegal possession of a firearm despite the presence of the registry. The events prove beyond a shadow of a doubt the ineffective uselessness of the long gun registry in protecting our society.

That is what we have been saying. Registering the long guns is not the answer to protecting society. Having owners of firearms registered and following up the rules with respect to the owners themselves is far more important than a registry of each individual long gun.

•(1055)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the previous speaker and myself have an excellent working relationship at committee. In light of his past experience, I would like him to tell this House how come the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, the Canadian Professional Police Association are among the numerous organizations which support a complete gun registry. As I recall, every police association in all the provinces but one, namely Saskatchewan, also supports this registry.

Next, the hon. member could perhaps explain how maintaining the amnesty will result in more people registering their firearms, as

he suggested, if I understood him correctly. Personally, I think that, if the amnesty is maintained, many of those who refuse to register their firearms will continue refusing to do so. They will not do it and they will only do it once the amnesty period, for which there is no good reason now, especially after more than four years, has been eliminated.

[*English*]

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Mr. Speaker, it is fairly obvious that not everyone has registered his or her firearms. That is one of the problems and the fallacy of this whole thing.

I appreciate the member's comments with respect to some of my former colleagues and the organizations they represent, but those organizations do not represent every officer and every chief across the country. They represent a body, which is fair and fine and I have no problem with that.

I would say to my friend opposite that we do get along very well. He said it would be foolish to dismantle the system already set up. However, the gun registry is by no means complete. Only seven million of sixteen and a half million guns that are in Canada, according to government import and export records, are registered. The system has not worked.

All we are doing is putting people at risk of being criminals because they own firearms. They have been law-abiding citizens. They have had their firearms for 40 years. It is time that we looked at this in the sense that we need to be careful about who has the firearms, not the firearms they necessarily have.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to debate this motion today. I want to thank my hon. friend, the member for Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, for bringing forward the motion.

I would respectfully argue that the motion brought forward for debate today is actually the reverse of what it should read. The current motion brought forward by the member states that we should eliminate the amnesty period and maintain the long gun registry. I would respectfully argue it should be reversed. We should maintain the amnesty and eliminate the long gun registry.

My hon. colleague from Oxford went over a number of points on the intent of the amnesty. Not to reiterate everything my hon. colleague said just a few moments previously, I will make a couple of quick points.

The purpose of the amnesty is quite clear. It is to try and get those firearm owners currently in non-compliance with the law back into compliance. In other words, all we are trying to do by having an amnesty for a year is to indicate to those firearm owners who are currently in non-compliance, those who have not licensed their firearms, that they would not be prosecuted if they renewed their licence. We are trying to encourage more people to become compliant with the law. That is the purpose of the amnesty.

The larger question, I would argue, is the long gun registry itself and why it is totally ineffective, and even more so, the abhorrent costs upon the taxpayers of this country.

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I would also point out, just for the sake of putting things into context and perspective, that back in 1995 when Bill C-68, the original gun registry bill, was first introduced, members of the Bloc Québécois debated that very bill in this place. I would point out for the record that 18 members of the Bloc Québécois voted against Bill C-68. They knew even then that the registry would be ineffective because we have always had a licensing system in this country.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: They have evolved in their thinking.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, the member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine is always interrupting. She cannot make an effective point in debate so she has to heckle from her seat, but that is fine. We will let her do that.

Let me point out though that the reasons Bill C-68 was ineffective are still valid today. The gun registry does nothing to reduce the threat to public safety. It does nothing to reduce crime. It does nothing to reduce violent gun incidents.

Time after time we have spoken in the House of the fact that criminals who commit the most egregious crimes against Canadians are using illegal guns, guns that perhaps were smuggled in from a different country. Criminals do not register their handguns. They do not register their long guns. Therefore, the long gun registry is only putting a burden on those honest citizens, the farmers, target shooters and hunters. They are not criminals but they are required under this abhorrent law to register their firearms when in fact they have no intention of ever breaking any law or using those long guns in an illegal fashion.

I come from a province in which our police association is dead set against the registry and for good reason. The police association recognizes the fact that the majority of legitimate law-abiding gun owners in our province use their long guns not as a weapon but as a tool. Farmers in my province, and I would suggest farmers across Canada, have long guns as part of their tool kit, literally. It is the same thing as the farm machinery they use to cultivate their land. A long gun in the hands of a law-abiding farmer is a legitimate tool. It is not used for any other reason. Yet they are the very people in this country who are being burdened by this cumbersome and expensive long gun registry. I said expensive, and darn right it is expensive.

• (1100)

Back in 1995 when the then Liberal government introduced Bill C-68, it stated that the registry would cost \$2.2 million to be fully implemented and operational. We know how much of a fallacy that is. To date, according to the Auditor General of Canada, in figures that I would suggest are three years old, it has cost the Canadian taxpayer well over \$1 billion in direct costs for the registry itself. That is not counting indirect costs; in other words, the costs of other departments that have to comply with the registry. It does not talk about compliance costs for the actual gun owners themselves.

Not only is the cost abhorrent, but the Firearms Centre itself, according to the Auditor General's report of 2006, stated that it could not provide one shred of evidence that the registry had anything to do with reducing the threat to public safety or reducing deaths or crimes. This is the Firearms Centre that was established to actually administer the registry. It could not produce one shred of evidence, according to the Auditor General, that it has been effective.

We have a situation in which Canadian taxpayers are footing the bill to the tune of well over \$1 billion during the 15 years that the registry has been in effect. It is not proven to reduce the threat to public safety, to reduce crime or to reduce violent incidents, so I would argue, what good is it doing?

There is a big difference, I would argue, between licensing provisions and the registry. We have always had licensing provisions for long guns, always. It used to be called the FAC, the firearms acquisition certificate. Provinces used to administer this individually. I believe in Saskatchewan, to obtain an FAC back in the days when it was still called an FAC, one would apply through the Department of Environment. Speaking with many legitimate long gun owners in my province, it was entirely effective. A person could not purchase a long gun at any point in time in our history without getting an appropriate licence, in some cases called the FAC or a certificate. It was the same thing. Those are interchangeable terms.

We are not suggesting that be changed whatsoever. We continue to say that all long guns should be licensed, and licences are part of the culture of gun owners. They accept that. They approve that. They agree with that, but it is the registry that offends legitimate long gun owners because it is not required. It is useless. It is a bureaucratic exercise in waste.

I would also point out, as everyone in the House knows, that handguns and restricted weapons such as automatic weapons have always needed to be registered. That will not change by our call for the elimination of the long gun registry. We are not trying to eliminate the registry provisions for handguns. We admit and we agree that handguns and restricted weapons such as automatic weapons should be registered. That should be maintained.

In fact, handguns have been registered in this country since 1933. We are only talking about long guns, because the registry, at such a cost to the Canadian taxpayer, which has been proven to be totally ineffective, is not required. It is absolutely useless. We could be using that money, well over \$1 billion over the course of the last 15 years, for more effective crime prevention policies, or one could even argue, if we did not want to put it into crime prevention measures, we could put it into another government initiative, such as health care.

It is quite clear to me and quite clear to hundreds of thousands of rural residents across this great country that the long gun registry should never have been introduced. The legislation should never have been passed in the first place, and now is the time to get rid of it.

I would also argue that if all opposition parties were allowed to vote freely, if their members were allowed to vote freely on a bill brought forward to eliminate the long gun registry, the elimination of that registry would occur in a heartbeat.

Thank you for your indulgence, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to comments and questions from my colleagues.

• (1105)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Before we begin questions and comments, I want to ask members to try to keep their questions to about a minute. There seems to be a lot of interest in this subject today.

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The hon. member for Abbotsford for questions and comments.

Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I commend my colleague for his prescient remarks and for his support for dealing with guns in a responsible manner.

One thing that has confused me is that over the years the opposition has supported this ineffective, expensive gun registry, yet it has also opposed our efforts as a government to implement mandatory minimum sentences for gun-toting, violent criminals in our society. I would invite my colleague to remark on whether he sees that as being inconsistent and whether he is as puzzled as I am with this inconsistent approach to trying to address violent, gun-related crime in our communities across Canada.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, I agree. I am totally confused, because it is a complete contradiction.

On one hand, opposition members want to point to the gun registry as being something they support because it prevents crime in this country, when in fact all empirical evidence suggests just the opposite. Yet when this government brings forward legislation that is tough on crime, such as mandatory minimum sentences or the end of conditional arrests, what do we get from the opposition? We get complete opposition. They will try at every opportunity to either defeat our legislative initiatives completely or in fact sometimes will vote in favour of it at second reading and then gut it once it gets to committee.

Canadians know this contradiction in terms. They understand that fundamentally. That is why Canadians from coast to coast to coast recognize and appreciate the fact that there is only one party in this country that is truly tough on crime and criminals, and that is the Conservative Party of Canada.

• (1110)

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we all agree that we want to protect society. The hon. member discussed at length the cost of the program. Policing is an important part of protecting society. I believe \$400 million was allotted over five years to hire 2,500 police officers. The Canadian Police Association said it needed \$1.2 billion for five years. How does the member respond to comments that the amount was insufficient and unsustainable and no controls were put in place to assure accountability?

One police officer explained to me that he feels that he is in a foxhole waiting for recruits, only they are not coming.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, we have made a commitment to increase the number of police officers on our streets. We stand by that.

I would point out to my hon. colleague that she is supporting my argument. If we had not spent over \$1 billion on a useless gun registry, we would have had additional funds to hire more police officers. That is our point. We could be using that money, that total waste of Canadians' taxpayer dollars, more effectively. We could be hiring more police officers. That is the first case. Second, if in fact members decided that \$1 billion might be used more effectively in terms of health care, we could do that.

The point is that \$1 billion is a lot of money to waste on a useless gun registry when we could be putting that money to far more

legitimate and useful purposes. I thank the member opposite for supporting my argument.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like the previous speaker to explain how he could begin his remarks by saying that amnesty is necessary to convince more people to comply with the law, then go on to say that the law they would be complying with is no good and should be eliminated.

Does he know what percentage of the budgets he referred to was allocated to the establishment of the long gun registry? Does he not realize that all the other measures, including approving possession licences, account for the largest part of the cost?

[*English*]

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, I will give the member points on this one. The amnesty quite frankly might not be required if the long gun registry were eliminated.

However, what we are saying is that compliance with the law means that people have to license their weapons. Many firearms owners have not renewed their licences, and we are saying the amnesty would allow them to re-license their weapons without fear of prosecution. We are merely trying to encourage all law-abiding firearm owners who have let their licences expire to renew them. We encourage them to do so without fear of prosecution for allowing their licences to lapse.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I am rising in this House, on behalf of the Liberal caucus, to support the motion tabled today by the hon. member for Marc-Aurèle-Fortin. That member has a long and distinguished career in the area of public safety. He is one of those people here who really knows what must be done to improve public safety and, for example, to fight organized crime, as he did for so many years during his tenure at the Quebec National Assembly. Today, I salute him and I am telling him that the Liberal caucus will support his motion.

I also want to stress the important work done by many Canadians on the very complex issue of gun control. For example, Suzanne Laplante-Edwards, who is the mother of one of the victims of the tragedy at the École Polytechnique, has done a lot to promote gun control. She is in Ottawa today to remind parliamentarians of the importance of supporting measures that will help control guns and increase public safety, and also to remind us of past tragedies that show the importance of continuing to fight to improve all these measures, which are so critical to ensure public safety. Gun control and the gun registry are undoubtedly two initiatives that help us achieve these goals.

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•(1115)

[English]

I want to be very clear. Liberals will be supporting this motion tabled by our colleague for Marc-Aurèle-Fortin. We believe gun control and the firearms registry are essential elements in the effort to improve public safety across Canada. However, Liberals also recognize that there are persons across the country and in rural communities such as the ones I represent who legitimately use firearms, non-prohibited weapons, for sporting purposes, hunting and target practice.

We recognize and respect that some Canadians have a legitimate need for firearms, but they must also recognize that the legitimate need to protect public safety and to follow the advice of Canada's front-line police officers and police chiefs across the country requires that all firearms need to be part of an effective firearms registry that serves as an essential element of the police officers' work to protect public safety.

In a question a few moments ago, I think my colleague for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine reminded the House of a very important document that was sent to our leader by the Canadian Police Association, a group that represents 57,000 front-line police officers. The elected president of this association wrote to the leader of the Liberal Party on April 7 and asked the Liberal Party to continue to support the firearms registry. He asked members of our party and members of Parliament in other parties to oppose Bill S-5, currently sitting in the Senate, and to oppose Bill C-301, a very irresponsible private member's bill that sits on the order paper of the House.

I want to quote from the letter from the Canadian Police Association, where the elected president said:

It would be irresponsible to suspend or abandon any element of [Canada's firearms program]

In 2008, police services used the firearms registry, on average, 9,400 times a day. They consulted the firearms registry over 3.4 million times last year alone. In that year, 2008, they conducted an inquiry of the firearms registry on over 2 million individuals and did over 900,000 address checks at the firearms registry.

Another organization that in our view is eminently qualified, more so than government members of Parliament, to speak on the issue of public safety is the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police. In a letter sent to our leader on March 9, they also said they were asking members of Parliament to oppose Bill C-301 and to maintain the registration of all firearms.

[Translation]

That is precisely the thrust of the motion tabled today in this House. It is important to maintain the integrity of the gun registry and to end the amnesty which, in our opinion, has watered down the integrity of the registry, something which certainly does not help public safety.

The government across the way claims to be interested in public safety. Mr. Speaker, I am sure that you have often seen cabinet ministers and government members wanting to be photographed with police officers. These people make announcement on various bills, or on amendments to the Criminal Code. We often see police

officers standing behind the minister announcing such changes to the Criminal Code.

It is obvious that Conservative members view the support of police officers as something symbolic, but also very important for their so-called improvements to the Criminal Code. However, when these same officers, through the duly elected officials representing their associations, ask them to put a stop to a policy which, in their opinion, is irresponsible and goes against the goal shared—I hope—by all members in this House, namely to improve public safety, government members do not agree with the people with whom they had their picture taken just weeks earlier.

There is no doubt, in our view, that extending the amnesty poses a threat to public safety. That is why we will oppose the idea of extending or renewing the amnesty.

•(1120)

[English]

If we think about the whole idea of an amnesty with respect to a Criminal Code provision, it is a rather bizarre way to make criminal law in the country. For a government to simply decide that it will suspend the application of a particular section of the Criminal Code or another criminal law is, to me, not a very courageous or legitimate way to make public law in Canada.

If the government had the courage to table a bill in this House that would do what so many government members in their speeches or in their questions and comments claim they want it to do, it knows very well that the bill would be defeated. What does the government do? It signs an order in council or a minister simply directs crown prosecutors that, for this or that reason, for a period of time they should not enforce the criminal legislation.

That is as irresponsible as deciding that the sections of the Criminal Code, for example, that apply to impaired driving would be suspended for two weeks around Christmas. It is the same sort of notion that the government can tell prosecutors or justice officials that we are going to provide an amnesty.

Earlier we heard members claiming that this was only so that firearms owners would come forward and voluntarily choose to register their firearms. If that were the original intention of the one year amnesty when it was announced almost three years ago, why was there a need to continually renew it? The reason the amnesty was renewed is because the Prime Minister has made it very clear that he does not support effective gun control in Canada and he wants to find a way to do what he cannot do legislatively in this House, which is to weaken the firearms registry that is so important for public safety.

The government's true agenda with respect to gun control and public safety is found in two measures. It is found in private member's Bill C-301. The government likes to say that it is a private member's bill but it is the first time I have seen the Prime Minister address a large gathering of persons in front of the media and urge members of Parliament to support a private member's bill, as the Prime Minister did in support of Bill C-301.

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However, when the Prime Minister's office realized that it was an irresponsible and appalling piece of legislation, which, for example, as my colleagues have identified, would allow people to transport automatic weapons such as machine guns through neighbourhoods on their way to a target range, it then said that the government would not support the bill on the same day the Prime Minister publicly called upon members of Parliament to vote for it. However, as a way to sort of recoup the embarrassment, the government then presented in the other place Bill S-5.

It is pretty transparent why the government did that. It is because it does not have the courage to move legislation in this House of Commons that would weaken public safety and compromise the safety of police officers and Canadians by weakening gun control measures across the country.

● (1125)

[*Translation*]

The government likes to use this issue to try to drive a wedge between rural and urban Canada and has done so on many occasions.

I have been fortunate enough to be elected four times in a rural riding in New Brunswick. The largest town in my riding is probably Sackville, which has about 5,000 people. The rest of my riding consists of small towns or unincorporated areas that do not have a municipal government.

So I have been elected four times in a rural riding and I have visited hunting and fishing clubs there. Where I live, in the Grande-Digue area of New Brunswick, the local hunting and fishing club organizes a community lunch once a month on Sunday morning. I have gone to it many times.

It is not true that our position in favour of registering all firearms means we are against the legitimate use of hunting rifles in parts of the country where hunting is a common sport.

The Prime Minister tries to use this issue to divide people. I can assure the House that the Liberal Party fully respects the legitimate use of firearms, whether for sport or by people who simply collect guns. We also value the lives of the people who are responsible for ensuring the safety of Canadians all across the country, including in rural areas, and who want us to keep the firearms registry.

The idea that rural areas are safe from threats to public safety and tragedies involving guns is also not realistic. Just a few months ago in the town in Shediac, where I have my riding office, someone died as a result of a crime. Three people entered a house and killed a young man with a hunting rifle. Criminal charges were laid a few weeks ago and the case is now before the New Brunswick courts.

Public safety definitely matters to people in the town of Shediac, New Brunswick, on the banks of the Northumberland Strait, just as it interests people in such big Canadian cities as Vancouver, Toronto, Winnipeg or Montreal. We are all affected by measures to improve public safety, but it is in the interests of us all to preserve a balance between the legitimate use of firearms and the need to have a full and complete registry that is used more than 9,400 times a day by Canadian police officers who need to consult the registry for their own protection and to conduct criminal investigations.

[*English*]

The Liberals are interested and will always be interested in ways to improve the registration process for firearms. We acknowledge that over a number of years there have been some improvements but there can continue to be ways to make registration easier and simpler for those who legitimately have firearms that are not prohibited weapons for legitimate purposes.

To have an interest in seeing how we can improve the firearms registry for those who apply to have firearms registered is as legitimate as the desire to want to preserve the integrity of the firearms registry and not allow an amnesty, which is an irresponsible back door measure to do what the government does not have the courage to do legislatively, which is weaken the firearms registry across the country.

We spend a lot of time in the House talking about public safety and about ways improve criminal legislation. We have seen a number of examples where Liberals have worked with other parties in the House and the government to make amendments to the Criminal Code that will improve public safety.

Yesterday, the House passed Bill C-25 at second reading and it will now go before the justice committee. That was important because it would reduce the two for one remand credit which will improve public confidence in the justice system. We also supported Bills C-14 and C-15. Yesterday evening, I, along with my colleague who chairs the justice committee and committee members, passed Bill C-14 without amendment and it will be referred back to the House. That bill attacks some of the difficult problems of organized crime. It would the police increased ability to lay criminal charges to deal with some of the tragedies in some of the difficult situations that we have seen in places like Vancouver.

On this side of the House, the Liberals are very interested in working in ways that are responsible, balanced and recognize the importance of Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms but we also recognize that the Criminal Code needs to be modernized and strengthened and to give police officers and prosecutors the tools they need to preserve and improve public safety.

One of those tools is a national system of gun control. Canadians across the country support the idea that there should be effective gun control measures in the country. Much to the chagrin of Conservative members, that includes, in the opinion of police officers and police chiefs, the registration of all firearms in Canada as an essential tool in the pursuit of improved public safety.

● (1130)

[*Translation*]

Our hon. colleague from Marc-Aurèle-Fortin was right to introduce this motion and we intend to support it.

[*English*]

We will be supporting this motion when it comes before the House for a vote because we will not play the games that the Conservative Party wants to play in pretending that this is a great divide between rural and urban Canada.

I stand before the House, as a member elected in a rural riding, as living proof that the people in my riding support effective gun control measures and understand that when the police officers across the country say to us that this is one of many tools they need to improve public safety, we should be careful before acting in an irresponsible way that would diminish and reduce something that I think we all share as a desire to have safer communities, safer homes and safer streets all across the country.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member who just spoke for his flattering remarks towards me. It is more a case of my experience than of my personal values. Perhaps, my experience is also part of my personality.

This morning we heard the Conservatives say that the purpose of the amnesty is to allow those who have not yet registered their weapons to do so. At the same time, we also heard some very strong criticism of the firearms registry and they do give us the impression that they want to abolish it. How do you think someone who has not registered a firearm will react? Will that person want to register a firearm as a result of this amnesty? Indeed, if he or she wants to register a firearm, could they not do it before May 16? Or on the other hand, will he or she rather have a tendency to believe that they do not need to register it until the Conservatives succeed in their ultimate goal? The answer to that question is too easy and I know it, of course.

For that reason, I will ask a shorter question. There are two ways of fighting against crimes committed with a firearm: by control or by dissuasion. It is true that the Conservatives emphasize dissuasion. Control is prevention. How does the member believe that we should seek a balance between control and dissuasion?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Marc-Aurèle-Fortin has, in fact, asked two good questions. As he clearly said in his last question, if we are seeking measures that will improve public security, there must be a balance. Dissuasion through the Criminal Code and legislative measures in terms of criminal law are very important. Whether it is the setting of minimum sentences, dealing with particular offences, changing the Criminal Code or giving prosecutors other tools for dealing with certain difficult situations, such as in Vancouver, or against organized crime in some regions, as in Montreal, for example, a few years ago. However, we also need the element of control and prevention

The Conservatives do not believe in prevention. They have money for that purpose that they are not spending. For all practical purposes, they want to abolish the firearms registry, which is an important measure of control in the fight against criminal activity. My colleague has also described very well the contradiction between the idea of an amnesty to encourage people to register weapons and a promise, at the same time, to abolish the firearms registry. It makes no sense. The other place is looking at Bill S-5 which shows that flagrant contradiction and I thank my colleague for pointing that out.

• (1135)

[*English*]

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my hon. colleague for his eloquent speech. I was very interested in what he had to say, particularly on an issue that concerns all of us as

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legislators, those who are responsible and charged with making responsible laws and good governance for our country.

I was very much intrigued in what he had to say in terms of our role in making public law and the responsible nature in which the government is supposed to uphold the law. It basically is telling Canadians that it is okay to ignore the law. It is trying to find a partisan wedge issue between urban and rural communities, but the divide does not really exist.

As my colleague mentioned, he is from a rural riding and I am from an urban riding, yet there is no divide. We understand the importance of legitimate gun owners, but at the same time the registry, which is used 9,000 times a day by police officials, is very much essential. It is irresponsible for the government to suspend the law and tell officials of the justice system to ignore it or put it aside. This is not the way we do things in our country.

Could my hon. colleague comment further on—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The hon. member for Beauséjour.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Davenport went right to the heart of the issue. The idea that one could have an amnesty from a provision of criminal legislation in Canada makes no sense at all. It is a very cynical kind of political way to do what cannot be done legislatively, doing it indirectly and in a rather unprecedented way.

The only example I can think of is a practice at the Canada Revenue Agency. If people voluntarily disclose income that may not have reported on previous tax returns, they may not face a criminal prosecution for tax evasion. The tax will have to be paid and there will probably be interest and penalties applied, but there will be no prosecution for tax evasion if people voluntarily come forward and say that they forgot to disclose income received when they filed their income tax return three years ago and that they would like to report it on their income tax return for the current year.

Criminal law with respect to something as important as gun control and public safety is hardly like a tax measure, which encourages people to come forward and report income which may not have been reported.

A better example is the idea that we would suspend Criminal Code provisions on impaired driving at Christmastime, because sometimes it is hard to get a cab and people go to different functions. It makes no sense at all.

The motion before us asks the government to correct what is a really cynical measure, allegedly designed, as my colleague from Marc-Aurèle-Fortin said, to encourage people to voluntarily come forward and register their guns. However, at the same time the government is telling them not to panic, that it really wants to abolish the firearms registry, once and for all. It makes no sense at all.

Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I enjoyed hearing my colleague's remarks. I also enjoy his participation on our justice committee. I sense there is perhaps a better working relationship on the committee this time around, and I appreciate that.

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I want to take issue with one of his comments. He said that our Conservative government did not care for prevention when it came to crime and to the issues of drug dealing and drug use in Canada. In fact, in 2007 our government introduced a \$10 million fund to specifically address the issue of prevention and to provide the kind of education to those youth who perhaps could find themselves getting into a life of crime. We also provided an additional \$32 million for drug treatment in Canada.

I challenge the member to perhaps correct his statement and acknowledge that our Conservative government took steps that the previous government never did.

• (1140)

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Abbotsford is correct about the justice committee. We saw that last evening, and we have seen it in a number of previous meetings.

I think all members from all parties in the House are making an effort to work together to improve criminal legislation, to study issues like organized crime, which represents a challenge in so many communities across the country, small rural communities in northern New Brunswick, for example, and large urban centres like Vancouver and Montreal. He is right about that.

He identified the national drug program that was announced some years ago, and I remember that announcement. I remember thinking it was a good step and a modest step in the right direction.

The focus of the government is not in helping people with addictions. It is not in seeing harm reduction as an important element of public safety. The government is always threatening to shut down Insite in Vancouver, an important public health experiment asked for by responsible public health authorities and other elected officials in that community.

The government cut literacy programs, which was appalling. One thing that helps people earn a productive living, participate in their workforce and improve their quality of life is the ability to read and to write, basic literacy skills. In various regions of the country there are some alarming statistics, yet the government turned around and cut literacy programs and youth at risk programs.

The government can choose narrow windows where it did something positive, but at the end of the day it has really damaged crime prevention in the country. We think that is regrettable.

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was having a discussion with my colleague from Timmins—James Bay about the factual reality that we were still having a debate on the gun registry so many years after it was introduced into law.

I was telling him that for a while I had been studying the experience that Australia went through. It is similar in terms of its initiation into attempts at gun control, gun registration and regulation. Our attempt in Canada was prompted, to a significant degree, by the massacre at Polytechnique in Montreal. Australia's attempt was prompted by an incident on the island of Tasmania, where some 45 people were killed in one incident of mass murder. These incidents prompted governments to react.

The debate has ceased in Australia. Its gun regulation is stronger and more extensive than it is in Canada. However, we continue to

have the debate and it is in part because of really gross incompetence on the part of the Liberal government of the day in the deployment of the gun registry, the long gun registry in particular, and its inability to bring provincial governments onside.

I do not know if this is accurate, but I am told that the decision made by the Liberal government of the day was to do this and that it did not need the provinces onside. There was an arrogance, as described to me, but I am not sure how real that was.

In Australia all six of the state governments were onside. Australia has a federated system like ours. It has legislation at the state level and at the federal level. As I said earlier, it has a much more stringent regulation of guns than in Canada.

While reading this material, one of the points I came across was the fact that for 10 years after the regulations and laws went into place, Australia did not have one incident of multiple murders. It was a whole 10 years before Australia had any reoccurrence and those incidents were minor by comparison to some of the experiences it had before the regulations and laws went into effect.

In terms of my analysis, this has become as much an emotional issue as a factual issue. It is unfortunate that we are at that stage, but I understand it in quite some depth.

I have rural areas in my riding. A number of my constituents are hunters and they have strong feelings against the registry. When I discuss it with them, the cost always comes up, the incompetence on the part of the Liberal administration of the day in allowing the cost to escalate to such a degree.

The Auditor General has said that the costs are under control. The RCMP has taken over and it has it under control. She says that it is an effective mechanism.

The anger on the waste that has gone on still overwhelms those factual arguments. I do not think those people hear me and unfortunately that is probably true of a number of members of the Conservative Party. They are overwhelmed by that history and cannot see their way through it.

Another very small group of people oppose the gun registry to a significant degree on principle and on their philosophy of life. These people are opposed to any control at all, whether it is handguns, or long guns, or rapid fire weapons or assault weapons. They do not want government involved in their use of weapons at all. Fortunately these people make up a fairly small percentage of our population, probably no more than 5%.

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• (1145)

Then there is the third group. They have issues in the way the registry functions. I am thinking in particular of people from the rural areas and the northern part of the country. Our first nations are probably the best example. People in the third group feel that the system could perhaps be modified for those regions. I have some significant sympathy in that regard. I think that if in fact we are going to have any reform in the legislation, the Firearms Act, that is the area that we should be looking at.

Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Outremont. I will only use half the slotted time.

Australia, a country that is similar to us, had the same experience. It is very true in Canada that the registry has been effective. It has reduced significantly, by as much as two-thirds, the domestic murders committed with long guns. Those are incontrovertible facts. The suicide rate with the use of long guns has reduced itself dramatically since the registry was in place.

The fact that I find perhaps as telling as those two is that the number of accidental deaths with the use of guns has dropped dramatically. That result has occurred because of the number of guns that have been taken out of circulation.

There was a survey done of gun owners around 2001-02. One of the questions asked of people was when they last used their guns. Over 50% of them said they had never used their long guns.

When the registry came into effect, people had to pay to register their long guns and a good number of them said it was no longer necessary, they were not going to use them any more, they were not going to put any money out, and turned their guns in. A huge number of weapons were turned in that were not stored properly and were not being taken care of properly from a safety standpoint.

When people had to meet the requirements under the act, they simply got rid of their guns because they were not using them. They were not real hunters and were not using them for recreational purposes. The effect of that has been to dramatically reduce accidental deaths, such as kids getting a hold of guns because their parents or custodians had not properly stored them.

It has had that impact in those three areas. Domestic murders are down dramatically, suicides with long guns are down dramatically, and accidental deaths are down dramatically.

The other point I want to make when I am assessing my position on gun control and the gun registry is to say there are arguments on both sides of this and they are valid. I do not want to take that away from the people who are opposed to the gun registry. Ultimately, as members of Parliament, we have to assess both sides and so we look to other sources, experts and knowledgeable people, to give us some direction. On this issue, I have looked to our police forces. They are the front line.

As everyone has heard today from other members, the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police is adamant that we need the kind of system we have in place now, that it is effective and usable, and police forces use it. We have heard in the last few days very strong language of a similar nature coming from the Canadian Police

Association. We hear from the Conservatives in particular that it is leadership. It is not.

This morning I met with members of the CPA on the Hill regarding their lobby and efforts. These are people from Windsor. They are very clear that the rank and file and regular police officers are saying they need it, they use the system, they need it for their own personal protection, and for the protection of society. As a test, they are the people we should be listening to.

• (1150)

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have spoken on several occasions already this morning on not only the effects of the registry, or the non-effects of the registry, but also on the fact that we believe there needs to be stronger measures taken to combat crime in Canada.

I would ask the member, knowing that he is a long time member of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, about an amendment that was brought forward in the justice committee. Yesterday, at the justice committee, the Bloc moved an amendment to take out the mandatory minimum penalties for drive-by shootings and other reckless shootings in Bill C-14, which the committee is examining. The NDP supported the Bloc amendment. Obviously, it goes without saying that had this amendment passed, it would have seriously weakened the intent of the bill, but with the support of the Liberals, that amendment was not approved.

I would like to ask my hon. colleague from the NDP, why did the NDP decide to support a Bloc amendment that would take out the mandatory minimum penalties for drive-by shootings?

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, I have a long history in the House since I have been our justice critic on speaking to the need to clean up our Criminal Code.

We have huge conflicts within the code and we have huge redundancies within the code. This was one of the examples of it. If a person is convicted under that section, which is the point that was made by the Bloc in presenting the amendment, if a person is in fact convicted of a drive-by shooting, the mandatory minimum is already in the code. It would add absolutely nothing. It does not weaken the section. It does not alter it in any way at all in terms of its impact.

We supported the mandatory minimums in the use of guns, we as a party, in the last Parliament. We did that because we know they are a scourge in society. We supported it, but I am not prepared, and I say that as an individual member of Parliament but also on behalf of my party, to simply keep clogging up the Criminal Code with those kinds of redundant, useless provisions. We have to at some point say, "Stop doing it".

• (1155)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to my hon. colleague. As he well knows, I represent a rural region, where people have had a lot of concerns about the gun registry and the way that gun registry was implemented. We also see how the Conservatives send mailings into our ridings, saying they will take on the gun registry and try to inflame people.

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However, when we look at Bill C-301, residents in my riding are certainly horrified to see a bill that would allow machine guns to be transported, making it easier for prohibited arms to be carried around, and allowing individuals with the illegal possession of prohibitive handguns to keep them, which is under clause 8. This bill is a Trojan Horse allowing people in urban areas to drive around with Berettas in their SUVs.

I want to ask my colleague why he thinks the Conservatives would float a bill that is so reckless it would allow gangbangers in Vancouver to have a field day and use that while trying to create a greater urban-rural divide and play upon the resentment that exists in rural Canada toward the gun registry?

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, the member has hit the point in part, in terms of his question giving some of the answer on that divide that unfortunately all too often we see from not only the Conservative Party but the right-wing ideologists who model themselves after the Republicans in the United States, knowing that if they divide society and get people lined up on their side, it helps their political aspirations and their ideology. That is part of it.

In addition to that, and I do not want to sound like I am paranoid, there is also a clear expression here. In my speech I talked about the 5% who just philosophically are opposed to any government involvement in gun registration or gun control. They are absolutely opposed to it. There is no need for it and they will not tolerate that. That 5% drove a number of those sections and drove the member from Saskatchewan, who authored that bill, to begin to initiate the total destruction of the gun registry, not just the long gun registry but handguns, restricted weapons, assault weapons, all of those, that on the surface we all say none of us want. However, there is that small percentage, and I think that is what was driving him when he drafted the bill, who would like to get rid of the registry completely, not just the long gun registry.

[Translation]

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there are these issues in our society that can be used to widen the divisions that already exist. The firearms registry debate is one of those issues. My colleague from Windsor—Tecumseh has just given us a list, with the evidence, of the kinds of deaths that have declined as a result of the existence of a firearms registry, including registration of hunting weapons, rifles and so on.

He said that the number of murders in Canada is falling, and that is tangible. The number of murders with that kind of firearm is falling dramatically. The number of accidents, because the weapons were very often improperly stored, where young people found themselves with a gun in their hands, has also dropped dramatically. As well, the number of suicides with that kind of firearm has also radically declined.

When we see that an instrument of public policy can produce results like that, can reduce the number of murders, the number of suicides and the number of accidental deaths, it is entirely reasonable to expect to see complete unanimity in this House. And yet we see from the tone and content of the question the Conservative member just put to my colleague that once again, the Conservatives are pulling out all the stops to create a problem where there is none and to advance their extreme right-wing ideology.

What the question referred to was a sham, a pointless, redundant amendment proposed by the Conservatives, because there are already provisions in the Criminal Code that deal with this firearms issue. They want to be able to go back to their *Reform Party* base and say that they are proposing amendments and want to have longer minimum sentences for gangs with firearms, and the separatists and socialists are standing in their way.

That is completely false, however. The Criminal Code already addresses this. The minimum sentences are in the Code now. This was a purely partisan manoeuvre by them in the parliamentary committee this week. But that did not prevent them from rising and making their stand here in the House. They convince themselves they are here to protect, when abolishing the firearms registry will make it easier to get guns.

That does not mean that there are no irritants in the system and we certainly have no intention of denying the administrative boondoggle caused by the incompetent Liberals who put the registry in place. The Liberals show their incompetence every time they introduce a program. They signed the Kyoto protocol, but instead of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 6%, they increased them by 30%. For them, it is always a matter of perception. Eddie Goldenberg, Jean Chrétien's former chief of staff, once said that the Liberals had signed the Kyoto protocol "to galvanize public opinion". So it was just a public relations stunt. In this case, they brought in legislation to create a gun registry. The cost exceeded \$1 billion. Let us think about that. Years later, it is still not quite done, it is very expensive and it is badly administered.

In Quebec, when the parental insurance program was brought in, it took no more than six weeks for the first cheques to be issued. That is good public administration, but people have a tendency to confuse bad public administration by the Liberals with the critical need to maintain the gun registry. True, there was incompetence in the way it was set up, but now that the registry is there, the argument is turning against the Conservatives. They are shooting themselves in the foot. They say that because of that incompetence, the registry has to be abolished. No, it cost too much money. Maybe the Liberals were incompetent in putting it in place, but it is there now. The last thing we want to do is to add insult to injury. Not only does the registry save lives, as was just shown, but it exists, it is there and it cost a lot of money. That is one more argument for maintaining the registry, for the sake of the taxpayers who paid for it.

There are people like Louis-Gilles Francoeur from *Le Devoir*, an avid hunter, who explains certain situations that may arise under the current legislation. For example, someone may drop a hunting rifle and damage it. That person may then have to borrow a rifle from a fellow hunter.

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• (1200)

It could be a criminal offence if the papers were not handed on at the same time. This is the kind of thing which can be corrected. It is called an irritant. Removing it would never take away the obligation for one person or the other to register the firearms. There are fees. Are they too high? Perhaps. The question needs to be examined. Is there a way to make registering firearms easier and more accessible? We should make sure that there are more places where registration can take place or help can be obtained. All those irritants can be corrected. There is no need to abolish the firearms registry.

Some people in rural Canada are convinced that they are bearing the brunt of the problems in urban areas. However, the numbers given by my colleague from Windsor—Tecumseh tend to show that this not only a matter of crime in urban areas. Even in rural areas, access to firearms is too easy, and accidents, suicides and murders can occur.

I will never insist enough on the advice of the police chiefs of Canada, who are dedicated to public safety. They are supposedly the typical supporters for Conservatives, who boast about being the great defenders of law and order. If they believe that police forces must be listened to, can they for once walk the talk and listen to the police chiefs? I have a son who is now a father and who has been a police officer for 10 years. He is a sergeant in the Laurentian region. When he approaches a house to which he has been called for a case of domestic violence, I like to think that he knows if there are firearms on the other side of the door. I attended the funeral of Laval constable Valérie Gignac. I was there. She was shot at close range, through a door and through her bullet-proof vest. That is the reality of police officers in Canada.

In the name of law and order, instead of satisfying their desire to pander to their Reform base, will the Conservatives listen to Canada's police officers, who are unanimous in asking them to maintain the gun registry? It is a question of public safety, which is supposed to be the Conservatives' be all and end all, so they should listen for once. But no. This is exactly the same situation as last year. They introduced a private member's bill to impose a double sentence if a pregnant woman is the victim of crime. It was clear; I was sitting next to them and Conservative back-benchers openly said that their ploy was meant to re-open the debate on abortion legislation in Canada. It was patently obvious. It is always the same. Under the guise of doing something else, they try to introduce the policies and social objectives that stem directly from the Reform wing of what was once the Progressive Conservative Party. The word "progressive" was removed, and rightly so.

Eliminating the gun registry would be a clear step backwards for our society. We are up against one of the most powerful lobbies there is. The gun lobby is a well-oiled machine with solid financial backing. It has been operating across the United States for years, and it is now well established in Canada. Furthermore, it has its henchmen, the Conservatives, to do its dirty work here.

Persuaded by the wisdom of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, which supports maintaining the gun registry, the NDP members will rise in this House to say no to the Conservatives as they try to eliminate this tool to protect the public, and we will say yes to any amendment that could make this registry more accessible,

simpler, more flexible and less expensive for our citizens, while guaranteeing the protection of Canadians.

• (1205)

[English]

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Madam Speaker, perhaps my colleague from Outremont could pursue a bit more the attention we should be paying to the positions taken by the Canadian Police Association and the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police.

In that regard, I want to read from a letter that the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police sent to our leader, the member for Toronto—Danforth. The last paragraph of the letter concludes with this sentence:

All guns are potentially dangerous, all gun owners need to be licensed, all guns need to be registered and gun owners need to be accountable for their firearms.

The Canadian Police Association, in a letter to the leader of the official opposition, which has been made public, said:

We...consider the licensing of firearms owners and the registration of firearms to be a valuable public safety tool for front-line police officers.

That quote is from the letter from the association's president, Charles Momy. He referred to the most recent and horrific incident in Canada at Mayerthorpe, Alberta. It is little known but the two additional men who had been caught and now have been convicted of manslaughter were traced from a gun that was found at the scene which belonged to one of them. The gun registry mechanism was used to determine that.

I would ask my colleague from Outremont to comment more extensively on the attention we should be paying to the role the Canadian Police Association and the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police have played.

• (1210)

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: Madam Speaker, with regard to the chiefs, they are looking at it from the overall perspective of public security and public safety. They find that the gun registry is just that: a tool for public security. Viewed through the lens of public security, much of the work that we do here always has the same purpose, whether it is for food inspection or making sure that we have a registry in place to reduce the potential risks from firearms.

With regard to the front-line officers, that is an important point. I mentioned in French that unfortunately in the space of just over a year, I attended two funerals in Laval, which used to be my riding provincially in Quebec. One funeral was for a young female police officer in Laval, Valérie Gignac, who was shot through the door with a hunting rifle and the bullet went right through her bulletproof vest. That is the type of firearm that has to be controlled. I know that case very well, unfortunately.

If anybody thinks about it for just one second, if a police officer is approaching a home where there has been a signalling of a domestic dispute, that police officer is not going to be more or less careful depending on the existence of registered arms. They are always going to be careful, but it gives them just that little advantage, just that little extra prudence, knowing that there is a gun registered in that home. Perhaps they will wait that extra minute for somebody else to show up, to have a slightly different approach.

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These are the apostles of law and order on the Conservative side. They preach about it all day long. It is interesting that the Canadian Chiefs of Police, with one voice, the representatives of Canadian police officers, with one voice, today in Quebec the representatives of all police unions, with one voice are calling upon this Parliament to maintain the gun registry in the interest of law and order and the protection of the public.

It is very interesting to see who is offside with the application of the principle of law and order. It is the Conservatives because they are dogmatic, they are ideologues and they are playing this whole thing to their Reform base. Shame on them.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to congratulate the member for Outremont on his excellent speech, but most of all, I would like to congratulate the member for Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, who has been involved in this public safety policy for several years.

This public safety policy reminds us that registering guns is of vital importance because it enables police officers to make well-informed decisions when responding to situations in which such knowledge can make all the difference. I will talk more about that later.

As I listened to the members, I remembered that some of our fellow citizens sometimes say that all politicians are the same. Sometimes I hear that when I am meeting with my fellow citizens. Some people say that all of the political parties are the same too. People listening to today's debate—we will be debating this issue from 10:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.—will become aware of a few things.

I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup. We will speak for 10 minutes each.

Today, those of our fellow citizens who think that all political parties are the same will see that there is indeed a difference. Some parties believe that it is neither a constitutional right nor a privilege to have a firearm. It is a responsibility that must be controlled. Of course, many people can own firearms and be completely responsible and diligent about it. However, that does not make it a right; it is a privilege.

For public safety reasons, we have asked our fellow citizens to register their firearms and to hold a possession licence. I just want to point out that, as my colleague from Marc-Aurèle-Fortin said, there is no fee associated with registering. The fee is charged for the firearm possession licence, not for registration itself.

I would like to give only one statistic. For the fourth consecutive year, we are asking for a firearms registry including restricted firearms, but also, ideally, unrestricted hunting rifles. That is not insignificant. Since 2006 it has not been possible to prosecute hunters who own unrestricted firearms and who, for one reason or another, did not register them. They have been repeatedly granted amnesty. The Bloc Québécois is calling today for an end to the renewal of the amnesty for unrestricted hunting rifles.

Let us now take a closer look at the situation. I was a member of this House when the debate started with Mrs. McLellan, who was

then replaced by Mr. Allan Rock. There were extremely passionate statements from both sides. At the time, my colleague Mr. Michel Bellehumeur was the spokesperson on this issue for the Bloc Québécois. My party had in mind the need for public safety.

What kind of judgment should we now make about the existence of this registry and the obligation to let the mandated authority know about the presence of firearms in a given place?

Since the registry was first created, some 20,000 licences have been cancelled, always for the sake of public safety. The individuals who lost their licence were believed for good reasons to be people who might misuse firearms.

● (1215)

I am not talking about revoking 1, 2 or 3 firearm licences but, rather, 20,000.

I also have a brother who is a police officer. He is my oldest brother and he was the biggest one when we were growing up. I came in second, and I hope no one doubts what I am saying. As we know, it is now harder to enrol in the police techniques program—and I hope I am not disappointing the hon. member for Marc-Aurèle-Fortin when I say that—than to be admitted to the faculty of law. Fewer candidates are accepted in the police techniques program than in the law schools of major Canadian universities. Being a police officer is an extremely important responsibility. It requires judgment, intellectual dexterity, and the ability to think quickly. Being a police officer is not merely a matter of physical strength. Police officers are very important front line workers in our communities.

My brother is a police officer and I would not want to know that he has to intervene urgently in a serious domestic dispute. I think it is useful, necessary and critical to know whether there are guns in a house where an officer is sent. I was told about a case that I would like to share with parliamentarians in this House.

In the winter of 2003, officers from the Montreal police department had to intervene in a case of domestic violence. Quebec has a zero tolerance policy regarding violence, but we are even more vigilant in the case of domestic violence, because there is a very real risk of the situation deteriorating. The spouse who called the police department was afraid because her husband, who had been hospitalized, was now coming home. He was in possession of a real arsenal that included 26 handguns, 16 hunting weapons and 45,000 rounds of ammunition. Surely, it was important for the officers who went to that house to have this information. In this specific case, action was immediately taken to seize those guns. If the search had proven unsuccessful, the officers could have done some research. Thanks to the gun registry, they knew that this individual was in possession of the arsenal that I just described.

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These are reasons that lead us to be very supportive of this initiative, as we have been since the very beginning of this debate, when Bill C-68 was introduced by the previous government. As parliamentarians, we do not have the right to question the existence of such a tool, or to remain passive when the government is contemplating to extend year after year the amnesty on hunting weapons, as if these firearms did not have a harmful potential, as if they could not kill someone, be used to commit a homicide, be discharged accidentally, or be used by someone who is suicidal. These are exceptional situations, but they do exist and they are very real.

I will conclude by saying that the issue of costs is not a good argument. Of course, the Bloc was here when these costs were estimated at \$1 billion, and then at \$2 billion. But the Auditor General confirmed to the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security that these costs are now under control, and she provided guarantees to parliamentarians. That is the kind of guarantee that we must have, and we have it.

I am concluding by congratulating my party for using its allotted day to put this issue before the House. I hope that all parliamentarians will support this motion from the Bloc Québécois.

• (1220)

[*English*]

Mr. Rob Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC): Madam Speaker, what I have heard here is an example of an extremely flawed logic. It is the logic that got us into the mess of the gun registry in the first place.

The hon. member seems to believe that we should be targeting, with a giant bureaucracy costing over \$1 billion, law-abiding citizens, citizens like the people who live in my riding of Fundy Royal, many of whom have never had a speeding ticket in their life. He wants to have a law that brings them into violation of the Criminal Code.

Yesterday we had an opportunity in the justice committee to target the real perpetrators of crime, target gang violence. Our government bill, which targets gang violence, was before the committee. It specifically targets the offence, which we all agree is a terrible offence, of drive-by shootings. Our bill has a mandatory minimum four year penalty for someone who commits a drive-by shooting but the hon. member introduced a motion that eliminated that mandatory minimum.

On one hand, we have someone saying that we should target the grandma and grandpa in my riding who happen to have a rifle or a shotgun, the people who have never been in violation of the law in their life, with a giant bureaucracy and bring the full weight of the federal government down on those people but do not target someone who has perpetrated the crime of a drive-by shooting. I do not understand the logic.

Could the member reconcile those differences?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Réal Ménard: Madam Speaker, the parliamentary secretary should be ashamed of his narrow-mindedness and demagoguery.

How can he rise in this House and reduce this debate to mere bureaucratic considerations?

First, the member made a connection that is totally unfair. As a political party, we have always been opposed to mandatory minimum sentences being included in government legislation because they simply do not work. That is the first thing. Second, the gun registry and the amnesty in question for long guns, without restrictions, have nothing to do with bureaucratic realities. It takes someone who is pretty narrow-minded, who lacks human sensitivity and who personifies the most appalling conservative tradition to reduce this debate to mere bureaucratic considerations when the real issue that needs to be debated here is public safety.

• (1225)

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Madam Speaker, a few weeks ago I went to see the movie *Polytechnique*, which will be shown here tonight and which is a painful re-enactment of the Montreal massacre that devastated the victims' families.

After that tragedy, in early 1994—I arrived in 1993—the legislators in this House began to look for solutions to these problems and to try to put in place as comprehensive a system as possible to keep unwanted guns out of circulation.

In rural areas such as mine, which are not exempt from the possibility of violence, especially spontaneous violence—domestic or family violence, for example—there has been a very significant reduction in the number of deaths caused by guns after the registry was established and the system implemented.

Today, the Bloc Québécois has a consensus to inform the government through the motion moved that states:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should not extend the amnesty on gun control requirements set to expire on May 16, 2009, and should maintain the registration of all types of firearms in its entirety.

To ensure the effectiveness of registration, we must maintain the registration of all types of firearms in its entirety. I believe it is important to be able to continue doing so.

This morning we heard from representatives of police associations, among others, who showed us how useful this tool is for police. It allows them to intervene in a much more sensible and logical way, and to have as much information as possible about the state of the people they will encounter and the potential presence of guns in a given situation. I believe we absolutely must be able to continue going in this direction.

Business of Supply

In the second part of my speech, I will attempt to debunk some of the myths that exist around this. First there is the supposedly high cost of the gun registry. In her first report on this, the Auditor General of Canada, Sheila Fraser, indicated that costs of the gun control program have been under control since 2002. So that problem no longer exists. The annual costs of the gun control program has markedly decreased, from \$200 million in 2001 to \$73 million. What is more, while the program costs \$73.7 million a year, the annual cost of registration is \$14.6 million, or \$10 million less than the upper limit of \$25 million set in 2005-06. So that deflates the first argument: gun control is not all that costly, given the results it allows us to achieve.

Then there is the second myth: abolishing the registry would enable the government to save millions of dollars, which could be invested in more effective crime prevention programs. This is not so. According to the plan announced by the Conservatives, amendments to the registry to exclude long guns should allow the government to save a little over \$10 million annually, because the registry would continue to operate for handguns and prohibited weapons. That is not enough money to fund better initiatives to reduce crime. In the end, the effect would be a negative one.

It is not true that abolishing the registry would allow the government to save millions which could be invested in more effective programs. The registry's very existence is an effective prevention program in itself.

According to the third myth, the Auditor General has supposedly indicated that the gun registry is useless. The Auditor General said nothing of the sort. She did identify certain flaws in the quality of the data contained in the gun registry. She did raise those points but she could not have made it any clearer as far as the registry's effectiveness is concerned: "We did not examine the effectiveness of the Canadian Firearms Program or its social implications." The claim that the Auditor General indicated that the registry is useless is absolutely false.

It is important to dispel these myths because we are dealing with an issue about which the public hears all kinds of information, even things that have nothing to do with the reality. The motion brought forward by the Bloc today gives us an opportunity to dispel these myths.

Here is the fourth myth: there is an increase in violent crime, which shows that the registry simply does not work and that more effective measures need to be put in place. That is totally false. Even though the media coverage of violent crime may lead us to believe that the number of such crimes increases every year, the reality is totally different.

• (1230)

We see a disproportionate number of reports on violent crime in relation to what is really happening. In the 1990s, there was a steady decrease in crime in Quebec as well as in Canada. Statistics Canada even confirmed recently that, for 2006, the overall crime rate in the country was at its lowest level in more than 25 years. And that is not all. Quebec had its lowest homicide rate since 1962. Another myth dispelled.

The fifth myth is that gun registration is a long, costly and complicated process. That is not the case.

I am having a problem with my voice and I will have to end my remarks before my time is up. However, it has been shown that the situation has improved thanks to the gun registry.

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Madam Speaker, I was not here when the member from New Brunswick and Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice asked the member for Hochelaga about expenditures and the fact that it is so costly. I would like to know if the member has heard about the Prime Minister coming to New Brunswick before the last election, to the riding where the registry is administered, and stating, with the local Conservative candidate, that nothing would change for the employees if firearms were no longer required to be registered. I would like to know if the member knew about it and if he had comments to make.

Mr. Paul Crête: Madam Speaker, about the costs, we are being told to the contrary that the registry works well and that 7.1 million firearms are now registered, of which 90% are hunting rifles. On average the registry was consulted 6,700 times a day in 2006, and since December 1, 1998, a total of 1,125,372 firearms have been exported, destroyed, neutralized or withdrawn from the Canadian information system, therefore reducing the risk of a firearm being used.

It has been shown that, as far as costs are concerned, the system is now under control and that, indeed, to maintain the present moratorium introduced by the Conservative government would not save a significant amount of money, but would make the registry much less effective. The motion from the Bloc needs to be passed by the House, so we can move forward. The government must finally understand how important it is to make the firearms registry fully operational again.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Parliamentary Secretary for Status of Women, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am rising to debate the motion tabled by the hon. member for the riding of Marc-Aurèle-Fortin.

I am fully aware that the issue of gun control, like all crime-related issues, is of great importance to this hon. member and all the hon. members of the House.

The government has established a balanced approach to gun control in Canada, an approach that does not try to criminalize legitimate owners of firearms or to impose an additional burden on them.

Canadians and Quebecers have, to a large extent, put their trust in this government because it has undertaken to stand up to criminals to ensure the integrity of and respect for victims' rights. Our balanced approach is part of a comprehensive plan which also aims to make our streets and our communities safer.

Business of Supply

The government has made major investments in crime prevention in the last three years and has provided law enforcement services with new and improved tools. The government is taking action against gangs and those who commit drug-related crimes. We are transforming the way that the justice system deals with criminals, while seeing to it that their victims receive all due respect.

Tackling the illegal use of firearms is one of the pillars of the government's public safety agenda. We have introduced longer mandatory prison sentences for gun crimes, and we have put tough new rules in place for the release on bail of persons charged with a serious weapons-related offence.

We are also strengthening the police presence in communities to fight armed crime with the aim of increasing the safety of Quebeckers and Canadians and their families. As a woman and a mother, I support my government's approach, particularly so that victims can finally hope to see the light of day and feel safe in our country.

We have invested \$7 million annually in tightening up the front-end screening of first-time firearm licence applicants, in order to keep firearms away from untrustworthy individuals. Just recently, we tabled a bill which, among other things, creates a new criminal offence for drive-by and other intentional shootings that involve reckless disregard of the life or safety of others.

In addition to taking these long-overdue actions, the government has proposed fundamental changes to gun registration laws. As members know, it is our intention to take an approach that aims for effectiveness without imposing an additional burden on farmers, duck hunters and other law-abiding Canadians, coupled with specific measures to prevent gun crime.

For example, we are going to fund initiatives designed to strengthen front-line policing, border security and the fight against organized crime. We feel that the gun control laws have to target the criminals, not the thousands of honest Canadians and Quebeckers who use rifles or shotguns to protect themselves, hunt, and otherwise earn a living.

Our goal is to prevent criminals from getting their hands on guns, not to create bureaucratic nightmares and needless costs for legitimate owners of non-restricted firearms.

With this objective, the government has introduced a number of measures to make it easier for gun owners to comply with the existing legislative requirements, since firearms owners whose weapons are registered are subject to continuous eligibility screening.

The motion currently before the House, which was put forward by the hon. member for Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, seeks to eliminate one of these measures.

● (1235)

In 2006, the then minister of public safety announced a one-year amnesty period to shield from prosecution those owners of non-restricted firearms whose license had expired, provided that they take the necessary steps to meet compliance requirements again within that period. This amnesty period, which the member seeks to

eliminate, has since been extended, and the government recently announced plans to extend it further, up to May 2010.

I should point out that I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Mégantic—L'Érable.

This amnesty is one of several measures taken by this government to enhance compliance with the law. In 2006, the former public safety minister also announced that license renewal fees would be waived. In other words, individuals would not have to pay a fee to renew or upgrade existing licenses or to replace expired licenses. Those individuals who had already paid such fee were reimbursed. It is important to note that new license applicants are still required to pay a license fee. Like the amnesty, the fee waivers was extended for one year.

In May of last year, the government introduced yet another measure to support compliance through a regulatory amendment that enables individuals with expired possession-only licences to apply for a new license without taking the Canadian firearm safety course. Most of the affected individuals are over 50 years of age, and they often reside in rural or remote areas where access to training is limited.

Collectively, these three measures form a comprehensive regulatory package intended to increase compliance levels, and they appear to be working. In just three years, from 2006 to 2008, the rate of renewal of possession-only licences increased by 15%. The initiative introduced last year to make it easier to renew these licences led approximately 11,000 holders of expired possession-only licences to comply once again with the Firearms Act.

As I mentioned earlier, the government plans to extend these measures for another year, until May 2010, to give more people the opportunity to comply with the gun control measures in the act. That is the government's goal, and the members opposite should want the same thing. This extension will also allow the government to develop and introduce long-term measures to help increase public safety and reduce the administrative burden on gun owners.

As I noted at the outset, the government has taken a balanced approach to gun control. We are absolutely committed to protecting the safety and security of Quebeckers and Canadians while ensuring that law-abiding citizens are not subjected to unnecessary registration procedures for legally acquired, non-restricted firearms.

Unfortunately, the motion before us is not prudent. The measures proposed by the hon. member would unnecessarily criminalize thousands of farmers, hunters and rural residents who are responsible gun owners. We would do better to work to protect victims of crime in this great country of ours.

Business of Supply

• (1240)

[*English*]

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Madam Speaker, I represent a very large region where many people have guns because they live in rural regions. I would say that the people in my riding are very responsible gun owners. They have had a lot of resentment about how the registry was implemented, and a lot of that resentment has been well founded.

However, I am concerned and responsible gun owners in my riding would also be concerned about the Conservatives' moves in claiming that they are going to deal with the gun registry through Bill C-301. It is being touted as a way of killing the gun registry, but when we look at the clauses in it, subclause 9(2) would make it easy to transport machine guns and assault weapons; subclause 9(1) would weaken transportation rules for restricted firearms; and clause 8 would allow individuals in illegal possession of prohibited handguns to keep them.

It seems to me that instead of presenting rural Canadians with a plan to deal with their resentments over the gun registry, the Conservative government is actually presenting a plan that would allow urban gangbangers to carry Berettas on the streets of Vancouver.

I would like to ask the member, if the Conservatives are very serious about the gun registry and addressing rural concerns, why does Bill C-301, which is their government bill, bring forward these kinds of provisions that allow machine guns, prohibited weapons and handguns to be carried, under the guise of claiming that they are going to help rural Canadians?

• (1245)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Madam Speaker, we must make it perfectly clear that it is not all firearms that are concerned, but only long guns used for hunting. We on this side feel that gun control legislation needs to target criminals, not the thousands of honest Canadians who use rifles and shotguns to protect their property. Our purpose is to stop criminals and to protect victims, whom the NDP too often forgets about.

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank our colleague for taking part in this debate but would ask her respectfully whether she will agree with me that, even if we are part of a pluralist society where everyone is entitled to his or her opinion, it is still the case that the gun registry is a measure that is extremely popular in Quebec. Our fellow citizens expect us to defend the integrity of this program. By allowing an amnesty for the fourth year in a row for long guns, she is suggesting that such weapons cannot be used in unfortunate incidents, and in cases of suicide and homicide. I do not think that logic will stand up to scrutiny.

Can she tell us, as a proud Quebecker and a person who subscribes to Quebec values—I have no doubt about her convictions—whether she will be supporting the Bloc Québécois motion, which would strengthen our friendship?

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Madam Speaker, I find this gentleman really very charming.

I will agree with him on several points. The gun and handgun registry remains in place. The demagoguery must stop and we must put in context what is true and what is not. The members across the way are trying to convince people that we want to do away with the registry completely. That is false. The gun and handgun registry is here to stay, and that is what we are saying on this side of the floor. As a woman, and a mother, I support my government's approach, because I feel it is time today to speak of the victims, which my colleagues over there never do. They are the ones we are thinking of, along with the many men and women in Quebec and in Canada who have long guns and use them within the laws of Canada. This is why the red tape needs to be reduced. We have to be guided by our hearts, our gut feelings, as well as our heads.

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to also have the opportunity to take part in this debate on the motion moved by my colleague, the hon. member for Marc-Aurèle-Fortin.

Quebeckers, like all Canadians, remember the tragedy that took place at the École Polytechnique in Montreal in 1989. We were all deeply affected by that incident, which, to this day, serves to remind us of the need to establish effective gun control measures and to understand the importance of fighting crime. Tragic incidents that have occurred in other places also remind many of us that much more needs to be done to fight crime and to ensure that guns do not find their way into the hands of people who pose a threat to the safety of our families, our streets or our communities.

The government has already done a great deal in this regard and we intend to do a lot more. I hope the motion moved here today is a sign that the members across the floor understand how important it is to implement effective measures for preventing crime and to cooperate with the government to get tough on crime, especially gun crime.

I would like to congratulate the hon. member for Marc-Aurèle-Fortin for moving his motion, which, despite its good intentions, has some major flaws.

In fact, this motion seems to suggest to the government that it should abandon all the measures brought forward over the past three years to ensure that gun owners comply with current gun legislation—measures that enhance public safety and prevent gun crime, while ensuring that more gun owners are subject to continuous eligibility screening.

By abandoning these measures, more Canadians would be at risk of being the victims of gun crime and this would weaken, rather than strengthen, gun control in general.

Business of Supply

We know now that many owners of non-restricted firearms, such as shotguns and hunting rifles—long guns—do not renew their licences when they expire, in large measure because of the cumbersome process established by the previous government, which turned out to be an administrative failure.

We also know that most of the people concerned are more than 50 years old and live in rural or remote areas, where access to training is more limited. Finally, we know from experience that only a small number of these people will comply with the firearms registration program, unless a special effort is made to facilitate registration.

That is why our government introduced a series of administrative measures in May 2006. We simplified the firearms licence renewal process by providing a temporary dispensation for two years and by looking into the renewal fees, and by reducing the fees that Canadians have to pay. As part of that initiative, people who had already paid the higher fee received a refund.

The government also declared an on criminal charges against owners of non-restricted firearms who take the necessary steps to comply with licensing requirements.

In 2008, we extended the amnesty period for another year, while undertaking measures intended to encourage a larger number of firearms owners to renew their licences and to register under the Canadian Firearms Program by allowing holders of possession-only licences to submit a new application. In that way, we eliminated the tedious requirement for experienced owners to take the Canadian firearm safety course to obtain a possession and acquisition licence.

What results did these measures produce? This targeted initiative led to an increase in compliance in some cases, even in the preliminary stage. For example, the renewal rate for possession-only licences increased from 50% to 65%.

Nearly 11,000 holders of expired possession-only licences are now in compliance with the federal legislative measures on firearms. There are more registrations under the Canadian Firearms Program. A greater number of owners of non-restricted firearms are in the process of renewing their licences, which involves ongoing verification of their eligibility.

● (1250)

The point of the review is to ensure that all known high-risk behaviour is automatically brought to the attention of chief firearms officers and law enforcement officers. More Canadians are being protected from potential gun crimes. That is what we were hoping to achieve with our initiatives and our commitment to implementing gun control measures. In light of these positive results, in March of this year, our government announced that it planned to extend these measures for an extra year until May 2010.

Our government is determined to ensure that our country has an effective gun control system. That is why we have taken the necessary measures to bring more gun owners into compliance with existing laws.

We are investing \$7 million per year to ensure more thorough screening of people requesting an initial firearms permit and to keep firearms out of the hands of untrustworthy individuals. We have to

make sure that firearms control measures keep guns out of the hands of those who threaten our communities, our safety and our lives.

Firearms control measures must enhance public safety and community safety by preventing dangerous individuals from obtaining firearms and by imposing serious consequences if they use them to commit crimes. That is what Quebeckers and Canadians want.

The government is committed to maintaining an effective gun control system while tackling the use of firearms for criminal purposes by getting tough on criminals. As such, I cannot support my colleague's motion because it would weaken gun control and expose us all to greater risk.

● (1255)

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am trying to remain calm and impassive, but I hope you understand how disappointed I am.

First, I thought the minister was a dove in cabinet and espoused the values we are conveying today.

It seems to me that his speech is somewhat contradictory. I am not questioning the genuineness of his convictions, but I want to ask him how he can stand up in this House and say that the government wants to maintain an efficient system and work on the integrity of that system when, for the fourth year in a row, a whole slew of people will not have to comply with the renewal process and meet their obligations under the system.

Is there not something contradictory in his speech? Can he explain what is so administratively cumbersome about what owners of non-restricted guns and hunting rifles are being asked to do?

Hon. Christian Paradis: Madam Speaker, I had no doubt that my colleague would remain calm. That is one of his best qualities, and it allows us to engage in worthwhile debates.

First, we have to address the whole problem. My colleague, like his party, tends to compartmentalize the debate and look at the gun registry in isolation.

The gun registry is an administrative disaster. In the past, the registry was a combination of overregulation and a waste of public money. It is inefficient, and we can still see that today. We need to go on from there and take action against crime.

We all have the same goal, which is to reduce crime and make Quebeckers and Canadians safer. Yes, unacceptable crimes are committed with guns, but we have to send a message, we have to impose tougher and longer sentences.

Business of Supply

As well, as I said in my speech, control is needed when a person initially applies for a possession-only licence. We need to carry on along those lines. If the registry is too cumbersome, people do not comply with the law and do not renew their licences, and that is when we lose control. That is the problem.

[*English*]

Mr. Greg Rickford (Kenora, CPC): Madam Speaker, there is no question that a majority of folks in Kenora support the dismantling of the gun registry but that is not what today's debate is about. Clearly, there is a debate about dismantling the gun registry, and I expect that will come, but the singular issue today is extending the amnesty.

I would pose this question to my hon. colleague. Is it not true that in a province as great as Quebec, just like northern Ontario and many parts of the Arctic, there are particularly onerous aspects of this that must be worked out and that amnesty is one of the most effective ways of dealing with that until there is more certainty around the long gun registry?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Christian Paradis: Mrs. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

I come from a rural area too. This weekend I attended the convention of the Quebec federation of anglers and hunters, which has 125,000 members. These people are law-abiding citizens. They believe in the conservation of nature and they use proper methods while living out their passion. Many farmers attended the convention as well.

Indeed, a cumbersome registration procedure and an ineffective registry tend to make people not want to register or to obey this law. This has a cascading effect and now, no licences are being renewed. These people are happy because someone heard their call. The aim of the registry is not to punish honest hunters and farmers. The government must always keep in mind the fight against crime. We must protect our fellow citizens. The first nations are in the same situation. I mention the hunters and anglers, because I just saw them just this past week-end. Their federation has 125,000 members in Quebec. But the concern is the same for the first nations.

● (1300)

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to speak to the motion moved by the Bloc Québécois. I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Gatineau.

The motion reads as follows:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should not extend the amnesty on gun control requirements set to expire on May 16, 2009, and should maintain the registration of all types of firearms in its entirety.

I will use my personal experience to explain my arguments with regard to this motion. I own long guns, am a hunter and now a guide because politics prevents me from practising the sport of hunting as I would like.

My friends know my position on the registry very well. When we go on a hunting or other trip, the vehicle is registered and so is the boat, quite often. We have hunting licences that we pay for before we leave. We have to report the game taken but we do not have to

register the guns used to hunt. I have a great deal of difficulty with that.

By declaring this amnesty, the government is keeping the registry in limbo. That is the Conservatives' goal. They have always been against the gun registry and this is their way of ensuring that the system does not work. Much has been said in this House about duck hunters, among others. We should put the duck hunter myth to rest. You hunt ducks with a 12 gauge shotgun. That type of gun can be sawed off and used in armed robberies. We have to stop with the duck hunter myth. I want hunters to be seen as honest people. My friends and I are honest hunters. We use our guns to go hunting. These guns can be used for purposes other than the ones for which they are purchased and used.

I said I would refer to my personal experience. A few years ago, as legal counsel, I had to advise a couple that was separating. The husband owned guns. One of the wife's recommendations was that, given the couple's situation, the husband should get rid of his guns.

I met with the husband and assessed his condition. In my opinion, he was in no condition to have weapons in his possession. He agreed, but at the time of handing in his weapons to the Sûreté du Québec or court designated custodians, there were weapons missing. Good thing that the registry was there. The wife knew little about what weapons he might have owned. These are not easy situations, and people who are afraid of weapons do not go around their homes making a list of all their contents. If only for that reason, there has to be a way for those who enjoy hunting to feel comfortable. I speak with hunters and women, who are increasingly taking up hunting. People have to act responsibly. One responsible thing to do for those who practice that sport is to register all their weapons so that, should anything happen to the family or should their health deteriorate, they do not become a menace to those around them. That is reality, and that is acting responsibly.

I have a big problem with the Conservative line because, often, what the Conservatives talk about is the need to protect our property. I especially have a problem with it when defending our property requires us to arm ourselves. This means that, if the purpose for the long guns we buy is to defend our property, then they ought to be registered. In my notarial practice, I saw my share of disputes between neighbours, and I could not say that all neighbours deserve to own weapons with which to defend their property. We can see people making a big fuss over nothing and witness situations which are an absolute shame. Some neighbours feud over really trivial stuff.

● (1305)

I hope it is not Conservative ideology to say that when you keep weapons, they need not be registered because people have the right to protect their property. Not everyone protects their property the same way, and I find this worrying. What the Bloc Québécois is calling for is simple. Putting an end to the amnesty means telling all hunters that they will have to register their weapons.

Business of Supply

Of all the friends I know and all the persons I have met as a regional member of Parliament, and although I have been lobbied by hunters' groups, I have never had a hunter come up to me who had not registered his guns. But they were quite aware that a large percentage of their colleagues in western Canada, among others, had not registered their guns. It is not by chance that they have not registered their guns: it is because the Conservatives decided not to support this registry from the outset and are encouraging their fellow citizens not to register their weapons.

I have a problem with my Quebec colleagues when they support this philosophy, and I challenge them to talk to some hunters and ask them whether or not they have registered their firearms. They will find that in Quebec, 99% of citizens abide by the rules, have registered their guns, and have the necessary licences.

They have no difficulty, they have had no difficulty, apart maybe from a little at the beginning. In fact what they found most irritating was the fee to be paid, but that has been abolished, which is good. Those who wish to register their weapons may do so for free. Once again, it is our duty as responsible citizens to register our weapons if we want to practice a sport like hunting and keep those around us safe. If one day a problem should arise in our personal life such that people might have doubts about our capacity to use firearms, those people would be able to file the necessary complaints. In the case of a separation, weapons are often placed in the custody of a third party who keeps them until an authorization is obtained, and that is how it should be.

I have explained this situation to the citizens and hunters who have had the opportunity to talk to me. In Quebec, given that hunters' firearms are already registered, the registry does not pose a problem. In fact it is working well.

Naturally, if you tell these people that the registry is going to be abolished, everyone will be in agreement. In my opinion, it is no fun to fill out a form, but once a hunter understands that a vehicle or a motor launch has to be registered when it is being used, everything is fine. The same applies for a hunting licence: it is necessary, so you have to register. You also have to report game taken. It is not clear to me why people do not understand the necessity of registering weapons.

That is why I am very comfortable about voting for the Bloc Québécois motion. I am happy to vote in this House against any law that would set aside the firearms registry, imperfect as it was when it was created. It is true that there was waste by the Liberals at that time, but that is the Liberals' problem. There were repeated computer contracts, etc. They paid the price in Quebec and they will continue to pay it.

However, since the system was introduced, and because the representatives of law and order tell us they need this system, in my experience and from what I have seen, this register has not caused me any problems. Personally, I registered my weapons and I obtained the necessary permits, and I have no problem with it. Even though not all my friends necessarily like having their name registered, now that it has been done, they are reasonably accepting of the system. They understand very clearly that to be responsible we must register our weapons, just as we register a vehicle or boat or report game taken, and just as we need to obtain a hunting permit.

This system is well accepted. However, as long as the government decides that it is not interested in the system and lets it be known that there will be changes for long arms, it will not work. It is certain that there will always be people—especially in the west—who, from the beginning, have not registered their weapons, and who continue to oppose having this register in place. Often, as several Conservative colleagues have told us in this House, they will tell us it is to protect their property. Right away, I have a problem with the protection of property because not everybody protects their property in the same way.

So I hope that our colleagues will understand, especially those from Quebec. As far as those from the west are concerned, I understand that they do not understand. Nevertheless, our colleagues from Quebec should be able to follow our lead on this matter and to recognize the fairness and justice of what we are proposing.

● (1310)

Mr. Daniel Petit (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC): Madam Speaker, through you, I would like to ask a question of my colleague, who spoke very eloquently. He just said something that opened the door to this question that I have for him. He said that car registration, or any other motor vehicle, is a provincial jurisdiction, that boat registration is a provincial jurisdiction, that dog registration is a provincial jurisdiction. Firearms registration is also a provincial jurisdiction. Civil law is the responsibility of the provinces.

Could the member answer me without letting his emotions get in the way? I understand the motion put forward by the Bloc, but would he be willing to let it go because, since civil law is a provincial jurisdiction under the Constitution, should it not be tabled in the Quebec National Assembly instead, which could maintain a registry without any involvement on our part?

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Madam Speaker, I will start with a correction for my colleague: ships are under federal jurisdiction. That is the reality.

It is nonetheless true that even the Government of Quebec has asked the federal government to transfer to Quebec all of its powers for administration of the gun registry. Consequently, if my colleague really wants to come across as a good Quebecker, let him propose to his party that they say yes to what Quebec has been asking for since the very start: the transfer of all powers and charges relating to the registry, as well as all information contained in the registry to the Government of Quebec, to administer itself. Once again, we in Quebec are responsible.

[English]

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Madam Speaker, could the member respond and perhaps give some explanation as to why the Conservatives are attacking something that police officers use over 9,000 times a day, that the Canadian Police Association has said is an essential tool for it in both protecting its officers and reducing crime? Why would the Conservatives be against something that the chiefs of police have said, time and time again, is so essential to the job they do?

Business of Supply

Since the registry was introduced, gun violence has been reduced across every category. Could the member perhaps give his impressions as to why we see legislation such as private member's Bill C-301, which would undo so much of the good work the House has done in this area?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Madam Speaker, there is a conservative ideology behind their position, probably something to do with defending property. There is a reason why several Conservative members have referred to defending property. We see that in the U.S. as well, where everyone has the right to bear arms to defend himself. This has been debated on numerous occasions.

That is not the situation in Quebec. Care must be taken; there are laws to be respected. If you were to tell me that, starting today, everyone owning property in Quebec can have a firearm to defend himself, that would be risky for all the landowners in Quebec, given all the little spats between neighbours that we see. That is a reality.

Somewhere, there is a conservative ideology about protecting one's property showing through, one which gives people the right to have guns without any obligation to register them, to protect their property. Our freedom ends where the next person's starts. That is what the Conservatives should understand.

[*English*]

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Madam Speaker, I was home this week. We have 800 people in Abitibi who are worried about their pensions. We have had 1,000 layoffs in Sudbury. Smooth Rock Falls and Kapuskasing are down as are our mills all across the north. We are debating something that he says everybody in Quebec supports, and he is blaming western Canada.

Why do we have an opposition day motion on something like this, something which is creating political mischief? People back home want to know where we stand on fighting for pensions and EI and ensuring we can get through this economic crisis.

● (1315)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Madam Speaker, it is because safety is very important. If our NDP colleague is telling me that if everyone has guns, that will solve the unemployment problem, I think that it would worsen public safety instead.

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am sure that you yourself are quite sure that I am going to speak in support of my party's proposal.

I believe we should not extend the amnesty on gun control requirements set to expire on May 16, 2009, and that we should maintain the registration of all types of firearms in its entirety—I repeat: in its entirety.

The Bloc Québécois is the federal party that best represents the interests of Quebecers and that calls for the consensus in Quebec to be respected. As a result, the Bloc Québécois is firmly committed to improving firearms control and maintaining the registration of all types of firearms in its entirety, as I said.

For the umpteenth time, the Conservative government is attacking the firearms registry; it wants to exempt unrestricted firearms—rifles

and hunting weapons. This stubborn persistence, which can only be described as ideological, is hard to justify when we see how the gun registry has led to a drop in tragic events involving firearms. But the Conservatives do not care about that.

We already knew that when it comes to justice and public safety, the Conservatives care only about their partisan interests. Was it not the Minister of Justice who said, on July 17, 2008, “We do not govern by statistics. We are governing by what we promised Canadians in the last election and what Canadians told us”?

The bills that are currently before Parliament regarding the registry quite simply provide the evidence that the Conservatives are wilfully blinding themselves to reality. It is not the Bloc Québécois members who see the benefits, it is police services in Quebec and Canada, which say that the registry is a useful and effective tool; it is public health agencies, which report the situation on the ground and observe the significant declines in homicides, suicides and accidents involving firearms; and it is the statistics—and this is very important—that show that firearms control reduces the number of crimes, including the most violent crime, murder.

This is obvious when we compare Quebec's track record to the United States. The rate is five times lower in Quebec than in our neighbour to the south.

When it comes to justice and public safety, the Bloc Québécois firmly believes that the most effective approach is still and will always be prevention. This means that we have to tackle the root causes of crime and the conditions that lead to tragedies in the home. We have to tackle the causes of youth crime and violence, rather than waiting for things to get broken and then trying to fix them, that is the wisest and most importantly the most profitable approach, in both social and economic terms.

This can be clearer, and I will spell it out. First, we have to tackle poverty, inequality and exclusion, all of which provide fertile ground for frustration and its manifestations: violence and crime.

And in addition, we have to limit access to the firearms that make it easier to commit serious crimes. The evidence is in on this point: gun control is one of the most effective ways of preventing crime, particularly the greatest danger of all, homicide.

● (1320)

There is a direct connection between the homicide rate and how easy it is to acquire guns. They go hand in hand. Now that the cost of setting up the firearms registry has been covered and the actual registration only costs about \$15 million a year, it would be a huge mistake to deprive ourselves of a tool that has proven its worth.

Most importantly, it is wrong to assume that removing non-restricted firearms from the registry would result in fantastic savings. That is totally false. Somehow the Conservatives need to understand that the cost of registering hunting guns is only a small fraction of the total cost of the registry.

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The Bloc Québécois was in favour of removing certain obstacles that might annoy hunters and target shooters, including making registration free. That was done back in 2004. Considering the advantages of a gun registry, its low annual cost and the lack of any serious disadvantages to people who meet their obligations, the Bloc Québécois is convinced that the registry should be maintained and gun control should be improved. I want to point out as well that the Quebec National Assembly has twice expressed its unanimous support for keeping the gun registry.

The Government of Quebec has also indicated its intent to assume more responsibilities in the area of gun control. On May 17, 2007, the Quebec public safety minister sent his federal counterpart a letter asking him to amend the Firearms Act to give Quebec and the provinces that so desire more regulatory authority over firearms. The Government of Quebec asked specifically for the power to tighten the rules governing the control and storage of restricted firearms. On the same occasion, Quebec repeated its support for keeping the firearms registry in its entirety. The Quebec government reiterated this stand during the last election campaign when the Premier wrote to his federal counterpart asking him to continue registering all firearms.

This is the text of the document included in the Premier's letter to the Prime Minister of Canada.

To prevent events such as those at the École Polytechnique and Concordia from happening again, the Government of Quebec has taken steps to protect the people of Quebec.

Recently, the Government of Quebec passed the Anastasia Act. This act is designed to protect the people of Quebec by tightening gun control, regulating gun ownership in certain places and creating a system to control the practice of target shooting with restricted or prohibited firearms.

The Government of Quebec would have liked to do more to protect the public, but as you know, criminal law comes under federal jurisdiction. After consulting with the province's police forces, the Government of Quebec asked that the gun registry be maintained.

The Government of Quebec is calling on the federal government to make a commitment to maintain the gun registry.

The Government of Quebec is also calling on the federal government to make a commitment to strengthen gun control by tightening the rules for transporting and storing firearms.

In conclusion, the Premier of Quebec said:

If you [at the federal level] do not want to proceed in this way, we [in Quebec] ask for a delegation of powers so that we can achieve the objective stated above.

We must act accordingly. We must maintain the registry of all guns.

• (1325)

[English]

Mr. Greg Rickford (Kenora, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am a little confused. The hon. member spent the first part of his speech talking about priorities like health, which are important to him and perhaps his constituents. Then he said that we were currently spending only \$15 million on the registry. Maybe \$15 million is not a lot of money to other people, but it happens to be a lot of money to me.

Is the hon. member not willing to concede that it would be better to not spend that money, actually put it into the programs he is talking about and start respecting people in our rural and remote communities, of which Quebec makes a large part?

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Madam Speaker, a life is priceless. We are now talking about saving lives. How can that be done? Is there a way to prevent murders and homicides completely? If there were a simple and concise formula, all human beings on earth would use it. Right now, there are firearms in our society and the vast majority of murders are committed with firearms.

Health workers tell us that there are fewer people arriving in hospitals injured by firearms since the introduction of the gun registry. It is the health sector that inspired my very simple proposal to maintain the registry because it saves lives.

[English]

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member opposite was referencing costs. The RCMP has stated that ending the registry would save about \$3 million a year. That is about the same amount of money that is spent by members of Parliament when they send ten percenters into other people's ridings.

If we want to talk about saving \$3 million, does the member think we should be cutting something that police use over 9,000 times a day and something they say is an essential tool? Or does the member think we should end the practice of partisan attack ads that are paid for by taxpayers in the form of ten percenters that are used so heavily by the Conservative Party?

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Ajax—Pickering.

Basically, it is not a question of money or investments, but a question of life and death.

The gun registry is a proven system. Various police forces use it more than 9,000 times every day to prevent more murders and to find out what firearms there are in the houses where they are about to intervene in order to prepare themselves accordingly. That is where the system shines. It is not a question of costs. We cannot put a price on a human life. That cannot be measured in millions or in billions of dollars. Every life is worth saving and the gun registry with its proven track record is a solution. That is at the heart of our debate.

[English]

Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Madam Speaker, in listening to the member and his Bloc colleague before him, I was amazed at their willingness to attack law-abiding farmers and duck hunters. They talk about sustaining a completely ineffective, horrifically expensive gun registry, but at the same time, yesterday at justice committee, the Bloc members actually moved to remove mandatory minimum penalties for those who are committing drive-by shootings in our communities.

How can they justify that?

Business of Supply

● (1330)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Madam Speaker, members opposite like mixing everything up to keep their demagogy at a constant shameful level.

The gun registry is already in place and its operating costs are now known. The system works well and thanks to it, police forces know if there is a firearm in a house when they have to intervene. It reinforces prevention and that is the important thing.

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this issue. It is one that has created a lot of debate in the House over many years. I will start by explaining how my opinions have been shaped on the issue of guns overall.

My grandfather was a hunter. He had a hunting camp. I had the opportunity to go there and fire a gun with him. I have come to learn a lot about gun ownership, hunting and how important that was to his life. I also learned a lot about how important it is to be a responsible gun owner and how seriously he took that commitment and how important it was to him that the guns were stored safely. Like most gun owners, when he was alive, he was incredibly responsible and was very careful with the weapons that he had. I got to see that side of it. I appreciated how much that meant to him and how much that experience was valued by him.

The other experience that formulated my opinion on this was my time on the Durham Regional Police Services Board. I had the opportunity of working with front-line police officers to see how the registry really worked, how it is put into motion and how it is actually used when we strip away all the rhetoric and the arguments and we talk about what is the real purpose of it.

One of the most defining moments for me when I was on the police services board was when I talked to an officer about going into a domestic violence situation. The police were able to use the registry to confirm that a weapon was present. He explained how it changed his approach in that situation. He explained that most violence, particularly domestic violence, is not planned a long time in advance, but is in fact violence that occurs spontaneously in the heat of the moment. When there is a weapon in the house and there is someone who has never committed a crime before, there is an incredible additional danger both to the police officer and to the person who is the subject of domestic violence.

We do not know who is going to get into this situation and who is not. It is much like when we ask people to register a car. We are not saying that everyone is going to get into a car accident, but we are saying that cars can pose a serious threat to society and other people's lives and it is important to register them and to make sure that those who drive them have the needed skills.

It is the same thing with weapons. Most people who own guns are not going to get involved in crime. Most are going to be responsible. However, we do not know in advance who is going to commit a crime and who is not. It is extremely important that the people who have those weapons be properly trained, that we know where those

weapons are and when there is a situation such as domestic abuse that we know whether or not a weapon is present.

When I hear from those officers about how important that tool is, I have to say that it resonates with me. As a legislator I listen to police officers on the front line. It is not just that police officer who shared that experience with me or my time on the police services board. The Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police has been extremely strong in saying the registry is an essential tool to protect police officers and also to protect the public. If that were not enough, the Canadian Police Association expressed the same opinion in a letter. The Canadian Police Association has made it very clear that it is an essential tool for its members. This is something they use more than 9,400 times a day. This is a tool which in the last year was used almost 3.5 million times. The police officers do not use this tool for something to do or because they are bored. They use it because it is an essential tool in crime fighting and in keeping the public safe.

To me, the debate should end there. If police officers are speaking with that degree of unanimity, and that many are saying it is an essential tool and they are using it with that kind of frequency, one would think that should probably end the debate, but unfortunately it has not. In fact, it has mischaracterized this debate as somehow being against hunters or against people who have weapons.

I have never heard anyone make the argument that licensing cars and asking people to get driver training is going against drivers, that we have something against drivers in this country. It is a ridiculous and preposterous argument. If we were against hunting, we would make it illegal, but of course it is not. If we were against long guns, we would make them illegal, but of course we have not. It is a false argument. It is designed to create a wedge and to play games. We should be clear on that. That is what this has really been used for, to create false arguments, false divisions, to create wedges that should not be there, to create clouds around what should be clear arguments.

● (1335)

In that regard, I am going to read some statistics with respect to long guns. There is a lot of talk about excluding the long guns, but let me read some statistics.

Spousal homicides involving firearms occur twice as frequently with long guns than with handguns. Suicides are five times more likely to be committed with long guns than with handguns. The majority of guns recovered or seized by police are non-restricted long guns. Murders with rifles and shotguns have decreased dramatically since 1991, in no small part because of stronger controls on firearms. In fact, the number of murders in 1991 by long guns was 107, and the number for 2007 is down to 32.

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People who do not believe the police and want to ignore them, the mass majority, are left with those statistics. In fact, in talking about police safety, police officers report that in the last decade, of the 15 officers who were killed, only 2 were killed by handguns. The remaining 13 police officers were killed with rifles or shotguns.

To say that long guns are not part of the equation of public safety is a false argument. The statistics bear it out and the police repeat it. Yet what we see is a continued misrepresentation of the facts and people trying to pretend that the registry has no function.

If all of that were not enough, let me read directly from a letter dated April 7 from the Canadian Police Association. In this letter the association clearly articulates the reasons that the registry is so important. These are the words from front-line police officers:

Registration is an Important Component of the Canadian Firearms Program.

Licensing firearms owners and registering firearms are important in reducing misuse and illegal trade in firearms, for a number of reasons:

1. Rigorously screening and licensing firearms owners reduces the risk for those who pose a threat to themselves or others. Already there is evidence that the system has been effective in preventing people who should not have guns from getting access.

2. Licensing of firearm owners also discourages casual gun ownership. Owning a firearm is a big responsibility and licensing is a reasonable requirement. While not penalizing responsible firearm owners, licensing and registration encourage people to get rid of unwanted, unused and unnecessary firearms.

3. Registration increases accountability of firearms owners by linking the firearm to the owner. This encourages owners to abide by safe storage laws, and compels owners to report firearm thefts where storage may have been a contributing factor. Safe storage of firearms:

- Reduces firearms on the black market from break-ins;
- Reduces unauthorized use of firearms;
- Reduces heat of moment use of firearms; and,
- Reduces accidents, particularly involving children.

4. Registration provides valuable ownership information to law enforcement in the enforcement of firearm prohibition orders and in support of police investigations. Already we have seen a number of concrete examples of police investigations which have been aided by access to information contained in the registry.

In fact, one of the prime examples that I would point to was a situation involving the shooting of four officers in Mayerthorpe, Alberta in 2005. In that instance the evidence that led to the arrest and conviction of two men was directly related to the registry. The registry helped convict those two individuals. The letter further states:

5. While police will never rely entirely on information contained in the registry, it is helpful to know if guns are likely to be present when approaching a volatile situation, for example, in responding to a domestic violence call. The officer, in assessing threat and risk can weigh this information.

6. Registration facilitates proof of possession of stolen and smuggled firearms and aid in prosecutions. Previously it was very difficult to prove possession of illegal rifles and shotguns.

7. Registration provides better information to assess an investigation of thefts and other firearm occurrences.

8. Recovered firearms can be tracked to the registered owner using firearms registration information.

9. Registration is critical to enforcing licensing. Without registration, there is nothing to prevent a licensed gun owner from selling or giving an unregistered weapon to an unlicensed individual.

10. Illegal guns start off as legal guns. Registration helps to prevent the transition from legal to illegal ownership, and helps to identify where the transition to illegal ownership occurs.

● (1340)

We should look at the overwhelming body of evidence showing how important this tool is for police. As I said, these are not my words or something that I concocted. This comes directly from the Canadian Police Association telling us why it needs the registry to continue.

With all the evidence I have just presented, it seems that this would be a moot matter, that we would not need a motion from the Bloc to try to protect the registry or deal with the issue of amnesty. I think most reasonable people looking at that overwhelming body of evidence would realize that any wedge or distinction was really just manufactured. In fact, that is the case.

The Conservatives, instead of abiding by this overwhelming information and working with law enforcement officials and legitimate gun owners to ensure the program works as effectively as possible, are trying to get rid of it. In fact, a private member's bill, Bill C-301, not only deals with long guns, which I have been talking about for a few moments, but would actually gut the registry for prohibited and restricted weapons. It would cut the registry on things like handguns. In fact, the individual who presented this bill to the House of Commons was first going to be a speaker at an event celebrating the death of the registry where the door prize was a Beretta. This was not just any Beretta. It was a Beretta that was advertised for its stealth.

Why would a marksman who wants to shoot at the range need a Beretta that is advertised for its stealth? The insensitivity is monumental. Where was this event? It was in Mississauga, in the GTA, in our neck of the woods where we have seen an incredible amount of gun violence. One can imagine the reaction.

If all of that gutting and undoing of all the good work I just talked about was not enough, this bill would go even further. This bill would make it legal to transport a fully automatic machine gun. If people have an Uzi, this bill would allow them to drive it through the streets on the way to the range. An Uzi, an fully automatic machine gun is what we are talking about and that is what the Conservatives are introducing.

That did not go over so well In the Senate. As everyone can imagine, a lot of people were upset about this so the Conservatives tried it again and introduced a bill in the Senate to try to gut the registry another way.

I will refer again to the Canadian Police Association's specific comments about the impact of Bill S-5, which, conveniently, was introduced in the Senate where it stands almost no chance of being passed. It makes one wonder whether the Conservatives really are just playing games or what their motives are. However, the following are the words of the Police Association:

Bill S-5 Will Make it More Difficult for Police to Investigate Gun Crimes and Compromise Public and Police Officer Safety.

Bill S-5 will:

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Repeal the requirement to register non-restricted firearms...and the offences and penalties for failure to register non-restricted firearms. In recent years the current government has allowed those who have disobeyed the law to avoid compliance and prosecution by creating successive amnesty periods. We fail to understand why the government would relax controls to favour those who deliberately choose to avoid accountability for their firearms.

The second major point it makes is:

Eliminate the requirement for persons wishing to transfer non-restricted firearms to notify the registrar, and introduce a new requirement that the individual seek authorization from the Chief Firearms Officer.... This will devolve the responsibility from the provincial CFO's, who will be required to verify the recipient is licensed to possess the firearm and verify that the firearm is non-restricted. ... —this verification [will be] for each and every transfer. It will be impossible to determine, however, whether or not such requirements are complied with, as records linking firearms to owners will no longer be retained.

The comments go on to explain in many other terms why Bill S-5 is so destructive.

Why exactly are the Conservatives seeking to gut and destroy something that is so evidently needed for public safety and is such an important tool for police?

• (1345)

The reality is that there is a divide between the Conservative rhetoric on crime and the Conservative reality on crime. While the Conservatives talk about being tough on crime, what they are really talking about is creating wedges, about being dishonest on crime, about trying to frame issues in a way that is all about politics and not about making our streets safer. This is a perfect case in point.

I will give the House another case, the crime prevention budget. The crime prevention budget for last year was \$43 billion and, of that, only \$13 billion were spent. They talk about being tough on crime and yet the Conservatives underspent that budget by half. In fact, when this party left office, that budget was well over the amount that it is right now and was fully deployed and fully spent.

The Conservatives talk about ending the two-for-one remand credit, which we support, but they are not doing anything with respect to addiction in correctional facilities which creates a deadly cycle of people coming back in and out of the system. They are not doing anything about mental health issues. About 60% of those who are incarcerated are facing addiction issues and yet we just keep throwing them back in jail and they come out and reoffend and we throw them back in jail. Nothing is being done.

The Conservatives can talk about being tough on crime. We are not afraid of being tough on crime, but they need to be even tougher on the causes of crime. They need to be tough at ensuring there are not victims in the first place, and that is the abysmal failure of the government and where its rhetoric does not match up to the reality.

We need to ensure that we ask gun owners to be responsible. No one likes to have to register their car, register their pet or file taxes but if the government says that we do not need to do that because it is not important, then people, naturally, get conflicted and get angry. What we should do is go to the good men and women who own firearms and present them with all the facts that I gave today. We need to collectively say as a body that this is something we need for public safety, that we need to work with people to ensure our communities and streets are safer, that we need to prevent things like domestic abuse, that we need when responding to a suicide call and

that this is information that is vital. If we present it in that way, we will be doing the right thing and we will be responsible.

Instead, the choice to this point is to use this issue as a wedge, as a divide, to create false divisions and separate rural and urban Canada. The issues that face public safety, whether it is in a small town in Alberta or in my hometown of Ajax or in Pickering, are the same. It is time we were honest and responsible and it is time we cut through the nonsense rhetoric used on this issue.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Madam Speaker, there have been discussions among the parties and I believe you would find unanimous consent for the following motion:

That, at the conclusion of today's debate on the opposition motion in the name of the member for Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, all questions necessary to dispose of the motion be deemed put and a recorded division deemed requested and deferred until Wednesday, April 22, 2009, at 3:00 p.m.; and that the deferred recorded divisions on the second reading stage of Bill C-268 in the name of the member for Kildonan—St. Paul, Bill C-300 in the name of the member for Scarborough—Guildwood, and Bill C-291 in the name of the member for Jeanne-Le Ber, currently scheduled before the time provided for private members business on Wednesday, April 22, instead occur immediately following the vote on the Bloc Québécois opposition motion on the same day.

• (1350)

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Madam Speaker, we just listened to a very disingenuous and misleading speech by the hon. member for Ajax—Pickering. He talked about when his party left office.

When his party left office, the Canadian Police Association came to the Hill with a long list of legislative changes that they wanted to see made in the name of public safety. Guess what? Members of the Canadian Police Association are on the Hill this week and that list of legislative changes they wanted to see made are not on their wish list any more because we have actually done something about them.

I want to talk about the misleading and disingenuous comments of the hon. member. The motion today is about Bill C-68—

Mr. Paul Szabo: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I want to refer to the Standing Orders which, as you know, does not permit a member to impugn motive or to speak disrespectfully of another member. In this regard, the member has a point and he has the right to say it. We have a presumption of honesty, not being disingenuous in their speaking.

I would say that the member should be very careful and maybe even withdraw the word “disingenuous”.

Business of Supply

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): I would ask the member to correct his phrase.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Madam Speaker, with respect, I would ask you to check, because the word “disingenuous” is acceptable. The word “dishonest” is not acceptable. The word “misleading” is acceptable. The words “deliberately misleading” are not acceptable. I said “disingenuous” and “misleading”. I would ask, Madam Speaker, that you reconsider that and check the Standing Orders.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The hon. member for Edmonton Centre is technically correct but I would ask that we show respect to each other in the House. Please continue your question, remembering the respect that is owed to other members.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Madam Speaker, I accept that and I will be respectful. I would ask the hon. member to be respectful about what the debate is all about.

The debate is about a motion that talks about the long gun registry, not some fanciful thing that the hon. member believes the government is trying to promote in the House. When we talk about impugning motives, he is suggesting that the government is trying to take actions that are not government policy. I would simply ask the member to stick to what we are debating today and not introduce things that are simply not true.

Mr. Mark Holland: Madam Speaker, this issue is important. I just spent a great deal of time going through exactly why the registry is such an important tool for our police officers, why we heard nearly unanimously from chiefs of police and why we heard from the Canadian Police Association about why they need this and about how it is used over 9,400 times a day. I talked about how essential this is as a tool and I went through it in great detail.

Respectfully, every time the Conservative Party tries to gut it, whether or not it is in Bill C-301, Bill S-5 or in some speech where the Conservatives try to create division and use this as a political wedge, I am respectfully asking that we work with police on this issue, and turn to responsible gun owners, just as we do to responsible car owners and responsible pet owners, and explain why licensing is important. We need to work with them to ensure we have safer streets and safer communities.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank the member for Ajax—Pickering for his brilliant speech in favour of the motion. Not only was he as eloquent as he always is, but he was also particularly well prepared. I found his arguments very appropriate.

I would like to ask him to comment on the position of the Conservatives that is slowly coming to light. Several of them began by telling us that an amnesty was necessary to allow those who have not yet obeyed the law time to do so. Maybe we should ask if they will need four, five or ten more years.

Then, they talk about the weaknesses and the uselessness of the system. We must also point out that the Conservatives have been saying for four years that gun owners do not have to register their guns yet.

Do you really believe that if they oppose the motion, it is because they want more people to abide by the law? If you do not believe it,

what do you think of people who are trying to convince us we should believe it?

• (1355)

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): I am sure the member for Marc-Aurèle-Fortin was addressing the Chair, but I will ask the member for Ajax—Pickering to answer the question.

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Holland: Madam Speaker, I think the motion that the hon. member has brought forward addresses this issue. I think it is so important because the reality is that amnesty sends the message that it is okay to not follow the law, that this is not an important law, that we can skirt this one, that we can ignore it. If anything, it makes the job for police even tougher. This is what we hear back from police officers, that the amnesty allows these individuals to think this is not an important law.

Imagine if we said to people with respect to registering their cars that we were going to give them amnesty, that they did not really have to register their car, that it really was not that important. It sends the wrong message.

The message we should be sending is that this is an essential tool, that it is a tool that police are using, and using to great effect, to make our streets safer. We should be working with legitimate gun owners to explain the importance of the program, why registration is a good idea. What we should not be doing is playing politics and trying to divide them against each other to play partisan political games, because all that does is make the registry less effective. It weakens public safety and it confuses individuals as to the importance of why they should register. That confusion and that fog is deliberate. It is done for political reasons. It is most certainly not done to increase public safety.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, NDP): Madam Speaker, as you know, my riding is home to a lot of farmers and hunters. The gun registry is certainly a controversial issue in my area.

When the registry was put in place, had it been clear and simple, everyone would have been happy and we would not be facing the dilemma we are today. It must be said that the Prime Minister was the only Reform member to vote in favour of gun registration when the Liberals first introduced their bill.

My colleague mentioned a few bills.

[*English*]

The hon. member talked about Bill S-5. What is really interesting about the bill is that it is virtually the same as Bill C-21, introduced by the Conservatives in 2006, and Bill C-24, introduced in 2007, and the Conservatives never allowed either bill to come to a vote.

Statements by Members

The other point I want to make is that introducing the bill through the Senate is very unusual and that the Conservatives again seem to be playing partisan games with divisive issues. Senators are already signalling that they will amend the bill, so we really do not know what it is going to look like.

So my question for the member is, what are his concerns with regard to Bill C-301 because he also mentioned that bill?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): I will ask the hon. member to try to remember that question until after question period.

We will now go to statements by members.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

DISAPPEARANCE OF CHILD

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Oxford, CPC): Madam Speaker, I rise in the House today to draw the attention of members to the disappearance of eight-year-old Victoria “Tori” Stafford, who was last seen on April 8 in Woodstock, Ontario. I would like to extend my deepest sympathy and concern to the family and friends of Tori as they go through this most difficult of times.

I would also like to thank the police, the fire departments and all agencies involved in the continuing search to locate young Tori, and I would like to especially thank the community for their true concern and the support they have shown.

To see a picture of Tori, please visit Crime Stoppers' website, or to provide any information about Tori, immediately contact Crime Stoppers at 1-800-222-TIPS.

Let us bring Tori home.

* * *

• (1400)

[*Translation*]

MARTIN BRODEUR

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on March 18, 2009, the New Jersey Devils defeated the Chicago Blackhawks 3 to 2.

This was the 552nd regular season win in the NHL career of Devils' goalie Martin Brodeur and made him the all-time record holder for wins in goal.

His talent, tenacity and will to win have helped him to three Stanley Cups victories as well as an Olympic gold medal. His passion for hockey, our national sport, puts him in a class of his own.

Martin Brodeur is a local boy, born and bred, and the pride of Saint-Léonard.

As the member for Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, I extend my congratulations to Martin Brodeur and wish him more NHL records in goal, as well as another gold for Canada at Vancouver 2010.

VOLUNTEER WEEK 2009

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thāi Thi Lac (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on the occasion of National Volunteer Week, April 19 through 25, I would like to draw attention to the exceptional contributions of the women and men volunteers who are committed to helping their communities. They embody the “passion for action” the Fédération des centres d'action bénévole du Québec has chosen for its slogan.

There are many different ways of getting involved, of course. Some act locally, addressing such issues as poverty, health, rural development and the promotion of human rights. Others choose to address international issues. It is also reassuring to know that we can count on thousands of committed volunteers during our election campaigns.

I would like to pay tribute to these thousands of devoted volunteers who not only play an essential role in preserving our democracy, but also focus their efforts on improving the lot of their neighbours in these difficult times.

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[*English*]

VOLUNTEERING

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, every day in my riding, hundreds of men, women and young people volunteer, bettering the lives of others and the communities in which they live.

This being National Volunteer Week, I salute them: farmers doing business plans for an abattoir; 450 people signing up for the Scotties national curling championship; Rotary Club and Sault College volunteers baking cookies for Easter Seals; neighbours building school playgrounds; hospice, soup kitchen, minor sports, and church volunteers; and the list goes on and on.

Volunteer Canada notes that volunteering is crucial in a time of economic crisis. I wonder how many realize that our federal elections bring together the largest experience of volunteering in the country. I salute those volunteers from all parties that nurture our democracy.

Volunteers help build our social fabric. They create a vital sense of belonging to a society where neighbours care about each other and work for the common good.

I thank our volunteers. Let us invest in the voluntary sector.

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BATTLE OF VIMY RIDGE

Mr. Greg Kerr (West Nova, CPC): Mr. Speaker, 92 years ago, on Easter Monday of 1917, the four divisions of the Canadian Corps captured Vimy Ridge and earned Canada a place on the international stage.

The Canadian commanders devised an innovative battle plan to take back the ridge, a plan executed to near perfection by the Canadian troops.

Statements by Members

Tragically, the glory Canada won on that day came with a heavy price. By the fourth day of battle, our Canadians controlled the entire ridge, but 3,600 Canadians gave their lives in this triumph.

One of Canada's most impressive tributes now stands on the battlefield of Vimy Ridge. The majestic Canadian National Vimy Memorial stands as a reminder of that heroic battle and as a tribute to the brave men and women who served their country during the first world war.

They defended with honour the values upon which our country was founded: freedom, democracy and the rule of law. These are the same values that Canada's military men and women are currently defending around the world.

Ninety-two years later, after that fateful Easter Monday, we pay tribute to our proud history and we honour those who continue to serve today.

* * *

● (1405)

HEALTHY SCHOOLS DAY IN CANADA

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to recognize the work of Canadians for a Safe Learning Environment, or CASLE, formed in 1994 by parents in Halifax West and neighbouring ridings. This group has worked to improve the condition of school buildings and the products and practices used in our schools.

This year, CASLE declared April 27 Healthy Schools Day in Canada. Every year, Healthy Schools Day in Canada allows students, teachers, organizations, school boards and others to focus on making our schools healthy places to work and learn. I ask the House to join me in recognizing the tremendous job that CASLE has done and in promoting Healthy Schools Day.

* * *

VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTER

Mr. Tim Uppal (Edmonton—Sherwood Park, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to honour one of my constituents, Mr. Walter Tomaszewski, a volunteer firefighter with the Fort Saskatchewan Fire Department for the last 62 years. Mr. Tomaszewski started in April 1947.

Walter was a soldier from 1942 to 1945, fighting for Canada and the Allies in World War II. While stationed overseas, Walter met Alice, his future wife of 62 years. Walter and Alice have raised seven children, all in Fort Saskatchewan, Alberta.

After the war, he attended Alberta College, where he became a bookkeeper.

Walter no longer responds to emergency calls, but he does attend every Tuesday evening practice and is the department's historian.

I want to take this moment to recognize Mr. Tomaszewski's contribution to the community of Fort Saskatchewan and to his country. It is people like Walter who make me proud to be a Canadian.

[Translation]

GUN REGISTRY

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois would like to use our opposition day as an opportunity to reiterate the importance of maintaining the gun registry.

Numerous stakeholders in Quebec civil society also support it, including the president of the Montreal police brotherhood, Yves Francoeur, and several public health directors, including that of the Quebec nation's capital, Dr. François Desbiens.

In an open letter to all MPs, Dr. Desbiens said that the bills introduced by the Conservatives in the House of Commons and the Senate concerning the gun registry were meant to eliminate measures that are known to be effective in saving lives. He referred specifically to a recent study that found that the legislation enacted to create this registry has considerably reduced the number of homicides and suicides committed using firearms.

We therefore hope that all members, especially the Conservatives, will hear this appeal in favour of maintaining the gun registry. To further increase awareness, I would like to invite all members to a screening of the film *Polytechnique* at 7 p.m. today in room 200, West Block. Everyone is welcome.

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[English]

SEAL HUNT

Mr. Rodney Weston (Saint John, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this morning, Liberal Party caucus members held a press conference at which they depicted propaganda images of Canada's seal hunt in an attempt to attack and vilify those Canadians who are so dependent on the hunt for their livelihood.

It is shameful that the Liberal Party continues to allow these types of attacks on our seal hunt, at a time when seal hunters depend on this hunt now more than ever.

Liberals cannot get away with saying one thing in Toronto and another thing in Newfoundland and Labrador. They cannot rant and rave and pretend to defend the hunt in Atlantic Canada, yet sit silent while other members of their caucus attack the hunt in Ottawa.

This Conservative government is working to defend the seal hunt, and it is shameful that the Liberal Party is working against it.

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HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL DAY

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today is Holocaust Remembrance Day, a sombre day when we reflect on one of the most tragic periods of human history.

Yet, just yesterday, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad used the Durban Review Conference to incite hatred and genocide and undermine the cause of human rights. The Iranian president's complicity in crimes against humanity reminds us of our profound obligation to speak out against hatred and his call for the end of Israel.

Statements by Members

We must join together, today and every day, to remember the millions who lost their lives as innocent victims of hate at the hands of the most despicable regime the world has ever seen.

Let us challenge inhumanity and confront injustice when it tries to rear its head. Let us say with conviction, “Never again; never again!”

* * *

HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL DAY

Mr. Gord Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today is Yom Hashoah, Holocaust Memorial Day. Across this country, Canadians will remember, reflect, and most importantly, ensure that we never forget one of the greatest tragedies in human history.

The extermination of millions of Jewish people during World War II was a crime against all humankind. It is a priority of our government to ensure that the Holocaust is properly taught and commemorated both in Canada and around the world. We have committed to host the next meeting of the Inter-parliamentary Coalition for Combating Antisemitism, in 2010.

In partnership with the French and American governments, we will co-host with B'nai Brith a conference entitled, “The St. Louis Era: Looking Back, Moving Forward”.

Also this summer, Canada will take the next step toward becoming a full member in the Holocaust task force.

Canada was the first country in the world to withdraw from the anti-Semitic Durban Review Conference.

To acknowledge the singular horror of the Holocaust is to acknowledge that there are lines we may never cross and that human rights are either universal or non-existent.

* * *

• (1410)

PEACE

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, how does a society develop a culture of peace? The Canadian Department of Peace Initiative focused on that question last weekend in Hamilton, Ontario.

Peace activists from across Canada showed our support for a major realignment of federal and provincial government priorities away from militarism and violence, and toward peace.

The Department of Peace Initiative proposes the establishment of a federal department of peace to place the promotion of peace at the heart of the operation of our government by redirecting the machinery of government toward the promotion of peaceful conflict resolution, non-violent intervention and mediation.

As well, establishing a Canadian civilian peace service to professionalize peace work by Canadians would significantly improve Canada's role in charting a course to peace at home and around the world.

New opportunities exist to recommit to peace given the coming end to Canada's participation in the war in Afghanistan and new interest in nuclear disarmament. A broadly mandated department of

peace would entrench Canadians' hopes for a peaceful world in the work of our federal government.

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[*Translation*]

LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Mr. Speaker, having read all about the respectable ancestors of the hon. member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Canadians have the right to know what the member's hidden agenda is. One thing is clear. On April 14, 2009, the Liberal leader said, “We will have to raise taxes”. Here is a new chapter that could be called, “How to tax Canadians more with the Liberal Party of Canada”. This raises a number of important questions. When will they raise taxes? How much will they raise them? Which taxes will be raised, and above all, who will foot the bill? Of course, taxpayers will.

That is the full truth about the secret agenda of the Liberals, who have nothing better to offer Canadians in the midst of this economic downturn than higher taxes. Fortunately, the best economic team has been working hard on this for several months. In Canada's economic action plan, our Conservative government wrote on one page in bold letters, “Tax less, not more”.

* * *

HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL DAY

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today is Holocaust Memorial Day, when we remember the World War II tragedy that resulted in the unjustifiable and arbitrary death of more than six million Jews.

More than 60 years later, it is important that we retain the lessons of these tragic events. We must remember the courage of the survivors and also the fight against racism. But most importantly we must ensure that such a systematic and organized massacre never happens again.

Therefore, on this day we should focus on current challenges faced by a number of peoples. Our responsibility remains to provide support to those who defend the right of nations to exist. In this context, we must hope for the recognition of the Palestinian and Israeli peoples and the creation of two separate countries.

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[*English*]

HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL DAY

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I too rise today to pay tribute to the victims of the Holocaust.

Sixty-four years ago Nazi extermination camps were liberated, but for more than six million Jews and millions of others it was too late.

As we mark Yom Hashoah, Holocaust Memorial Day, we must remind ourselves why we say “Never Again”.

We say it to remember the countless victims who were brutalized and murdered simply because of who they were. We say it to remind ourselves that those who fail to learn from the past are condemned to repeat it.

Now more than ever it is important to reflect and to act.

We must act today when human rights are mocked at the Durban Review Conference and Israel is unjustly singled out yet again. We must act when the Iranian president speaks of Zionist conspiracies and tries to rewrite history to make the Holocaust a myth. We must act as anti-Semitism flares up in Canada and incitement to murder Jews persists around the world.

We must remember, be vigilant, and outspoken in defence of everyone's right to life, free of persecution.

* * *

• (1415)

TAXATION

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this Conservative government has brought in an economic action plan that will further reduce the tax burden on individuals, families and businesses. This \$20 billion of additional tax cuts will leave more money in the hands of Canadians.

However, the Liberal Party has its own plan for dealing with the economic situation. As revealed just last week, the Liberal leader said, and I quote, “We will have to raise taxes”.

The Liberal plan is to raise taxes on Canadian families. Everybody with any basic knowledge of economics knows that raising taxes, while trying to grow the economy, is the absolute worst thing to do. Canadians should be aware of the dangers of the Liberal plan.

Will the Liberals come clean and tell Canadians what taxes they will hike? Will they tell us how much they will raise taxes? Will they explain which Canadians will be forced to pay?

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Bank of Canada now says that the recession will be deeper than the government anticipated. That makes it all the more important to create the jobs of tomorrow today, yet the government has done nothing but cut. It cut \$148 million from our three research councils. It cut Genome Canada from the budget altogether. It cut research funding each year since it took office in real terms.

How can we expect to get recovery from a government that has so little confidence in Canada's scientific community?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, actually, nothing could be further from the truth. This government, in budget 2009, increased funding for science and technology by \$5.1

Oral Questions

billion. That is more money for our researchers, more money for our research institutions, and more money for the granting councils because we believe in science and we believe in innovation.

Speaking of raising, though, it is the hon. member as leader of the Liberal Party who wants to raise taxes. He said last week, April 14, “We will have to raise taxes”. Canadians want to know, which taxes? How much will they go up? Who will pay? Those are the questions Canadians want to know about.

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do not take lectures in fiscal responsibility from a government that led us to the edge of deficit before the recession began.

Let me try again on science. The U.S. is investing six times more per capita in science than we are. What are we doing? Genome Canada is cancelling major stem cell research. We are losing top talent to other countries. That is the legacy of the Conservative budget cuts.

Why has the government lost faith in Canadian science?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, under this government Genome Canada had a multi-year commitment of hundreds of millions of dollars. That is our commitment to Genome Canada and we are following through on that commitment.

The hon. member said and I want to be clear about this, “We will have to raise taxes”. Not we do not want to raise taxes, or this may be a possibility but I do not want to do it. He said we have to raise taxes. That is what he told the people of Canada.

That is the Liberal instinct. Whenever there is a challenging time, whenever we are facing challenging times, the Liberals' instinct is to raise taxes. The people of Canada do not want that instinct in government.

[Translation]

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is a desperate tactic by a government that led Canada to the brink of deficit before the recession. This government has cut funding for scientific research every year, in real terms, since it was elected. It has cut \$148 million from the three research councils.

Why is this government starving our scientists? Why has it not given them the support they need?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is not true. In our 2009 budget, we increased funding for research across Canada by \$5.1 billion. But when the Leader of the Opposition went to Ontario, he said, “We will have to raise taxes.”

Canadians are not wondering which budget they support. They want to know which taxes will go up, by how much and who will pay. That is the question—

Oral Questions

● (1420)

The Speaker: The member for Westmount—Ville-Marie.

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[English]

AEROSPACE INDUSTRY

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives made a clear promise during the last election to provide \$200 million in new funding for the strategic aerospace and defence initiative. This is a program to develop new technologies for the jobs of tomorrow. We are still waiting.

At a time when thousands are being laid off at Pratt & Whitney, Bombardier and Bell Helicopter, what is the minister waiting for to get this money out the door, so that we can begin to create not only the jobs of tomorrow but keep the jobs of today?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Actually, Mr. Speaker, I happened to be in Montreal a few weeks ago with CAE that is investing, along with the Canadian government, \$714 million in new research and development. It is going to be the world leader as it is now.

That is as a result of our programs, the programs that he cites. We are proud of those programs and we will continue to support those programs.

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I guess a promise does not mean anything.

[Translation]

Are the Conservatives aware that time is short and we must act quickly?

We have an aerospace industry and a shipbuilding industry that are patiently waiting for billions of dollars in federal government contracts. The industrial and regional spinoffs will create the jobs of tomorrow.

Governing is more than just making announcements, it is following through on those announcements.

What is this government waiting for to award these contracts it took so much pleasure in announcing?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is the new money, of course, but there is also the money included in the 2009, 2008 and 2007 budgets, which will add to our investment in the sectors the hon. member mentioned.

The good news is that this will create many jobs in our country, such as at Bombardier and CAE.

That is another achievement by our government.

* * *

FORESTRY INDUSTRY

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the union at AbitibiBowater, the Quebec Forest Industry Council and the Forest Products Association of Canada were all unimpressed by the establishment of a working committee on the forestry crisis.

If the government really wants to help the forestry industry, it should provide loan guarantees immediately. In fact, its own lawyers are arguing before the London court that such guarantees are legal.

Therefore, if its lawyers are defending loan guarantees, what is the government waiting for to put words into action and to provide such guarantees to the forestry industry, whose survival is at stake?

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of State (Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec), CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have been defending the forestry industry since we took office. The previous government had let a gap between 2002 and 2006, and it was difficult to sell our products. We will continue to work for that industry. Yesterday, I had the pleasure of accompanying the Minister of Natural Resources when she announced the establishment of a Canada-Quebec committee that will work to promote the recovery of the forestry industry and to implement concrete measures. Since the committee has until May 15 to present the measures that will be selected, we are going to wait until then.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of National Revenue recognized that, at first glance, loan guarantees respect the softwood lumber deal. However, so far, the Conservatives' attitude has been the same as that of the Liberals at the time: they are caving in to the American threat.

Yet, it is very simple: the industry needs cashflow and loan guarantees exist for that reason. What is the government waiting for? After all, such guarantees are legal, as its own lawyers are saying.

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of State (Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec), CPC): Mr. Speaker, in 2008, Export Development Canada helped 534 forestry companies, or 90% of businesses in Canada's forestry sector. Several billions of dollars were provided to support the forestry industry, and we will continue to help that sector.

The issues that were set as priorities to the Canada-Quebec committee include, among others, access to capital, support to workers and communities, and the development of new products and markets. Quite frankly, the problem that the forestry industry is experiencing is, unfortunately, a market problem, because 50% of Quebec's lumber is exported, and 96% of those exports are going to the United States.

● (1425)

Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on the softwood lumber issue, the United States has—from day one—systematically challenged every government support measure, in order to undermine businesses in Quebec and Canada. Government inaction, whether under the Conservatives or the Liberals, has assured the U.S. industry that, even if it were to lose at arbitration, irreversible damages would be caused to the industry in Quebec and Canada.

How can the Prime Minister, who pleaded in favour of loan guarantees during the 2006 election campaign, now be complicit to this U.S. strategy by refusing to grant loan guarantees to the forestry industry, which is going through an unprecedented crisis?

Oral Questions

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague was very clear. The government continues to support forestry companies. Let us think about it for a moment. Export Development Canada earmarked more than \$14 billion for next year. To me and other taxpayers, that is a lot of money. Unfortunately, the Bloc does not think it is very much.

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, to explain his government's refusal to grant loan guarantees to the forestry industry, the Minister of National Revenue contends that the industry asked him to stay put so as not to jeopardize the softwood lumber agreement signed with the United States. However, Quebec, the labour movement, the Quebec Forest Industry Council, as well as the Forest Products Association of Canada are calling for immediate action.

Will the government stop hiding behind double talk and help the forestry industry by granting loan guarantees, among other things, as it did for the auto industry?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last year, Export Development Canada provided support to more than 500 companies. As a matter of fact, I think that 534 forestry companies received support. That is significant support. EDC is continuing to look for ways to provide support to the forestry industry. These are tough times, but EDC is there. The Bloc Québécois does not recognize that support.

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THE ECONOMY

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, over a third of a million people have been laid off since the elections. That is, on average, about 100 people per hour. These people need help, not just numbers that reveal this government's poor economic performance. The House passed an NDP motion to change the employment insurance system so that families can get the help they need.

When will the government take action and fix the employment insurance system to help all of these people?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have made it clear that we want to help people who have been unlucky and lost their jobs. That is why, in our economic action plan, we extended employment insurance benefits by five weeks. That is why we enhanced opportunities for training so that people can get the skills they need for the jobs of the future. They voted against all of these initiatives.

[English]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today the Bank of Canada downgraded its projections. It now believes the Canadian economy will shrink twice as much as it earlier projected, and it has abandoned its optimistic forecast for the Canadian economy. It used to suggest there would be a rebound next year. That now will not happen.

Faced with this mounting evidence, is the government still going to cling to its old approach of just crossing its fingers and leaving the middle class to struggle for itself, or is it actually going to take some

action, finally understanding that Canada is going to need a second stimulus package?

• (1430)

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not know why the hon. member would ask for a second stimulus package when he voted against the first one.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the answer is simple. The first package, according to the Bank of Canada, is not going to get the job done. The Bank of Canada knows it. The economists know it. The middle class knows it.

Under the government, 100 Canadians have been thrown out of work every hour, on average, since it was elected. Over 800,000 of those Canadians need help from EI, but cannot get it because of the rules that the Liberals put in place and that the Conservative government has kept in place.

When will the government change the EI system and get some help to the people who need it?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have expanded the EI system that we inherited so people can get an extra five weeks of regular benefits. We have dramatically expanded work-sharing so up to 52 weeks of support is available now. Right now that is conserving 75,000 jobs in the country that otherwise would be gone.

We are taking those actions. We also investing \$60 million and hundreds of additional personnel and systems to ensure that the benefits people need get delivered to them in a timely manner.

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HEALTH

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on Friday the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food issued a report into his mishandling of the listeriosis crisis. The report claims that on July 18, 2008, the National Microbiology Laboratory informed Ontario's minister of health that it discovered matching genetic fingerprints in two separate human cases of listeria. However, Ontario's Chief Medical Officer has stated that the information was received on July 30, not July 18 as the minister contends.

That is 12 days difference and 21 lives lost. Who is telling the truth?

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture, CPC): Mr. Speaker, all of these questions were answered in the subcommittee last night. We heard from both Mr. McCain of Maple Leaf Foods and from the CFIA itself. My colleague was at that meeting. I would recommend that he review the transcripts.

Regarding food safety and this government, our Conservative government has implemented the toughest food safety rules Canadians have ever seen.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is not true. The minister did not answer the question. He tabled a report on Friday stating that his agency informed the Government of Ontario on July 18, 2008. Ontario's Chief Medical Officer also submitted a report on Friday, in which he said that it was on July 30.

Was it July 18 or July 30? Who is telling the truth—the minister or Ontario's Chief Medical Officer?

When will this government admit that it is incompetent?

[English]

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, I would invite my colleague to review the transcripts from the subcommittee meeting yesterday. All of this was discussed. There was an extended meeting, and she has full access to the transcripts.

As I said, other matters were discussed yesterday. In fact, in terms of us getting tough with food safety, we are reinstating mandatory environmental testing for listeria. This is something that the Liberals eliminated in 2005. We are also demanding mandatory reporting on any positive results for listeria and we are increasing CFIA testing.

* * *

SRI LANKA

Hon. Albina Guarnieri (Mississauga East—Cooksville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, at least 100,000 displaced Tamil civilians are trapped in the path of the Sri Lankan army and could not be in more desperate need of food, clean water, shelter and security. Safe zones are not safe from dehydration, malnutrition, snake bites, shelling or today's aerial bombardment of the latest makeshift hospital.

When will CIDA finally respond to the scale of this human tragedy and deliver aid where it is most urgently needed?

• (1435)

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the member is aware, Canada has responded and we are monitoring the situation very carefully.

Also, I want to point out to all Canadians that the Minister of Foreign Affairs has been very active on this file. He has asked for the continuation of a safe period for humanitarian workers to have access. He asked for a ceasefire so we can remove the wounded. He has also asked for consideration of the impact that this conflict has had on civilians in Sri Lanka.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Tamil community in my riding, I have approached health professionals and school boards and I have repeatedly talked to the International Red Cross that cannot get aid in there. I comfort children who find it difficult to study, hold grown men in my arms while they sob and pray with senior women.

Now I implore the government. What tangible action will it take to relieve the humanitarian disaster in Sri Lanka?

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as has been pointed out, it is very difficult for these humanitarian organizations to get into the conflict zone. That is why

we are asking for a humanitarian corridor. We are asking for a ceasefire. We are supporting the Red Cross and the UNHCR to provide assistance to those civilians to whom we can get access.

We are monitoring this situation. We are concerned about the impact on the civilians and we will respond appropriately when we can do it effectively.

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[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the committee examining the forestry crisis intends to study the situation of workers. Yet, we are familiar with this situation. More than 300 communities in Canada and 122 communities in Quebec have been affected. These communities are often single-industry towns and find themselves with workers who are unemployed and therefore without an income.

Does the government realize that the employment insurance waiting period must be eliminated in order to allow the unemployed to have immediate access to some income?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are taking care of the workers of Quebec and Canada, especially in the forestry, manufacturing and agriculture sectors. That is why yesterday we established a committee to focus on the situation of workers in the forestry sector. We will examine all aspects of these situations.

Mrs. Josée Beaudin (Saint-Lambert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, since April 2005, 21,000 workers have lost their jobs in the Quebec forestry sector. Of these, hundreds of older workers cannot be retrained and the minister refuses to acknowledge this. How can you retrain someone living in a single-industry community? The minister should understand this.

Will the government finally acknowledge that it must quickly put in place a real program to support older workers?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we already have a program for older workers. It is a pilot project that we expanded. That is why we also have funds for communities. We have also increased funding for training these people so they can prepare, together with the communities, for the jobs of the future in these communities.

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THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of the Environment maintains that he has an action plan and that most companies currently using dirty technology will have to adapt to his action plan. What the minister is really proposing is to help the oil and gas companies at the expense of the environment and Quebec. That is the reality. Abandoning 1990 means refusing to recognize past efforts and working against sustainable development.

If the minister wishes to maintain credibility when he talks about fighting greenhouse gas emissions, what is he waiting for to use 1990 as the reference year, establish absolute targets and promote a carbon exchange?

● (1440)

[English]

Mr. Mark Warawa (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member's question is a very important one. The question is really this. Why is he not supporting one of the toughest targets in Canadian history, and definitely one of the toughest in the world?

Canada's targets will reduce greenhouse gas emissions an absolute 20% by 2020. It is huge.

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary is spreading falsehoods here this House. These are the lowest targets we have ever seen. That is the reality.

The modelling group in the United States has pointed out that for Canada to do its fair share to reduce greenhouse gas emissions it must reduce its greenhouse gases by 25% compared to 1990 levels, by 2020. Without absolute targets, that goal is unachievable.

What is the Minister of the Environment waiting for to abandon intensity targets and immediately adopt absolute targets?

[English]

Mr. Mark Warawa (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member may not be aware, but Canada and the U.S. have a clean energy dialogue. The Prime Minister has met with President Obama. The Minister of the Environment has been meeting with his colleagues in the U.S.

It is a move forward to expand clean energy, research and development, technology, like carbon capture and storage, to build a more efficient electricity grid, harmonizing our fuel efficiency and on and on. We are getting it done.

* * *

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this month's unemployment numbers showed 61,000 more full-time jobs were lost in March, another 61,000 families who do not know where their next paycheque will come from, another 61,000 families who have been let down by the government. That is 380,000 full-time jobs since last October.

However, thousands who will apply for EI will not qualify, even though they have paid into it for years. Despite a universal call for action, the government has refused to adjust the rules to make assistance available to more Canadians.

Why has the government refused to help Canadians who have suffered at the hands of its mean and incompetent management of this economy?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in fact, the system that we have for employment insurance actually adjusts automatically to help

Oral Questions

those very individuals. It adjusts automatically every month in 58 regions across the country, based on the local conditions there. I can tell members that 32 out of the 58 regions have been adjusted recently so more people get easier access to more weeks of benefits.

That was the system the Liberals designed. We have added five additional weeks of regular benefits to that so Canadians can get the employment insurance benefits they need, and 82% of those who pay into the system are receiving those benefits.

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what the minister is saying is, "Just wait, things are going to get worse". This is from a minister who says she does not want to make EI too lucrative, at an average of \$335 a week for the 43% of people who qualify.

The government is totally out of touch with Canadians who are hurting right now. Will the minister now acknowledge that she was dead wrong on EI and extend EI to those who have paid into it for years, who need it now and cannot get it from the government?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, over 80% of people who pay into the system are getting the benefits for which they paid. It is true that not everyone is eligible. Unfortunately, that is the way the system is and everyone has agreed that this is not the time to overhaul it. This is the time to do as best as we can to get the benefits out there quickly and to provide training to people so they will have jobs in the future.

I would like to quote a Liberal member, who said:

This is the time to help by giving Canadians experience and training. Providing income support in the short term and training for when the economy picks up.

Who said that? It was the hon. member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour.

* * *

[Translation]

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Police Association and the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, through their elected president, have indicated that the registration of all firearms is essential to guarantee public safety. But this government, which claims to be interested in public safety, is ignoring this formal request.

Why is there this flagrant contradiction in the actions of the Conservative government?

● (1445)

[English]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our commitment is quite clear. We intend to eliminate the long gun registry. We do not believe it provides any particular benefits in terms of law enforcement.

Oral Questions

In fact, we have chosen to approach these matters differently, with mandatory prison sentences for crimes committed with guns, provide more resources to our police and more police officers on the street, with over 1,500 new RCMP officers so far.

That is our approach to making our communities safer.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police and the Canadian Police Association have both called on Parliament to maintain the national firearms registry for all firearms in Canada. It is consulted by those same police officers 9,000 times a day. The government likes to take photos with police officers, but the government does not want to listen to their thoughtful advice.

Why the hypocrisy? Why the change of plans?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our police officers are among the bravest people in our country. They undertake their work every day in various situations that are very dangerous. The one thing they will not do is assume that what is on the gun registry tells them who is a criminal. Why? Because the people carrying the guns, the criminals on our streets, have not signed up with the gun registry.

Those are illegal handguns. That is why we have made it a mandatory prison sentence when a person is convicted of carrying an illegal handgun. That is our approach to getting tough on crime: focusing on the criminals.

* * *

JUSTICE

Mrs. Kelly Block (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the best way to fight gangs and organized crime is to disrupt criminal enterprise. Today our Conservative government introduced new legislation to combat auto theft. Gangs thrive on the profits gained from these illegal activities. Cars are stolen and their parts resold to unsuspecting customers. This new legislation will seriously impact the ability of gangs to profit from these illegal activities.

Could the minister tell us how this legislation will help the Canada Border Services Agency reduce the harm inflicted by gangs and other criminal organizations?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first, I thank the member for her hard work on this issue. This new law will prohibit the importing and exporting of property obtained by crime, thereby giving our border security officers the tools they need to seize stolen property. This is in complete contrast to the actions of the members of the NDP and the Bloc who yesterday attempted to gut our bill on organized crime by weakening the penalties for gangsters.

Soft on crime does not work. This is why I always say that when it comes to standing up for victims and law-abiding Canadians, the only people who can be counted on are in the Conservative Party and in this Conservative government.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a United Nations study has ranked how G8 countries are progressing in cutting greenhouse gases. Germany cut its emissions by 18% and Britain by 15%. Where is Canada? Dead last. In fact, Canada's greenhouse gases are up 34% over 1990 levels.

Does the government not recognize that its measures are failing? When will the government make Canada a leader not a laggard by bringing in hard limits on greenhouse gases based on absolute scientific benchmarks?

Mr. Mark Warawa (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the fact is that for long, long years we had a Liberal government that did absolutely nothing on the environment. Now we have a Liberal leader who wants to impose a job killing carbon tax on Canadians.

Our policy on the environment is tough, it is real and it strikes the right balance between creating jobs and protecting the environment. That is what Canadians want. They want strong leadership on the environment and that is what they get right now.

[Translation]

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, indeed, Jean Chrétien's former chief of staff, Eddie Goldenberg, has told us that when the Liberals signed the Kyoto protocol, it was for public relations reasons. This is why, for the 13 years they were in power, the Liberals presided over the biggest increase in greenhouse gases in the world.

Instead of acting to protect future generations, the Conservatives are doing worse, and Canada has once again been shamed on the world stage.

The Kyoto protocol is part of Canadian law. What are they waiting for before they act?

• (1450)

[English]

Mr. Mark Warawa (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with shock to that question. The NDP members voted against \$1 billion for green infrastructure. They voted against \$300 million for the eco-energy retrofits. They voted against \$1 billion for carbon capture and storage. What is happening over there? Do they not believe in climate change?

* * *

[Translation]

GOODS AND SERVICES TAX

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Quebec and Ottawa are in a dispute over the harmonization of the GST and the Minister of Finance has made his conditions for compensating Quebec known. He position is that Quebec should stop collecting the GST and QST, and that these taxes be collected by the federal government in future.

Oral Questions

Can the Minister of Finance tell us whether this condition is non-negotiable for compensating Quebec? Is he telling Quebecers that it is this or nothing?

[English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): No, Mr. Speaker. I have had an exchange of correspondence with the current minister of finance in Quebec who has just taken the office from the former minister of finance. We are certainly open to discussions about harmonization. The reason we are is that it will create jobs, investment and economic growth in our country, including Quebec.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question now is for the Quebec lieutenant who has quietly given up defending the interests of Quebec, and is accepting his government's use of the fiscal weapon to deprive Quebec of \$2.6 billion and trying once again to strip Quebec of its prerogatives.

Will the minister stand up and denounce this absurd situation whereby Quebec's income taxes are used to pay the compensation that the federal government is granting to others?

[English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): The plain fact, Mr. Speaker, is the Government of Quebec is collecting the GST for the Government of Canada and is being paid \$130 million a year to do that job.

This is about economic growth in Canada. That is why New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Labrador and now the province of Ontario have all negotiated with the federal government and arrived at a harmonized tax system.

This is in the best interest of people who work in Quebec. That is why I look forward to continuing discussions with the Government of Quebec.

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[Translation]

FORESTRY INDUSTRY

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Natural Resources has not had the time to meet with the largest forestry workers union. While thousands of them are losing their jobs, she has hung out a "Do Not Disturb" sign on her door.

The only thing she has to offer is diversions to try to gain some time while continuing to do nothing. People are losing their jobs, the industry is in crisis, regions are at risk of disappearing. Will the Conservatives wake up before all the jobs, and the industry, disappear?

How many more jobs have to be lost before something is done to help the workers and the industry?

[English]

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I find it quite ironic that we have had these unprecedented public consultations across the country. We have listened to what the forestry industry wants. We have delivered. We have listened to what the communities are asking for. We have delivered.

Most important, perhaps when the Liberal leader meets with the people he says he is meeting with, maybe they should ask him what he plans on doing in raising taxes, which will really hurt the forestry industry and the communities.

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, thousands of forestry workers in B.C. have lost their jobs, while this minister is delivering a lot of words. The industry has been ignored by the Conservatives. Worse, they killed the 2005 Liberal plan to allocate \$1.5 billion to this vital industry. This included over \$300 million for innovation that would have helped to sustain forestry jobs.

The Conservatives are failing to support laid off workers and hard hit forestry communities. Why is the government helping some sectors but completely abandoning forestry?

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is simply not the case. In fact, I can quote Mr. Rick Jeffery, president and CEO of the Coast Forest Products Association, when he talks about the programs that this Conservative government has brought in to help the forestry industry. He said:

—the Canada wood export program, the wood-first policy, the value-to-wood program, and the forest innovation programs that were in the last budget. Those are all great programs. They help drive innovation; they help keep markets open; they help us produce new products and develop new markets; and they also allow us to promote our products in those markets.

* * *

● (1455)

FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Mr. Speaker, while the Bank of Canada's lending rate has hit an all time low, credit card interest rates have hit an all time high. Retailers and small businesses are being hit with higher credit card fees, eliminating what little margins are made in this economic recession.

Meanwhile, with Visa and MasterCard planning to move into the debit market, fees will skyrocket even higher and more costs will be passed on to consumers.

The government cannot continue to allow Canadians to be gouged with fees. Why is the government sitting by and letting consumers get fleeced?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, the hon. member from the New Democratic Party is advocating for something that the party voted against. We put in the budget this year and in the bill a provision to give the Minister of Finance and the government the regulatory power with respect to credit cards. We are working on that.

An hon. member: You've done nothing.

Hon. Jim Flaherty: I hear the member say that we have done nothing. We have actually done quite bit. If he stays tuned, he will see that.

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we need more than an information plan. We need an action plan.

Oral Questions

This situation is getting worse every day. A poll today revealed that one in five Canadians received new premium cards without asking for them. What is worse, those who received these high interest cards were the poor, elderly and least educated.

We cannot count on Visa or MasterCard to be concerned about the most vulnerable when it comes to taking on debt. We need legislation to protect consumers like Obama's credit card accountability act.

Will the government finally take action and stand up for consumers?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government has been taking action. We took action in the budget. It is now the law. We can go ahead and bring in regulatory measures, which we fully intend to do and which we have been working on and creating.

More than that, we are funding financial literacy in our country. Yesterday I spoke at the Federal Reserve Bank in Chicago on that subject. This is an important educational opportunity for Canadians in which our government is investing millions, not only with respect to consumer protection but also with respect to ensuring that Canadians have the knowledge they need to properly inform themselves when they look at financial and credit products.

* * *

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in January 2008, the Minister of Immigration announced that Canada would be the first country in the world to withdraw from the Durban review process. Since then, much of the world has followed Canada's lead, including Italy, Australia, New Zealand, the Obama administration in the United States and Israel.

Yesterday's hate-filled speech by Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad at the conference would seem to vindicate the Conservative position on Durban. Will the Minister of Immigration describe the government's policy on the Durban process?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada was the first country in the world to withdraw from the Durban process. We did so last January because of our concerns that it would be a repeat of the fiasco of Durban I.

Yesterday's speech by Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and his odious remarks vindicate our decision, which has been followed by a number of other countries. He made those remarks on the eve of Holocaust commemoration day. Bizarrely, a UN spokesman actually said that at least he did not deliver all of his lines about Holocaust denial.

Canada was right to lead the world in removing itself from this incredibly inappropriate process that is promoting and not combating racism. We are leading the world and not following.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the United Nations reports today that Canada now ranks first among the

G8 for increasing greenhouse gas emissions. In Germany, emissions are down 18% and in the United Kingdom they are down 15%.

There is no surprise here. We have had three ministers with three evaporating plans in three years. No regulations have come into force and no emissions have been reduced. Canada is outpaced sixfold by the U.S. in green investments and innovation that will drive the economy of the 21st century.

Why do the Conservatives refuse to make the investments necessary to put Canada on a competitive track when it comes to creating the green jobs of the future?

● (1500)

Mr. Mark Warawa (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that was from a member who just voted for the tiddlywink bill.

This government is committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 20% by 2020 and, by 2020, to have 90% of electricity produced by clean sources. A carbon tax that his leader is proposing will not achieve that.

* * *

[Translation]

SRI LANKA

Mr. Jean Dorion (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ): Mr. Speaker, between 70,000 and 10,000 Tamil civilians in Sri Lanka are crowded into a 15 km square area initially designed as a no-fire zone for the protection of civilians. The Red Cross has expressed extreme concern for the civilians caught in this zone.

Does Canada intend to add its voice to the others who are calling for both parties to ensure the protection of civilians and to immediately reach a lasting ceasefire?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. colleague for his question.

This is in fact what we have been doing for some time now. I have been in touch with the Secretary General of the United Nations. I have also spoken to a number of ministers of foreign affairs who have been directly involved in this matter. What we absolutely want is a humanitarian ceasefire in order to allow the civilians to escape the combat zone.

We are, however, well aware that this is not a real solution. There needs to be a dialogue, a negotiated solution. This armed conflict needs to come to an end.

[English]

POINTS OF ORDER

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I wish to apologize for any impression I may have given yesterday during statements that I was being disrespectful toward those who have suffered as a result of the tragedy that took place in Italy earlier this month. It was never my intention to show any disrespect.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, I immediately rose in the House of Commons following question period to clarify my comments but, unfortunately, as you later confirmed, you did not see me.

My personal and deepest sympathies go out to those in my community and others across Canada who have been touched by this tragedy. I would respectfully ask that this incident not be exploited further as it would only serve to prolong the pain of those who have lost loved ones.

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PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of the Hon. John Hogg, President of the Senate of Australia.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

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POINTS OF ORDER

EMERGENCY DEBATE

Hon. Jim Karygiannis (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order to request that the House hold an emergency debate in view of what is happening in Sri Lanka. We are getting reports that atrocities toward the Tamil population by both sides are rampant. The Tamil population was asked to go to safety zones where they only ended up being bombarded and killed. This is nothing less than the first genocide of the 21st century.

The front page of this morning's *National Post* shows a long line of thousands of innocent civilians trekking to safety, walking knee deep in water. This only reminds me of the first genocide of the 20th century when Armenians and Greeks had to flee the Ottoman Empire. There is a picture on page 537 of the *National Geographic* magazine of December 1925 that depicts that trek. The conditions are the same. The pictures are just a century apart. The world stood silent then and close to two million people were killed. We are standing silent today and innocent people are being killed.

The Sri Lanka government and the LTTE must realize that innocent people cannot be used as pawns.

In the spirit of the R2P, responsibility to protect, the government must act immediately and ask the United Nations to appoint a special envoy and take measures to provide safety for those people.

The Speaker: Order, please. I think the hon. member for Scarborough—Agincourt is going a little beyond his point of order. His point of order was to request an emergency debate.

Business of Supply

Is there unanimous consent of the House to have an emergency debate on this matter?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Speaker: There is no consent so I believe that disposes of the matter for now. The member knows he can make a request pursuant to the Standing Orders for an emergency debate. If and when that happens, we will deal with it here.

• (1505)

ORAL QUESTIONS

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture seriously misinformed the House during question period by alleging that the question raised today was handled yesterday in committee. That is not the case. The question was not asked or answered because it is information that became available overnight.

I know the parliamentary secretary to be an honourable gentleman and, therefore, would expect that maybe he will stand and inform the House in a proper fashion in response to that question. It was not dealt with at committee last night. It is new information.

The Speaker: While I am sure the hon. member for Malpeque feels that he may not have received the information he asked for or received it in a different form, the fact is that sometimes there are disputes about facts that occur in the House but they are not points of order and I do not believe he has raised a point of order. Those deal with procedural matters. The Speaker has no idea of what the facts are in any case and, if I do, I am not to let on.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—GUN CONTROL

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to focus on today's motion, dealing with gun control. The government wants to extend the amnesty on the requirement to register firearms. Since 2006, when it was first elected, this government has tried every trick in the book to water down the requirement to register all firearms in circulation, including rifles and long guns.

This is indeed what the government has in mind and wants to do. It is going through the back door, whether it is with a private member's bill, or with Conservative senators who also present bills in the Senate to change the cost of registering firearms.

I am going to split my time with the hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, who will also address this issue.

As we know, the debate on gun registration has been going on since 1995. We were in the House when that debate began, following the tragedy at the École Polytechnique.

Business of Supply

This evening, a film on this tragic event will be shown. It will stir emotions, and it may lead a number of colleagues here to change their views on this important issue. The Conservatives are saying that this is a campaign promise. Some of them made that promise to their fellow citizens.

I want to remind them that public studies or inquiries conducted in Quebec show that three quarters of the population is very satisfied with the gun registration policy. There may have been some irritants related to the process, which was a long and costly one. But now that this gun registry is in place and is controlled in Quebec, the public is aware of its impact and of the objectives that we want to achieve. The fewer guns there are circulating freely, the more control and registration activities there are, the better we will be able to determine whether firearms are present when, for example, police officers arrive at the scene of a crime, or of an attempted crime. When an individual is holding hostage members of his family, or people close to him, the police is able to determine whether that individual is armed.

The arguments of the Conservatives are very dubious and open to criticism and debate. I need only recall certain arguments emphasized this morning by some Conservative members from the Quebec City region. The member for Beauport—Limouilou, for example, said that we need to have confidence in people—as though we did not have confidence in them—that these are responsible people who own hunting rifles and other long guns, and that these are certainly not the people who should be targeted. It is not a matter of targeting these people; it is rather a case of being proactive and of establishing certain conditions that can save lives.

Suicides and crimes are committed with rifles. Far too many people can be victims of crimes carried out with these weapons. I knew someone who, a few years ago—even before registration of firearms was considered, before there was a safety code to put them in a safe place, back when they circulated freely—who used his rifle one day, while he was depressed and on medication.

● (1510)

One fine morning, unbeknownst to his children, he left the house with his rifle under his raincoat. He took his own life with a hunting rifle. I ask myself today; if, for example, that weapon had been stored under certain conditions, would he, perhaps, have had time to reflect on his actions? I know that it was quite a tragedy for the family that experienced that suicide.

Today, it seems to me that the debate is over. We thought it was finished; but, no, each year the Conservative party comes back with proposals that seek to reduce the scope of firearms registry and this law. We must question the real motives of the government. Why does it want to proceed by sheltering a certain part of the population that owns weapons, rifles or hunting rifles from the law? They tell us that they do not want to upset them and irritate them further and that we should have confidence in them. I find it hard to accept this kind of bizarre argument. We certainly register automobiles and the boats on our lakes. You need a permit for a boat these days. Why is this a requirement?

Moreover, we know that those who own rifles and hunting weapons do not have to pay for the licence to use their weapons.

Registration is free of charge for those people. What, then, are the irritants?

I remember another issue about which the same conclusion could be drawn. When we wanted to institute DNA testing, people in some caucuses did not want to see hair or saliva samples taken because they felt it was a personal invasion. At the same time, though, the objective was good. When someone is accused of murder, DNA testing might be the only way to find the real perpetrator. After several discussions within our own caucus, and other caucuses too maybe, we managed to reach a consensus and agreed to support the bill on DNA testing. I remember well because I wanted this bill to pass at a time when I was the Bloc critic on the status of women.

We might have expected, therefore, that all the members would refuse to extend this gun registry amnesty until 2010. We were asked to extend it in 2006. Then it was 2007 and then 2008 for the amnesty granted to hunters and people who have hunting guns or rifles. Now they want to extend it again until 2010. This means that some people do not have to comply with the law and others can be excluded from it.

We have a lot of support as well from the public, such as police associations and public health directors, including Mr. François Desbiens, public health director at the Agence de la santé et des services sociaux de la Capitale-Nationale. He says that the statistics are telling. A lot fewer people are using guns now to commit suicide or murder.

We also want all the members of the House today to think hard and come to see the film about the tragedy that happened at the École Polytechnique. An association was just created on gun control. We hope this might change the minds of some members of the House and that could make the difference when it comes to getting around this law and going back on our intent to pursue this objective.

● (1515)

[English]

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to my colleague across the floor and she mentioned a number of people who support the registry.

I have a quote that I will read and wonder if she would like to comment on it. This was stated by a senior police officer in the province of Ontario. The quote is as follows:

—a law registering firearms has neither deterred these crimes nor helped us solve any of them. None of the guns we know to have been used were registered...the money could be more effectively used for security against terrorism as well as a host of other public safety initiatives.

That was a quote from former Toronto police chief Julian Fantino dated January 2003. He is currently the Commissioner of the Ontario Provincial Police. I would suggest that he is a fairly well-known and respected senior police officer in this country. I wonder if she would have any response to the comments made by Mr. Fantino.

Business of Supply

[Translation]

Ms. Christiane Gagnon: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his question. That opinion is one among many others. For example, the Association des policières et policiers provinciaux du Québec and other police associations, who can speak for a number of people, tell us that there have, nonetheless, been some telling improvements.

I know that firearms control is not the only way to reduce the number of incidents or criminal acts committed with guns. I think that we must implement other prevention initiatives as well. We must go to the source of the problem and fight poverty, for example.

Today, many people lose their jobs and some are depressed because they do not know how they can get through the present recession.

Moreover, there are some desperate people out there. We must help community groups put resources at the disposal of people who commit serious crimes or attempt suicide. We must also offer support to certain individuals in our society.

However, we will never be able to prevent some deviant elements of our society from committing violent crimes.

In addition, the bill and the gun registry have larger objectives than those the member alluded to. Saying that we must invest the money elsewhere is one of the myths. I do believe that we must invest money elsewhere, but not the money used for gun control. I think that that would be a bad solution and a bad direction.

• (1520)

[English]

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, contrary to the comment offered to the House by the parliamentary secretary, it is interesting that a more current remark by a senior police officer, in fact the president of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, says that gun control saves lives. He was quoting from a report prepared for the police, which actually revealed that a substantial number of firearms recovered in crimes were once legal.

He calls for retaining the registry, including long guns, and says that, yes, rifles and shotguns are used less frequently in crimes today than 15 years ago. Why? It is because of the measures that were in place that paid off and the rate of firearm murders, particularly of women, has reduced because of that.

I am wondering if the member could remark on the support of the gun registry by the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police.

[Translation]

Ms. Christiane Gagnon: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for her question.

I was just saying a moment ago that various associations are satisfied, such as the police association and the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police. The great majority are satisfied. Apparently, three quarters of the population of Quebec are also satisfied with the registration of firearms. They know that there have been some irritants at the start and that implementing the firearms registry was very costly. But, now that it exists, it is inexpensive, and not using it would save only pennies, but that is what the Conservative member

who asked me the question earlier wants to do. Saving pennies would not be sufficient to solve the whole problem.

I think it is one of the tools we want to provide for our citizens. Having some control over the circulation of firearms allows police officers to be better equipped when they arrive at a crime scene or when someone is held hostage and they know that the perpetrator owns a firearm. But it must not be assumed that, because no firearm was registered, the individual does not possess any.

There are also solutions which the government could use against firearms smuggling, since nearly 50% of firearms found on a crime scene are handguns. There could be other solutions, but the government has not yet adopted them.

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thériault (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Québec for sharing her time with me.

As my colleague so aptly pointed out a little earlier, we willingly accept the registration of our cars, snowmobiles and all-terrain vehicles for safety reasons. Why should it be different for firearms? The gun control bill was passed in 1995. The Bloc Québécois, having demanded it, therefore voted in favour of it.

To justify their opposition to the firearms registry, the Conservatives prefer to hide behind the crimes that are committed with illegal weapons. The Conservative government maintains that the real criminals will always manage to procure firearms. That may be so, but do we have to make the task easier for them? Abolishing the registry may aggravate the contraband weapons problem, since there will be no more control or monitoring of firearms.

For the third time, nay for the fourth time if we count Bill C-301, the government is attacking the firearms registry. This ideological stubbornness is difficult to follow, since we know that the firearms registry has made it possible to reduce the number of gun-related tragedies.

Since they were elected in 2006, the Conservatives have been constant in their efforts to damage this registry. In June 2006, they set the tone for this issue by tabling the bill for the outright abolition of the registry. Unable to convince the opposition, they took roundabout action by declaring an amnesty. That amnesty had been allowed by the Liberals, but the Conservatives extended it until May 2008, then May 2009. They are attempting to extend it once again for another year.

Furthermore, the firearms marking regulations dating from November 2004, which initially were supposed to come into force in April 2006, were pushed back a first time by the Liberals and a second time by the Conservatives, less than a month before they come into force in December 2009. The amnesty announced in May 2006 had a term of one year. However it was renewed twice, and now the Conservatives are trying to extend it another year. This is unacceptable to the Bloc Québécois. We demand that this program be in place by May 16.

There is a direct connection between the ease with which one can procure a weapon and the homicide rate. Quebec has seen a drop in the homicide rate since 1995, the year the registry began.

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The hon. members from the Bloc Québécois are not alone in finding benefits in this registry. The police forces of Quebec and Canada indicate that they consider it a very effective tool. The public health agencies, reporting the situation on the ground, say that the registry is an effective means of achieving a lower homicide and suicide rate. Lastly, that is what the statistics say as well. The number of violent crimes has fallen since the firearms registry came into effect.

This request has also been made by the government of Quebec, which repeated it during its last election campaign, when the Quebec premier wrote to his federal counterpart to ask that the firearms registry be maintained. What is more, the elected officials of Quebec have on two occasions voted unanimously in the National Assembly in favour of maintaining this registry.

This evening, to raise awareness among our fellow members of Parliament, the Bloc Québécois will be screening *Polytechnique*, which relates the events of the 1989 massacre at the École Polytechnique de Montréal.

To prevent events like the ones that took place at the École Polytechnique de Montréal and Concordia University from happening again, the Government of Quebec is trying to protect the people of Quebec. Recently, it adopted the Anastasia Act, which tightens gun control by regulating firearms possession in some locations and creating a regulatory system for target practice in Quebec.

• (1525)

The Government of Quebec talked about its intent to assume greater responsibility for gun control. We know that criminal law falls under federal jurisdiction. If the Conservatives recognize the Quebec nation, they must recognize our right to have different needs. If they do not want to maintain the gun registry, they should transfer the responsibility to Quebec, and Quebec will look after it.

The best way to pass laws that reflect Quebec's needs is, without doubt, Quebec sovereignty. A sovereign Quebec would have dealt with the gun issue a long time ago.

Until then, the Bloc Québécois is the party that will stand up for the interests of Quebecers and for motions passed unanimously in the National Assembly, including the one on firearms. The Bloc Québécois firmly believes that taking preventive action and tackling factors that lead to crime are sure ways to prevent human and family tragedies.

I said earlier that we set a record when it comes to the decline in crime and homicide rates in Quebec. We can see that creating the registry has had beneficial effects, unlike what is going on in our neighbour to the south. Ten years ago, they too had a terrible tragedy, the Columbine massacre. They did nothing to tighten access to firearms. The only thing they did to prevent crimes like that was to adopt more enforcement-oriented measures, like what the Conservative government is preparing to put forward. We have seen, however, that there were no significant results from those kinds of measures.

Although media coverage of violent crimes may suggest that they have been on the rise over the years, that does not reflect reality. Since the mid-1990s, crime has been falling in Quebec and Canada. Statistics Canada confirms that the overall crime rate has recently

fallen in this country. It was the lowest in 25 years, and in Quebec it was the lowest homicide rate since 1962. That is not an insignificant fact.

We also know that violent crime declined by 22% in Quebec between 1991 and 2004. By way of comparison, the homicide rate in Canada for 2003 was three times lower than in the United States. That is very significant. Instead of modelling our policy on the Americans', what we have to do is continue to work on prevention, and before long it will be the Americans modelling their policy on ours.

The Conservatives' obsession with talking about nothing but smuggled guns must not be allowed to conceal the fact that the firearms most commonly used in spousal homicides are legally acquired shotguns and rifles. The statistics show that 85% of homicides are committed with rifles. We know that a large proportion of homicide victims in the case of spousal violence are women. That is not an insignificant fact.

We also know that it is not enough just to register a firearm. In 2003, Montreal police responded to a spousal violence situation. The wife was afraid because her husband, who had been hospitalized, was now coming home, and when the police checked the firearms registry they found that the man owned a real arsenal: 26 handguns, 16 hunting weapons and 45,000 rounds of ammunition. The registry made it possible for the police to prepare themselves before responding.

I will conclude by saying that we register our vehicles and we register our ATVs. Is it not reasonable for us to also register our firearms?

• (1530)

[English]

Mr. Gerald Keddy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member's comments are meant in the best practice of this House to add to the debate and to try to find a solution to a very difficult problem in this country.

Probably the greatest myth ever perpetuated in this country in the 20th century and certainly carried over into the 21st century is that of the long gun registry somehow changing safety and making people, especially women, more safe in this country. I would argue that during the 1990s and much of the early part of the 2000s, quite frankly, as a society we turned our back on problems regarding the safety of women. The previous government especially tried to make it all about a gun registry. The gun registry never enforced one peace bond. As a matter of fact, it took resources and dollars away from enforcing peace bonds in this country. The gun registry never made one woman any safer.

Registering gun owners makes a lot of sense. A licence and passing a psychological test make sense.

The member when talking about firearms has the right idea, but she is on the wrong road.

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[Translation]

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thāi Thi Lac: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is talking about saving money when I am talking about protecting lives. The firearms registry lets us protect lives. I referred to a case in point. When a police officer went to an individual's home, he was in a position to know that the individual owned an arsenal of more than forty firearms, and this meant that he was able to deal with the situation.

Right now, the last six murders of police officers were committed with hunting weapons. I am talking about saving lives. And the firearms registry is essential for precisely this reason: to protect people's lives.

• (1535)

[English]

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member will have heard already in the debate that the police consult the registry over 9,000 times a day and that the annual cost is about \$3 million. This is not in dispute.

However, the police association takes exception to a simple sloganeering of getting tough on crime and focusing on criminals, because we have to prevent crime, not deal with it after the fact. For me, the most important issue is that there is an improper balance between crime prevention and dealing with a problem after we have it.

The police association is calling for increased border security to deal with the illegal importation of guns. It wants to properly monitor retailers and wholesalers to deal with the issue where guns and ammunition are sold. It wants additional front-line police officers.

I wonder if the member would agree that the government seems to have more of a political focus on the need to somehow disband a gun registry, which our police authorities say helps them to keep the public safe. The government, for political reasons, rather than focusing on a balance between prevention and—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot.

[Translation]

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thāi Thi Lac: Mr. Speaker, in fact, when it comes to prevention, Quebec is one of the leaders. What Canada should be doing is modelling its policy on Quebec's. We know that Quebec has the lowest crime rate. Quebec has long understood that prevention is the best way of tackling crime. I am a criminologist by training myself, and so I know how important prevention and dealing with problems at their source are.

In my opinion, the gun registry is the best tool the police can have to work with, because in addition to protecting the public, it protects the police from some of the attacks they might be facing.

[English]

Ms. Candice Hoepfner (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time today with the member for Yorkton—Melville.

I stand today to address the House on the motion brought forward by the hon. member for Marc-Aurèle-Fortin. I am aware that gun

crime prevention is an issue of great importance to the hon. member, as it is to all of us in this House. We should never forget that so many tragedies have been a result of gun crimes. We also should never take for granted or take lightly our responsibility to approach this problem with vigour, sophistication and intelligence.

In order to do that, we need to look beyond the tempting initial assumption that all problems can be solved with more of the same: another registry, another bureaucracy, another bundle of red tape. It does not work.

I cannot agree with this motion or support this motion, nor would my constituents. We need laws that attack the problem, not law-abiding citizens. The government has set out a balanced approach to preventing violent crime in Canada and that approach does not include criminalizing or otherwise burdening legitimate gun owners.

Canadians put their trust in this government in large part because of our commitment to get tough on crime and to make our streets and communities safer. The choice now is clear. We can have more concrete action against crime or we can settle for what the hon. member from the opposition wants, which is a false sense of safety that comes from an expensive long gun registry.

Our way is better. We have made significant investments in crime prevention over the past three years and we have put more tools and better tools into the hands of law enforcement officials. We are cracking down on gang and drug crimes and we are changing the way criminals are dealt with in our judicial system.

Tackling the illegal use of firearms is a pillar of our government's public safety agenda. We have introduced longer mandatory prison sentences for gun crimes and tough new rules on bail for serious weapon related crimes. Our government has put more police on the streets to fight gun crime, among other priorities.

We are also investing \$7 million annually to strengthen front-end screening of first-time firearm licence applicants with a view to keeping firearms out of the hands of people who should not have them. We recently introduced legislation that would create a new criminal offence to target drive-by and other intentional shootings that involve reckless disregard for the life or safety of others.

In addition to taking these long overdue actions, our government has proposed fundamental changes to gun registration laws in Canada. As hon. members know, it is our intention to eliminate the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry that places an undue burden on farmers and on duck, deer, moose and other legitimate hunters. The long gun registry puts law-abiding Canadians at risk while doing nothing to prevent gun crimes.

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These honest Canadians were not part of and never will be part of the violent crime problem in Canada. Our intention is to shift resources from this program to the front lines of policing, border security and the fight against organized crime.

Eliminating the long gun registry is not about less gun crime prevention but about better, more effective gun crime prevention. We believe that firearm legislation should target criminals, not the millions of law-abiding Canadians who use rifles and shotguns to protect their farm livestock, hunt wild game or otherwise earn a living. These citizens should not be presumed irresponsible or dangerous simply because one article of their property happens to be a long gun.

Most gun crimes are not committed with long guns. Criminals do not and never will register their guns. We do a disservice to Canadians to operate on the assumption that these criminals will ever register their guns. Canadians deserve better than that.

Canadians deserve real action. We need mandatory minimum sentences for those who commit violent crimes and we need more police spending more time enforcing the law instead of pushing the paper of previous governments.

Our government has also introduced a number of measures to make it easier for gun owners to comply with the existing legislative requirements, as firearms owners who comply with the firearm program are subject to continuous eligibility screening.

With the motion currently before the House, the hon. member is attempting to eliminate one of these measures, the firearm amnesty. In 2006, the former minister of public safety announced that licence renewal fees would be waived. In other words, individuals would not need to pay a fee or renew or upgrade existing licences to replace expired licences.

• (1540)

Those individuals who had already paid to renew their firearms licence were reimbursed. New licence applicants are still required to pay a licence fee. The objective was to ensure that we had a system that encouraged people to self-identify to ensure the list of licensed, law-abiding firearm owners more truly reflected their numbers in our population. Without this enhanced compliance, the licensing system is meaningless.

In May of last year, the government introduced yet another measure to support compliance through a regulatory amendment that enables individuals with expired possession-only licences to apply for a new licence without taking the Canadian firearm safety course. Most of the affected individuals are over 50 years of age and they often reside in rural or remote areas where access to training is limited. Collectively, these three measures comprise a comprehensive regulatory package intended to increase compliance levels, and they appear to be working. In just three years, from 2006-08, the rate of renewal of possession-only licences increased by 15%.

As I noted at the outset, the government has taken a balanced approach to gun crime prevention. We are absolutely committed to protecting the safety and security of Canadians while ensuring that honest, law-abiding citizens are not subjected to unnecessary registration procedures for legally acquired, non-restricted firearms.

Unfortunately, this motion is neither balanced nor prudent. The measures proposed by the hon. member would unnecessarily criminalize thousands of farmers, hunters, rural residents and other law-abiding citizens who are responsible gun owners. It would continue to drain resources that could be better spent on tackling the real problem: gun crime. This motion is not in the best interest of Canadians. It does not deserve the support of the House.

• (1545)

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, while I appreciate the member's comments, there is a number of areas with which I have grave concerns. The first is the distinction that this would somehow criminalize individuals. When we ask everyone to licence their car or their pet, we do not say that we are making criminals of them because we are asking them to do that.

She asserted that somehow long guns were not part of the problem. Maybe she can reflect on some of these statistics and tell me how she came to that conclusion.

Of the 15 police officers who were killed in the last decade, 13 of them were killed with long guns, not with handguns. Only two were killed by handguns. With respect to spousal homicides involving firearms, they are more than twice as likely to occur with a long gun than with a handgun. When I was on the Durham Region Police Services Board, it was made very clear to me that these were not individuals who had committed previous crimes. This is one of the things I am not sure the members appreciate. These are passion crimes. These are individuals who have these guns in their homes. The police who must respond to domestic violence cases need to know that those weapons are there.

Why would we remove something that is used over 9,000 times a day, that the police and chiefs of police say that we need and something that is a vital tool in stopping this type of thing?

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: Mr. Speaker, the fact is that the registry, as it exists, does criminalize legitimate gun owners who do not register their weapons. It is a farce. We have a licensing process and we need to continue with that.

The fact is that criminals are not registering their guns. We have criminals who are killing and hurting people. These are people who are not registering their guns. Why does he want to penalize law-abiding citizens? It is not working. It has not worked in the past and it never will work. He needs to support ending the long gun registry.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I much appreciate the way the member tackled the problem from the start. I understand that we are pursuing similar objectives, and I even think she used almost the same terms I did in my speech. We all agree that firearms are dangerous and must be left only in the hands of responsible people.

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Those responsible people, who need an acquisition licence to buy a firearm, must know that they cannot give it to another person, since the firearm is registered in their name. If it were ever used by another person to commit a crime, the police would trace it back to the owner.

There is another aspect, and I have a hard time understanding it. I would like my colleague to explain. I do not understand why she talks about the registration of a firearm being a burden. My goodness, many different things must be registered. In my municipality, I had to register my cat. People will have a hard time convincing me that my cat is more dangerous than a rifle. I do not feel like a criminal simply because I have to register something. If I buy a dangerous object that can kill, I am being asked to be very careful with it and to register it in my name.

[*English*]

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: Mr. Speaker, I agree. We have the same goals in mind and that is to reduce crime, to make our streets safer and to ensure that men, women and children are protected.

A lot of the issues the hon. member raised are issues relating to licensing, which is something we do support. The problem is when we have law-abiding citizens who are made to look and feel like criminals because they have a gun. Maybe they are gun collectors. Registering one cat may not be an onerous issue for my hon. colleague but if we have gun collectors who are law-abiding citizens and they are considered criminals if they do not register all the long guns they are collecting, it is not working. It is wrong and the gun registry did not work. That is the basis.

• (1550)

Mr. Paul Szabo: So get tough on those criminals because they did not register.

Ms. Candice Hoepfner: Exactly, get tough on criminals. Support it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): I appreciate the enthusiasm that members bring to this debate but I would ask all members to show each other the respect they deserve.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Yorkton—Melville.

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to participate in this debate. I have no doubt, as was just mentioned, that the members of the Bloc care deeply about the safety of Canadians and for that reason I assume that the motion before us was tabled with the best of intentions. It suggests that by doing away with the firearms amnesty and by maintaining the registration of all types of firearms, Canadians would be safer.

I do not believe this is the case. Before I address this question in detail, let me put this into some context. As an aside, I have heard many arguments today that really are not valid at all. Some of the statistics I have heard quoted are totally twisted and are very misleading. I wish I had time to address them all. Unfortunately, at this point I do not, but maybe during questions and comments I will try to deal with some of those.

I want to deal first of all with the larger context here. When the gun registry was first introduced in 1995, the previous government promised it would cost approximately \$2 million to taxpayers to

implement over five years. In her 2002 audit, however, the Auditor General of Canada reported that the program's costs had skyrocketed to more than \$600 million and moreover, due to a lack of solid financial information, that is, the government was hiding costs, she believed this figure did not fairly represent the true costs of the program.

Then, in a follow-up audit in 2006, the Auditor General reported the cost of the new information system for the registry had nearly tripled from the initial estimate. What is more, the cost of the entire firearms program had mushroomed to nearly \$1 billion. Reflect on that: \$2 million, \$1 billion. That is 500 times over budget. I do not think there has been a government program in history that has gone 500 times over budget. It is unbelievable. I have talked to previous Liberal cabinet ministers and MPs who are upset with what happened and if they had known, would not have originally supported this. Yet, we are here today trying to defend something that is indefensible.

Small wonder that many Canadians are calling the gun registry a boondoggle, a terrible waste of government resources. But apart from the cost to taxpayers and the financial burden on law-abiding citizens, there is also no evidence that the gun registry has kept Canadians safe. I have heard the arguments that it is no different than registering a cat. We do not spend \$300 registering a cat and many times more than that and neither is it a criminal offence if we do not register that cat.

This is not only my personal belief. This is not only the belief of a vast number of my constituents in Yorkton—Melville, it is also the belief of the Auditor General of Canada who in her 2006 audit stated that, “The Centre does not show how these activities help minimize risks to public safety with evidence-based outcomes such as reduced deaths, injuries, and threats from firearms”.

This is a statement by probably the most credible person in Canada. She has studied this issue in more depth than anyone sitting here, probably anyone else in Canada. She has access to all the information behind the scenes. We had better listen to what she has to say. She tells us the gun registry shows no benefit to Canadians. Let this Parliament wake up to somebody that we can trust when they are speaking.

It is also the belief of veteran police officers such as Julian Fantino, Commissioner of the Ontario Provincial Police, who has said in the past, “The firearms registry is long on philosophy and short on practical results considering the money could be more effectively used for security against terrorism as well as a host of other public safety initiatives”. He has summed up the essence of what we should be talking about. Is it cost effective? He, of course, clearly indicates it is not.

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•(1555)

When this government came to office, we pledged that our approach to crime would generate the kind of practical results demanded by our law enforcement community rather than wasting taxpayer dollars on initiatives such as the long gun registry which does nothing to reduce gun crime.

This morning I chaired the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security. The committee is doing a review of the national sex offender registry. I find that study very interesting and I wish all Canadians could have been in on what we were hearing this morning. Officials before the committee told us that the RCMP spends less than a million dollars per year running its sex offender registry.

Why have we spent \$2 billion and counting tracking law-abiding citizens? Why do we not focus our sights on the criminal element and start focusing on their crimes? That should be what we are interested in: child molesters, drug dealers, organized crime.

We as Conservatives promised to make our streets safer by tackling the deadly combination of youth, gangs and guns. We proposed tougher sentences for violent and repeat offenders, especially those involved in weapons related crime. We promised to work with the provinces and territories to fight the root causes of crime through community-based prevention.

We made these promises and we kept them. Over the last three years the Government of Canada has passed legislation to tackle violent crime. We introduced mandatory prison sentences for gun crimes, as well as reverse onus bail provisions for serious offences, a lot of changes that have been long overdue.

I am citing these things for those watching to show that we have balance in our approach to fighting crime. We have provided more money to the provinces and territories so that they can hire additional police officers. The government has also committed to helping the RCMP recruit and train more personnel.

More recently, the government introduced legislation that among other things will create a new broad-based offence to target drive-by and other intentional shootings that involve the reckless disregard for the life or safety of others. Those convicted of such acts would be subject to a mandatory minimum sentence of four years in prison with a maximum period of imprisonment of fourteen years.

That is what we should be doing. We should be going after the criminals, not hoops, hurdles and all kinds of paperwork for law-abiding citizens because laying a piece of paper beside that gun does not affect one whit what happens with that firearm.

If these acts are committed by or for a criminal organization or with a restricted or prohibited firearm such as a handgun or automatic weapon, the minimum sentence would increase to five years. That makes sense. Punish the criminal.

The government has shown that through these measures it is serious about getting tough on gun crime. We also need to ensure that we have a system of gun control that is effective and efficient.

I support a licensing system. Keeping firearms out of the hands of people who should not have them makes sense. The gun registry does not do that. The bottom line is it does not do that.

We need to be combatting the criminal use of firearms and getting tough with crime. We also believe that gun control should target criminals, not law-abiding citizens. I have said that many times. It should save lives, not waste money. It should be cost effective. It should promote safety on our streets, not frustrate duck hunters and farmers. That is why the extension of the current compliance measures beyond May 16 of this year is so important.

I urge all hon. members to vote against the current motion which seeks to refuse the extension of the amnesty after May 16.

I have 33 pages of quotations from police officers on my website. I would like to refer people to them. I will give a quick one here. It states:

Your statement that it is used 5,000 times a day by police is misleading. A check of the registry is done automatically every time an officer is dispatched to an address, wanted or not. From its inception, I was advised not to depend on it to make decisions. It is outdated, inaccurate and completely unreliable. To make a decision at a call based on registry information would be foolish at best and deadly at worst.

There are thousands of police officers across this country who will tell members exactly the same thing. I ask members to consult them. They do not find this registry helpful at all.

•(1600)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the previous speaker said that some people have inflated the numbers. I believe he is one of them. I do not know where he found that registering a long gun costs \$300. Right now, there is no fee to register a long gun. Registering my cat cost me \$10. But whatever the cost, in civilized societies, dangerous objects are registered. Cars are a good example of that.

Then the member said that the registry cost went from \$2 million to \$1 billion. The numbers are huge, I agree, but the cost of the registry did not go from \$2 million to \$1 billion. It was supposed to cost \$83 million and produce \$81 million in revenues. There is the \$2 million. The cost of the registry has not been multiplied by 500.

We already have a registration system. Is the member opposed to the fact that police can know whether or not there are registered guns in a house where they are called because of domestic violence?

To operate, the system has to be computerized, which means centralized. It is the computerization that was expensive. But I agree that it could have been done at a much lower cost.

[*English*]

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz: Mr. Speaker, I wish I had 10 minutes just to answer that one question.

The hon. member should do the math. There are seven million guns in the gun registry. There are probably around 20 million guns in this country, so we have about one-third registered for \$2 billion. If he takes the seven and divide it into 2,000, he will find out how much per gun it has cost. He should do the math.

In regard to police officers consulting the registry before they go to a home, I have a police officer in my home province who instructs his police officers not to consult the registry. He says he has to re-program every cadet that he trains when it comes to CFR checks and reliability in regard to a police officer. In fact, it does not change their procedures at all. It would be insane for a police officer to rely on the information in the registry before he went to a home to, let us say investigate a domestic dispute. For example, criminals do not register their firearms and even if they did, the police officer does not know if there is one there so it does not change his procedure in any way.

This police officer goes on to say that the gun registry places the lives of police officers at risk. Hon. members should note that statement. The gun registry offers a false sense of security.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member is promoting changes to the law which, according to the police association, would relax controls on handguns and semi-automatic weapons, allowing licensed firearm owners to obtain as many handguns and restricted weapons as they want without an approval process. It also removes the requirement to have authorizations to transport restricted weapons and handguns. This would increase the transportation of semi-automatic rifles and handguns, and therefore increase the risk of loss and theft of vehicles as well as increase the access to firearms in less secure environments, thereby reducing public and police officer safety.

If the member wants to get tough on crime, why is he proposing changes to the law that will in fact increase crime?

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz: Mr. Speaker, that is another debate for another day. I would gladly answer those because every one of those accusations is false, sir. Everyone of them is false. Those are the talking points of the Coalition for Gun Control. Its information is totally inaccurate. We will have that debate another day.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there was a lot of sound and fury in the member's speech. I note that the government has made it voluntary to register long-guns because of the amnesty which will extend beyond May 16, 2009. If the government believes so strongly that the long-gun registry should be removed, then why does it not bring in its own government bill to eliminate the gun registry?

•(1605)

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz: Mr. Speaker, the government has introduced a bill in the Senate.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Brome—Missisquoi.

The Conservative government is determined to weaken the gun control legislation. After declaring an amnesty for owners of unregistered long guns three years ago and twice renewing it, the government is planning to change the gun registry with Bill C-301,

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An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Firearms Act (registration of firearms), sponsored by the member for Yorkton—Melville, and Bill S-5, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and another Act, which was introduced in the Senate.

The Conservative government, which is trying to please its militant base, wants to remove non-restricted firearms, meaning rifles and shotguns, from the current gun registry. In fact, the Conservative government wants to do away with the requirement to possess and present a registration certificate for a non-restricted firearm.

The Bloc Québécois has made a firm commitment to improve gun control and maintain the registration of all types of firearms in its entirety. Gun control is one of the most effective ways to prevent crime. That is why the Bloc Québécois is debating the following motion today:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should not extend the amnesty on gun control requirements set to expire on May 16, 2009, and should maintain the registration of all types of firearms in its entirety.

Even though the rate of homicides committed with rifles and shotguns continues to decline, the fact remains that of the 188 firearms that were used to commit a homicide in 2007, 32 were rifles or shotguns, which is still far too many.

Hunting is a popular sport in my riding. I myself have taken a firearm safety course. I know that some hunters probably do not appreciate having to register their guns. But registering a gun takes only a few minutes and does not cost the hunter a cent. It is a simple procedure that can help save lives.

The Bloc Québécois is in Ottawa to defend the interests of Quebecers. Public safety is not negotiable. Even if Canadian gun control legislation is for the most part under federal jurisdiction, the Government of Quebec has come up with a few tools to improve public safety. It has passed the Anastasia Act designed to protect the people of Quebec by tightening gun control, regulating gun ownership in certain places and creating a system to control the practice of target shooting with prohibited or restricted firearms.

If the Conservative government wants to deregulate gun control, let it transfer those powers to Quebec so that it can administer the firearm registry itself. Quebec MNA's all agree on the necessity of gun control legislation. On March 31, the National Assembly voted unanimously in favour of this motion by the member for Mercier:

THAT the National Assembly of Québec demand the maintaining of the firearms registry, including hunting weapons, and denounce Private Bill C-301 introduced by the Federal Member for Yorkton-Melville... which dilutes the application and scope thereof.

There is no lack of support in Quebec for the gun registry. Police forces report that it is an appropriate and effective tool. Front-line organizations involved in violence and suicide prevention as well as public health agencies report marked decreases in homicides, suicides and accidents involving firearms. They are all opposed to Bill C-301 and call for the registry to be kept as it is.

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The Barreau du Québec has expressed the opinion that “the Firearms Act should be kept as it is at present, and that abolition of the gun registry constitutes a threat to public safety.”

Yves Francoeur, president of the Montreal Police Brotherhood, maintains that the gun registry must not be weakened in any way. Even with its limitations, the registry is still a useful tool for Canadian police forces, and it is consulted by them an average of 6,000 times a day.

•(1610)

According to him, since the registry was created in 1998, about 20,000 licences have been revoked or denied, and this has undoubtedly averted a number of tragedies, particularly in spousal violence situations. To all appearances, a large proportion of the Quebec public believes that we need to maintain the gun registry as it is, and end the amnesty granted by the Conservative Party in May 2006.

In particular, we must not lose sight of a sad but true problem in society: suicide. Every year, there are people who use guns to end their lives, and often the weapon used is a hunting rifle. According to Statistics Canada, out of all suicides committed between 1979 and the end of the 1980s, about a third were suicide by firearm. Starting in the 1990s, the proportion began to fall. In 2002, about one out of six suicides was committed with a firearm. The decline in firearms suicides has contributed to the drop in the overall suicide rate. Avoiding easy access to firearms is the best way to prevent suicide. Most suicides would undoubtedly not have happened if the firearms and ammunition had been stored securely.

Firearms control is also a women’s issue. Women account for a small percentage of the two million gun owners in Canada. On the other hand, they account for a large proportion of victims of firearms violence. Over the last decade, the rate of spousal homicides committed with a firearm has fallen by nearly 50%. Is that not excellent evidence that the firearms registry is effective?

In spite of that fact, there is still far too much violence committed against women and children. It is up to the government to invest in preventing spousal homicide. The firearms registry contains tools for that job. The Association féminine d’éducation et d’action sociale, the Fédération des femmes du Québec and the National Council of Women of Canada, which are all women’s rights advocacy organizations, strongly support the firearms registry.

Some women’s organizations are critical of extending the 10-year licence validity period for all firearms owners, which would reduce the number of opportunities to review the information on the licence and ensure that it is up to date.

When it comes to justice and public safety, the Bloc Québécois firmly believes that the most effective approach is still and will always be prevention. This means that we have to tackle the root causes of crime and the conditions that lead to tragedies in the home. We have to tackle the causes that lead to crime: frustration, violence and despair. We have to find tools to combat poverty and inequality in our society.

The Bloc Québécois in fact believes that the federal government must do more to control firearms, including stricter enforcement of its regulations on the storage, display, transportation and handling of

firearms by individuals, which provide that firearms must be stored securely so they do not fall into the hands of criminals.

For all of the reasons I gave in my speech, I call on all my colleagues to vote against Bill C-301, and in particular I call on Liberal Party members, the ones who initiated the firearms registry, and on Liberal senators, to vote against Bill S-5.

[English]

Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague across the way for her interest in this. I would also like to recognize the work and understanding of the members for Portage—Lisgar and Yorkton—Melville on this very subject.

I recently read an article in *The Globe and Mail* about the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police ethics adviser, who resigned. Apparently he was upset about them accepting large sums of money from certain lobby groups. He felt that there was a definite conflict of interest in the positions they have on certain issues and for those who fund their organizations.

The Globe and Mail article of April 8 went on to say that one of their donors was Bell Mobility-CGI-Group Techna, with a donation of \$115,000, which went toward the purchase of 1,000 tickets, at \$215 each, to a Céline Dion concert. I would like the member to comment on that.

Since they also supply some of the stuff for the gun registry, I wonder if the member thinks this is a conflict of interest. I would like to hear her comments on it.

•(1615)

[Translation]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for referring to the article he has quoted in this House. I find it difficult to answer as I have not seen the article but I would nevertheless like to stick to the crux of the matter at hand and that is keeping the gun registry.

If my colleague listened carefully to my speech, he will have understood that I am in favour of keeping the gun registry in order to combat violence and eliminate domestic tragedies of which, unfortunately, many victims are women.

I imagine that there will always be corruption in this world. It is an element of human nature. I do not believe that there is any law that could eliminate this corruption. However, we must determine what this registry, in its current form, has produced in recent years, namely, a decrease in homicides, the suicide rate and family violence.

We note that support for the registry has come from associations, women's groups in Quebec, police officers. A unanimous motion by the National Assembly of Quebec even states the need and the—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The member for Ajax—Pickering has the floor for questions and comments.

Business of Supply

[English]

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to return to the matter at hand with a question about the safety of the police. We often talk about this issue in the context of how much the police support this as a tool because it increases public safety. It helps us deal with issues like violence against women, and it makes sure the police know the situation they are going into. We well know that most crimes are not premeditated. Most crimes are not committed by individuals who have previously committed a crime.

I would like the member to comment specifically about how this protects police officers. We know that, for example, 13 of the 15 police officers killed in the line of duty over the last decade were killed by long guns. We also know that, in Mayerthorpe, it was a registered long gun that was used to convict some of the individuals who were involved in that. In fact, it was a registered weapon that led to a conviction—

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The member for Laurentides—Labelle has the floor.

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: Mr. Speaker, if I may, I would like to provide my colleague with an example of what the gun registry can do for police officers.

In the winter of 2003, police officers with the Montreal police force intervened in a case of domestic violence. The wife was afraid that her husband would return after a short hospital stay. When they checked the registry, the police discovered that the man had a veritable arsenal: 26 handguns, 16 long guns and 45,000 bullets.

The guns were immediately seized and had the search not been successful, the police could have pressured the man to locate the guns. Without the registry, it would have been impossible to know that the man had an arsenal of weapons.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Labrador, Aboriginal Affairs; the hon. member for Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, Culture; the hon. member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, Domtar plant in Lebel-sur-Quévillon.

• (1620)

Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to address the motion presented by the Bloc Québécois today, asking the government to maintain the registration of all types of firearms in its entirety. It is truly a motion that reflects the wish of a majority of Quebecers.

I want to begin by referring to a specific case. This example will be compelling enough to make those who are opposed to gun registration think twice about this issue. It will also show, to some extent, my support for this idea. A few years ago, in the Sainte-Thérèse area, the police was called because someone had barricaded himself in a house. Unlike in the example given earlier, that person was not a criminal. He had no criminal record. Therefore, the police had no reason to suspect that this individual could be dangerous. What did the female officer do? She had no warning, because the

gun was not registered. She went to the door. The man was standing on the other side of that door with a hunting rifle. He fired a shot and the police officer died on the spot.

One may argue that this is just an exception. It is indeed, but it is one too many. If that gun had been registered, and if the police had known about it, the officers would have been aware of the danger. So, this case alone shows the need for the gun registry. Losing one officer may not seem like much in relation to the whole population, but it is one too many.

Of course, some chiefs of police, in Ontario or elsewhere, are saying that the registration process is not working. There are also Conservative supporters among the police. There are Conservative supporters in all areas. But we are talking about police associations, about the majority of officers who are saying that this registry is absolutely necessary. Just think that, on average, they consult it 6,067 times a day. They do not consult it just for fun, or to kill time: they do it to get information. Therefore, it must be relevant, otherwise they would not bother.

Earlier, it was mentioned that registering a gun was a difficult process. We do not understand. My colleague rightly pointed out that we register automobiles, among other things, but I would go even further. As members know, we must register a deer after killing it. Indeed, a hunter must register a deer after he has killed it. He must travel some distance, and he must pay a fee. By contrast, registering a firearm is currently free, and hopefully it will remain so. Mr. Speaker, if you go fishing, you have to register the fish that you catch. Is that too much work? Yet, everyone does it. To claim that it is too much work to register a firearm is nothing more than an ideological view. If one kills a wolf, even by accident, by hitting it while driving—it happened to me—one has to register it. Therefore, what is the big deal with registering a gun?

Is it too complicated? What about visas and residence permits to travel abroad? People have to spend days to get them. They have to go to one place to get a signature, to another to get a photo, and so on. Yet, they do it. Why would it not be the same with firearms? Why is it so complicated?

Finally, the Conservatives have never said what they really think down deep. They have certain prejudices because some of their voters still think they live in the wild west. They do not want to say they have guns at home. The member said we are criminalizing people who do not register their guns. We also criminalize people who do not register their cars. We criminalize anyone who does not register. Once people register their guns, they are in full compliance with the law.

• (1625)

The cost argument is the most beautiful of all because it comes back so often. This cost so and so many million dollars. However, the fact it was very expensive does not mean we should destroy it now. We should not get rid of it because the Liberals were incredibly irresponsible about the cost. It has been paid for, it is not a debt.

Business of Supply

If we built a bridge and it cost 3 times or even 500 times as much as it was supposed to, would we destroy the bridge because it cost too much? Let us be sensible. We would just say it was badly handled, but that is all water under the bridge now. We would not say we should destroy the bridge and go back to rowing across the river because that does not cost anything. This is what someone just said: we should do what we used to do because it did not cost anything.

The entire federal firearms control program costs \$73.7 million a year, and of this, the gun registry costs only \$14.6 million. How much is that per Canadian if registration remains free, as is currently the case? Not even 50¢ a year. And they say it is too expensive? It is nothing. They do not know how to count. There is a problem here somewhere.

I want to look now at the myths surrounding the gun registry. Some people have a talent for mixing everything up. They have a talent for mixing the gun registry up with the licence to make it seem that the registry is hyper expensive and useless. Nothing could be further from the truth because the registry and the licence are two different things. Getting a licence is much more complicated. The registry costs very little and does not take long. It is hardly necessary to eliminate it. We get back to the fact, as was mentioned earlier, that family tragedies always happen as a result of the presence of hunting guns and rifles in houses.

Some will say that it is because there are very few handguns, and indeed, very few handguns in houses. When I was younger and had young children, it suddenly occurred to me that I had inherited a rifle from my father and there it was, in plain sight. At that time, there was no gun registry or anything of the sort. I thought having a rifle in plain view in one's house set a bad example, even though it was a beautiful hunting rifle from 1898. I gave it to a friend and never saw that rifle again. I thought that merely having an uncontrolled weapon in the house set a very bad example. Now, certainly, putting weapons away in a cupboard, sealing or locking it, and so forth, that is definitely complicated. Registering the weapon is not the complicated part.

We are in favour of the registry and maintaining it in full. With this motion, we are supporting the notion that all Quebecers want it. With its legislation known as Anastasia's law, the Quebec National Assembly is also calling on the federal government to maintain it. Police forces and the general public want the same. It would be hard to eliminate something that has cost a fortune simply because there are a few people in another region who say that it serves no purpose. I will come back to this point. It is precisely because it has cost so much that we should consider it important to keep. We have it and people want it.

• (1630)

[English]

Ms. Candice Hoepfner (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is one thing members on this side of the House find very frustrating. We are making an attempt to protect Canadians from criminals. We have put forward legislation and different amendments, but it seems that no matter what we try to do, opposition members try to block it. All of a sudden, now we find there is a great passion for gun registration. It is frustrating.

This morning I met with Manitoba police officers who work in Winnipeg. They are on the front lines. They deal with criminals every day in downtown Winnipeg. They do not support the gun registry. They say it is a false sense of security. There are a number of police officers who do not support it. If we want to get tough on criminals and end crime, which is what we want to do, then let us look at a solution that works.

I want to ask the hon. member about that.

[Translation]

Mr. Christian Ouellet: Mr. Speaker, we consider prevention to be more important than punishing criminals. Before they become criminals, they have to be stopped and encouraged to do something else. We have to see the success that can be achieved. On the other side, they think it is just a matter of punishing criminals who are at that stage. If we engage in prevention so that they do not reach that stage, we will not need to put them in prison because they will not be criminals.

There was talk earlier about the cost of registering firearms. I might also ask them how much the sweep of the Hells Angels cost. It cost \$1 million. And how much will the trials cost? Between \$6 million and \$15 million. So, do not tell me that they reject the registration of firearms in order to save money.

[English]

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to come back to the issue of cost. It is being used as a smokescreen. We know the RCMP has said that it costs around \$3 million a year to maintain the registry. We know when the Prime Minister was in New Brunswick he said not to worry, that no one was going to lose his or her job. Clearly, the government is not reducing any of the employment that is there.

Perhaps we could help the Conservatives find \$3 million, if they are so concerned about the \$3 million. Perhaps the regional minister for Quebec could travel a little less, or perhaps the Conservatives could stop the contracts, which broke the rules, to hire speech writers for the finance minister.

I am wondering if the member has any ideas, since the Conservatives are concerned about the cost of \$3 million. Instead of cutting a program that police say is essential, perhaps we could help them find some waste that they could reallocate to cover that cost.

[Translation]

Mr. Christian Ouellet: Mr. Speaker, it is an excellent question. It is true that money could be saved and certain things could be changed in the present federal administration. We could also save money if our buildings were more efficient. The building next door still has only single-glazed windows. It costs nearly an extra million dollars per year for heating. Over three years, firearms registration could be paid for.

Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ): Mr. Speaker, there have been amnesties for four years. The people who do not want to register their firearms are not registering them. If those people are not registering their guns, does that make the registry more or less reliable? Should we be surprised that it is not working at full capacity if it is less reliable?

Business of Supply

Mr. Christian Ouellet: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question.

I was referring earlier to non-registered weapons. Certainly this makes the system far less effective. Some chiefs of police may say that it is not effective because we don't have a count of everybody's weapons. We wonder why some people are not interested in registering their guns. The people in my riding and the people I know are not reluctant to register their guns: they have nothing to hide. They do it easily. Why, in other places, is there this mindset of not wanting to register firearms? I have trouble understanding that, apart from the fact they are being encouraged by some parliamentarians.

• (1635)

[*English*]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, there have been discussions between the parties and I believe you will find consent for the following travel motion: That in relation to its study on the federal contribution to reducing poverty in Canada, six members of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities be authorized to travel to Halifax, Nova Scotia, Moncton, New Brunswick, and Montreal, Quebec, from May 10 to 14, 2009, and that the necessary staff accompany the committee; that in relation to its study on the federal contribution to reducing poverty in Canada, six members of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities be authorized to travel to Calgary, Alberta, to attend the Canadian Social Forum Conference from May 20 to 22, 2009, and that the necessary staff accompany the committee; and that in relation to its study on the federal contribution to reducing poverty in Canada, six members of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities be authorized to travel to Toronto, Ontario, from June 1 to 2, 2009, and that the necessary staff accompany the committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Does the hon. minister have the unanimous consent of the House to move these motions?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

An hon. member: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Resuming debate, the hon. member for London—Fanshawe.

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am sharing my time this afternoon with the member for Vancouver Kingsway.

I am glad to participate in this Bloc opposition day. I thank my colleagues from Quebec for this motion and this opportunity. It is certainly an important debate for Canadians, one that needs to hear the voices on all sides of the issue. The women of Canada are listening very carefully today. Women and their children are too often among those who suffer from gun violence.

I believe it is essential in any discussion to look at the facts. In this case the facts show that, in regard to the firearms program, the system is working. Claims that the system is without value are

simply untrue. The police have said time and time again that the new law and the system provide valuable tools for keeping Canada safe. It is interesting that we hear that mantra over and over again from the government benches about wanting to keep Canadians safe. Here is an opportunity.

In spite of the virulent opposition, over 90% of gun owners have been licensed and 90% of guns have been registered. As of 2008, the system is being used by the police 8,600 times every day and police report many cases where the registry has been used to prevent tragedies or solve crimes. Most gun owners, as I indicated, are indeed licensed and most guns registered.

As of April 2008, 1,871,595 valid firearms licences have been issued, representing 90% of those gun owners. The licensing procedure ensures all firearm users are qualified to possess or acquire a firearm. Gun registration is an important part of making gun owners accountable, helping prevent diversion to the illegal market and assisting police in their investigations.

Some 22,140 firearm licences were refused or revoked by chief firearms officers for public safety reasons between December 1, 1998 and April 2008, 7,490 of those applications were refused and 14,650 firearm licences revoked. The reasons include a number of things such as a history of violence, mental illness, the applicant is a potential risk to himself, herself, or others, unsafe firearm use and storage, drug offences and providing false information. We will never know how many tragedies have been averted, but in those many refusals of a licence we can be assured that there will not be the regret that comes when too late we realize that failing to act, failing to intervene when an individual should never possess a firearm has caused the loss of a precious life or many precious lives.

All illegal guns, interestingly enough, begin as legal guns. Opponents of gun control keep saying "punish the criminals, leave the law-abiding gun owners alone". These law-abiding owners are among the 90% who are licensed. That raises the question, where do the criminals get their guns? Although half of the handguns recovered in crime are smuggled in from the United States, the other half originate from Canadian gun owners.

The 2005 shooting on Yonge Street of Jane Creba involved a gun club member with a legally registered handgun. We have seen a number of high profile shootings, including that Toronto 2005 Boxing Day shooting, where the guns have been stolen from law-abiding gun owners.

Handguns are not the only threat. Half the police officers killed in recent years have been killed with rifles and shotguns, not handguns.

Business of Supply

Another key part of the current gun registry and gun control law is the requirement for the safe storage of guns. The shooter at Dawson College was a legal gun owner and a member of a gun club. Legally owned guns are too often improperly stored and stolen or sold illegally. As I indicated, the gun recovered in the 2005 Boxing Day shooting, which killed 15 year-old Jane Creba, was a stolen gun.

According to the police, about half the guns used in crime in Toronto are guns that at one time were legally owned in Canada, many of them stolen in break-ins.

•(1640)

Between June 20 and August 3, 2005, burglars made off with 84 firearms from Toronto area homes. More than half, including 43 pistols stolen from Cobourg, were handguns. One of these was used in a murder in Toronto in 2006.

In addition, smuggled guns originating from the United States are typically acquired through theft, straw purchases or gun shows. These guns account for as many as 50% of the handguns recovered in crime in Canada.

The gun used to kill Dianna Sandeman in 2006, as she and her boyfriend were leaving an Etobicoke sports bar, was traced to Gainesville, Georgia. The gun used to kill a Windsor police officer in May 2006 was smuggled in from the United States.

Some claim that more guns will make us safer. In fact, where there are more guns, there are more deaths. The terrible irony is that both in Canada and internationally, where there are more guns, there tends to be more opposition to gun control. However, where there are more guns, there are also higher rates of gun death and injury.

Among industrialized countries, where there are higher rates of gun ownership, there are also higher rates of gun deaths. When there are guns in the home, they are more likely to be used in suicides, domestic homicides and accidentally. It is pretty easy in a fit of rage to grab a gun if it is handy and if it is loaded.

In spite of the attention focused on urban crime, there are higher rates of gun death and injury in rural areas. For example, Northeastern Ontario has a gun death rate which is twice the provincial average, driven largely by higher than average suicide rates and also domestic violence with firearms or accidents.

Provinces with high rates of gun ownership, such as Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, tend to have a higher than average rate of gun death and injury.

In spite of the surge of gang related handgun violence in Toronto, Ontario has one of the lowest rates of gun death and injury in the country.

There has been a lot of misinformation about the firearms program fuelled by its opponents. Close to \$1 billion was spent over a 10 year period and most of that money was spent on screening and licensing gun owners, not on registering firearms.

Currently, the cost of the system is apparently about \$80 million a year. Ending the gun registry means that all of this money has been spent in vain and all those who have died at the hands of those using guns have died in vain. This would be a mistake.

I would like to conclude with a letter sent to the Prime Minister on March 12, signed by 21 concerned groups representing millions of Canadians. They respectfully ask the government to refuse to dismantle gun control. They go on to say "Our laws have made Canada safer".

In 1991 more than 1,400 Canadians were killed with guns. Now it is fewer than 800. The 2007 rate of murders with rifles and shotguns has dropped by more than 78% since 1991. The murders of women by those using guns have plummeted from 85 in 1991 to 32 in 2004. Suicide rates, particularly among youth, have also declined.

The numbers are not good enough yet, but if we keep the registry, we could make it even better.

Policing, public health and victims' organizations across Canada, including those from Polytechnique and Dawson College, support sensible gun control.

On behalf of millions of women in Canada, the letter concludes:

Let us be clear: the stakes could not be higher for Canadian women. Ending violence against women requires more than talk. It requires action. We urge you to lead your party to reduce violence and suicide in our families and our communities [by supporting gun control].

The women of this nation are watching intently today. They are listening and hoping that the House will say that their families and their futures are safe, that they need not fear the guns in our communities because they will be controlled and they will be licensed.

•(1645)

Mr. Gerald Keddy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will speak on this important issue a bit later so I will not give my speech now, but I have to make a comment. That was absolutely the most incorrect, incredible amount of misinformation that I have heard in the House in a long time. A good cook adds all the ingredients and then a bit of spice. In this case the spice was the true comments and the rest of it was the broth or the stew.

The member has mentioned statistics, well here they are: 84% of firearms used in the commission of crimes are unregistered; 74.9% are illegal guns smuggled into Canada, not the 50% as the hon. member has claimed. These are not speculative figures. These are the real numbers.

Where is the member getting her numbers?

Business of Supply

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Mr. Speaker, these statistics were compiled by reputable groups, people from NGOs who have made the effort because of their profound concern with regard to the violence we have seen in our society. Some of those statistics come from law enforcement agencies.

I hope the member opposite is not impugning the members of our law enforcement community, nor the groups that have put themselves forward and spent a great deal of time and effort to bring forward facts that we can use to support what we believe is an important law in Canada, and that is gun control.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague has made a presentation which I find excellent, and I would like her to comment on why there are so many victims in families. As we know, in 2007, 18 women were killed by a legally-married spouse, 22 by a common-law spouse, and 6 by a separated or divorced legally-married or common-law spouse.

This goes to show that the killers are not always hardened criminals; they can be family members. I agree with what the member said earlier, and I am wondering if she could perhaps elaborate a bit more.

[*English*]

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Mr. Speaker, my colleague has asked a very important question. The city of London, in a period of about two or three months, four or five years ago, lost five young women to gun violence. Five young women disappeared forever. Their families will never get over that. The community will never get over that. Their children will never get over that. We have to be very cognizant of that.

In a former incarnation I was a rural member in Middlesex county. I absolutely remember the day I went to the Women's Rural Resource Centre in Strathroy. In those days there was no community house for women, no safe refuge between London and Sarnia. These rural women were basically abandoned. The director of the rural resource centre told me about the women who called or the women who desperately cried out. These women were at the end of a 300-yard laneway on a remote farm. They had been victimized, beaten by husbands, threatened with guns, raped with guns. They had no one to turn to and nowhere to go.

The same is true of women in small towns. There is no one to turn to, nowhere to go. They could not tell their neighbour because it was a small town and it was something about which they did not talk. However, they were crying out for someone to listen to them and to help them. Therefore, I not only helped them to build a women's community house, but I also was very committed to their safety with regard to taking these guns out of the hands of those who had used them violently.

• (1650)

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, of course, today we are addressing the question of firearms registration in this country. I do not need to share with the members of the House that this is a very important issue. It evokes passionate feelings on both sides of the question.

Proponents of gun registration assert the obvious, that guns are inherently dangerous. They are capable of creating, and in fact have created, death and injury across this land. Those people advocate forcefully for appropriate controls over this dangerous item.

On the other hand, many Canadians, law-abiding, responsible farmers, hunters, sports and target enthusiasts, collectors and members of first nations, feel that a gun registry is unnecessary, intrusive and ineffective.

Compounding the debate is the previous Liberal government, which designed and introduced the current registry, which established a system that can only be described as a colossal boondoggle. It cost over \$1 billion to implement. It is incredibly bureaucratic and full of red tape. It is inefficient, costly and has been ineffective in many respects. This added an unnecessary and unfortunate difficulty to the entirely legitimate debate over the merits, or not, of registration in this country. Even those in favour of gun registration join with those opposed in condemning the Liberal government's inept and wasteful exercise in this area.

I would like to speak a little bit about what I think everybody in the House agrees on. We agree, first, that firearms are products that are deserving of appropriate care and respect. Once again, they are inherently dangerous. They need to be dealt with seriously. Appropriate safeguards respecting the importation, sale, storage and use of firearms are necessary, and I think every hon. member of the House would appreciate that.

Second, we all want to adopt policies that work toward keeping firearms out of the hands of criminals and off our streets.

Third, we want to acknowledge the legitimate and responsible ownership and use by thousands of law-abiding citizens and to make clear that gun registration is not a response in any way to their use of firearms.

The issue raised in this motion, however, concerns that of whether Canadians who wish to own firearms ought to be registered or required to register those weapons. I would like to speak to the benefits of registration and also acknowledge its liabilities, because this is an issue upon which many reasonable people may reasonably disagree.

Let us speak a little bit about what registration of guns does do in this country. First, it ensure the full registration of what is, once again, a product that when used exactly as designed is capable of causing death and destruction. It does no more than treat guns like we treat automobiles.

Second, the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police has come out very strongly and consistently in favour of gun registration, and I will speak a little bit later about the reasons for that.

Third, registration helps solve crimes. It helps in one respect with the tracking of weapons. Whether weapons are stolen or not, police officers have told me directly that when they locate a weapon that has been used in a crime, the fact that it has been registered assists them in tracing back that weapon to an original source, and this aids them ultimately in bringing perpetrators to justice.

Business of Supply

Fourth, registration symbolically emphasizes the serious responsibility that gun ownership entails. This cannot be underestimated. If we are going to have guns owned by citizens in this society, we need to impress, and in fact, as parliamentarians we are entitled and obligated to impress upon them the very serious nature that owning that weapon implies.

Fifth, gun registration helps police when they are carrying out their duties. For example, I talked to police officers in the past week who told me that when they are approaching a house, it is incredibly beneficial for them to know if a firearm is present. Coupled with information regarding past practices of domestic abuse, prior criminal involvement or a history of psychiatric illness, it helps prepare those police when they pull up curbside to a house. Registration protects police officers.

• (1655)

Sixth, when combined with Criminal Code provisions and other legislation making mandatory steps in the firearm acquisition process, things like criminal record checks and cooling-off periods between purchasing and possessing firearms, it helps keep guns out of the hands of people who should not have them.

Two years ago, 12,000 applicants in this country who had applied to own a gun were turned down. It is not illogical to conclude that deaths or assaults with weapons have been prevented by these legislative measures. As my hon. colleague for London—Fanshawe pointed out, many gun assaults are committed by people who know each other, including domestic assaults. Many believe tight gun acquisition procedures help reduce spousal assaults.

There are some disadvantages to registration, and in fairness, those should be pointed out as well. It imposes a regulatory burden on legitimate, responsible and law-abiding gun owners. Registration also imposes a cost upon gun owners.

It is also true that the registry will likely not prevent criminals or criminal organizations from obtaining guns in the illegal gun trade.

Registration systems have put a particularly onerous duty on first nations, hunters and trappers, and those who make their living off the land. Certain aspects of the law work a particular hardship on first nations, such as the prohibition on lending firearms, with no discernible advantage to society at large.

I can respect the position of all parliamentarians on this issue. Depending on the wishes of their particular constituents, rural or urban specifically, MPs will be voting their conscience. I am particularly proud of our leader, the leader of the New Democrat opposition, who has freed all MPs to vote at their conscience and as their constituents dictate.

In my case, I will be supporting this motion. I support the registration of firearms in Canada. Time does not permit me to go through all the reasons, but the most profound ones are the following.

First, a key distinguishing feature of Canada for which we are respected worldwide and distinguishes us from countries like the United States and Mexico is that we are relatively a gun-free, peaceful society. Gun registration plays a role in keeping us that way.

Second, gun control saves lives. Those are not my words. Those are the words of the president of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police.

Third, registration does not prohibit anyone from owning a firearm who is not properly precluded from doing so. All it makes them do is register. In my view, this is a small price to pay for the privilege of owning what we all agree is a dangerous item.

I come from Vancouver, where, in the last four months, over 45 shootings and 15 deaths have occurred due to gun violence. My constituents know first-hand, and I would dare say, more than the constituents of any other member of the House right now, what guns do. They are adamant that gunfire in our streets, near our schools and in our shopping malls must stop. Although a gun registry may not stop all of these incidents, now is not the time to be sending a message of gun liberalization. Now is not the time to be making gun ownership easier.

We register our cars and we prohibit many products from general ownership. In our view, asking Canadians who want to own instruments of power such as firearms to simply register them and comply with reasonable rules, to do whatever we can to keep guns out of the hands of those who should not have them, is both appropriate and reasonable. Although I respect deeply the views of all those in the House who may feel otherwise, I am one MP who will be proudly voting in favour of gun registration in Canada.

• (1700)

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have listened all day to debate on both sides of the House. One thing that keeps coming out is the fact that people are confusing gun control with the long gun registry. All that we are debating today, I think, is whether we maintain the long gun registry, not gun control.

There has been gun control in Canada since 1933 for handguns, and 1947 for long guns. It is not making gun ownership any easier at all. If somebody goes to buy a gun, the person has to be registered. It is not the long gun that is causing the problem, it is the person.

We have heard from the opposition benches all this rhetoric that is off topic, accusing us of doing things that we have never said we were going to do and have no intention of doing. I realize it makes good fodder for them, but it is misleading. It is not attacking the issue that we are supposed to be debating today, and I really wish the opposition would stick to what the debate is supposed to be about, which is the long gun registry, nothing else.

Mr. Don Davies: Mr. Speaker, with the greatest of respect, my friend should read the motion that is before the House. It says, and this is what we are debating:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should not extend the amnesty on gun control requirements set to expire on May 16, 2009, and should maintain the registration of all types of firearms in its entirety.

Business of Supply

The hon. member would do well to read the motion under debate.

I would also point out that both of the bills before the House, the one emanating from the Senate and the one emanating in this House, reduce the gun registration requirements in this country. Bill S-5 removes the requirement to obtain a registration certificate for firearms that are neither prohibited nor restricted. Bill C-301, a bill introduced by my friend's colleague, would end the registration requirement for long gun owners.

Lastly, before I conclude, my friend called this rhetoric. Let me quote from the chief of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police:

The report also underscores that rifles and shotguns account for a substantial proportion of crime guns seized. Recently police in Surrey seized over 200 rifles and shotguns. In Toronto a significant number of crime guns seized were once legally owned rifles or shotguns.

When my friend stands up and calls that rhetoric, perhaps he should direct his comments to the president of the Canadian Association of Police Chiefs and ask him why he is using such language.

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are talking a lot about the issue of amnesty, and of course, that is appropriate with the motion in front of us, but I am gravely concerned about the Conservative private member's Bill C-301.

I am going to read something very briefly from the Canadian Police Association with respect to its concerns about what Bill C-301 would do:

[Relax] controls on handguns and semi-automatic weapons, allowing licensed firearm owners to obtain as many handguns and restricted weapons as they want without any approval process. It also removes the requirement to have authorizations to transport restricted weapons and handguns.

This includes weapons that were used in Dawson College, if members can believe it.

The report goes on to say, further, this bill would:

[Allow] those firearms owners who have been previously "grand-fathered" to permit ownership of prohibited firearms, such as military assault weapons, fully automatic AK-47s, and prohibited handguns.

There is a reality here that this is about a lot more than just long guns. There seems to be an agenda to also really gut the registry when it comes to dealing with other types of restricted and prohibited weapons. So I wonder what the member's comment would be in response to the Canadian Police Association's concerns on this Conservative bill.

Mr. Don Davies: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is quite right. Bill C-301, if passed, results in less frequent screening, weakens transportation rules for restricted and prohibited firearms, makes it easier to transport machine guns and assault weapons to shooting ranges, allows individuals in illegal possession of prohibited handguns to keep them, and makes it easier to transport restricted weapons across the border. That does not sound to me like a particularly intelligent or appropriate step to be taken today in Canada, in 2009.

To get to my friend's comments about the chiefs of police, I will just quote the association:

We need to be able to track firearms to enforce laws and combat the illegal gun trade in cooperation with other nations. Without the registry, Canadian police will no

longer be able to trace unrestricted firearms and will become dependent upon police in other jurisdictions—

• (1705)

The Deputy Speaker: Order. I will have to cut off the hon. member there. The time has expired for questions and comments.

Resuming debate, the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade.

Mr. Gerald Keddy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to speak to this issue. The issue before us is an issue of extremes. There are probably two sides to this debate that are too far to the extreme and the essence of what we are actually talking about here is lost, which is safety for Canadians. On one side there is the extreme group that would go back to the old days of the wild west when one could have a firearm on one's person, on one's property or in one's car or truck and not have to register anything. I do not think anyone is talking about that. On the other side, there is a group that would quite simply destroy every firearm in Canada. I do not think we are talking about that. Somewhere in the centre, we have an obligation as parliamentarians to look at this issue in a practical, reasonable, rational way and come up with a solution that actually improves safety for Canadians.

Having been a farmer before my life in politics, I always had a permit to carry my shotgun. That permit was for shooting coyotes and bears. Having been a sheep farmer, I can say that a shotgun is a practical solution when a bear is in with the sheep. I would not want to go back into the house to get the broom out of the kitchen and try to chase the bear away from the sheep because that is not a practical solution. Destroying every firearm in the country is not going to work.

I would like to speak about what we do not do well as parliamentarians. I have been in the House for nearly 12 years. Sometimes we do not look at legislation that we have already passed, reassess it and ask ourselves the very difficult questions: Has the legislation worked? Did it perform the task that we expected it to perform? Did it make a difference in people's lives? Is it effective? Is it cost effective? I do not think the gun registry would pass any of those tests.

Some of the arguments that have been raised today are totally bogus. There are no statistics to back them up whatsoever. I honestly believe that the issue we are talking about is the safety of Canadians and how we establish a safer society. What is a practical way of doing that? I believe honestly that we license all gun owners. They take a course. We know that they pass a psychological assessment. We know that they do not have a criminal record. We know that they are not likely to offend with that firearm. There is nothing guaranteed in life. An individual cannot get a driver's licence and say he or she will never have an accident or be in a tragedy. There is nothing guaranteed in life. However, we can do our best to make sure that drivers are licensed, that they obey the law, that they do not speed, that they do not drink and drive, and that they follow the rules that we have established.

Private Members Business

As I am speaking, there are licensed firearm owners who have already qualified on a psychological assessment, who have proven they can pass the test to own firearms, who understand the rules, laws and regulations governing those firearms, that the firearms have to be locked up in a separate cabinet from the ammunition, that they have to be kept out of the easy reach of children or any other individuals, and today, that they have to be registered. That is why when we are talking about the safety of Canadians we have to look at the real numbers. Members should not make up numbers in this place. They should look at the real numbers.

● (1710)

There are seven million or eight million firearms registered in Canada. It was widely believed before the firearms registry was established that there were 20 million to 30 million firearms in Canada. Today there are seven million firearms. Where did the other 23 million go? Let us say that figure was too high. Where did the other 10 million go? They are still out there. I can say for a fact that many of my constituents own them because they did not register their firearms. They did not take the course. That is a problem. Those individuals would be licensed if they did not have to register their firearms.

If we want to make Canada safer, there is a good start and we can do it overnight because those individuals are honest, law-abiding citizens. Most of them have never had a traffic ticket and most of them have never gone through a stop sign, but they are not going to register their firearms. They are not going to put the information on a database that has been corrupted 306 times. People have logged on to the database 306 times. That is a serious problem.

There is another part of this debate that I think is a true tragedy. There have been some absolutely horrific deaths in this country perpetrated by people with firearms. Those people in a proper licensing system would never have received a licence to own a firearm. If we would not have spent \$2 billion on a registry, we might even have the police resources to keep firearms out of those individuals' hands, but that is not the case.

The issue that I think is the greatest hoax of the 20th century and certainly the beginning of the 21st, is the idea that the gun registry protects women.

When the former government was spending \$2 billion on a registry that would not work, and if a couple of million dollars would not have registered all the guns in the country something would have been wrong, when the government was doing that, we ignored violence against women. We absolutely ignored it and we are still ignoring it. Come on, get with the agenda here.

If we are going to look at registering firearms for individuals who have already been licensed, we are spending all that time and all those resources on individuals who have already proven to be safe. What we have not done is we have not enforced a single peace bond. We have not made a difference in any woman's life in this country who has been threatened by her spouse or who has been threatened by her neighbour. I think it is a tragedy. I do not understand it.

I say that as a law-abiding gun owner from rural Canada who absolutely has seen a remarkable difference in the hunters who I meet on my property, in individuals who own firearms, not because

of the registry but because of the licensing. We have safer communities, we have better and safer hunters, and we have a better society because of firearms licensing. I am convinced of that. The registry has not made one iota of a difference.

The Deputy Speaker: It being 5:15 p.m., pursuant to an order made earlier today, all questions necessary to dispose of the opposition motion are deemed put and a recorded division deemed requested and deferred until Wednesday, April 22, 2009, at 3 p.m.

● (1715)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cardin: Mr. Speaker, if you seek it, I believe you would find unanimous consent to see the clock as 5:30 p.m.

[*English*]

The Deputy Speaker: Is there unanimous consent to see the clock as 5:30 p.m.?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

[*Translation*]

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AGENCY OF CANADA FOR THE REGIONS OF QUEBEC

Mr. Serge Cardin (Sherbrooke, BQ) moved:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should reconsider its decision to eliminate the funding channelled through the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec to non-profit bodies active in the economic development sector, and reinstate their funding.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I must admit that I am pleased and proud to rise today to move Motion M-288, which I feel very strongly about because of how crucial it is to regional development and the economy in Quebec. This motion seeks to allow non-profit economic development bodies to survive, by ensuring that they have all the resources and funding they need to fulfill their role, which is so essential to the development of the economy in Quebec's regions.

The Bloc Québécois believes that it is imperative that funding for these non-profit organizations be reinstated immediately, fully and indefinitely.

My colleagues and I fiercely opposed cuts to non-profit organizations subsidized in part by the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec and active in the economic sector. This absurd situation is calling into question the economic development model that Quebec has been requesting for several decades.

Private Members Business

This is an inappropriate measure that is extremely prejudicial to the economic fabric of the regions of Quebec. It could result in the loss of jobs in local communities. What is more, the government's intransigence once again reveals the Conservatives' lack of understanding of regional development in Quebec. They are disregarding the demands of many economic forces in Quebec, as well as the Government of Quebec and numerous municipalities, including Quebec City, Montreal and Rimouski, that they reverse this decision.

In my riding, this inadequate measure affects a development organization. The Biomed organization fears for the worst if funding is not restored. In my region, the results of many years of work will be put in jeopardy by this grotesque decision.

Why is it so important to restore this funding for the regions of Quebec? It is because that funding is the foundation of the economic development strategy that Quebec has adopted. Let us back up a moment to gain a better understanding.

History shows that when Quebec, in agreement with its regions, takes charges of regional development, results meet expectations. Why? Because Quebec is closer to its regional partners, and because, in the end, consistency is the main reason for success in economic development.

Since 1960, Quebec has created a unique model of regional economic development based on the conviction that the regions and communities throughout Quebec are in the best position to know their regional situations. The regions and communities can best identify their own strengths and weaknesses and establish development strategies that are most effective for each of the regions of Quebec.

Over the years, Quebec has built up a broad network of organizations that work together by establishing durable links with one another. This has resulted in the creation of a level of consistency between the different levels of government, while each developed its own, complementary fields of expertise. That is how a significant network of non-government economic development organizations was established in the regions of Quebec. Over the years, those organizations have learned to work hand in hand with regional companies and institutions to identify regional needs and, in concert with their regional partners, develop appropriate responses in the best interest of the entire community.

These organizations have become key players in regional development, and that is why it would be a catastrophe if they were to disappear. Each successive government in power in the Quebec National Assembly has understood the dynamic these groups create and has given them unconditional support.

For a while, the federal government understood the power of this strategy and respected the will of Quebec by cooperating, instead of trying to control its own part of regional development or threatening the consistency that is so necessary in this field. Thus, between 1973 and 1994, there was a framework agreement between Quebec City and Ottawa whereby the federal government agreed not to take regional development initiatives unless sanctioned by both governments.

● (1720)

According to that framework agreement, most federal funds were channelled through Quebec's structures. However, in 1994, after the failure to reform federalism and with the Quebec referendum in the offing, the Liberal government put an end to that friendly agreement because it wanted to increase Canada's visibility in Quebec.

The federal government began to finance initiatives directly without consulting the people involved. It did not matter if the initiative was bad, ill advised or contrary to the regional development strategy, the important thing was to be able to make an announcement in front of a Canadian flag with a federal minister posing for the newspapers. With this goal, the ends justified the means. It should then be no surprise that the same logic applied to everything leading to the sponsorship scandal.

In 2006, the Conservatives could have announced a new era by reinstating the former level of financing. However, the Conservative minister responsible for Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions decided to push that absurd logic even further by taking personal control of the approval of subsidies. That step backward to Duplessis-style politics put an end to consistency in regional economic development and seriously threatened the very existence of non-profit organizations active in regional economic development. The numerous protests of the Quebec government and of all the economic stakeholders in the province did not faze the minister.

It was in line with this kind of thinking that in April 2007, the minister cut the economically oriented non-profit organizations subsidized in part by the Economic Development Agency for the Regions of Quebec. This inconsistency calls into question the entire economic development model that Quebec has wanted for decades.

This is an inappropriate measure that is very injurious to the economic fabric of the regions of Quebec. It could result in the elimination of jobs. In addition, the government's intransigence shows once again how inconsistent the Conservatives are when it comes to regional development in Quebec because they could not care less about the request from many economic players in Quebec.

As I said earlier, these non-profit organizations help small and medium-size companies to innovate and explore outside markets. They have become a key part of the economic fabric of many Quebec regions.

Unable to provide any explanations and especially any valid arguments in the face of the torrent of protests, the government issued a guideline that came into force on November 22, 2007. Here the responsible minister reiterated the elimination of funding for the daily operating expenses of these NGOs but allowed them a transitional period running until March 31, 2010 at the latest. In order to access this temporary funding, NGOs still had to have a serious transition plan showing how they intended to replace the agency's financial assistance for their operating costs after that date.

All other projects with any hope for funding had to be ad hoc in nature, of limited, well-defined duration, and directly related to Canada Economic Development priorities.

Private Members Business

These priorities are not explicitly defined, but we can rest assured that the government will provide funding to various individual projects scattered here and there around Quebec. This way of doing things is very good for the federal government's visibility in Quebec but there is no consistent, sustainable vision here to ensure the long-term development of Quebec's regions. This approach did not do anything to reduce the grumbling in economic circles and just delayed the slaughter.

A slaughter because the consequences of this decision are important to Quebec. Many organizations such as Montréal International, PÔLE Québec Chaudière-Appalaches, Technopole maritime du Québec basée à Rimouski, Technopole Vallée du Saint-Maurice, TechnoCentre éolien Gaspésie, Corporation de soutien au développement technologique des petites et moyennes entreprises de l'Est du Québec, and Centre Les Buissons de Pointe-aux-Outardes are directly affected and even threatened by this stoppage of their grants.

• (1725)

Whatever the size of the individual organizations, most were born from a desire by the regions and the Government of Quebec to support promising small businesses and help SMBs invest in innovation and explore foreign markets.

For several years, Quebec's regional investment strategy has been based on the development of distinctive industrial sectors. Thus, Quebec has given special prominence to the development of marine sciences in the Lower St. Lawrence region, the wind power industry in the Gaspé, and aluminum processing in the Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean region. Also, Quebec has based its development policies on the growth of networks of niches of excellence. These research centres subsidized in part by Canada Economic Development are working in these niches in partnership with SMBs.

For some of these organizations, funding from the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec represented up to 50% of their budgets. For example, the corporation providing technological support to SMBs in eastern Quebec and on the North Shore stands to lose the \$400,000 in support it used to receive every year. Many ongoing or upcoming projects may have to be postponed or cancelled for lack of funding. Some Quebec regions will be deprived of essential development tools, and research capacity will be seriously compromised in various sectors such as aluminum processing and marine aquaculture development. In the Matapédia area, the Forest Product Processing Research and Expertise Services will have to cut expenses in its research budget. In concrete terms, this measure is a direct threat to the operation and very existence of some of these organizations involved in regional development.

On March 18, the Conservative government unveiled CED's so-called new policy concerning not-for-profit economic organizations in Quebec. This policy, presented as a new initiative developed by the government, does nothing more than reinstate partially and temporarily the program it had cut in April 2007. Besides how farcical it is to hear the government talk about a new policy, several questions remain.

The Bloc Québécois takes note of this announcement, which will mean that NPOs will once again be able to rely on federal support for

their current operations, but it has questions about the associated terms and conditions.

First, the "new" funding is for a probationary period which ends March 31, 2011. Having already announced in 2007 the possibility for NPOs to extend their funding until March 31, 2010, this is in reality just another extension of one year only. Upon expiry, these organizations will find themselves back at square one, with no funding, and hence possibly in danger.

What is more, the minister has admitted that he is not in a position to say whether all the funding will be reinstated. One may conclude, without fear of error, that it will not be. Also, only 52 of the 200 Quebec NPOs that were eligible prior to November 2007 will be able to apply for temporary federal support. In other words, three quarters of the development agencies are being abandoned right away.

As the previous minister had done in 2007, the government is continuing to politicize the funding it grants. In its stubborn preference for its own visibility over the interests of Quebec, the federal government dictates that every project will be evaluated on merit and must be directly linked to the Canada Economic Development's priorities. Again the invocation of those famous priorities. The problem is that those priorities are formulated in general terms, which means that Canada Economic Development can leave itself enough discretionary flexibility to choose the projects that can receive funding. And considering how this ideological government operates, the chances are slim of seeing Quebec's priorities being given consideration in the process.

The government is trying to make us believe that new funding is being established for Quebec NPOs.

• (1730)

In fact, this announcement is a cowardly farce, a way to stifle the criticism erupting from all parts of Quebec against the elimination of funding for these NPOs. It is a way of slowly killing the Quebec economic development model. That is why I invite my colleagues to support motion M-288 to make the funding of Canada Economic Development consistent and efficient.

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and to the Minister of National Revenue, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have two questions for my colleague.

The decision to restore funding to economic organizations responds to the needs expressed by economic stakeholders and elected officials during recent visits by the Minister of State (Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec). Everyone is applauding this decision. I would like to ask the Bloc why it does not accept our government's commitment to provide assistance for the economic development of the regions of Quebec while ensuring responsible management of taxpayers' money?

Private Members Business

The Bloc also voted against creating the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec on June 1, 2005. Furthermore, on March 18, 2009, when it was announced that funding would be provided to economic NPOs, the Bloc stated that it was pleased for the non-profits. My question is as follows. How does the opposition member plan to work with the government to help the communities most in need?

Mr. Serge Cardin: Mr. Speaker, after listening to my Conservative colleague, even though he is from Quebec, I am wondering whether he read the same information in the papers when the minister announced the cuts affecting non-profits. The reactions were unanimous from the people directly involved with the organizations to those who deal with economic development across Quebec, from the mayors of major municipalities to the Quebec minister responsible for regional development and from the Quebec government to the Quebec National Assembly.

Thus, the consultations he alluded to were a waste of time. As I mentioned, there was a lot of consultations during the electoral campaign, which were obviously deliberate, to speak of the government's investments. We did that. We are listening to the people in our area because economic development in Quebec is different from economic development in other regions of Canada. A member from Quebec should know that.

He should also be trying to convince his colleagues from other provinces who do not operate the same way and who often are not even interested. We know about the Conservative ideology. When it comes to the economy, it is *laissez-faire*. They do not believe in government intervention. However, the government must take action and restore the previous budgets.

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for introducing the motion. It has many elements in it that are very important to all Canadians. First we have regional economic development because there are areas in Canada that need assistance to maintain a vibrant and stable economic climate for employment promotion.

Recently we dealt with a bill about tax credits to help young people stay in their communities rather than eroding the labour force available to them. Statistics Canada is now saying that young people under the age of 25 have been the ones disproportionately affected by job losses across Canada. I can only assume that Quebec is reflective of that same experience.

Is the member aware of the situation of youth in these areas and whether the innovative program of using the non-profits through the Economic Development Agency was dedicated to some extent to the promotion of or job creation for young people?

• (1735)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cardin: Mr. Speaker, every region has its own characteristics and in each one, youth migration is a major problem. Non-profits were active in the economic field, were doing promotion work and were even helping businesses to start up, particularly innovative businesses. Innovation is where we have to invest. This is increasingly the result of a better education which, in turn, leads to the creation of research firms. The Conservative government is often

against research, saying it is useless. So many businesses were created from—

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

Resuming debate.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services.

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and to the Minister of National Revenue, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to participate in the first hour of debate on the motion moved by the member for Sherbrooke. At the outset, I want to make it clear that Economic Development Canada never abolished funding for non-profit organizations.

In 2007, the former minister of Economic Development Canada made a courageous decision that was necessary given the context he had to deal with. However, that decision also gave Economic Development Canada access to some flexibility it no longer had. Thanks to our Conservative government's good management, funding by default based on nothing more than an activity is now a thing of the past.

When he took over the reins, the Minister of State (Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec) conducted a detailed analysis of all of his files. The difficult economic circumstances during which the minister took over called for quick, coherent action that took into account the harsh realities Quebec's regions were facing. That is why the minister undertook consultations in all regions of Quebec. He thought it was important to meet people on their own turf, stakeholders and elected representatives, everyone who was participating in their community's economy.

Each time, discussions focused on the following issues: How can Economic Development Canada do a better job of helping communities going through hard times? How can Economic Development Canada work more effectively with regional economic stakeholders? How can Economic Development Canada provide better support to the creation and growth of small and medium-sized businesses?

It was through consultations, for example, that the minister heard the concerns of the economic development community. Thus, on March 18, 2009, the minister was able to go ahead and open up financing to certain not-for-profit organizations, based on specific criteria. This new approach will be used for the next two years. From now on, all not-for-profit economic organizations with projects designed to deliver services that meet the needs of small and medium-sized enterprises or communities may apply for financial assistance, including operating costs.

Private Members Business

However, the projects submitted must meet Economic Development Canada's priorities. They must facilitate the adjustment of regions and communities to the new economic context and enhance the performance of small and medium sized enterprises. To ensure the sound management of public funds, we want the projects selected to produce concrete results that will benefit Quebec's enterprises and regions.

I must point out that the new policy is being very well received by a number of public stakeholders. I would like to mention, for example, the enthusiasm expressed by Quebec City's mayor, Régis Labeaume.

● (1740)

Following our announcement, Mr. Raymond Bachand, Quebec Minister of Economic Development, Innovation and Export Trade said:

Today's announcement demonstrates that the federal government has recognized the important contribution to the economic development of Quebec of the not for profit economic organizations.

Not for profit organizations will again have access for a period of two years to federal government funding, an essential complement to the action of the Government of Quebec. The economic vitality of Quebec is unfolding, day after day, thanks to the work of these economic leaders.

That was from a press release dated March 18, 2009 and released by Raymond Bachand, Quebec's Minister of Economic Development, Innovation and Export.

I would also like to remind hon. members of the favourable reaction by a number of these not for profit economic organizations, including Montréal International, PÔLE Québec Chaudières-Appalaches, Aéro Montréal and Laval Technopole. Thanks to our financial support, the non-profit economic organizations will be better able to support the development of Quebec businesses and communities. That is what the people in our struggling communities are hearing, and that is what we and our partners are focusing on.

Under our government, examples of assistance to the regions of Quebec abound. Through its 14 business offices, the Economic Development Agency of Canada works with a clientele comprised for the most part of SMEs and non-profit organizations.

We have been very proactive and attuned to the needs of the regions and communities experiencing difficulties during this period of economic crisis. The programs and measures put in place by the agency bear witness to our commitment to finding solutions in the best interests of the workers of the country and of Quebec.

I am thinking of such programs as Community Diversification, which enables the regions of Quebec to maintain and develop their economic base, and of Business and Regional Growth, which enhances the conditions favourable to the sustainable development of regions and of SMEs.

These are in addition to numerous other measures, such as funds to assist with the creation and transfer of businesses, set up in collaboration with the community business development corporations joint fund. More specifically, our government created a \$1 billion Community Adjustment Fund to help communities depending on struggling economic sectors, and over \$200 million will go to Quebec.

Our new policy on the non-profit economic organizations is evidence of our ability to listen and intervene in order to ensure the viability of our communities in the best interest of workers, business and the regions of Quebec. I would therefore encourage the members of the opposition to set partisan games aside and work with the people they represent in order to take advantage of this new policy.

● (1745)

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes (Brossard—La Prairie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by congratulating my colleague from Sherbrooke on introducing this motion, which calls for support for non-profit bodies. It is crucial to reinstate funding for these bodies, as they play a pivotal role in economic development in Quebec.

Since the Conservatives came to power in 2006, funding for non-profit organizations and for CED in general has decreased steadily. Generally, that means that economic development is not a priority for this government. At times of economic difficulty such as the period we are going through at present, CED should be the main engine of economic development in the regions of Quebec. CED should be ready to invest heavily in non-profit organizations that help small and medium-sized enterprises develop.

Since 2005, when the budget for CED was \$444 million, the agency's funding has decreased by 45%. This is a huge reduction for a department whose mandate is economic development.

Another sign that this department is not high on the government's priority list is the number of applications for grants or financial assistance received. In 2006-07, 1,179 applications were received. Because of changes to the eligibility criteria for applicants, the number was down to 596 in 2007-08. In 2006-07, 235 applications were denied. In 2007-08, 223 were denied. But what stands out is that the number of applications that were approved went from 944 to 373. There was a significant decrease in the rate of approval of applications for financial assistance and grants, and it shows the dramatic change this government made in managing Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions.

Obviously, there is the whole issue of eligibility criteria for non-profit organizations. The government has announced that funding will be reinstated for the next two years, but as my colleague from Sherbrooke said, it has not made any change to the eligibility criteria for these programs, which means that 75% of the non-profit organizations in Quebec still will not have access to this funding.

This proves once again that, in the eyes of the Conservatives, the role of the government is not at all to support and to help communities for them to develop and above all to stabilize in a period of economic crisis.

In my view, one glaring number is quite telling. Their success rate in implementing their own programs is barely 4%. The funds barely get to those who need them and this causes a great deal of problems for our regions.

The other evidence, as it were, of the lack of interest or lack of conviction of this government for the economic development agencies is the reduction of these departments in October 2008. They became ministries instead of being full-fledged departments as they were before. To conclude, I would like to mention that subsidies coming from CED, for Quebec, were reduced by \$75 million.

I will obviously support the motion tabled by my colleague from Sherbrooke. I hope that the government will take into account the need to give the agency what it needs in order to properly support the regions of Quebec.

• (1750)

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the New Democratic Party will also support the motion of the member for Sherbrooke. In the few minutes allocated to me I will focus on the intervention of the member for Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière. I wonder if he sometimes has moments of lucidity. He just told us that the Conservatives never made cuts to the program. Yet, our colleague who just spoke provided data showing that two-thirds of the program and subsidies have been cut.

I listened to the member for Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière read the text prepared for him. It was full of empty rhetoric and platitudes, the stuff typically written by ministers' staff for the puppets who rise in this place. We all remember him, during the election campaign, when he drove a truck—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Lévis—Bellechasse has the floor on a point of order.

Mr. Steven Blaney: Mr. Speaker, we are talking about Canada Economic Development. The member for Outremont will be able to campaign in due course. We are talking about clowns, puppets and trucks in the House. Could we focus on the debate? We are in the midst of an economic crisis. Could the member for Outremont raise the tone of the debate today and not make personal attacks? Otherwise, he will find us in his way.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Lévis—Bellechasse raised a point of order concerning the relevance of interventions. If all members who rise to speak could keep in mind the subject at hand, that would be best for the House.

The hon. member for Outremont.

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Speaker, you are quite right to remind the House that we must stay on topic. I began by explaining that the NDP supported the motion moved by the hon. member for Sherbrooke. I then congratulated our Liberal colleague who had just given some figures demonstrating that, contrary to the completely false statements made by the member for Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, the subsidies were cut by two-thirds.

I was in the midst of reminding the people watching us who the member for Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière was, in order to support my comments concerning the motion moved by the member for Sherbrooke. That was the same member who, during the election campaign, was put behind the wheel of a truck in order to travel around Quebec to insult the democratic choices made by Quebecers. That is also the same member who just rose in this House, since it is pretty easy to convince him to do just about anything. He just rose in this House to refute the evidence. The same Conservatives

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who convinced him to drive around in a truck also convinced him to rise in this House to read a speech full of falsehoods.

When he was talking about the intent to boost community vitality and ensure good management of public funds, he must have forgotten institutions like the Marine Biotechnology Research Centre in Rimouski, which I have visited on several occasions. It was one of the institutions targeted by the great Conservative policy-makers, the reformers who tell members like the member for Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière what to tell us here in the House, what tangled web to weave.

The Marine Biotechnology Research Centre in Rimouski is a centre of excellence. They recruited some 30 Ph.D.s and post-doctoral students from the regions, people trained at Scripps and MIT and the best universities in Canada and the United States. The only way to bring them back to the region is with a research institution like that.

However, according to Conservative ideology, there is no room for non-profit organizations in the economy. That is what the Conservatives from Quebec are saying. They are unable to take a stand for home-grown Quebec institutions or for supporting local economies to attract quality, intelligence and expertise to the regions of Quebec. They would rather dismantle the Quebec model. But they are not content to destroy it by cutting off funding. They want to destroy it by standing up in the House and justifying what can never be justified.

The member had the nerve to say that it was a courageous, necessary decision. Since when does it take courage to cut funding from economic development institutions that were created to help the regions of Quebec? Since when is it necessary to withdraw public funds from institutions that create employment and build the knowledge base? There may be just one way to reach the Conservatives, so let us remember that the only way to create wealth—

• (1755)

The Deputy Speaker: I am sorry but I have to interrupt the member for Outremont since there is a problem with the simultaneous translation for English-speaking members.

It is working now.

The member for Outremont.

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: Do I have 10 more minutes? May I resume? Could the clock be reset to zero? There is so much to say about the extreme right ideologists that we call the Conservatives. They systematically attack the institutions put in place by Quebec. They laugh nervously when presented with evidence of their negligence because they are unable to stand up, to look at the Reformists making cuts in the economic institutions put in place by Quebec and to tell those people that it is the wrong way to go.

I started by asking the member for Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière if he sometimes has moments of lucidity, when he realizes what is going on. Do you know what? I prefer that he continues the same way, not realizing what he is doing. This is a bit like another member from Quebec City, who used to be the minister in charge of culture and who had the brilliant idea, just prior to the last campaign, to slash the programs supporting culture.

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It had the desired effect. At least the Conservatives were prevented from getting their majority. That is a great achievement for Canada as a whole. We have succeeded in preventing those extreme right ideologists from getting the majority. I do not even want to think about what kind of country we would have right now if we had let them get that majority.

That is the kind of approach extreme right wing ideologues, reform ideologues, go for. It is one thing for them to decide to put an end to the involvement of the not-for-profit sector in the economy, in their regions, that is all right. But it is another for the members for Quebec, Lévis, Chutes-de-la-Chaudière or Beauce to rise in this House and deny the reality. The former minister responsible made cuts. Thankfully, the new one is putting money back. The fact remains that these members are trying to deny the reality. That is the kind of mad idea they acted on during the last election campaign, when they sat behind the wheel of their truck with the brilliant and oh so talented Michael Fortier.

Whatever became of Michael Fortier? Let us not forget that the same Michael Fortier lost to now senator Leo Housakos when he ran under the Reform Party banner in my riding of Laval. We can see what the Conservatives are all about.

This is a very timely motion the Bloc Québécois has put forward. I will read it so that everyone watching understands what it deals with, assess it and compare it to the nonsense coming from the member for Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière.

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should reconsider its decision to eliminate the funding channelled through the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec [which was unquestionably eliminated, whether the member for Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière likes it or not] to non-profit bodies active in the economic development sector, and reinstate their funding.

If the Conservatives took the slightest pride in Quebec's economic performance over the past 40 years, in what was accomplished in Quebec, they would not assist the Reformers in dismantling and demolishing it. They would not demonize it, as the member just did in his pathetic and shameful remarks to this House.

We, however, will stand up for Quebec and its institutions and vote with the Bloc and Liberal members to reinstate the funding which was undeniably cut by the Conservatives and their extreme right wing friends.

• (1800)

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the debate is quite animated, thanks to my colleague. Together with my colleague from Laval, I would like to thank him for his support. As my colleague from Sherbrooke says, I will continue along the same lines.

Earlier, the parliamentary secretary said something that made my hair stand on end. He said in his speech that the Conservative government had cut funding for non-profit organizations in the interests of sound management of public funds. Does that mean that helping non-profit economic organizations that develop the regions is not sound management of public funds? Does that mean that the organizations in question were mismanaging and wasting the funding they received from the government? It is completely ridiculous to say that the government wants to exercise sound

management by cutting funding for regional development and organizations involved in regional development.

The other thing I do not get about the Conservative government's attitude is the fact that it completely fails to understand the development model that Quebec has put in place over the past 40 years. It is important to understand that institutions in Quebec have changed a great deal. If we look at a map, we can see that Quebec created regional county municipalities, development plans and a set of tools to allow it to manage public funds more effectively and serve communities better.

The same is true of health care services. Quebec created local community service centres where people can access health care services. It established regional boards because it knew that centralizing services did not give good results. These services were therefore decentralized in the regions, and Quebec created institutions that manage each region. It created similar models of economic development.

Development committees were created for each regional county municipality and regions formed conferences of elected officers. Each regional county municipality in Quebec has a development plan that corresponds to its needs, abilities and the community as a whole, as well as its unique environment. For instance, we would not see an area in the middle of Montreal setting a goal to develop agriculture. I refer to agriculture because my hon. colleague from Richmond—Arthabaska is here. He is our agriculture critic and is doing an excellent job.

Each regional county municipality has its own model, a development objective. That is included in all administrative regions of Quebec, and each one has its own objectives. These are the objectives defended by not-for-profit organizations. We have heard the example of Technopole maritime du Québec based in Rimouski. All the stakeholders involved tried to identify a niche that could have worked for Rimouski, one that could have been the focus and could have been developed more than other sectors. That was the decision made by the stakeholders, the city of Rimouski, the Université du Québec à Rimouski and the Quebec government, which for years has been supporting marine development at the Université du Québec.

The Conservatives just crushed that decision by eliminating the programs offered to not-for-profit economic organizations. Consider, for example, my riding of Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia.

•(1805)

In the Matapédia valley, at this time, we have set up a forestry research centre. This was a tool we created with the support of Canada Economic Development. There is now no chance at all that it will get that support again, with the criteria that have been established, and with the budget cuts. We focused as our niche market on the forest, at the primary level, but also at the secondary and even tertiary stages of processing. We have been trying to develop that sector for years. With the crisis in the softwood lumber sector, it is even more important to invest in research and development so that we can manage to revive the economy of the Matapédia valley. What happened in 2007 was that the Conservative government said that this would not work out, to forget the non-profit organizations. According to it, these were people who did not manage public funds properly. That is what we have been told. It makes no sense. It is a snub to the entire Quebec model, which was starting to fall in line with the best international models of regional development. Think of Finland, Norway, the Nordic countries with more or less similar models that allow each region to have niche markets and to be able to develop them without competition from other regions. What this does for the government of Quebec and what it ought to do for the federal government is to support development of this type. It avoids any foul ups, muddles and duplication, which is really important.

What the Bloc Québécois wants is for the federal government, if it refuses to pull out of regional development completely—and incidentally, this is a prerogative of the provincial governments, and particularly the Government of Quebec under the Constitution—to try to coordinate its programs with those of the Government of Quebec, and reach agreements with the provincial governments. We speak of the Government of Quebec because that is where we are from, but the same thing could be done in New Brunswick. The federal government can reach an agreement with it on regional development. Or with the government of Newfoundland and Labrador, or the other provinces, particularly Ontario. This is a very fine example at present. The federal government, if it refuses to pull out of this area completely, and it is a provincial jurisdiction, must reach agreement first with the Government of Quebec and agree to accept the models of Quebec, Ontario and New Brunswick, and to go in the same direction.

What the Conservative government has done is to go right back to the quagmire that existed previously. It is setting priorities that are not really the priorities of each region and even less so those of Quebec. It says that it wants to make investments but the problem when it does so is that the investments do not correspond to the needs or wishes of the area. So what will they develop? A great number of businesses that are not a good fit for the community and that will lead to regions competing against one another for the fun of it? That does not make sense.

If we develop a marine niche market in Rimouski, we will not develop another in Trois-Rivières. That needs to be understood and yet the Conservative government has not understood. Furthermore, this government cut almost 50% of funding for regional development. When the former minister told us that he had to cut something, that he had to make cuts to non-profits, what he did not tell us is that

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he had completely failed to defend the budget for regional development that we had before.

In closing, I would like to move an amendment to the motion presented by my colleague from Sherbrooke. The amendment reads as follows:

That the motion be amended by replacing the words “and reinstate their funding” with the words “reinstate full funding and eligibility criteria, and continue such funding beyond March 31, 2011”.

•(1810)

The Deputy Speaker: It is my duty to inform hon. members that, pursuant to Standing Order 93(3), no amendment may be proposed to a private members' motion or to the motion for second reading of a private members' bill unless the sponsor of the item indicates his consent. Therefore, I ask the hon. member for Sherbrooke if he consents to this amendment being moved.

Mr. Serge Cardin: Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to consent to the amendment.

The Deputy Speaker: The amendment is in order.

Resuming debate on the amendment.

The hon. member for Lévis—Bellechasse.

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my great pleasure to take part in this debate to talk about our government's concrete achievements and Economic Development Canada's concrete achievements under the aegis of two excellent ministers, the hon. member for Jonquière—Alma and, of course, the hon. member for Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean.

I would like to share part of a quote: “Economic Development Canada's initiative is timely because it comes at a time of global economic slowdown and increased international competition,” said the president and CEO of Montréal International, André Gamache on March 18, 2009. “We applaud the Roberval minister's openness and his awareness of the economic challenges facing greater Montreal”. And there is more. This is a key Montreal organization applauding the Conservative government's initiatives.

I have another quote here from the mayor of Quebec City, Régis Labeaume, who was very pleased with the Government of Canada's decision to develop a new funding policy for non-profit economic organizations. Mayor Labeaume said that it was important to get all the ducks in a row. We are managing taxpayers' money. We are here to manage the biggest portfolio in Canada, and we have to make careful choices. By working together, these two ministers have paved the way for effective economic development.

I am sure everyone will agree that it is surprising to hear the Bloc Québécois ask for more money from the federal government for economic development when, not so very long ago, it stated quite clearly that the federal government should not get involved in regional development strategies for Quebec because it was getting in the way of integrated local development. The Bloc Québécois even said that it was a waste of time and money.

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●(1815)

The Deputy Speaker: Unfortunately, the time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired. However, the member for Lévis—Bellechasse will have eight minutes next time the House considers this bill.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

[*English*]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Todd Russell (Labrador, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am following up on my question for the Minister of Indian Affairs concerning the failure of the government to address Métis needs in its budget and economic plan.

As I noted at the time, the word Métis does not appear in the budget speech. It does not seem to appear in any budget news release or background. It is as if the Métis have been written out or written off by the Conservative government.

While I and some others on this side welcome some of the budget measures aimed at improving social and economic conditions in first nations and Inuit communities, the same social and economic challenges face Métis communities in Canada.

I think of the Inuit/Métis communities in Labrador. There were no specific training programs or adjustment programs. There was no economic development or infrastructure investment. There were no dollars for Métis education or health improvement. There were no additional dollars for housing.

The omission of the Métis peoples from the budget plan is unfortunate, and I hope it does not reflect any underlying attitudes on the part of the Conservative government.

I was not alone in noticing the omission. The Métis National Council issued a strong statement expressing its disappointment in the budget and its desire to see Métis economic stimulus addressed in some way, shape or form.

It was disappointing that the government failed to take into account the Métis National Council's prebudget submission or the views of other Métis representative organizations and leaders.

The current economic downturn is hurting every sector of the economy and every region. However, as in all economic crises, it is too often the economically disadvantaged who suffer the greatest impact.

Many Métis, and indeed other aboriginal communities, including Inuit and first nations, had made economic progress in recent years. I think for example of many natural resources projects which had begun to make some strides in employing aboriginal people and involving them in training, supply and other opportunities. Many of these communities are now finding themselves taking an economic hit from shutdowns and layoffs.

The government should have taken the situation of Métis communities more fully into account in drawing up its budget plan and its plan for economic stimulus. Unfortunately, this latest economic crisis is on top of the economic challenges which have faced Métis communities for far too long.

Unfortunately, the economic situation in Canada does not seem to be turning around yet. We saw today the latest move by the Bank of Canada, which has revised its economic forecast yet again, foreseeing a longer recession than previously predicted. A longer or deeper recession will only worsen the economic impacts on economically vulnerable communities.

It will make it even more important that government takes measures to stimulate the economy for all Canadians, in all regions and from all parts of our society. That includes the Métis, who need to be included more fully in the economic plans of government and in the economic life of our country.

●(1820)

Mr. John Duncan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to the question from the hon. member for Labrador. I am quite surprised by this question. Our government is deeply engaged in a relationship with the Métis, and we are committed to concrete actions.

Last year our government signed the historic Métis nation protocol, an important partnership agreement with the Métis National Council to improve the lives of Métis. Already we have met with them to identify a number of priority areas important to the Métis nation, including war veteran issues, Métis former students of the residential school system and economic development.

Clearly our government is committed to taking steps to ensure that Métis fully share in economic opportunities offered throughout Canada. In fact, we believe that increasing aboriginal participation in the economy is the most effective way to improve persistent socio-economic conditions faced by aboriginal people in Canada, and there are some real success stories out there.

In budget 2009 we have taken some very important steps to help aboriginal people with workforce training opportunities by investing an additional \$100 million over three years in the aboriginal skills and employment partnership initiative. This is expected to support the creation of 6,000 jobs for aboriginal Canadians. I happen to have personal experience with that program, and I know it is achieving results. We are committed to ensuring that Métis have full access to this program.

In addition, our government is investing \$75 million in a two-year aboriginal skills and training strategic investment fund. In the coming months we will introduce a new federal framework that will align all federal actions in support of aboriginal economic development, including recent and new investments to enhance access to capital. The Métis will play a significant role in this framework.

Mr. Todd Russell: Mr. Speaker, I listened quite intently to the remarks of the parliamentary secretary and again I think he evaded the question.

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I would like to ask once again very quickly what Métis specific programs there were. What investments were there for Métis specific investments in things like housing, infrastructure, water and sewer? These communities need it, just like first nations and Inuit communities need these investments.

Mr. John Duncan: Mr. Speaker, we are working through the Métis protocol on issues that are important to the Métis, including access to the budget 2009 initiatives.

Our government is proud to be making notable progress with the Métis National Council. We have been working very hard on a government-to-government basis from economic development to housing to educational outcomes. We remain committed to working in partnership to improve the quality of life for Métis people. The government is making notable progress.

[Translation]

CULTURE

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in March, I asked a question in this House, and I have to say that I did not get a very satisfactory answer.

I asked the Minister of Canadian Heritage to justify the cuts to arts and culture programs. The Minister of Canadian Heritage did not make these documents public, claiming that they were secret cabinet deliberations.

Either these documents and the analysis do not exist and the cuts were made for ideological reasons, or the government is not happy with the findings and does not want to show them to us. Either way, is its refusal to make these documents public not proof that these cuts were unjustified?

The Minister of Canadian Heritage has repeatedly said that these programs were not cost-effective, but he has never been able to prove it. He has never been able to show us even one sentence in a study to prove it. But when we go to the website of the Department of Canadian Heritage, we can find studies, analyses and even surveys about the Trade Routes program. There are even 200 pages of survey results from December 2007, 14 or 15 months ago, that speak glowingly of the results of the Trade Routes program, which was cut.

The minister inevitably says that the Conservatives are good, that they have given a lot of money to artists and that the Bloc Québécois has voted against it. But the Bloc Québécois has not always voted against the government. On May 10, 2006, the Bloc voted in favour of the Conservative budget, because it included a lot of money for Quebec. On March 27, 2007, the Bloc Québécois also voted for the Conservative budget, because it gave more money to artists through the Canada Council. It was not enough for this government to brag about, but there was more money for the Canada Council and it was a step in the right direction. We asked for \$150 million more and the government gave \$30 million.

But that is not enough. I know that the parliamentary secretary will rise soon to say that they have never given so much money. However, this “so much” only represents a few thousand dollars more.

It is true. We twice voted for this Conservative government's budgets because they put more money in the right places. This time the cuts are vicious and unwarranted. The minister appeared before our committee and repeated the same old story that he had given more money but he never explained the reason for the cuts or why the programs are ineffective.

The deputy minister also appeared before the committee. She, too, was asked to produce her studies but was unable to do so. She said the studies were secret because they came from cabinet. However, the very week that I asked my question, on February 10, the government unveiled, piece by piece, like a stripper, the pieces of the budget it was going to present.

The reason he gave is a vile and false excuse and I would like the minister to produce the studies that prove these programs to be supposedly ineffective.

• (1825)

[English]

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last year the Department of Canadian Heritage was among 17 departments and agencies that participated in a strategic review of all program spending. During the strategic review, the department reviewed the bottom 3.4% of program spending within the context of the \$2.31 billion spent by the Canadian Heritage portfolio, not the full 5% as requested.

The strategic review process was a budgetary exercise completely covered by the concept of cabinet confidence. Every document, opinion and any advice provided to the government cannot be revealed. Laws exist that maintain the security of these documents.

As I have said before, our government supports the overall objectives of Trade Routes but did not agree with the overall results of the program. Five million dollars in administrative costs cannot justify \$2 million in direct benefits. This is an opinion that many in the arts community share, including Alain Paré, president and CEO of CINARS.

The member opposite seems to forget that we are contributing some \$22 million in support of international touring and export through the Canada Council, Telefilm, the National Film Board, FACTOR, Music Action and the Association for the Export of Canadian Books. There is an awful lot of support that this government is conducting.

We know in budget 2009, of course, that the government announced an additional investment of more than half a billion dollars over the next two years for arts, culture and heritage, including \$276 million in new funding, including \$60 million in new funding for cultural infrastructure and \$20 million in new funding to train the next generation of Canada's most promising artists, while spending \$100 million over two years for marquee festivals and events that draw tourism and related spinoffs right here in Canada. It is a great program. This builds on the \$30 million in permanent appropriation of funds to the Canada Council for the Arts, bringing its budget to at least \$180 million a year and \$181 million this year.

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I would like to note for the member opposite that this past fall the Prime Minister announced that our government would be reinvesting \$25 million over five years in additional support to the international francophone television network TV5. This investment increases our contribution to \$13 million a year, which should greatly help promote Canadian content to the some 180 million households around the globe that watch TV5.

In closing, I want to reiterate that this government believes in efficiency and ensuring that that maximum support possible goes to creators and to sharing their work with audiences. We want to get value for money. We are absolutely supporting arts and culture, as we are so many facets for which this government is responsible, but we are also ensuring that every taxpayer dollar is respected.

• (1830)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: Mr. Speaker, what we have just heard is not any more satisfactory. It is really the minister's story told another way but the words are not all that different. When talking about the strategic reviews of these programs he states that the information is confidential because it originates from cabinet. However, that does not mean that the information cannot be disclosed; it can if the minister wishes it to be. We must conclude that the minister does not wish to disclose this information. That is what we must conclude.

In the story that he has told over and over again, only one sentence speaks remotely to my question and that is when he talks about the Trade Routes program. This program's budget totalled \$7 million: \$5 million to send agents, who were like public servants, around the world and \$2 million that was actually subsidies for organizations. The latter want the \$2 million, but not the \$5 million.

[*English*]

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: Mr. Speaker, we went through a number of hearings at committee. Perhaps, for the member's benefit, she should know that it was not the case that Trade Routes sent people throughout the world. In fact, Trade Routes had locations in five cities. They just happened to be the most expensive five cities to set up agencies like this. It was spending \$5 million in administration but delivering only \$2 million in benefit, clearly not a program that has the type of efficiency that I believe Canadians expect when we are spending their hard-earned dollars, their taxpayer dollars that they are sending here to Ottawa.

What we are determined to do is provide unprecedented support to arts and culture, which is what we are doing, but we are also ensuring that each and every dollar gets results for Canadians.

[*Translation*]

DOMTAR PLANT IN LEBEL-SUR-QUÉVILLON

Mr. Yvon Lévesque (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on January 27, I asked the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development a question about a problem in Lebel-sur-Quévillon concerning the closure of the paper mill and sawmill, which put 425 employees out of work. For that town, it was the equivalent of 550,000 jobs in Montreal. On that day—budget day, as you may recall—the minister replied, “I invite the member to wait for this afternoon's budget and to support us so that we can rebuild the economy together.”

However, further to the request I made to the minister, after reading the budget several times, I have not found anything that would answer the question I asked. I would remind the House of a few facts. The Employment Insurance Act used to be called the Unemployment Insurance Act. Before that, the federal government had gathered together legislation that existed in all the provinces, but did not exist at the federal level. In the provinces, including Quebec, legislation was passed in the 1920s to help those most in need, and in 1939-40 it was temporarily taken up by the federal government, which allocated funds in order provide a decent income for the time.

As soon as the economy recovered and the program was put in place, the government ensured that it would self-sustain itself and stopped funding it, while keeping control of operations and grabbing surpluses to use them towards the federal deficit. It is in that context that, in 1996, the Minister of Finance released the name, the thrust and the goals of that program. Indeed, at the time, the minister changed the title of the Unemployment Insurance Act, which referred to the situation for which this legislation had been passed—that is to protect the workers and local economies affected. Until 1996, the program had always been indexed to the cost of living, or close to it.

So, ironically, the minister renamed it the “employment insurance” program, as if the income provided by our employment was not in itself an insurance provided by our work, and as if we needed other compensation in addition to the income provided by our work.

Worse still, the minister reduced insurable amounts from \$47,000 to \$39,000, in addition to reducing from 60% down to 55% the percentage used to calculate the amount of the benefits to be paid. That percentage was also reduced each time a claimant would rely on these benefits, down to a threshold of 50%. This means that benefits which, in most cases, amounted to \$28,000 in 1994-95, went down to \$19,500 in January 1996, and, in many cases, to much less than that. In his desire to grab money as quickly as possible, this minister, who went on to become the Prime Minister, had made his legislation, which was passed on April 30, 1996, retroactive to January 1.

In response to the question that I put to her on March 10, when I came back, the minister said that there were very great challenges in these tough times for a great number of people, and that the government had a framework and intended to stick with it.

We are now going through another crisis, and it is important to give back access to employment insurance to those who need it. People serving two or three years in jail can maintain their right to employment insurance, but that is not the case for workers, and today they need that program.

• (1835)

[*English*]

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is no doubt that the employment insurance program has been expanded. A number of things have been done to enhance the program.

The EI program's basic insurance principle stipulates that the premiums paid and benefits disbursed must be reasonably close in terms of both timing and value. That is why the EI program's qualifying period is clearly established as the 52 weeks preceding an application for benefits. It is a core principle that would need to be enhanced or dealt with in any program.

We analyzed the labour market and consulted widely with Canadians before developing our economic action plan. The result is a framework that responds to the current economic situation by assisting workers financially now and helping them to prepare for jobs as the economy improves.

The changes we have made to the EI program are an essential component of our economic action plan. There are a number of enhancements to the program. They include: providing nationally the benefits of the previous five-week pilot project and increasing the maximum duration of benefits available under the EI program by five weeks, raising it from 45 weeks to 50 weeks; allowing earlier access to EI regular income benefits for eligible individuals purchasing their own training using all or part of their severance package; a pilot project that will provide extended EI income support to long-tenured workers while they are on claim; temporarily increasing the funding to the provinces and territories for training programs and services, an additional \$1 billion to top up the current funding of \$1.95 billion; and a two-year strategic training and transition fund to create opportunities for employment, enable community self-reliance and provide flexible support to individual workers for skills upgrading and training.

Clearly, these measures and others, such as the targeted initiative for older workers, show that this government continues to take action to adjust the employment insurance program to meet the needs of today's workers and prepare them for the jobs of tomorrow.

That being said, I wish to assure the hon. member that we will continue to monitor the current EI system to ensure that the program is working and responding effectively to ever-changing economic circumstances. Built within the employment insurance program is the provision that if unemployment in a region rises, benefits are

longer and the time to qualify is shorter. That part is flexible. We are making sure that the needs of those who are most vulnerable are met.

● (1840)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Lévesque: Mr. Speaker, my colleague across the floor just underscored a point which absolutely needs to be tackled. He said that the plan must adapt to the emerging needs. Because of the cost of living and the urbanization, the needs of today, in this crisis, are much more pressing than they were in 1920 or 1940. Given that there are enormous amounts of money in the employment insurance coffers, that the government draws from to pay off the debt, that money should instead be used to help the ones who paid it in the first place: businesses, workers and communities. Without employment insurance revenues, these people cannot recover the money owed to them. We are forcing workers to get into debt, and they become helpless.

[*English*]

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned earlier, there are 58 regions in the country and they adjust automatically month by month so that they react quickly. Eighty-two per cent of those who pay into the system actually receive benefits.

We understand that many Canadians have been affected by these economic times. We empathize with them and understand where they are, in that they have lost their jobs through circumstances beyond their control. For those who are able to qualify, these benefits are there for them. We want to ensure that we continue to take steps to get the money to those who need it most.

It is critical that these benefits, as they are applied for, are processed expeditiously. We have taken steps to ensure that happens.

The Deputy Speaker: The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:42 p.m.)

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