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(HANSARD)

Monday, February 14, 2011

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

CONTENTS

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

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, February 14, 2011

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayers

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1100)

[English]

POPE JOHN PAUL II DAY ACT

The House resumed from November 16 consideration of the motion that Bill C-573, An Act to establish Pope John Paul II Day, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to support the private member's bill put forward by my hon. colleague from Brampton West.

The bill creating Pope John Paul II Day is truly an important one, as Pope John Paul II was a transforming figure not just in his homeland of Poland but also throughout the world.

I have to say that it was a great pleasure for me as the chair of Exhibition Place in Toronto and a former city councillor there to play host for the World Youth Day. That was certainly a remarkable gathering of youth from all over the world. It was another initiative that His Holiness Pope John Paul II started during his papacy to bring youth from all over the world together in common prayer and thought, and in action. That event will always stick in my mind, the gathering of youth from different corners of the earth at Exhibition Place and then afterwards followed by a mass and service at Downsview Park.

I had the pleasure and honour of being there and working along with Father Thomas Rosica who was the CEO of Salt + Light Television, a network that does wonderful work throughout Canada in promoting the Christian, Catholic faith. Father Thomas Rosica played a truly tremendous role in hosting that particular event. I was pleased to work with him.

Certainly the response from people, regardless of faith, was always truly one of welcoming His Holiness and incredible cherishing of his presence, his magnetism and charisma.

He was the pope who transformed Europe to what we know today, not just with the fall of the Soviet Union and the fall of communism but also with his the ability to allow his people who had suffered so

much to, as he famously said, "Be not afraid", to be not afraid of totalitarianism, to be not afraid to speak out, to be not afraid to be a light in the darkness. Certainly he was that transformative figure who could inspire people to do amazing things and to be a leader for all.

Poland, with the Solidarity movement, in which he played such a major role, transformed the rest of what we know in Europe. However, it was his initiative and his imprint that we celebrate worldwide in recognizing this day.

He was also a man who reached out to people of different faiths. He was the first pope in the history of the Catholic Church to actually visit a synagogue, in Rome. He certainly held the role of Bishop of Rome very dear to his heart and reached out to the people of Rome, like no Pope before him. Being that particular transforming figure, going out to the people of Rome and the people of all faiths, is what makes him one of the most incredible men of the 20th century.

He was also the first pope to ever visit a mosque. It is, again, a tribute to his understanding and solidarity and friendship with people of different faiths, in extending a warm hand of friendship to all. Again this was important milestone for him as a world leader on stage to say that we want to be friends with everyone of all different faiths. I think it was an important and incredible milestone for us.

The other thing is that he was a pope who actually took his mission as a shepherd and a preacher of the gospel very seriously. He went to 129 different countries and attracted some of the largest crowds in history, such as five million people once in Manila in 1985 and, of course, in Toronto there was about 800,000 people. Some estimated the crowd to be close to even a million people attending his event.

This bill, in recognition of John Paul II Day across Canada, is an important one. It gives credit to someone we consider to be one of the greatest humanitarians of the 20th century, a man of incredible courage and vision, somebody who transformed the world, who built relationships with countries all over the world and who also played a major role in peace negotiations.

• (1105)

I was always saddened by the fact that he never won the Nobel Peace Prize, but certainly nobody promoted more peace than John Paul II, not just in Europe but all over the world. I remember the times when there were skirmishes in Latin America. It was always his intervention that saved the day for certain countries in South America and Central America from actually going to war with their neighbours. He played a major role in all of those events.

Private Members' Business

Thus we are looking at a man of incredible faith, vision and passion, someone man who deeply cared about the world community. He was a shepherd of peace and a messenger of the gospel.

As we all know, Pope Benedict XVI has announced that Pope John Paul II will be beatified on May 1, 2011. People from all over the world will gather in Rome to celebrate this momentous event for this incredible man. In the history of the church, this is a very short period of time for somebody to be beatified. The fact he is going to be beatified and become Blessed John Paul II on May 1, 2011, is indicative of the incredible esteem with which he is held and how we all feel about this particular pope whom we really see as a saintly man. He will probably be considered, as I mentioned in this House on his passing, as John Paul the Great because he was one of the greatest popes in the history of Catholicism and, certainly, a transforming individual.

I am pleased to support the bill. The member for Brampton West has put an incredible amount of work into this and I want to commend him for that. His Polish background speaks also to the fact that he knows, from his ancestors and family members, what an important role John Paul II had in liberating the Polish people. However, at the end of the day, he was really a liberator for all of us, a man of all the people, a man for all seasons, as was said about Saint Thomas Moore. He was an incredible human being who deserves this incredible recognition, because he did transform Canada, the world, and history as we know it.

As I said before, I was deeply moved when I first saw him. I will never forget that moment in Downsview Park when I took communion from His Holiness. It was a transformative day for me. I remember getting there early in the morning. It was pouring rain, and just as he came out for the mass the sun came out. It was the most beautiful experience ever.

He was at that time quite frail. He was somebody who was not afraid to show his physical vulnerability and weakness. We always remember the images of him when he first came to Canada in 1984 as someone who was very strong with an incredible physical presence. Later in his life he became quite frail. He suffered from Parkinson's disease and other illnesses, but he never was afraid to show or accept his own frailty and illnesses, while also showing compassion and care for others.

He was also a pope who was a transformative figure in the church's two millennia of history. All of us remember the particular mass he celebrated when the Holy Door was opened to celebrate the second millennium of Christianity in the world. He was the Pope who launched the new millennium. We will always remember him for being probably one of the greatest popes in living memory.

I am proud to support this bill. I am very pleased that the member for Brampton West has put this bill forward.

• (1110)

Mrs. Kelly Block (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am honoured to be here today to further our discussion in support of Bill C-573 to designate April 2 of each year as Pope John Paul II Day.

Pope John Paul II was a remarkable man who was influential not only in the Catholic church but also in the global environment. During his 27 years as the Pope, he was an important advocate of interfaith dialogue, tolerance and co-operation.

In 1986, Pope John Paul II led a multifaith service with other leaders of the world's religions. This led to other interfaith services all over the world and to yearly interfaith prayers on the annual feast of Saint Francis.

In 1994, the Pope gave the inaugural address at the World Conference on Religion and Peace.

In January 2002, following the terrorist attacks of September 11, he convened a multifaith service that united 200 religious leaders from all over the globe. From this service, the leaders pledged that religion must never again be used to justify violence.

There are various other examples of the Pope's work on the world stage, where he served as a bridge-builder between cultures and religions.

I would like to talk about another important role he undertook, a role that Canadians recognize and applaud: his fight against oppression. Pope John Paul II was a man who fought oppression wherever and whenever he saw it. He was a man who understood from experience what happens to a person during the terror of war and the imposition of a totalitarian regime.

As a youth, Pope John Paul II was an athlete and an intellectual. He lived in a community with people of all different faiths, where he and his Jewish neighbours played football together. He enrolled in university at the age of 18. However, when Nazi Germany invaded Poland in September 1939, the university was closed shortly afterward and all able-bodied young men were forced into manual work. His call to priesthood came soon afterwards.

During his time as a priest, his compassion was evident when he helped a young Jewish refugee who had run away from a Nazi labour camp. She had collapsed on a railway platform and the young priest carried her onto the train and accompanied her to safety in Krakow. Many Polish Jews have said he was instrumental in protecting them and their families.

In 1978, when he was pope, he addressed the UN General Assembly and called on the world to fight for human rights. Not content with words alone, he went on a nine-day pilgrimage back to communist Poland. This trip ultimately led to many changes in that country: for the advocacy of and fight for freedom, for compassion and the offering of protection.

These are qualities that we Canadians believe in, as well. As a country that is defined by its bilingual, pluralist nature, we believe in freedom and we have fought to protect it.

Canadians also understand the importance of compassion. They know that compassion is nothing without action to back it up, the same type of action that we can see of Pope John Paul II.

During the fight for Vimy Ridge in World War I, 3,598 Canadians made the ultimate sacrifice for freedom. We fought for freedom and we came together as a nation.

Private Members' Business

Canadians continued their fight for freedom through World War II right through to today, when our gallant men and women are fighting to bring freedom and human rights to the people of Afghanistan, especially the women and girls.

However, just like Pope John Paul II, we not only fight for freedom but also to protect those who are seeking to find freedom. Canada is proud to have a long humanitarian tradition of being a place of refuge and protection for victims of violence, persecution and conflict. The fight to protect freedom is a tradition that Canada has proudly maintained.

Through the periods of high immigration in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Canada received hundreds of thousands of refugees from the oppression and terror behind the Iron and Bamboo Curtains, as well as from many other totalitarian and communist regimes.

●(1115)

In 1956, 40,000 Hungarians fled the soviet invasion of their country and found a safe, new beginning in Canada. In 1968, Canada welcomed thousands who fled the Soviet invasion of Prague. In 1979, when millions of Indochinese boat people had to flee oppression, they went through the United Nations and obtained refugee status. The UN called for help and Canada responded. Approximately 65,000 came to Canada.

Through the generosity of Canadian faith groups, doors were opened and newcomers were settled in Canada, and they continued to contribute to the cultural and economic life of our country.

One of our former prime ministers, John Diefenbaker, stated:

I am a Canadian, free to speak without fear, free to worship in my own way, free to stand for what I think right, free to oppose what I believe wrong, or free to choose those who shall govern my country.

As Mr. Diefenbaker added in his speech 50 years ago:

This heritage of freedom I pledge to uphold for myself and all mankind

Canadians, just like John Paul II, are compassionate people who care about freedom and human rights. As a man many Canadians honour, admire and try to emulate, let us set aside a special day to honour and consider Pope John Paul II and his works.

Mrs. Bonnie Crombie (Mississauga—Streetsville, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am honoured to join the debate today to support my colleague from Brampton West who presented the motion.

I am proud to do so for a number of reasons, the first one being that I am Polish Canadian and, I believe, one of the first female Polish Canadian members of Parliament this House has seen. Therefore, I am very proud to stand and represent the Polish community and support Pope John Paul II, our pope.

Second, of course, is that I am a practising Roman Catholic and it is important that I stand up for the Roman Catholics in Canada.

It is important legislation that would celebrate the memory of Pope John Paul II day every April 2 on the anniversary of his death. He was beloved not only in Poland but internationally, in Canada and abroad, everywhere that he travelled. He was one of our most travelled popes.

Why do we designate days to celebrate the memory of great people such as John Paul II? We do it to acknowledge their significant accomplishments and their historical contributions to our country as well as to larger historical events.

He was a great man. Not only was he a scholar, he was a philosopher. He came from simple, humble beginnings in Poland as a priest and before that as an actor and a teacher. He was a charismatic and moral leader to, not only the Catholic community across the world, but to everyone.

Pope John Paul II reigned for 27 years, one of the longest reigns of any pope. He also was one of the youngest popes of the 20th century.

There are a number of reasons we should support the bill, many due to his great achievements. He was one of the architects of the defeat of Communism. He was one of the leaders of the solidarity movement, a very significant historical event, particularly to the Polish people. He is and remains a hero. He was the first non-Italian pope since the 15th century. There are over one million Polish Canadians in Canada who would celebrate this day each and every year.

He was a very accomplished pope. He had a large following of supporters and travelled around the world. He completed over 102 pastoral visits outside of Italy.

The pope first visited Canada in 1984 and had visited three times since. He came in 2002 on World Youth Day. I myself billeted a number of youth who came from the former eastern Europe to celebrate this day. Young people from all parts of the world gathered for World Youth Day at the Downsview Centre in Toronto. With their gifts of intelligence and heart, they represented the future of the world but they also bear the marks of humanity and that, too, often knows and understands peace and justice.

The pope said at that time, "Too many lives begin and end without joy and without hope." However, he proved that there was hope in this world. That was one of the principal reasons for World Youth Day.

He spoke to us directly as Canadians. Canadians are heirs to an extraordinary, rich humanism, enriched even more by a blend of different cultural elements. However, the core of our heritage is the spiritual and transcendent vision of life based on Christian revelation, which gave vital impetus to our development as a free, democratic and caring society recognized throughout the world as the champions of human rights and human dignity.

Private Members' Business

I was astounded at how proud the youth were who attended World Youth Day, proud to be Catholics and proud to be there celebrating the pope who value the contributions that youth had made.

One of the other reasons of course was that the pope sought reconciliation for the Jewish community and opened a dialogue with many other faiths.

Those are some of the key reasons that I believe we should support John Paul II day. I hope there are other members of the House who will reach out and encourage all members to support this very important bill as well.

the Ontario legislature introduced a similar type of bill to honour Pope John Paul II. It had been introduced and had passed first and second reading but, unfortunately, died during prorogation. We are attempting to bring back this honour for Pope John Paul II for not only Ontarians but for all Canadians so that we can all celebrate.

• (1120)

In addition, I have attempted to described this man who has done great work. He has been recognized not only among his peers, Canadians and everyone across the world, but people in the church have extended to him the title of Venerable. Pope Benedict has placed this title upon him, which is one step toward sainthood. One step will be completed later this year. It is a two year process but it has been expedited so that this great glory will be placed upon our beloved pope.

As I mentioned earlier, he is one of the great reasons that communism had fallen non-violently in the Soviet Union. Quite unbelievably, the Soviet Union fell and communism fell without a single bullet being fired. Pope John Paul's 1979 trip to Poland was described as the fulcrum of revolution that led to the collapse of communism. As Timothy Ash put it, "without the pope, no solidarity, without solidarity, no Gorbachev, without Gorbachev, no fall of communism". Even Mikhail Gorbachev said that it would have been impossible without the pope. He credits John Paul II for being a key factor in the fall of the Soviet Union.

My very humble roots, as I described, also come from Poland. My family left Poland because of the scourge of communism and sought work and refuge in France. My grandfather served in a Polish division of the French army to fight against Hitler and did not return to Poland because of the rise of communism in the Eastern European Bloc. One of the major reasons we came to Canada was to seek freedom, and we have Pope John Paul II to thank for the fall of communism in Eastern Europe.

Another major accomplishment of the pope, with which nobody will disagree, was provide a bridge to bring in other religions. In 2003, the Anti-Defamation League issued a statement congratulating Pope John Paul II on entering his 25th year of the papacy and complimenting him on his role in bridging the divide between the Jewish faith and the Catholic Church. It said, "More change for the better took place in his 27-year papacy than in the nearly 2,000 years before".

There are many other examples of that as well, many attempts to make a bridge to many other faith communities, especially with Muslim community. When Pope John Paul was in Casa Blanca August 19, 1985 in Morocco, he said:

Christians and Muslims, we have many things in common, as believers and as human beings. We live in the same world, marked by many signs of hope, but also by multiple signs of anguish. For us, Abraham is a very model of faith in God, of submission to his will and of confidence in his goodness. We believe in the same God, the one God, the living God, the God who created the world and brings his creatures to their perfection.

He reached out to the Muslim community when he was pope and he reached out to the Jewish community as well. He reached out to many communities. We know that in 1993 he held a meeting with over 120 religious leaders from around the world of different religions and different Christian denominations to foster some unity and respect among the various religious sects.

He was a well travelled man and a remarkable world leader. He was known as the travelling pope. He visited 129 countries and attracted some of the largest crowds in human history. As many as five million people came to see him in Manila in 1995. He came to Canada on more than one occasion. When he came in 2002 on World Youth Day, over 800,000 people came out to meet him and to pray with him. As Kofi Annan had said, "he is a tireless advocate for peace".

When Pope John Paul II died, the outpouring of grief at his funeral showed how strong he was and how respected he was, both as a religious leader and, more important, as a world leader. At his funeral and his requiem mass on April 8, 2005, he was said to have set world records for both attendance and the number of heads of state who were present at the funeral. It was the single largest gathering of heads of state in history, surpassing the funerals of Winston Churchill and other world leaders. Kings, queens and leaders of many countries were in attendance. It was one of the largest single pilgrimages of the time.

• (1125)

For this reason, and because of the great man he was, I hope everyone will join me and my colleague from Brampton West in supporting the bill to commemorate Pope John Paul II day.

Mr. Andrew Kania (Brampton West, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I had the honour of speaking to this matter before Christmas. I gave a lengthy speech and I will not repeat all of it now.

I highlighted the fact that Pope John Paul II fell into two separate categories, First, he was the leader of the Roman Catholic church and one of the leading popes in Roman Catholic history. The second is more secular. Pope John Paul II was a world leader onto himself.

Many people have commented upon the fall of communism and his role. I am a first generation Polish Canadian. My parents immigrated from Poland. My uncle and his family escaped Poland, with guards shooting at them across the border. Through my family and extended family who lived in Poland at the time, I know what it was like to live through communism. The end of communism was a celebration in Poland and eastern Europe, without parallel, and in the world generally speaking.

Pope John Paul II has been credited with being one of the key figures, if not the key figure, in the fall of communism. Many people, including Mikhail Gorbachev, said that without Paul John Paul II the fall of communism simply would not have been possible in the manner that it happened at that time.

S.O 57

I would like to update the House on what has occurred since I spoke to this matter last fall. Pope Benedict has declared that Pope John Paul II will be beatified on May 1 in Rome, a ceremony that millions of Catholics, including myself, are planning to attend. That is the final stage under the Roman Catholic religion before he becomes canonized and becomes a saint. That is of huge significance for the Roman Catholic church and for the Polish community generally. Over one million Polish Canadians live in Canada. We have a very large Roman Catholic population in Canada, which supports this proposed legislation.

I also want to give thanks to colleagues on all sides of the House who have spoken to the bill and have indicated they will support it. I consider this to be a non-partisan issue. Religious persons support my bill. Equally as moving for me is the fact that non-religious persons have come up to me and said that they will support it, either because they recognize the significance of John Paul in world history or because they recognize that in our society we respect divergent points of views and we have to support one another in these sorts of worthy endeavours, whether one agrees with everything someone may have said during the course of his or her life. I am very honoured and moved to support this.

From what I understand, thousands of Canadians have mailed in cards in support of the legislation. I thank all of those people who took the time to sign those cards.

• (1130)

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The question is on the motion. It is the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: On division.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Accordingly the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage.

(Motion agreed to, bill read the second time and referred to a committee)

SUSPENSION OF SITTING

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The sitting of the House is suspended until noon.

(The sitting of the House was suspended at 11:33 a.m.)

SITTING RESUMED

(The House resumed at 12 p.m.)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1155)

[English]

DISPOSITION OF ABOLITION OF EARLY PAROLE ACT

MOTION THAT DEBATE BE NOT FURTHER ADJOURNED

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Madam Speaker, with respect to the consideration of Government Business No. 10, I move:

That the debate be not further adjourned.

• (1200)

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Pursuant to Standing Order 67.1, there will now be a 30-minute question period.

The hon. member for Ajax—Pickering

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): My question to the minister will be in three parts.

First, why now? The Liberal Party introduced the idea of ending the accelerated parole in situations for large-scale fraudsters a couple of years ago and has been pushing the government to act on this. The government, in the case of Mr. Lacroix, got caught with its pants down in not acting. Now, all of a sudden, it wants to fix it at 100 miles an hour when we have been pushing it for a couple of years. Why did it take this long for the government to bring something forward?

Second, why does this apply to every single non-violent first-time offender? We would agree wholeheartedly that we need to go after large-scale fraudsters such as Mr. Lacroix and the Earl Jones case, but why are we now applying this across the full spectrum against every first-time offender who is non-violent? We know this program has been a great success in reducing recidivism and reducing the amount of crime that is committed.

I know the minister often attacks us about victims, but it may come as a surprise to him that if we reduce crime, there are less victims. The objective is to stop crime before it happens. Why on earth would we throw in the whole lot of everybody if the bill is in fact targeted to these individuals? This program has been such a success in non-violent first-time offender cases to ensure they do not become major criminals and that we do not turn our prisons into crime factories.

Third, I ask the government table the cost and its analysis on the impact of recidivism and rehabilitation. If the government is ready to close this debate and not allow Parliament to discuss it, surely the minister would be able to table today the exact costs that are involved with this bill. Surely the minister would be able to table today an analysis of the impact on rehabilitation and the exact impact this would have on public safety. I would ask the minister to submit those things if he would.

Hon. Rob Nicholson: Madam Speaker, I am pleased to be a part of the process to move this new legislation forward. It is new only in the sense that it has been partitioned off from a bill that was before Parliament.

S.O 57

It is ironic that the hon. member asks why now. He would know, as well as anyone within the Liberal Party, of all the difficulties we have had getting anything moved through the public safety committee. This bill's antecedent has been there forever. We have been trying to get the bill through committee and Parliament. Who are we targeting? We are targeting white collar criminals, the people who fleece victims and prey on people, their bank accounts and resources. The tragedy of this is that many white collar victims have told me it is as bad as getting beaten up in an alley. They say they experience as much pain as if somebody attacked them.

Why now is an ironic question from the Liberal Party, when it has been the one standing in the way all of these measures coming forward. My colleagues on the public safety committee tell me the same thing. That man is exhibit A on the challenges in moving the legislation forward. This is an important initiative by the government to crack down on white collar crimes and get rid of accelerated parole.

The hon. member also asked why don't you just target white collar criminals and not others. This stems from the Liberal position on a lot of these issues, particularly with respect to drug crimes. That is what we are talking about. We are saying that accelerated parole will not be available to people who are in the business of trading drugs and proceeding to involve some type of violence. I suppose one could argue that there is a certain level of violence any time people are given drugs that could destroy their lives.

In any case, he asks why we are including those people. We hear it all the time. His leader several weeks ago said that Liberals wanted to decriminalize marijuana, that this was some sort of message they wanted to send out to young people. They have been consistent with their soft on crime approach to challenge the drug bills before Parliament.

There are a large number of people to whom we want to get. I would have liked to have discussed the other one, but perhaps in an additional question I may be able to answer that.

● (1205)

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Madam Speaker, I will certainly ask the minister a question, but I have something to say about the fact that we have always had unanimity in this House regarding the abolition of this measure, just not all at the same time. That is what is rather distressing in this case, especially since I just heard my Liberal colleague say that his party had already called for the abolition of automatic parole after one-sixth of the sentence has been served, and all of a sudden they are asking why. Now is the time to take action.

In 2007, the Bloc Québécois proposed a justice plan—we were already talking about it. We believe that even though these crimes are considered non-violent, they are extremely violent. Families have been completely destroyed by fraudsters, by white collar criminals. There are people who were involved in the sponsorship scandal and who got out of prison very quickly, so the justice system also got a bad reputation because of this automatic parole.

Action has been needed for a long time. When we introduced a bill for the first time, the Conservatives refused to have it fast-

tracked. Now that we agree, the Liberals and the NDP are refusing to fast-track the legislation, even though they had already agreed to do it before.

There is a problem, and I would like to ask the minister whether now is the time to leave partisan politics aside. At some point we have all agreed that this measure should be abolished, so we should ensure that this happens to help restore public faith in the justice system.

[English]

Hon. Rob Nicholson: Madam Speaker, with respect to partisanship, if the hon. member is talking about members of the Liberal Party, that is their business. If their position is to decriminalize marijuana and not to crack down on people in the grow op business, that is their business. They can explain that to the Canadian public. It is a fair comment to point out to people that is exactly where the Liberals stand on this. A member was asking why we do not confine this to people involved in white collar crime and not go after those poor drug dealers. That is what they are saying.

If that is the Liberals' position, they are welcome to it. We have a completely different view when it comes to the problems of drugs and the threat they pose to Canadians. We have a completely different view on that.

The Minister of Public Safety has come forward with legislation in this area. We are looking for support. Any support from the members of this House would certainly be welcomed by everyone on the government side. As the hon. member would be aware from listening to the debate, our concern is for victims in this country.

The hon. member made the point that it is a type of violence against individuals who get fleeced by these criminal types. The Minister of Public Safety has brought forward legislation. These are all steps in the right direction.

If the hon. member could talk to his colleagues in the opposition and if they would all come together to get this bill passed, the country would be better for it.

● (1210)

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is somewhat of a pleasure to take part in this so-called debate as circumvented as it is.

There are three things the government has to justify when using what is an extraordinary measure in Parliament. This is the most brutal thing that can be done when trying to pass legislation. The government essentially is using what is called super closure; it is closing the closure. A bill cannot be moved along any faster than this.

There must be some justification on the part of the government for the urgency. That is the first thing that the government has to justify to the Canadian public. They are the people to whom the government has to justify this, not us.

S.O 57

Last Thursday the government House leader said there were negotiations going on with the other parties. We in the New Democratic Party know that not to be true. There was one negotiation going on and that was with the Bloc. If the minister, whichever minister, from the government had really and truly wanted to collaborate with us because there was some great urgency, that could have been done, but there was no communication whatsoever with our party.

Let me say at the outset that there was and is some willingness on our part to get at the issue being discussed here. I think in a quiet moment the minister would recognize that. The Earl Joneses of the world need a punishment that is somehow connected to the severity of their crimes. That is not the case right now in Canada.

There is a second point the government has to justify to the Canadian public in using this particular method. It has much to account for in its partnership with the Bloc. When we in the New Democratic Party were working with other parties on other issues, there is quote after quote from the government saying, for example, that we had made “a pact with the secessionists, whose sole goal is to weaken Canada”, and also turned their backs on the remains of their reputation as defenders of Canadian unity.

If it was true at other times in Parliament that working with the Bloc must mean there is a weakening of the Canadian institution and Constitution, clearly the government has decided that is no longer is case.

The government chose to communicate and collaborate solely with the Bloc. It did not phone or talk to us, a federal party interested in strengthening Canada. The government only went to the Bloc asking to move the legislation forward. The government has to come to some sort of peaceful reconciliation in its own mind, if not through to the Canadian public.

With respect to the use of closure time after time in this place, I will quote the Prime Minister, who said, “True parliamentarians repel themselves from the act because it is offensive to our sense of democracy”. The Prime Minister also said, “The choking off of debate today is the latest example of disrespect that the government has for Canadians”.

My question for the minister, very simply, is, why not present evidence, why not go through the committee process that we are willing and open to use to discuss the merits of the bill? Why jump into bed with the Bloc solely in order to pass this piece of legislation?

The case of Earl Jones, to which we know this is directed and fair enough, will not come forward until December of this year. It will not happen next week. It is not the same situation as what happened last year when the government waited so long to change the laws that Karla Homolka had the opportunity to get out of jail before we could fix them. We rushed that through. We did that with the government.

This does not have the same urgency. We have a number of months. Why not hear witnesses? Why not actually have a debate as opposed to this charade the government has put forward as somehow being true parliamentary debate?

Hon. Rob Nicholson: Madam Speaker, the hon. member covered a lot of ground. I do not want to get into the whole topic of the coalition and the working arrangement the NDP had with the Liberals with the support of the Bloc. I do not think that is a germane discussion for today.

The member asked why I was looking for other members of Parliament. I look for members of Parliament on all our justice and public safety bills. This is a minority Parliament. I want them all. I think these are all great bills.

He asked why this particular bill. The member should talk to his colleagues in the public safety committee. This bill has been languishing there for months. It is the same for all the bills we bring forward. They are important for Canadians, but we get either filibusters or the bills are not discussed in committee.

Yes, there is an urgency. There is an urgency about doing something for victims in this country, standing up to white collar criminals who would fleece people. Yes, there is an urgency. The justification is that this is a problem. There are victims looking to this chamber, to this Parliament, to stand up on their behalf and come forward with legislation.

He asked what justification could there be against moving against white collar criminals in this manner. The member should chat with some of the victims groups. He should ask them whether they think this is a good idea to move forward. They will invariably come forward and say, “Yes, please move on these things”.

The hon. member does not like that some of his coalition colleagues may be supporting this and others may not. I wish they all would support it. I wish they would all stand up and support us on these and all the other justice legislation we have, but again, I know that is not the case.

Shortly after I became justice minister, when I was trying to push I think it was the drug bill, a reporter said to me, “Well, you have to understand that you are in a minority Parliament”. I told him that a minority Parliament is no excuse not to stand up for victims and law-abiding Canadians, that this Parliament should work together and that all members should support this. This is a great idea. I commend the public safety minister, his parliamentary secretary and people like the member for Brandon—Souris who have been so supportive of what we are trying to do to stand up for victims and law-abiding Canadians. I am proud to serve with them.

I encourage all members of the House to join together and get this legislation passed.

• (1215)

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Madam Speaker, this is an interesting debate. The debate began on Friday.

S.O 57

It is interesting because the Liberal members' problem with the bill is that they want some credit for it from some time ago. I do not know if it was good enough for them two years ago and it is not good enough today, or something similar, but it all seems to be about credit. The NDP members who were opposed to it seem to be opposed to it because other people besides white collar criminals were included, but this applies only to people who have been convicted of criminal offences. Somehow the victims are always missed in the discussions on the other side.

I wonder if the minister would elaborate on the fact that victims are missed, and it is only people who have been convicted of criminal offences to whom it applies.

Hon. Rob Nicholson: Madam Speaker, that is a very good point.

Again, I congratulate the hon. parliamentary secretary, who has been a champion for victims' rights even going back before his career in Parliament. In policing he served the people of his area, his province and this country very well, and I am very grateful for that.

When I get briefed on various issues on this whole question, people will mention costs. I am able to define that for them. I never hear any questions from the opposition about the costs to victims of crime. That is the one area we do not hear anything about. I have no hesitation to point that out. They do not want to hear it, but I tell them anyway that the costs to victims of crime in this country are huge, in the billions of dollars. Victims are the ones who pay the greatest price.

When we look at a piece of legislation like this one, which gets rid of accelerated parole, it speaks to some of the other issues, such as, truth in sentencing. People will have confidence in the criminal justice system that people who are convicted of these terrible crimes will serve time that is appropriate to the seriousness of the crime. It never puts the victims back in the original place in the sense of undoing the harm that has been done, but people want to have confidence in the criminal justice system. Quite frankly, they do not have it if there is not a reasonable connection between the time served and the seriousness of the crime.

I say to the hon. member that the costs to victims are considerable. I appreciate being part of a political party and a government that continues to put victims first. That is one of the hallmarks of this government. One of the reasons I am so proud to serve with the Prime Minister is that he consistently worries and asks about the victims in these cases. Those who are so proud and pleased to serve with him are only too pleased to be able to support him. That is one of the reasons for the bill to be passed.

• (1220)

Mr. Andrew Kania (Brampton West, Lib.): Madam Speaker, first, I would like Canadians to understand what the debate is about. It is not about the merits of the bill. That is not what this debate is about and it is not what we will be voting on at one o'clock today. This debate is exclusively about whether there should be closure of debate on the bill. Whether the government's proposition that there should be no further debate by members of Parliament should rule the day is what we are analyzing now.

The responses from the minister concerning whether it is a good or bad bill and the merits of the bill do not address whether or not

there should be closure at this stage. That is what I am asking about from two perspectives.

As the Minister of Justice knows, in the fall of 2010, Bill C-21 was before committee and there were Liberal amendments at the committee to eliminate the one-sixth accelerated parole review. If that had passed at the time and the bill had become law, Mr. Lacroix, who was released, would not have been released. That is the reason from the minister for why we are doing this. The Bloc and the Conservatives voted against the amendment and defeated it with the result that Mr. Lacroix was released.

If the Conservatives defeated this in the fall of 2010, on what basis can they say this justifies closure and ending democratic debate in the House of Commons at this stage?

Hon. Rob Nicholson: Madam Speaker, there is no end to the way the Liberal Party would like to spin and/or delay the measures which are before Parliament.

The bill to get rid of the faint hope clause is a perfect example. That is the bill that gets rid of what is sometimes referred to as the loophole for lifers, the ability for first degree murderers to apply after 15 years for possible early parole. We got rid of it. It passed through the Senate. All it needed before royal assent was the consent of the House.

Then the Liberals came up with all kinds of issues with it. They did not like the title. They do not like the whole area of getting tough on crime, that is what they do not like, but they were upset with the title. All members in this place are advised by procedural experts and what they were doing, in effect, was trying to delay the bill. That has been their modus operandi for the last five years; keep delaying, keep pushing these things, let the Senate do it, and if they cannot control the Senate, get someone in the House of Commons to do it. They do not want any of this legislation passed, so that is exactly what happened, because by amending the faint hope clause, it has to go back to the Senate, which has the effect of delaying it.

The hon. member can talk to some of his colleagues on the public safety committee and ask why this was not brought forward and why did we not get this through the committee. Let them come up with the explanations as to why. I know why and I think most Canadians who view these issues know why. The Liberal Party is not interested in moving ahead. It does not like the government's attempts to get tough on crime and stand up for victims. That is why we are moving forward.

The Liberals do not want to change it. They do not want to talk about the guts of the issue. They say it is the procedure and that is the problem. It is a bunch of nonsense. They do not support our efforts to get tough on crime and that is apparent in this debate as well.

S.O 57

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Madam Speaker, Canadians could be forgiven in listening to my hon. colleague, the Minister of Justice, talk about delay, as if the only place crime bills had been impeded were from the rows of the opposition. In fact, the single greatest delay with the justice agenda was a year ago when the Prime Minister prorogued Parliament, killing every crime bill that was in the log.

Now, after a year of slow implementation, we have some of them. The RCMP reform bill, for example, which the minister would obviously know well, has been sitting for months waiting to be called by the government. That bill would allow Canadians to have a debate about how our national police system is governed, run and accounted for, maybe a moment of true public accountability. No one in opposition controls the time clock on this one, only the government. No one in opposition controlled the time clock when the government shut down debate on all the other justice bills.

The minister talks about victims of crime. Two days ago I met with the father of a young woman who was killed in my riding just before Christmas. The young woman, Loren Leslie was 15 years of age. I will be bringing the case to the minister to talk about how we can help her father get his message out. The victim of crime support in this country is still not what it needs to be, particularly in cases like this. The minister has no argument with me there, but should not simply say that every bill must be rushed through expeditiously.

My point is about cost. Jay Hill, the former government House leader, said: "Furthermore, Canadians, the provinces and industry, have no idea what the actual cost of the Prime Minister's" act would be.

We have simply asked for this and it is becoming a standoff in Parliament. The government must bring evidence forward that crime bills actually address the issues it is going after and that the costs are being accounted for. It is not simply enough to say the cost to victims is so much and that we do not have to pay any attention to other costs. Would the minister at least submit those to the House today so that we can understand the—

• (1225)

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The hon. Minister of Justice.

Hon. Rob Nicholson: Madam Speaker, that proves exactly what I have been saying about those people. When they talk about costs, they never talk about the cost to the victims. Members may have noticed that. They can never bring themselves to talk about what it costs the victims. We are talking about white collar crime.

Victims will appreciate and will stand by this government's attempt to keep those individuals who take part in white collar crime in prison longer so they pay the price for what they have done.

I meet with victims as well. The hon. member touched on a subject that has nothing to do with white collar crime but rather a family which has been victimized.

One of the first measures I undertook as justice minister was to create the Office of the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime. I asked who in this town would stand up for victims. Our government created the office four years ago. In my discussions with both ombudsmen I told them that their job is to make sure that they

represent the interests of victims. I do not want the ombudsman's mandate to keep expanding so that it goes beyond victims. Our government has been making improvements. We created the victims' fund. We are pushing for more sensitivity toward victims and victims' rights. That is one of the hallmarks of this government.

I appreciate all the work that has been done on the economy, which remains the over-arching concern of Canadians. I also appreciate the work that has been done by my colleague, the Minister of Finance and those working with him. They are to be commended.

This too is one of the defining characteristics of this government. I have met with victims across the country and I have always told them that they can count on this government to take their concerns forward.

Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the minister may have inadvertently misled the House in trying to explain why the government in this ad hoc coalition with the Bloc Québécois is going to cut off debate on this bill by saying that the bill has been languishing in committee. That is not true. The government's own motion says that this motion is to cut off debate at second reading. The bill has not even been sent to committee yet.

Why are we considering this egregious act of cutting off debate in the House based on misleading information provided by the Minister of Justice?

• (1230)

Hon. Rob Nicholson: Madam Speaker, the member will know that Bill C-39 has been at committee. That is what we are talking about. We are talking about the white collar crime bill. We have hived off part of the bill in an attempt to get it passed. That is what I am talking about. I am talking about standing up for the victims of white collar crime. The bill has been languishing at committee. It is not being debated. We have taken away part of the bill. We have split it in two. In effect, we have created a new bill.

Now we are calling upon coalition members to stand together and stand up for victims of white collar crime. That is exactly what they should do. They would feel better for it in the long run.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): It is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith the question necessary to dispose of the motion now before the House.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

S.O 57

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Call in the members.

• (1310)

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

(Division No. 179)

YEAS

Members

Abbott	Ablonczy
Aglukkaq	Albrecht
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)	Allison
Ambrose	Anders
Anderson	André
Armstrong	Arthur
Ashfield	Asselin
Bachand	Baird
Beaudin	Bellavance
Benoit	Bernier
Bezan	Bigras
Blackburn	Blais
Block	Bouchard
Boucher	Boughen
Bourgeois	Braid
Breitkreuz	Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)	Bruinoooge
Brunelle	Cadman
Calandra	Calkins
Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)	Cannon (Pontiac)
Carrie	Carrier
Casson	Chong
Clarke	Clement
Cummins	Davidson
Day	DeBellefeuille
Dechert	Del Mastro
Demers	Deschamps
Desnoyers	Devolin
Dorion	Dreeshen
Duceppe	Dufour
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	Dykstra
Faille	Fantino
Fast	Finley
Flaherty	Fletcher
Freeman	Gagnon
Galipeau	Gallant
Généreux	Glover
Gourde	Grewal
Guay	Guimond (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les
Basques)	
Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord)	Hiebert
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)	Hoepfner
Hawn	Jean
Hoback	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Holder	Kent
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Komarnicki
Kenny (Calgary Southeast)	Kram
Kerr	Komarnicki
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Laframboise
Lake	Lauzon
Lavallée	Lebel
Lemay	Lemieux
Lessard	Lévesque
Lobb	Lukiwski
Lunney	MacKay (Central Nova)
MacKenzie	Malo

Mayes	McLeod
Ménard	Menzies
Merrifield	Miller
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	
Moore (Fundy Royal)	
Mourani	Nadeau
Nicholson	O'Connor
O'Neill-Gordon	Obhrai
Oda	Ouellet
Paillé (Louis-Hébert)	Paquette
Payne	Petit
Plamondon	Poilievre
Pomerleau	Preston
Raïtt	Rajotte
Rathgeber	Reid
Richards	Richardson
Ritz	Saxton
Schellenberger	Shea
Shipley	Shory
Sopuck	Sorenson
St-Cyr	Stanton
Storseth	Strahl
Sweet	Thi Lac
Thompson	Tilson
Trost	Tweed
Uppal	Van Kesteren
Van Loan	Vellacott
Verner	Vincent
Wallace	Warawa
Warkentin	Watson
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)	
Weston (Saint John)	
Wong	Woodworth
Yelich	Young — 172

NAYS

Members

Andrews	Ashton
Bagnell	Bains
Bennett	Brison
Byrne	Charlton
Chow	Christopherson
Coderre	Comartin
Crombie	Crowder
Cullen	Cuzner
D'Amours	Dewar
Dhaliwal	Dion
Donnelly	Dosanjh
Dryden	Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Easter	Eyking
Folco	Foote
Fry	Garneau
Godin	Goodale
Harris (St. John's East)	Holland
Hyer	Jennings
Kania	Karygiannis
Kennedy	LeBlanc
Lee	Leslie
MacAulay	Malhi
Marston	Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)
Mathysen	McGuinity
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)	McTeague
Mendes	Minna
Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)	Murphy (Charlottetown)
Murray	Neville
Pacetti	Pearson
Proulx	Rae
Ratansi	Regan
Rodriguez	Russell
Savage	Savoie
Sgro	Siksay
Silva	Simson
Stoffer	Szabo
Tonks	Valerioté
Wilfert	Wrzesnewskij
Zarac — 77	

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

Government Orders

[English]

DISPOSITION OF ABOLITION OF EARLY PAROLE ACT

The House resumed from February 11 consideration of the motion.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member from Trinity—Spadina

Mr. Speaker, it is obvious in this House of Commons that we are now facing probably the most undemocratic government of all time. It is bad enough that the Conservatives got elected, but ever since they have been elected they have displayed a level of arrogance that is beyond the pale.

It took over 13 years for the Liberal Party of Canada in power to develop that level of arrogance. It took the Conservatives over 13 days. Since then, we have seen an unprecedented level of attack on Canadians and the Canadian system in the history of our country.

It starts with the Conservative government reversing itself when it comes to closure. I remember a time when the Conservative Party of Canada, the Reform Party and the Alliance Party went nuts over the Liberal government every time it invoked closure. Every time that happened they stood up and screamed and yelled. Now they turn around and do it themselves. In fact, they do it in such a way that is really quite sad because the bill they brought forward has no accounting mechanism whatsoever.

We in the opposition have asked quite clearly what the cost of that initiative will be but the government has refused to give it. Why would a government, so hell bent on passing legislation that it has to rush it down the throats of parliamentarians, in this case with their coalition partners, the Bloc Québécois, not tell the House of Commons or the Canadian taxpayer how much it will cost?

Let us go through the past couple of months of the Conservative government.

The Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism attacked the judiciary. Just recently, the member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke attacked the good people of Newfoundland and Labrador by saying that they should be responsible for their own safety when it comes to the waters off the east coast. The Conservatives have attacked public servants and one of the finest people in the nuclear industry, Ms. Keen. In fact, every time people disagree with the government, they get attacked, and viciously I might add. The list goes on and on.

The Conservatives have given us record deficits, a record debt and yet they continue on without any accounting methods whatsoever. They are just basically saying to heck with the rest of us. They tell us what they will do and then say that we can bring them down if we want. Well that day may come very soon.

I think Canadians are tired of the level of arrogance that the Conservative government has displayed. In my 13 and a half years I have yet to see this level of disgust by a party over there, especially when it is the governing party.

The ironic thing is that we have men and women serving overseas in many countries bringing forward peace, freedom and democracy to many other people who have never had democracy and yet the Conservatives step on democracy because they do not even like it.

I remember very clearly that every time closure was brought in by the Liberals, the Conservatives yelled and screamed. Now they turn around and do it themselves. They attack the judiciary, public servants and disagree with people they hire. When the veterans ombudsman, Colonel Pat Stogran, issued a scathing report over the Department of Veterans Affairs they attacked him. The government did not attack the message, but the messenger because the truth hurts.

The reality is that the government's time is on a very short leash. I, for one, hope the Canadian people in this country rise up to say that this is enough. The good people of Egypt rose up against Mubarak and many of them died to get democracy in Egypt. I would hope that they are not looking at our democracy right now.

What the heck is going on? The government does not even respect the fact that there is an opposition, which is something the Conservatives wanted when they were in opposition. In fact, several pieces of legislation have passed the majority of the House of Commons only to go to an unelected, unaccountable Senate to die.

• (1315)

Bill C-311 was a classic example of how the Conservative Party of Canada trampled on the democratic rights of the majority of the House of Commons. The majority of the House clearly voted for Bill C-311. In fact, the Prime Minister himself said that when the majority of the House democratically votes on a legislation or motion, then the government is honour bound to honour that bill or motion. Those were his own words.

However, when the House did that on several occasions, it went to the unelected, unaccountable Senate, which, by the way, the Conservatives said they would never do. They stood here in the House and screamed and yelled against the Liberal-appointed senators holding up legislation.

When we look at the facts, at least the Liberals were honest about their view of the Senate. They liked it just the way it was. The Conservatives screamed and yelled about that. The minute they put enough their cronies and bag people in there, they started changing the rules.

Without even having a witness and without even having one word of debate, the Conservative senators killed Bill C-311 without even any discussion.

The Senate is supposed to do two things and two things only: peer review legislation that comes from the House of Commons and work on in-depth reports facing the issues of the day. It is not supposed to fundraise. It is not supposed to send ten percenters out, slamming members of Parliament in the House of Commons. Its members are not supposed to be flying across the country in business class on the taxpayers' dime raising funds for the Conservative Party. That is not what the Senate is about.

Government Orders

Yet, when the Senate was asked to actually do its job, it did not even do that. It killed legislation before it even discussed it. Why? It is because we have a female senator of the Conservative persuasion who says, “Why would we vote for anything that wasn't in the throne speech—

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I have been sitting here listening and I am a little puzzled. I am trying to understand why it is that the member is debating what the Senate did to Bill C-311.

It is my understanding that the rules require a certain amount of relevance in a member's comments. I would ask you, Mr. Speaker, to call the member to order and ask him to speak to the subject at hand.

The Speaker: I am sure the hon. member will tie his remarks in to the motion currently before the House. The hon. member for Sackville—Eastern Shore.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Mr. Speaker, it is obvious that the fairly new member is trying to get a Senate spot here. If he keeps that up, maybe the Prime Minister and his cronies will appoint him to the Senate. As a member of the Parliament with the rest of them, they are certainly not doing their elected duties by respecting the will of the House of Commons.

The debate is quite clear. It is the trend of the Conservative Party and its members to trample on democracy, to ignore the will of Parliament and to continue on its merry way. The list goes on and on.

I just heard today about the new coalition between the Conservatives and the Bloc Québécois. It just happened. It is the same coalition that they had during the 2006 budget when the Conservatives invited the Bloc Québécois to get it through.

I know the Conservative counterparts do not want it hear it because it does not make them feel good. They do not like it when what they said they would do when they got into government gets thrown back in their face. The fact is that they have attacked civil servants, the judiciary and literally everyone who gets in their way.

The one that puzzles me the most is the trampling of citizens. I know a lot of the folks in the Conservative Party are of the Christian faith. One would think that those of the Christian faith would stand up for a group like KAIROS, but, no. What we get is a doctored document with three signatures on it. We still cannot get the minister to stand and tell us exactly who did that.

• (1320)

Hon. Jim Abbott: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The member has had an admonition, I believe from the Speaker, on this very speech about the fact that he must remain relevant. What he is talking about has nothing whatsoever to do with the topic of debate.

I ask you, Madam Speaker, to ask the member to be at least a bit relevant.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The hon. member for Sackville—Eastern Shore has one minute to conclude and bring his comments back to the topic.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Madam Speaker, it is very relevant. What we are trying to talk about is the closure that was just forced upon this House of Commons, which is a very undemocratic rule that the Conservatives use in the House in order to trample on the rights of

members of Parliament. Since when have they been afraid of debate? Since when have they been afraid of discussion? It is almost as if they are saying that if we do not like their way, then we can take the highway.

The truth hurts. The fact is that the current Conservative Party is the most undemocratic party that I have seen in my 13 and a half years here. If we look at the history of this Parliament, I could almost assure members that over the last five years we have witnessed the most undemocratic group of parliamentarians on the Conservative side to ever grace this beautiful House of Commons.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank the member for his efforts to point out to the House and Canadians that we are dealing with some very important issues and that the government has turned down debate, saying that it will not be delayed any further.

The relevance here is that there was a question of privilege last week in the House that the government has refused to provide costing of its justice bills, claiming cabinet confidence. Again, it is secrecy over how members of Parliament will be able to do their jobs. In fact, without that information, how can we make an informed decision? How can we make good laws when the government is not even going to be open with the House of Commons about the details relating to an important piece of legislation?

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Madam Speaker, my hon. colleague is absolutely correct.

One of the greatest oxymorons of all time is a “fiscal Conservative”. One would assume that any Conservative worth his or her weight in gold would quickly advise the Canadian taxpayer, and especially the House of Commons, how much a particular piece of legislation would cost.

I suspect the Conservatives know the true cost of this legislation and they do not want to tell the opposition, and they certainly do not want to tell the Canadian people. It is much easier to put these things in a soundbite, make it sound easy, and hope that the Canadian people never read the details, because they are quite scary.

However, it would be nice, once and for all, if the Government of Canada, on any of its legislation, put forward the true cost of its measures before introducing the legislation.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth (Kitchener Centre, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have listened to this member go on at great length about how closure is non-democratic.

I wonder if the member is aware that the environment committee right now is subject to a closure rule on an NDP bill that is being considered, Bill C-469, giving every Conservative member on that committee one and a half minutes to speak to each clause of that bill.

Government Orders

Would the member be willing to have his leader instruct the NDP member on the environment committee to abolish that closure rule so that we could have some good discussion about what is really a revolutionary bill in the environment committee, and do it in a nice, democratic way?

In light of the member's comments today about how closure is non-democratic, will he push to open up that debate in the environment committee?

•(1325)

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Madam Speaker, I think if we checked the records, we will see that the member talked about relevancy and he knows very well that the House of Commons cannot tell a committee what to do.

Here is the truth: even if there were no closure on the bill, even if the bill came forward, any NDP amendments or anything of that nature would be defeated by the unelected, unaccountable Senate. And who put those people in there? It was the Conservative Party of Canada.

The reality is that if the Conservatives truly wished to have a fair, open and democratic debate, we would love to have it with them. Unfortunately, we are dealing with a whole whack of people over there who just do not believe in fair, open and honest debate.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr (Jeanne-Le Ber, BQ): Madam Speaker, I heard the presentation given by my colleague who, once again, levelled the most outrageous accusation we have heard recently in the House regarding the forming of coalitions. He mentioned that the Bloc voted with the Conservatives. Are we to assume that there is a coalition between the Liberals and the NDP because they voted the same way? Come on. Let us be serious.

I wonder if my colleague is aware that there are four parties in the House and that we can only vote for or against something. So mathematically, it would be impossible for there not to be two parties voting for the same thing in the House every time.

The purpose of this debate is to determine whether we are ready to vote or not. For four years now the Bloc Québécois has been talking about abolishing parole after one-sixth of a sentence is served. We are ready to vote. In his speech, the member—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): I must give the hon. member for Sackville—Eastern Shore equal time, that is, 30 seconds, to respond.

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Madam Speaker, what I would say to my hon. colleague from the Bloc Québécois is that I wonder if he has had a chance to tell his constituents the true cost of this legislation. I would bet he does not even know what the cost is, but voted blindly with his party on a particular political issue.

I would respectfully ask the hon. member to go back to his constituents and tell them the exact cost to the taxpayer—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Order, please.

The hon. member for Trinity—Spadina.

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Madam Speaker, we are here talking about Motion No. 10, a closure motion. It is about shutting down debate. That is why I am going to speak about democracy.

If the members choose to heckle, they must be afraid of what we have to say as members of Parliament. They do not want to hear what other members of Parliament have to say in the House of Commons because they are afraid of open government, they are afraid of accountability and democracy.

For 19 days we have seen democracy in action in Egypt. People have shed their blood for democracy, for a chance to speak out, for freedom of speech. That is what this House of Commons is supposed to be all about. I am here to talk about open and accountable government but that is not possible if we do not talk about prorogation, closure and the Senate. We are talking about accountability.

What is open government? An open government is about taking in everyone's point of view, having a chance to talk about issues.

The issue before us is Bill C-59. How can we possibly talk about it within a few hours? The closure motion before of us says that we have to finish everything by the end of the day.

This reminds me of another debate, the harmonized sales tax debate. Two Christmas' ago, the Conservatives were very afraid of the public's resentment of this tax, because they had campaigned on having no tax increases. However, they decided to ram the bill through the House in one day. They introduced the bill with less than 24 hours notice and tabled the closure motion with the support of the Liberal Party of Canada. Within 24 hours that bill passed the House of Commons just before Christmas, because the Conservatives were so afraid of people saying no to the very much hated sales tax. That is precisely what is happening in this case.

Soon after introducing that bill, the Conservatives closed the door on the House of Commons because they were afraid of what members of Parliament would do. They called it prorogation. They did not do it once but twice. That was a government that said it had run on open and accountable government. However, the Conservatives were so afraid of the House that they had to prorogue Parliament: they locked out all of members from the House of Commons and we were not able to do any work.

People are afraid of democracy when there is something to hide. What is there to hide in this bill? Maybe the government wants to hide the cost, just like it has something to hide with respect to the Afghan documents. That is why the government does not want to bring forward the Afghan documents, even though the Speaker said that all of the documents should be given to members of Parliament. However, that did not happen. The Conservatives have something to hide.

Government Orders

The Conservatives campaigned on open and accountable government. How is the Senate accountable, especially a Senate that includes the chief fundraiser of the Conservative Party and the chair of PC Canada Fund, Mr. Gerstein? He received a good income of \$341,000, including expenses, as chief fundraiser of the Conservative fund. The Quebec co-chair of the Prime Minister's leadership bid is also a senator. The Conservative Party president, Mr. Pratt, is also a senator and receives a salary of \$262,000. The Conservative Party spokesperson, the famous Mike Duffy, is also very much a partisan person. These folks, these senators, use our tax dollars to do partisan work.

● (1330)

Madam Speaker, tell me how it is open and accountable government when we have a Senate full of people who are out there fundraising, doing partisan work, attacking members of Parliament and saying no to bills that have been collectively passed by the House of Commons? That is not democracy. That is not what Canadians want. It is not government we can trust, particularly a government that came in saying "Trust us; we are going to be open and democratic", and yet in everything it does, including this closure motion before us on Page 41 of the order paper, it is not democratic.

We have seen a lot of examples of how democracy and the voices of the people are being completely ignored. If we look in detail at the bill before us, we notice that the Conservatives do not want us to find out how much it will cost.

Let me talk about the spending. We noticed on the prison agenda, for example, that the Minister of Public Safety announced one day that it was going to cost taxpayers close to \$90 million. Then the next day he said it would cost \$2 billion. That is a twentyfold increase in 24 hours.

What is the cost going to be? How much are all of these crime bills going to cost? We need to know the figures. Is that why we have a closure motion before us? Is that why they are afraid of our getting to the truth? Is it because we do not know how much it is?

The non-partisan Parliamentary Budget Officer estimated that the prison costs would be much higher. He estimated it would be \$10 billion over five years for only one of the crime bills, with the costs being downloaded to the already over-burdened provincial prisons.

When we have a Conservative government that refuses to release any cost information on its crime bills and then turns around and works with the Bloc to inflict closure on the bill so that by 8 o'clock today we will have had no chance to debate Bill C-59, that is not democratic. It is certainly not an open government. It is certainly not accountable, and we certainly cannot trust this government to run the business of the country in this way.

● (1335)

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am always disappointed when I hear the opposition members ask how much justice will cost, that perhaps Canada cannot afford justice, that perhaps we should look to the victims of crime and tell them that while we hear them, unfortunately, Canada cannot afford to pursue justice and that we are just going to do what we can and that there will be more victims of crime and that we will just turn a blind eye to

them here in the bubble that is Ottawa because, ultimately, this could cost money.

What is the cost of not enacting justice for a society? What is the cost for Canadians who are afraid to walk out of their doors? What is the cost when people come forward in my community and say this is not fair, that it is not just to have people who are committing crimes and victimizing our society being dealt with in this fashion?

Why is the NDP constantly coming forward and saying that we cannot afford justice? We cannot afford not to pursue justice in this country.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Madam Speaker, justice is doing what you say you will do, and not saying one thing and then doing something else.

The Prime Minister said that he really wanted to help the store owner, David Chen, of the Lucky Moose. He went to meet with the store owner. He said, like the New Democrats, that store owners, small business people and hardworking people, deserve to be protected when they try to protect their own merchandise.

Yet over and over again, promises have been made and we still have not seen a bill that would amend the Criminal Code concerning the situation David Chen faced when he tried to detain a shoplifter and was himself charged. After a whole year of defending himself, which cost a lot of money, he was finally found not guilty; but our Criminal Code still needs to be changed.

If the government really wants to talk about justice, bring that bill forward.

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Madam Speaker, to build upon the comments of the hon. member and the question that was asked by the member for Peterborough, it would be one thing if the cost being proposed worked. If there were an actual debate about whether it would work, that would be something. Except these policies, anywhere they have been tried, have been a complete and total failure. They failed in California, in the United Kingdom and anywhere they have been implemented. In fact, they took states like California to the brink of bankruptcy.

Why should we nearly bankrupt the nation, chasing a disaster that has been repeated elsewhere?

Ms. Olivia Chow: Madam Speaker, the conservative American states like Texas and Oklahoma are actively reducing the prison populations. U.S. conservatives, like Newt Gingrich, said that the approach to prisons had been an abject failure. They said that locking up of tens of thousands of young people and non-violent criminals was terribly expensive and totally ineffective.

Even the United States Republicans are rejecting the very same policies that the Conservative government is pushing. We do not need to say more.

• (1340)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ): Madam Speaker, if I understood the translation of what my NDP colleague said earlier—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Order, please.

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Thank you, Madam Speaker. If I understood the translation correctly, my NDP colleague said that justice is doing what you say you will do. Yet in September 2009 and March 2010, her party was willing to support a Bloc Québécois bill that aimed to do exactly the same thing as what Bill C-59 aims to do.

Why will they not keep their word?

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The hon. member for Trinity—Spadina has 25 seconds to respond.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Madam Speaker, we are not even debating the bill. We are debating the closure motion. I would love to have some time, rather than the 25 seconds, to look at the history of the bill and at the situation.

We do want to make changes to our law to eliminate accelerated parole for those convicted of serious white collar crimes, but the Conservatives and the Bloc members propose to scrap the entire system, a system that has been in place since 1992.

There is a lot of complexity to this law, which I cannot—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Order, please. The hon. member's time has run out.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for St. Albert.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber (Edmonton—St. Albert, CPC): Madam Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Abbotsford.

I am proud to have the opportunity to join this debate and offer my support for Bill C-59. I will indicate in my comments why the bill needs to be passed expeditiously not only by the House but also by the Senate.

As we have heard, the legislation before us today would do away with the part of the parole system in our country, which gives some offenders an opportunity for early release because they are first-time non-violent offenders. Nevertheless, they are serious offenders.

The legislation would do away with a system that sends a message to people who commit fraud or steal millions of dollars from innocent Canadians that the seriousness of their crimes is not on par with those who commit violent acts. This adds insult to injury for those hard-working Canadian families that have lost everything in an investment fraud or who have seen their entire life savings wiped out and their relationships and families torn apart in the aftermath.

We need to change the system so the time fits the crime. The legislation before us today will ensure that offenders will not have expedited access to day parole or parole. They will become eligible for parole at the same point and under the same criteria as all other offenders. It means that offenders who prey on law-abiding Canadians and wipe out their hard-earned savings will serve the

Government Orders

appropriate time in custody for the severity of the crime to which they have been convicted. That is what Canadians want. It is what this government is delivering.

Since we were first elected in 2006, our government has been very clear that cracking down on crime is one of our top priorities. That means all types of crime. We have listened to Canadians who have told us that they are tired of not feeling safe in their own homes and communities. We have listened to stakeholders and to law enforcement groups that have asked us time and time again to give them the resources they need to perform their jobs. We have listened to victims who have told us that their voices also need to be heard. That is why we have taken action over the last five years on a number of fronts to build safer communities and to stand up for victims.

We have introduced legislation to crack down on organized crime and drugs by imposing mandatory jail time for people involved in serious drug crimes. We have introduced, which has been passed by Parliament, legislation that automatically views murders connected to organized crime as first degree murders.

We have introduced, which has been passed Parliament, legislation to tackle drive-by shootings and other intentional shootings that involve a reckless disregard for the life and safety of others. As well, we have further protected police officers and peace officers.

We have introduced legislation, which has been passed by Parliament, to ensure that individuals who are found guilty of a crime will serve a sentence that reflects the severity of that crime by limiting the amount of credit they will receive for time served in pretrial and pre-sentence custody.

We have also taken action to provide the police resources in our community. We have hired over 1,000 new RCMP officers. We said that we would provide funding for the provinces and territories, allowing them to hire additional police officers, and have delivered on that commitment.

We have also given police forces more of the tools they need to do their jobs by passing legislation to strengthen the National Sex Offender Registry and the National DNA Data Bank. As well, we have introduced measures to support the ability of our law enforcement community to combat crime in the face of rapidly evolving communication technologies.

I am also proud of the fact our government has passed tough legislation to give police officers and the courts the added powers they require to fight identity theft, a major type of fraud which, by some estimates, robs Canadians of millions of dollars annually.

Hon. members will also know that our government has introduced legislation to get tough on all types of fraud by imposing mandatory minimum sentences of two years for fraud over \$1 million and requiring the courts to consider restitution orders as part of the sentencing process.

Government Orders

We have already done a lot to make our streets and communities safer and to ensure that offenders are dealt with appropriately. However, we can, we will and we must do more.

Canadians are asking us to make changes to a justice system that has yet to find the right balance between the rights of offenders and the rights of law-abiding citizens. They want individuals who are found guilty of crimes to serve a sentence that reflects the severity of those crimes. Bill C-59 is all about that.

Bill C-59 would help ensure that individuals who committed non-violent or white-collar crimes could not get out of prison after serving just a small fraction of their sentence.

● (1345)

I am certain hon. members have heard the many stories of Canadians who have lost their entire life savings in massive fraud scams. It is hard to imagine how traumatic it must be for an individual to wake up one day and realize that his or her lifetime investments have completely evaporated.

It is also impossible to imagine how disappointed and frustrated these same individuals must be when a few years later they hear that the person who was convicted of fraud is allowed to apply for parole after serving only a small portion of his or her sentence. In many circumstances, the Parole Board of Canada has little choice but to authorize parole, unless there is a reason to believe the individual may commit a violent or drug-related offence once released.

This legislation would set things right and ensure that there would be justice for all Canadians who have been victims of crime. The proposed amendments abolish accelerated parole review, which currently grants offenders eligibility for day parole after serving only one-sixth of their sentences and full parole after serving one-third of their sentences.

Under the reforms that our government is proposing through Bill C-59, individuals who commit crimes such as fraud will be treated the same way as those who commit serious violent crimes. These so-called white-collar offenders would be eligible for regular day parole review six months prior to full parole eligibility and full parole review after serving one-third of their sentences.

What is more, the test for parole will no longer be whether they are likely to commit a violent offence. Like other offenders, they will qualify for parole only if the Parole Board of Canada is convinced during a face-to-face hearing that they do not present an undue risk of committing any type of crime, including fraud.

I point out that the proposed amendments in this legislation are in line with the recommendations found in the 2007 report of the Correctional Service Canada's independent review panel. In its report, "A Roadmap to Strengthening Public Safety", it made 109 recommendations, including that the government abolish accelerated parole review.

I would like to quote from the executive summary of that report, which states:

The Panel is of the opinion that presumptive release is a key disincentive to offender accountability and is therefore recommending that Statutory Release and Accelerated Parole Review be abolished and replaced with an earned parole system.

Our government agrees with this panel's conclusion that accelerated parole review can be counterproductive. That is why the government has introduced Bill C-59. The reforms that our government is proposing today will mean that white-collar offenders will now get the prison time that their crimes warrant.

We are taking this stand on behalf of all Canadians who want the rights of law-abiding citizens properly balanced with the rights of offenders. We are taking a stand on behalf of everyone who wants action on crime now. That is what we intend to deliver, now and in the coming weeks and months, as we continue to work to improve legislation on matters affecting the safety and security of all Canadians.

● (1350)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member provided a fact-based explanation as to the elements involved in Bill C-59. One piece of this has to do with the government's reluctance or refusal to provide all the information to the House of Commons or, indeed, the finance committee with regard to the impacts in this case of justice legislation.

I would ask the hon. member not so much whether it is a matter of making laws because of money, but whether the justice system is based on rehabilitation, punishment, reintegration and other elements. That principle seems to be abandoned. Would the member care to comment on whether we are moving away from the fundamental principles of public safety and the justice system?

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: Madam Speaker, certainly rehabilitation and reintegration are a large part of our correctional system. It is, after all, called a correctional system. It is hoped that a person's behaviour will be corrected so he or she can eventually reintegrate into society. However, other aspects are equally important. The concepts of general and specific deterrents come immediately to mind.

Individuals have to be deterred from repeating the type of dilatory behaviour that causes problems and losses to society. However, society also has to be deterred through the concept of general deterrence by denouncing these crimes and letting society know that sentences will be appropriate for the types of crimes committed and that automatic parole will not be granted. Society will soon learn that those who prey upon innocent victims and rob of them of their life's fortunes will be dealt with appropriately and they will spend time in prison.

Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Madam Speaker, all Canadians want to feel safe in their communities. I think all members of this House want to ensure that all communities are in fact safe. We may differ from time to time on how that gets done, but it is times like these that we need to have debate, not closure and the stifling of that debate. I would like to read a statement:

The choking off of debate today is the latest example of the disrespect the government has for Canadians, their jobs, their opportunities and their futures.

That was said by a former member of this House, Mr. Jay Hill.

Could the hon. member talk about what the cost of this bill will actually be?

Government Orders

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: Madam Speaker, it is ironic that members of the New Democratic Party and the Liberal Party always talk about the cost of these bills but they never talk about the cost of not passing them.

They never talk about the cost to victims, the hundreds of millions of dollars of life savings and RRSP accounts that have been bilked from innocent victims, including seniors and the infirm. Imagine the gall of people who would prey upon individual victims.

Crime has costs; we know that. Violent crime has costs in terms of lost wages, pain and suffering, and bereavement time. The costs of property crime are huge, both for the insurance system and the individual victims of property crime.

For once, this House needs to focus not on the cost of passing these bills, but on the cost of not passing these bills.

Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to speak about the importance of Bill C-59 and to encourage all hon. members to support its swift passage.

Our government has said from day one when we came to power in 2006 that our highest priority is to protect the safety and security of Canadians. In the very first Speech from the Throne, the Prime Minister said that we would tackle crime, that we would introduce changes to the Criminal Code that would ensure tougher sentences for violent and repeat offenders, that we would put more police on the streets and improve the security of our borders. Since that day we have done exactly what we said we would do. As we used to say during the early years of our government: promise made, promise kept.

We have introduced numerous pieces of legislation to tackle violent crime. We have passed new laws that address the growing crime of identity theft and identity fraud. Our government has also introduced legislation to give victims of crime a stronger voice in Canada's justice system. This includes guaranteeing victims a chance to speak at parole hearings and emphasizing the responsibility of offenders to play a role in their own rehabilitation.

Each step along the way we have run into resistance from the opposition parties.

While our Conservative government has done many things already to strengthen the justice system and protect the rights of victims, there is still more work to be done. That is why we have introduced Bill C-59, which would amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act to abolish something that really has Canadians steaming, and that is the current system of accelerated parole review.

Essentially, what accelerated parole does is it accelerates the process of applying for parole for offenders convicted of non-violent crimes, such as fraud and other white collar offences.

Back when this law was first introduced, crimes like fraud were generally considered victimless because they were not directed at individuals. Instead, they were more likely to target large faceless corporations, but things have changed, and how. Today we hear stories in the media about someone dressed in a business suit, a confidence man, a con artist, stealing hundreds of thousands of dollars from average hard-working Canadians, including vulnerable

seniors. Today we understand more clearly how a crime like fraud can affect people on a profound level, wiping out their life savings and putting unimaginable stress on their lives and those of their families.

Even when the offenders are finally brought to court and given prison sentences, victims feel that the justice system has completely failed them. Why? Under accelerated parole, these so-called white collar criminals can apply for day parole after serving only one-sixth of their sentence. Members heard right: one-sixth of their sentence.

Let me briefly review the specific differences between accelerated parole reviews and regular parole reviews. There are three key differences that I would like to address in turn.

First, under accelerated parole, the only way for the Parole Board of Canada to deny day parole to an offender is if he or she is likely to commit a new violent offence. The key word in that sentence is "violent". Even if there was a fear that the offender would perpetrate new frauds against our communities, the offender would still have the right to go on day parole. That is much less strict than the one for regular parole. The test for regular day parole is whether the parole board has reason to believe that the offender presents an unmanageable risk of committing a new offence, any offence.

A fraudster is held to a different standard than all other offenders. Most Canadians question that. This is clearly an advantage for those white collar offenders, the con artists. An individual who is convicted of fraud, for example, may not have a violent past but may still have criminal intent. With no evidence that the individual is prone to committing a violent offence, the parole board must release him or her back into the community even if he or she continues to represent a significant financial criminal risk to the community.

Our government believes it is unfair to have an accelerated parole system where some offenders are treated differently based on their crimes. We intend to change this practice.

Under Bill C-59, white collar, non-violent offenders would have to face the same parole test as all other offenders.

• (1355)

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): I have to interrupt the hon. member for Abbotsford. He will have four minutes when this debate resumes.

*Statements by Members***STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS**

●(1400)

*[English]***VALENTINE'S DAY**

Mr. Ed Holder (London West, CPC): Madam Speaker, today there will be hundreds of people who will not be anywhere near their sweethearts on Valentine's Day.

[Translation]

In ridings across the country, parliamentary spouses and partners are making many sacrifices to allow MPs to serve their constituents.

[English]

Our time with them is precious and our privacy rare. Our spouses inspire us, support us, stand by us and show their love in so many ways. In return we offer them crazy schedules, public scrutiny and many nights at home alone taking care of our families.

Tonight, while many Canadians are spending time with their sweethearts, we will pause yet again to give thanks to our loved ones, because we truly are the luckiest people around.

Today, one of our own, the member for Prince Albert, celebrates his wedding anniversary. To him and his wife Jerri, a special wish.

On this day, let me honour the sacrifices made by the spouses and partners of our diplomatic corps and our armed forces.

On behalf of all members, I would like to thank my wife Judite and all parliamentary spouses and partners for giving to Canada in the way that they do. They are the unseen and unsung heroes.

[Translation]

Happy Valentine's day.

* * *

*[English]***JOHN MACLEOD FRASER**

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Madam Speaker, John MacLeod Fraser was born in Montreal in 1935. When his father, the late Blair Fraser, became Ottawa editor of *Maclean's* in 1943, John moved to Ottawa and attended Ashbury College. He became a Rhodes Scholar before joining the external affairs department where he had a distinguished career.

In one of his first postings he opened Canada's embassy in Beijing after Prime Minister Trudeau had re-established diplomatic relations with China 40 years ago. Then he served as ambassador to Poland, where he witnessed the rise of the solidarity movement. He became director-general of external affairs foreign intelligence bureau. After retirement, John worked as a consultant as an intelligence analyst until the end of his life.

John died on December 29, 2010. I offer my deepest condolences to his family. They have lost a loved one. Canada lost a friend and a formidable public servant, one of those who was responsible for Canada's excellent international reputation. My thanks to John.

*[Translation]***KYRGYZSTAN**

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ): Madam Speaker, from June 10 to 14, 2010, southern Kyrgyzstan was rife with violence.

According to the International Red Cross, 356 people died and 92,000 people fled to Uzbekistan in June and July 2010.

The Red Cross estimates that in Kyrgyzstan, there are some 375,000 displaced persons, all of whom are Uzbeks and most of whom are women, children and seniors. Witnesses report numerous kidnappings and the rape of women and children. What is more, Kyrgyzstan's own security forces turned a blind eye to it all. That is unacceptable.

On October 10, 2010, an internationally recognized election was held in Kyrgyzstan. Let us hope that the new political situation will ease the ethnic tensions in that country and that the Government of Canada will actively encourage this budding democracy to respect human rights and the rights of minorities.

* * *

*[English]***ECO-ENERGY RETROFIT PROGRAM**

Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Madam Speaker, during the town hall meetings I recently held in my riding, many constituents called for the reinstatement of the eco-energy retrofit program that the government suddenly cancelled in March 2010.

This program helped thousands of Canadians renovate their homes, cut home heating bills by 20% and save an estimated three tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions per home, or 1.5 million tonnes of emissions after four years of retrofits.

Constituents in my riding want to take advantage of energy-saving programs like this but many are living paycheque to paycheque and need the assistance of such a program.

The eco-energy retrofit program not only created jobs, but helped working families make needed improvements to their homes.

This program supports a green economy and stimulates jobs in the trades.

I call on the government to reinstate the eco-energy retrofit program.

* * *

LAMBTON CHINESE CANADIAN ASSOCIATION

Mrs. Patricia Davidson (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Madam Speaker, I rise today in our nation's House of Commons to celebrate the occasion of the Chinese New Year, where they celebrate the changing of the lunar year.

The Lambton Chinese Canadian Association in my riding of Sarnia—Lambton plays a special role in bringing this unique aspect of China's culture to my community in southern Ontario.

The Lambton Chinese Canadian Association first came to Sarnia—Lambton in 1970 and for the last 41 years has celebrated the Chinese New Year with hundreds of Chinese Canadian families as well as the rest of my community who share in the celebrations. Today this association has over 300 members and continues to grow.

In this the Year of the Rabbit, I congratulate the Lambton Chinese Canadian Association for a successful 41 years in my riding, and I thank it for its continued support and contribution to our community.

Gung Hay Fat Choy.

* * *

● (1405)

SENIORS CENTRE

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Madam Speaker, two years ago I spoke in the House on behalf of the senior citizens of Southeast Vancouver, the Southeast Vancouver Seniors' Arts and Cultural Society and the chair, Lorna Gibbs.

There is a dire need for a seniors centre in this area of Vancouver. There are at least 25,000 seniors living in the southeast quadrant of Vancouver in my riding. That is almost a third of the total senior citizens living in Vancouver. There are nine seniors centres in the city of Vancouver, eight of them on the west side, west of Main Street, only one east of Main, and none in this particular area.

In 2009, the park board had dedicated land at the Killarney Community Centre for the project. This year on February 1, Vancouver City Council voted for \$2.5 million toward the project.

There is an urgent need for financial commitments from both the federal and provincial governments. I would urge the federal government to work with the City of Vancouver and the provincial government to make this senior citizens centre a reality for the senior citizens of Southeast Vancouver.

* * *

BIRTHDAY WISHES

Mr. Bob Dechert (Mississauga—Erindale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today marks the 90th birthday of one of Canada's most remarkable citizens.

Hurricane Hazel McCallion enters her 91st year as mayor of Canada's sixth largest, fastest growing and most dynamic city.

For the past 32 years, Hazel McCallion has guided the growth of Mississauga from an amalgamation of small historic hamlets into one of the most diverse and prosperous cities in the world. Mississauga is a city which hosts Canada's busiest airport, the Canadian headquarters of 60 Fortune 500 companies, and welcomes and provides quality of life and opportunity to newcomers from every nation and culture.

Her direct, no-nonsense style, while sometimes intimidating, gets the job done. Hazel's legendary attendance at every community function has won her the admiration of the people of Mississauga.

Statements by Members

As a professional woman hockey player, business person, wife, mother, grandmother, volunteer, patron of the arts and leader in public service for more than 50 years, Hazel McCallion embodies the true spirit of Canadian citizenship.

Hazel is an inspiration to all Canadians. Best wishes for a very happy birthday and many more.

* * *

[*Translation*]

QUEBEC ATHLETES

Mr. Pascal-Pierre Paillé (Louis-Hébert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, a number of Quebecers earned international honours on the weekend in their respective sports.

In short track speed skating, Marianne St-Gelais, from Saint-Félicien, won gold in the 500 metre event and François Hamelin, from Sainte-Julie, won silver in the 1,000 metre event. The women's relay team came away with a silver medal and the men's team won bronze.

In alpine skiing, Érik Guay was crowned the world downhill champion after being sidelined from competition for a month due to back injuries. Last year, the Mont-Tremblant athlete won the super G Crystal Globe.

I would also like to point out that my colleague from Abitibi—Témiscamingue will be inducted into the Canadian Olympic Hall of Fame, in the builder category, for his leadership in Quebec, Canada and internationally in the sport of cycling. He has received many honours for his commitment to the development of this sport.

To all our athletes, thank you for your contributing to the promotion of Quebec.

* * *

[*English*]

DEPRESSION

Mr. John Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to bring awareness to a tragedy that is suffered daily in homes and communities across Canada.

This Valentine's Day, as many of us express our affection to loved ones in special ways, I urge Canadians to look out especially for someone in your circle who may suffer from depression.

I would like to pay tribute to Whistler's Dennehy family, who have risen above their own tragedy to help others. Ten years ago Kelty Dennehy, then a popular, academically successful junior hockey player, took his own life after battling clinical depression.

Kelty's parents, Ginny and Kerry, responded to Kelty's death by creating the Kelty Patrick Dennehy Foundation, which has used Kelty's memory to inspire support for the battle against adolescent depression.

Statements by Members

Colleagues, please join me in a tribute to the Dennehy family, who with their courage have inspired thousands of Canadians. To Olympic hero, Clara Hughes, I thank her for having the courage to speak out about her own battle with depression.

May our voices join with hers to remove the stigma of shame and remind us of the importance of speaking openly and honestly about depression.

* * *

● (1410)

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, after ringing up a record \$56 billion deficit, the Conservatives are now trying to hide the facts from Canadians.

The finance committee has asked for the cost of justice bills, as well as projections of corporate profits, but the Conservatives have refused, falsely claiming cabinet confidence.

Today the *Globe and Mail* weighed in, saying:

The [Conservative] government uses “cabinet confidence” the way the Nixon administration used “executive privilege.” The Liberals provided projections of corporate profits when they were in government. And it is ridiculous for the Conservatives to maintain that the cost of their law-and-order legislation is a state secret. How is Parliament to judge the wisdom of that legislation if it can’t measure its projected impact in prisons built and guards hired?

Either the requested information exists, in which case the Conservatives are treating Parliament with contempt, or the information does not exist, in which case the Conservatives are incompetent and are treating Canadian taxpayers with contempt.

Either way, Canadians deserve better.

* * *

[*Translation*]

VANCOUVER WINTER OLYMPIC GAMES

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a little over a year ago, Canada celebrated the opening of the Vancouver Winter Olympic Games. As we all know, the Vancouver games will go down in winter Olympic history as a tremendous success.

Our Canadian athletes outdid themselves and represented our country with great pride. Our government would like to highlight the incredible performance of the athlete who won the first gold medal on home soil. Exactly one year ago today, Alexandre Bilodeau won this precious medal in freestyle skiing. He was a great inspiration to the entire country, and his performance marked the beginning of a record number of medals for Canada. Alexandre Bilodeau's great determination and indomitable perseverance created a true spirit of unity across the country. His influence will continue to be felt by future generations of Canadians and will no doubt help to encourage our young athletes to follow in his footsteps.

It was a record year for Canada, with a total of no less than 14 gold medals. We will always remember this record performance.

[*English*]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, people in Sault Ste. Marie and Algoma work hard and are watching their money. No one is telling me Canada should buy \$35 million worth of fighter jets. No one is telling me Canada should build more prisons. No one is telling me corporations should have more tax cuts.

My region has among the highest unemployment in Ontario. What I hear is people want good-paying jobs. They want adequate, universal health care without the shortages of doctors and crowded hospitals. They want affordable housing for seniors and supportive housing for others, including persons with disabilities. They want investment in people, in services, in creating real opportunities. They want investment in education.

They want a Canada that looks after the vulnerable and leaves no one behind. That would be a Canada of compassion and justice. That would be a government which actually knew how to manage people's money.

* * *

IMMIGRATION

Mr. Paul Calandra (Oak Ridges—Markham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Amir Attaran may have gone to Harvard with the Liberal leader, but that certainly does not make him better than the rest of us.

Earlier today, Amir Attaran had to defend his private lawsuit to move his American parents' sponsorship application to the front of the line. Attaran is not asking for faster treatment for anyone else's parents, just for his own.

Attaran is entitled, like everyone else, to sponsor his American parents into Canada, but they need to wait in line, just like my constituents do and just like the constituents of every member of the House.

Immigration Canada considers sponsorship applications in the order in which they are received. Amir Attaran may think that because the Liberal leader was his mentor, because he went to Harvard, that makes him better than the rest of us.

I have news for Mr. Attaran. He is not better than my constituents and his parents are not better than the 150,000 immigrants in the sponsorship queue or the historically high 280,000 immigrants our government welcomed to Canada in 2010.

Why will Amir Attaran's parents not wait in line like the rest of them, and why will they not join with—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Drummond.

[Translation]

GRAMMY AWARDS

Mr. Roger Pomerleau (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, at the 53rd annual Grammy Awards yesterday, the Montreal band Arcade Fire unexpectedly took home the prestigious album of the year award for *The Suburbs*, an album about boredom in North American suburbia.

This shining star of Montreal's indie scene has been popular since the launch of its first album, *Funeral*, in 2004. The band, formed around couple Win Butler and Régine Chassagne, is made up of multi-instrumentalists.

On hand to accept their trophy, they thanked both Montreal and Quebec, in French no less, for giving their band a home. And we want to thank them for being such incredible ambassadors for Quebec.

I would also like to congratulate the MSO's conductor, Kent Nagano, who won the Grammy for best opera recording for Saariaho's *L'amour de loin*.

* * *

• (1415)

[English]

CANADIANS' ACHIEVEMENT

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, while the Conservative government continues to diminish Canada's stellar reputation on the world stage, fortunately Canadians are doing just the opposite.

This past weekend, Canadians from across the country proved to the world that Canada is a leading nation on many fronts.

In music, indie pop sensation Arcade Fire made Montrealers and all Canadians proud last night when they took home the coveted Album of the Year award at the Grammys, while Neil Young proved he is still "rockin' in the free world" with his Best Rock Song win.

In sport, Ontario tennis champ, Milos Raonic yesterday became the first Canadian in 16 years to capture an ATP Tour title at the SAP Open in San Jose, California.

[Translation]

And Érik Guay won gold at the Alpine World Ski Championships in Germany.

[English]

Whether on stage, on the courts or on the slopes, this weekend was Canada's.

On behalf of the Liberal Party of Canada, I would like to congratulate all of this weekend's winners.

* * *

TAXATION

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Peterborough, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal leader has a plan to raise taxes. He is openly and unambiguously calling for a massive \$6 billion tax hike on Canada's job creators. In fact, the Liberal leader is demanding his new tax hike

Oral Questions

be included in the next budget and if we do not raise taxes, he and his merry band of Liberal tax hikers will vote against the budget to force an election that Canadians do not want.

It is a reckless tax increase. It will stop our recovery in its tracks and hurt job creation in all regions of Canada.

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business, representing small and medium size enterprises, considered this issue settled and off the table. It is now openly opposing the Liberal plan that would hike taxes for Canada's job creators. The Liberal leader, who proudly called himself a "tax and spend" Liberal, and his finance critic over there should reconsider their job-killing tax hike plan.

It is simple. Higher taxes do not create jobs. Higher taxes kill jobs.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, nearly three million Canadians are taking care of sick or aging loved ones in their own homes. Two-thirds of family caregivers are women with incomes below \$45,000. Many have to quit their jobs or use up their savings to handle their family obligations. However, the government says it would be "reckless" to offer any help. Instead, it blows \$6 billion on extra tax cuts for the biggest and wealthiest 5% of corporations.

Why Bay Street ahead of families? Why do these Conservatives hide corporate profit data like a state secret?

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let there be no doubt that the Liberal leader has a plan to hike taxes in Canada. He is openly and unambiguously calling for a \$6 billion tax increase. The Liberal leader is demanding his new tax be included in the next budget. If we do not raise taxes, he will vote against the budget and call for an early election. That is bad for our economy and it is bad for Canada.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it just does not add up. Conservative corporate tax cuts are going only to the biggest, wealthiest 5% of Canadian businesses, whose tax rates have already been cut by 35% and who are already fully globally competitive. However, for small business, there is no tax cut, only a tax increase because Conservatives are slapping a heavier, job-killing payroll tax on every employer and employee in the country.

Why the double standard? Why the unlimited largesse for the privileged few, but nothing for small business or for families?

Oral Questions

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the head of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business has spoken up in favour of our job-creation taxation policies and has spoken out very clearly against the Liberal leader's plan to increase taxes by \$6 billion. This is a reckless tax increase that will stop our recovery in its tracks. Is it any wonder the Liberal leader calls himself a "tax and spend" Liberal?

• (1420)

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government refuses to give answers about its pet projects, its big, reckless spending schemes. It spent \$16 billion to \$21 billion, maybe more, for untendered, non-competitive stealth fighter jets; \$10 billion to \$13 billion for U.S.-style megajails; \$6 billion every year for extra corporate tax cuts for the privileged few, but nothing for small business, nothing for caregivers, nothing for early learning, students or skills.

Why do not hard-pressed families make it onto the Conservative agenda?

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our pet project is job creation and economic growth.

One thing those of us on this side of the House know is the Liberal leader's plan to blackmail this government into raising taxes by \$6 billion with the threat that he will vote against the budget and take Canadians to the polls is wrong for Canada. We know that low taxes are a magnet for jobs, for investment and opportunity. We know that raising \$6 billion in taxes, as the Liberal leader would have us do, would kill jobs, would kill hope and would kill opportunity.

* * *

[Translation]

THE ECONOMY

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is why people are now saying they are fed up with this government.

Ever since they were elected, the Conservatives have made lack of transparency and secrecy their trademark. Even cost projections have become state secrets. How much will the megaprison cost? Their answer is that they cannot say. Worse yet, they keep using platitudes, telling us to wait and see, that it will not be much longer, to be patient and they will have an answer.

Are the Conservatives afraid to open their books and prove Kevin Page right because they are heading straight for a structural deficit?

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the first act that we brought in as government was the Federal Accountability Act, the toughest anti-corruption legislation in Canada. Ever since then, we have been focusing on job creation and economic growth.

The Liberal leader now wants to raise taxes by \$6 billion. We want to keep taxes low to create jobs. A reckless \$6 billion tax increase, as the Liberal leader proposed, would do real harm to our Canadian economy. That is why Catherine Swift, president of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, has spoken out so

strongly in favour of low tax plan and so much against the Liberal leader's \$6 billion tax increase.

* * *

[Translation]

SALES TAX HARMONIZATION

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I predicted, there is an example of a Conservative platitude.

Not only do the Conservatives have problems with transparency, but they also have problems with the mail. In the \$2.2 billion harmonization file, the Minister of Finance is saying that he is still waiting for documents, although Minister Bachand sent them a long time ago. That is the new excuse of the month, one also used by his colleague from the Quebec City area: we are waiting for the documents.

Why not sign the proposed agreement in principle that he has received from the Government of Quebec? Have the Conservatives already written off Quebec?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is no agreement. Negotiations between Quebec and the federal government are going well. We are making progress, but both parties acknowledge that there remains work to be done. If the Government of Quebec decides to adopt this tax, we will be ready to enter into discussions with it, but not with the Liberal Party.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the maritime provinces, British Columbia and Ontario have all been compensated for harmonizing their sales tax with the GST. Now it is Quebec's turn.

Contrary to what the minister said, Quebec's finance minister says that negotiations are stalled, that he is prepared to sign and that everything has been resolved. The minister has a lot to answer for. This House was elected to get the answers.

When will he sign? When will he tell us the truth?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to congratulate the Bloc leader for the show of support he received over the weekend. It is clear that someone is smiling even more than we are on this side of the House, and that someone is Ms. Marois. She is relieved because this means that he will be with us even longer.

As the Minister of Finance said, I will tell my hon. colleague that we are still negotiating with the Government of Quebec and certainly not with the Bloc.

• (1425)

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I know some people in Quebec City who are less happy, those who were members of the Liberal Party with this minister back when he would stand up for Quebec. Since he came here, he has stopped defending Quebec.

Oral Questions

What Quebec's finance minister is telling us is that a political decision needs to be made. Right now, there are technical answers. Quebec has been doing this for a long time, dating back to the days of Mr. Bourassa, and the minister who just replied worked with Mr. Bourassa. I think that when he crossed the Ottawa River he forgot about the interests of Quebec.

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can simply say loud and clear that I was elected to Quebec's National Assembly. I do not know if he is capable of getting there himself.

* * *

SECURITIES

Mr. Daniel Paillé (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, last Thursday, the Prime Minister said that the Conservative government's initiative to create a single securities commission, and I quote, "has the support of 10 provinces and territories". However, Alberta, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, New Brunswick, British Columbia and Quebec are all opposed to this initiative.

When will the Prime Minister stop distorting reality and finally accept once and for all that his securities commission initiative has no reason to exist?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is a voluntary initiative that has always respected the provinces' jurisdictions and will continue to do so in the future.

[*English*]

We have a group of 10 provinces and territories that, for well over a year now, has been working with the Government of Canada in the development of the new Canadian securities regulator.

As members know, the bill was tabled in the House. It has been referred, by the government, to the Supreme Court of Canada. The argument will take place in April. We look forward to receiving the decision of the court.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Daniel Paillé (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the minister should check his mental arithmetic again, because the membership in his volunteer army is dropping.

Given the project under which the Toronto stock exchange will be taken over by the London stock exchange, the Autorité des marchés financiers du Québec has the power to decide whether or not to authorize this transaction based on Quebec's interests.

Will the minister abandon his predatory plan that serves only to give his Bay Street friends the power that we have in Quebec and that we intend to continue to exert independently?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I made an announcement about the proposed merger of the London and Toronto stock exchanges, saying that the federal government would review the transaction under the Investment Canada Act. Of course, British Columbia, Alberta, Quebec and Ontario have the right to review the transaction as well. From our point of view, this is a very complex transaction, so the review must be very thorough.

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this government is not able to see what is so obvious to the rest of the

country: the takeover of the Toronto Stock Exchange needs meaningful input from the public. All we are asking is that the Prime Minister do what is required of him by law, in other words, the bare minimum.

Will the Prime Minister keep sitting on the fence, or will he finally recognize the significance of this takeover and announce a full public consultation?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have already said, this is a very complex transaction. The Investment Canada Act must be taken into consideration. The process needs to comply with that act. Today I announced that the review will go ahead.

[*English*]

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, everyone knew last week that this was a takeover and that we needed a full public review, not just minimum adherence to the law.

Before Christmas, in response to the NDP leader, the Prime Minister admitted that the Investment Canada Act was broken and needed fixing. Those were his words. Since then we have seen nothing from the government.

Now we have another takeover in a strategic sector. How many more takeovers will we see with no public consultation before the Conservative government finally revamps the act?

● (1430)

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my obligation of course is to review this under, as I said in French, the black letter of the law. Of course, I will be doing so pursuant to my obligations as Minister of Industry. It is a very complex transaction and we have to do it by the book. The book in this case is the Investment Canada Act.

There is a review. We are in favour of a review of the ICA. I referred it to the industry committee and we look forward to its deliberations as well.

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, after many months of promises, we finally see the beginning of some change by this government for some kind of public review. However, the provinces, business analysts, traders and even oil industry executives are all voicing concerns about this deal. While the exchanges are private companies, they are tightly regulated because of their strategic importance as capital markets.

Will the minister commit today to a full public review that allows for open and transparent consultations on both this decision and any conditions that might apply if the deal is approved?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we all know where the NDP members stand on this. Whenever there is a foreign entity that wishes to invest in Canada, they are against it; they are against it across the board, so their position is easy. Of course, when the Liberals were in power they were in favour of every transaction.

Oral Questions

We take the view that the net benefit test to Canada under the act is an important test. We review each transaction individually to ensure that we do have a net benefit to Canada. We will continue to defend Canada's interests in this regard.

* * *

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week the Minister of Immigration announced a 5% reduction in the family class of people coming to Canada.

I will give just one example of how discriminatory that decision is. It directly contradicts a statement made by the Minister of Human Resources who said last week that people did not need to send their kids to child care centres, but could have their parents and grandparents and their loved ones take care of them.

The minister is stopping those loved ones, is stopping those grandparents, from coming to Canada. How does he justify that kind of discriminatory practice?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I expect more from that member than that kind of base demagoguery.

The reality is that yesterday I announced that in 2010 we welcomed 281,000 permanent residents to Canada, the largest number in 57 years, and 106,000 more than the Liberals did shortly after they came to office and cut immigration levels. We are welcoming more family members, more economic immigrants. We have announced a 20% increase in the number of refugees that we have resettled.

We are getting the job done for newcomers.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, although the minister did not reply in the spirit of Valentine's Day, I would like to ask him another question in the same spirit. Today is a day of love and reconciliation. So why did the minister announce a reduction in the number of people who will be allowed to immigrate to Canada in the family reunification category? They will have a harder time helping their families.

Are family values no longer important to the Conservative Party?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we did no such thing. More and more Canadians' children will be welcome in Canada.

[*English*]

Let us be clear. What the member is really saying is that we should reduce the number of economic immigrants coming to Canada because there are trade-offs.

There are trade-offs, and this government is focused on the priorities of Canadians, and those are economic growth and prosperity. We need more newcomers working and paying taxes and contributing to our health care system. That is the focus of our immigration system.

[*Translation*]

JUDICIARY

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last Friday, the Minister of Immigration launched an attack on the judiciary. According to him, judges make up excuses to allow foreign criminals to stay in Canada. He described judges' rulings as capricious and he deplored what he called their misplaced clemency.

Will the minister give us the name of a single judge who has acted in this way or will he allow his disgusting comments to tarnish the reputation of every judge in Canada?

● (1435)

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, I am not aware of the rulings her husband made when he was on the IRB.

That being said, I can say that it is unacceptable that we still have terrorists in Canada when we have been trying to turn them away at the border for 20 years. Everyone is entitled to natural justice and a fair trial, but at the end of the day, we should be able to turn away foreign criminals and terrorists at the border.

[*English*]

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Minister of Immigration escalated his attack on the judiciary. He said that Canadian courts do not allow the law to be enforced.

This is a serious and unprecedented charge that must be explained. The Minister of Justice has a responsibility to defend the independence of our judges and our Canadian court system. Why has he been silent?

Why is the Minister of Justice allowing his colleague to intimidate our judges and our court system? Why?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. The Hon. Minister of Citizenship and Immigration has the floor.

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I encourage the ever-thoughtful and soft-spoken member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine to actually read the speech that I delivered, in which I quoted the Supreme Court of Canada several times reproving junior courts for not having accepted decisions taken by the IRB, the public servants who are delegated to take quasi-judicial decisions.

The point is very simply this: We do not believe that convicted criminals or terrorists who are foreigners should be able to stay in Canada for a decade or longer, abusing the generosity of Canada. After due process they should be kicked out of Canada.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the night he was elected, the Prime Minister said that he would clean up Ottawa. Now, rather than making appointments on the basis of competency and transparency, the Conservative government is perpetuating the Liberal culture of entitlement by freely appointing friends and people who share the ideology of fundamentalist religious groups.

Will the Prime Minister admit that the recent appointment of Tom Pentefountas to the CRTC is just another example of the Conservative government's partisanship when making its appointments?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first of all, Mr. Pentefountas will do a very good job as the vice-chair of the CRTC. We have replaced one Quebecker with another in order to ensure that our election policy is implemented and to guarantee that all Canadian voices will be heard.

Second, I have to say that I hope the Bloc Québécois will stop its continual attacks on those who are religious.

* * *

RIGHTS & DEMOCRACY

Mrs. Carole Freeman (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the same approach was used with regard to the announcement that Jacques Gauthier's and Elliot Tepper's terms at Rights & Democracy would be renewed. The opposition parties that were consulted on the issue unanimously refused to support these appointments.

Does the government commit to respecting the opposition's verdict or will it prove that these consultations were just for show by reappointing Mr. Gauthier and Mr. Tepper?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the law provides for consultations with the leaders of the opposition parties. We complied with the provisions of the law and sent the opposition leaders correspondence informing them that we had decided to appoint these individuals, who have carried out their duties in a professional manner to date. Clearly, the government is going to reappoint them.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Jean Dorion (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it took less than 24 hours for Switzerland to freeze Mubarak's assets. Europe and Switzerland also dealt quickly with the assets of Tunisian dictator Ben Ali and his entourage. Members of the Ben Ali family have been in Canada for weeks now and we still do not know whether Canada has frozen their assets.

Is anyone in this government able to tell us whether or not Canada has frozen the assets of members of the Ben Ali entourage?

• (1440)

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is a condition that needs to be met, as I have told

my colleague many times: the request has to come from the Tunisian government. For example, in the case of Egypt, the request was made to the various countries my colleague mentioned. However, before we can take action, this request has to come from the Tunisian government. We have worked and continue to work closely with government authorities. My colleague, the Minister of Justice, is weighing all the options, and we will pursue this matter with the same intention I have already identified.

Mr. Jean Dorion (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ): Mr. Speaker, these dictators are experts at tax evasion, and Canada is not doing anything about it. The more time passes, the greater the risk is that these assets are disappearing in tax havens, where they will be practically impossible to trace.

Does the government realize that by doing nothing, not only is it being complicit, but it is also abandoning the Tunisian people by preventing them from getting their hands on the money that was stolen from them?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, we are working with Tunisian government authorities to come up with a solution to freeze the assets of these people. I want to remind the hon. member that the goal is simply to ensure that we can support any initiative the Tunisian government might take.

* * *

[English]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this weekend, low-income northerners were shocked at massive price increases in food prices caused by the government's removal of subsidies.

Arctic Bay residents say that the price of shipping these foods to the poor, the vulnerable and the elderly has risen from 80¢ to \$13 a kilogram, leaving the price of a Cranberry Cocktail at \$38, Cheez Whiz at \$29 and a whopping \$77 for a bag of breaded chicken.

What is the government going to do to end the suffering it has caused?

Hon. John Duncan (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CPC): The nutrition north program is not yet in effect and is already being blamed incorrectly for high prices. The nutrition north program has been renovated to ensure that the federal subsidy applies to healthy food, and the more remote the community the greater the subsidy.

In May of last year we announced the end of subsidies for non-food items, non-perishable foods and some perishable foods of little value nutritionally, effective in October to give retailers and the public the opportunity to use the sealift or other transportation.

In addition, we have a—

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. member for Yukon.

Oral Questions

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to hear the member thinks cranberries, cheese and chicken are not nutritional.

The minister has not justified why he is putting the most vulnerable, the poor and the elderly through his horrendous cost-cutting situation.

He is right. The program has not come in to reduce the subsidies. However, the costs went up on October 1. He implemented that.

The Conservatives could only find \$60 million for this program while they found \$130 million for shameless, self-promotional advertising.

The vice-president of Northern stores says the air freight price has gone up 600% in some cases and is not likely to be offset by the minor 5% to 7%—

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development.

Hon. John Duncan (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the food mail program was in effect since the 1960s. The Liberal government never made any changes. It became very inefficient.

This is not a cost-cutting exercise. We are spending more than was ever spent under the Liberals. This program is designed to deliver healthy food to isolated communities. It will do a good job when it comes into effect.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Francis Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is fighting his own defence minister to have one of only five Canadian Forces transport planes repainted white and red for exclusive VIP use.

One officer wrote:

...to have an Airbus permanently configured for VIP use in a colour other than the standard grey would have an impact both financially and on operations as essentially it would leave you with one less air resource.

Despite this warning, why is the Prime Minister insisting on having this plane repainted instead of deferring to the informed opinion of people at National Defence and his own defence minister?

• (1445)

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member has it wrong. There has been no decision taken with respect to the repainting of transport aircraft. In fact, the repainting of military assets occurs on a regularly scheduled, established maintenance cycle. It is done when the operational tempo will not be affected.

I can assure the hon. member and members present that we would never do anything that would interfere with the operations of the Canadian Forces, or that would negatively impact the forces in any way.

Mr. Francis Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is clear from access to information that the defence minister is wrong.

The defence minister has rejected the Prime Minister's attempt to repaint the aircraft at least three times and senior members of the Canadian Forces, including the Chief of the Defence Staff, also have rejected the idea. The Prime Minister's personal meddling is robbing the forces of a valuable air resource for his own personal vanity.

The Prime Minister ignored his defence minister before and it cost Canadians \$300 million to move Camp Mirage.

When will the Prime Minister put the needs of our forces before his own ego?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is passing strange that a member of the Liberal Party would somehow hold himself out as a defender of the Canadian Forces; this from the party that gutted the Canadian Forces. It took assets away from the Canadian Forces when it needed them dearly going into Afghanistan. It cancelled the Sea King helicopter program at an expense of \$1 billion.

Guess what? The Liberals are doing it again. They are promising to cancel the F-35, an aircraft critical for the protection of Canada's sovereignty. There are no lessons to be learned from the Liberals when it comes to the military.

* * *

[Translation]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while the Conservative government is focusing on the economy, the real priority of Quebecers, and continuing to support our families and businesses, the leader of the Bloc Québécois wants to trigger an election before even reading the budget.

Can the Minister of Veterans Affairs and Minister of State for Agriculture tell this House what the Conservative government has been doing recently for the economy in the regions of Quebec?

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, what government took action that helped to stimulate the economy and has fared the best among all G7 countries? The Conservative government.

What government took action that successfully created 450,000 jobs? Once again, the Conservative government.

And what government is closest to the regions of Quebec? Once again, the Conservative government.

And who has the nerve to vote against our budget measures? The Bloc Québécois, Mr. Speaker.

Oral Questions

[English]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister wants to commandeer a military transport jet for his personal use, complete with a stateroom and sleeping quarters. Yes, Mulroney's notorious flying Taj Mahal flies again.

Conservatives want an expensive makeover while needs suffer, like improved search and rescue, which goes begging while Conservatives tell fishermen to save themselves when lost at sea.

Our military says the Conservative plan is too expensive and would hurt operations.

Will the Prime Minister drop his airplane makeover vanity project, which is designed solely to enhance his image?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member should press rewind and watch the tape. The answer is the same. It is not happening.

There is a regularly scheduled maintenance program that occurs when an aircraft is in need of repainting. There has been no decision taken with respect to that.

I can assure the hon. member and members present again, nothing this government will ever do is going to impact negatively on the forces and their operations, their families, the work they do that brings so much pride and purpose to our country. The forces have a great friend in the Conservative Party when it comes to giving them assets.

* * *

SHIPBUILDING INDUSTRY

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Britain's Under-Secretary of State for Defence is quoted as saying in the British House of Commons that they are having "close discussions with the Canadians" on a new global combat ship. These discussions have shipbuilders in this country very nervous.

Is the government having discussions with the British government regarding the new global combat ship? Will the government tell this House of Commons and all Canadians that all vessels for the Canadian military, now and in the future, can and will be built in Canada?

● (1450)

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member knows, the government made a historic announcement last year by committing to procure all of our ships here in Canada.

This is a massive undertaking that will provide 75 million man-hours of work to the shipbuilding industry in Canada, but the member voted against it anyway. I know the member's riding is very excited in Halifax, as are shipbuilders from coast to coast to coast.

[Translation]

QUEBEC CITY ARENA

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government is refusing to do its share for the Quebec City multi-purpose arena. According to a survey taken last weekend, 79% of those polled are in favour of federal funding for the arena.

Can the minister responsible for the Quebec region explain why her government has decided to disregard the will of Quebecers? Will she make a decision only after the arena is built?

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister for La Francophonie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our position has not changed. We are still waiting for a business plan indicating a substantial contribution by the private sector.

Allow me to read the following quote: "From the beginning, we have indicated our support for the arena, but always with the same expectation—and we are not the only ones—a contribution from the private sector. I believe that is imperative."

That is a quote from Pauline Marois in the January 30 edition of *Le Soleil*.

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have a quotation, too.

The current Minister of Finance, when he was a minister in the Ontario legislature, announced in a press release, "...four projects for priority action in support of Toronto's bid for the 2008 Olympic and Paralympic Games", to which the federal government contributed \$500 million." Ten years later, Quebecers are still contributing to this \$500 million through their taxes.

Why are the reasons given to justify funding the Toronto bid not applicable to funding for the Quebec City arena. Is that fair?

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister for La Francophonie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to set the record straight.

I have been told by my fellow ministers that most of the investments made at that time were for the purpose of redeveloping the lakeshore.

Having said that, at this time, there is no possibility of making a bid for the 2022 Games. Nevertheless, our position remains the same, and we are waiting for a complete file from the mayor of Quebec City.

Ms. Christiane Gagnon: Liar.

* * *

[English]

INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in your ruling last week against the CIDA minister, you stated:

Oral Questions

The full body of material gives rise to very troubling questions. Any reasonable person confronted with what appears to have transpired would necessarily be extremely concerned, if not shocked, and might well begin to doubt the integrity of certain decision-making processes. In particular, the senior CIDA officials concerned must be deeply disturbed by the doctored document they have been made to appear to have signed.

The question is, does the Prime Minister agree with your statements?

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member knows, the department does make recommendations to the ministers. Ministers are responsible for making those decisions.

In this case the department made a recommendation and I did not agree with it. We want to ensure that our development and aid dollars go forward to make a difference in the lives of those living in developing countries, living in poverty, who are seeing high rates of disease, et cetera.

Let me be clear that this has always been the role of the minister.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, why does the minister not admit what everyone knows? The minister de-funded KAIROS. She tried to blame it on officials. Then she misled the House, and then she was caught.

Will the Prime Minister censure the minister?

• (1455)

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me reiterate that, as members know, departments give advice and make recommendations to ministers. Ministers are responsible for making decisions on behalf of the government.

In this case, I did not agree with the recommendation of the department. I have always acknowledged that it was my responsibility. I made the decision. I would never mislead the House.

* * *

[Translation]

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, chickens are pumped full of antibiotics to keep them from getting sick. Consequently, every time we eat chicken, we are devouring antibiotics, even though we do not need them because we are not sick.

The problem is that bacteria are able to adapt. The superbugs found in chicken are becoming increasingly resistant to antibiotics.

What is the government's plan to protect people and deal with this problem?

[English]

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can assure the House and all Canadians that our chicken is safe. CFIA regularly tests meat and poultry entering the food supply for antibiotics. The compliance rate for chicken is 100%. The last time I checked, that is pretty good.

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Public Health Agency of Canada's own testing has found antibiotic resistant bacteria in foods. This poses serious health risks to Canadian

children and their families. Because of these health risks, the EU banned unnecessary antibiotics over five years ago. Is the health of Canadians any less important?

Shocking reports on bacteria in food like chicken show that Canada has dragged its heels on food safety issues.

Where is the government's plan to keep deadly and resistant bacteria off our families' dinner plates? When will the government ban the use of antibiotics for animals that are not sick?

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, no one stands still in this world. We constantly upgrade our antibiotics and the resistance to them, as the member well knows, with science and research. That comes about in budgets that we bring before the House and the NDP always votes against them.

If those members want to be a part of the solution instead of part of the problem, they might want to read a budget and support the science and technology side of it before they dismiss it out of hand.

* * *

HEALTH

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill-Gordon (Miramichi, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is estimated that approximately 5% to 6% of young children and 3% to 4% of adults suffer from food allergies. As well, nearly 1% of the population is affected by celiac disease.

Our Conservative government is committed to protecting children and families from dangerous products.

Could the Minister of Health inform the House of what measures our government is taking to protect Canadians with food allergies?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, earlier today I announced new measures taken by our government to protect Canadian children and their families by strengthening food labelling to require clearer language in the declaration of hidden allergens. Enhanced labelling will provide Canadians with allergies with more information to make food choices.

Our Conservative government wants parents to have confidence in the food they are serving their families. These changes to food labels will make it easier for parents of children with food allergies to identify potentially harmful ingredients in food.

* * *

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, veterans' widows are still being made to jump through hoops for Agent Orange compensation.

When widows had applied previously, they were informed that they were denied only because their husbands had not died on or after February 6, 2006.

If the government's arbitrary restriction has been eliminated, why are so many widows and their families still being denied compensation?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, as we all know, the government before ours refused to deal with the issue of agent orange for a number of years. This government decided to take action. We are providing an *ex gratia* payment of \$20,000 to these individuals. Just before Christmas, I confirmed that the widows could also receive this payment. And we have extended the deadline by another year. On the contrary, I think that we are concerned about these people.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's Office is insisting that one of the five Canadian Forces airbuses be painted white and red; however, the Department of National Defence opposes this request because the use of such bright colours could be dangerous when these aircraft are used for transporting soldiers and materiel during high-risk missions.

Does the Prime Minister not find it contradictory that he is arguing with his Minister of National Defence about an unnecessary expense, the paint colour of an aircraft, when he is asking everyone to tighten their belts and use restraint?

• (1500)

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I repeat that no decision has yet been made about the colour scheme. No decision will be made in this regard that will have any sort of negative impact on Canadian Forces' operations.

* * *

[*English*]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today, women have gathered from across Canada to plead with the government to fund Sisters in Spirit. Sisters in Spirit brought hope to many communities facing unacceptably high rates of violence committed against aboriginal women.

Now the government is playing games with the funding and has left the organization in limbo. It had to let staff go and important projects have been put on hold.

As a gesture of basic decency, will the government commit to funding the important work of Sisters in Spirit?

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the member knows full well, we have worked hand in hand and stood shoulder to shoulder with this organization, and we will continue to do that. We will continue to support the good work it has done.

Points of Order

In fact, we have doubled our funding to the highest level ever for women's groups that are fighting violence against women. In terms of fighting violence against aboriginal women, we have now undertaken, the first of its kind in Canada, a national program that is not only committing a new RCMP centre for missing persons, improving law enforcement data bases, but we have also created a national website for public tips to help locate missing and murdered aboriginal women.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Lee Richardson (Calgary Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think it is easy for Canadians to understand that our government is creating jobs and promoting economic growth with our low tax plan and our economic action plan.

Our government has created 460,000 new jobs since July 2009. This is far and above the strongest job creation in the G7, and I think Canadians understand that. What they do not understand is the Liberal plan.

I wonder if our Minister of Finance could explain the Liberal tax and spend plan.

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals' economic policy, as everyone knows now, is to hike taxes by \$6 billion. They say that if we do not hike taxes by \$6 billion, they will force an election.

It seems that nothing has changed, something the member for Kings—Hants would understand. He said that neither the Liberal caucus nor the Liberal Party had ever encountered a problem that they did not believe to be best solved by throwing copious quantities of taxpayer money at. They are tax and spendaholics.

For once, I can only agree—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. I am afraid the time has run out for question period.

* * *

[*Translation*]

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as you know, I do not enjoy doing this, but sometimes we must correct certain things that were said during question period. During that period, after the minister replied, I clearly heard the Bloc member for Québec call her a liar. I ask you to rule on that today.

Routine Proceedings

●(1505)

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, since the word “liar” is unparliamentary, I would say that the minister from the Quebec City region misled the House when she said that the press release was not for the Vancouver Olympic Games and that it was false. She therefore misled the House. I would replace the word “liar” with “misleading the House”.

[English]

Ms. Shelly Glover: Mr. Speaker, I think the member clearly indicated that she used unparliamentary language. I would expect that someone in the House would ask the member to apologize and let us get on with it. To continue in this manner of replacing unparliamentary language in such a way is absolutely disrespectful in the House. I would expect better.

[Translation]

Ms. Christiane Gagnon: Mr. Speaker, I rise to apologize if I called the member for Louis-Saint-Laurent a liar. Instead I would like to say that she misled the House. Indeed, misleading people is very serious. The press release definitely stated that the renovation was for the Toronto Olympic Games bid, and not for Vancouver.

She misleads the House so often that we have every right to be offended by her responses.

The Speaker: I do not believe that she said she used the word. If the hon. member for Québec used the word “liar”, she knows very well that such language is unacceptable in the House, even if she wants to change her words later. It must be withdrawn. So if the member used that word, I ask her to withdraw it immediately. I did not hear it myself.

Ms. Christiane Gagnon: Mr. Speaker, for the third time, I will say that I withdraw the word, but the member continues. Her specialty seems to be misleading the House and spewing nonsense when answering during question period.

The Speaker: The word has been withdrawn.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the eighth report of the Standing Committee on Citizen and Immigration in relation to a motion adopted by the committee on Thursday, February 10, on the funding to immigrant settlement and adaptation services.

* * *

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to designate Thursday, February 17, as an allotted day.

PETITIONS

ANIMAL WELFARE

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes (Brossard—La Prairie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table the following petition that was presented to me by students in my riding.

They are calling upon the House of Commons to amend the animal transportation regulations under Canada's Health of Animals Act to be consistent with the findings of the EU's scientific committee for animal health and welfare, to reduce transport times for pigs, poultry, horses, cows and lambs to 8 hours and 12 hours for cattle, sheep and goats, and to ensure adequate enforcement of the regulations.

[Translation]

SOCIÉTÉ D'HABITATION DU QUÉBEC

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be presenting a petition asking the government to give the Société d'habitation du Québec the necessary public funds to complete its low-income-housing renovation plan. A number of municipalities have also shared their concerns with me about the 30% budget cut imposed by CMHC.

I would like to thank Jacqueline Boisvert, who circulated this important petition in my riding.

●(1510)

[English]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions to table.

First, I have a petition urging hearings on the Joint Strike Fighter purchase. The petitioners say that the Government of Canada is proposing the purchase of 65 F-35 Joint Strike Fighters for a cost of roughly \$30 billion over 30 years.

The petitioners call upon the government to conduct public hearings to enable a thorough, informed and frank national debate about the security threats to be met, as well as the costs, benefits and consequences of the acquisition of a new generation of fighter aircraft and a competitive selection process before any final commitment to the JSF project is made.

ANIMAL WELFARE

Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my second petition is in support of Bill C-544, which was introduced by my hon. colleague from British Columbia Southern Interior.

Points of Order

The petitioners say that as Canadian horse meat products currently being sold for human consumption in domestic and international markets are likely to contain prohibited substances, they call upon the House of Commons and Parliament assembled to bring forward and adopt into legislation Bill C-544, An Act to amend the Health of Animals Act and the Meat Inspection Act (slaughter of horses for human consumption), thus prohibiting the importation or exportation of horses for slaughter for human consumption as well as horse meat products for human consumption.

INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION

Hon. Rick Casson (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions today that deal with two different issues. Pursuant to Standing Order 36 I would like to table these.

The first petition calls upon the Government of Canada and the provincial and territorial governments to cease negotiations with the EU while nation-wide public consultations take place.

JUSTICE

Hon. Rick Casson (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the second petition has to do with the Omar Khadr case.

The petitioners bring to the attention of the Government of Canada the devaluation of the Canadian justice system in the case of Omar Khadr.

HERITAGE CANADA

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present a petition signed by many constituents and people in the region of Durham concerned about the demolition of important heritage buildings in north Pickering conducted by the Government of Canada.

The petitioners ask that the government cease the destruction of those buildings, work with the municipality, re-establish the heritage committee to identify buildings of important heritage and ensure that going forward the wishes of the community to restore that heritage are respected and be borne by the owner of those lands, the federal government.

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my petition calls upon the Canadian government to end Canada's military involvement in Afghanistan.

In May 2008, Parliament passed a resolution to withdraw the Canadian Forces by July 2011. The Prime Minister, with agreement from the Liberal Party, broke his oft-repeated promise to honour the parliamentary motion and, furthermore, refuses to put it to a parliamentary vote in the House.

Committing 1,000 soldiers to a training mission still presents a danger to our troops and an unnecessary expense when our country is faced with a \$56 billion deficit. The military mission has cost Canadians more than \$18 billion so far, money that could have been used to improve health care and seniors' pensions right here in Canada.

Polls show that a clear majority of Canadians do not want Canada's military presence to continue after the scheduled removal date of July 2011. Therefore, the petitioners call upon the Prime

Minister to honour the will of Parliament and bring the troops home now.

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise once more to talk about the employment insurance pilot projects for areas of higher unemployment, certainly above 10%. Well over 100 petitions at this point are asking that these pilot projects be made permanent. Since 2005, they have been extended time and again. The last extension went from September and October into June.

The petitioners are calling upon the government to make these projects permanent. Obviously, if they have been extended three or four times over a period of six years, then the government must believe that they are doing good and therefore deserve to be made permanent.

Once again, these projects include the best 14 weeks, working while on claim and, of course, the extended weeks.

I am hoping that the government will consider these petitions and this particular one from the Port Blandford area as well as Bunyan's Cove.

* * *

● (1515)

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.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

FUNDING APPLICATION FOR KAIROS

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to set the record straight regarding the funding application for KAIROS. I wish to clearly inform the House of the matter and clear up any misunderstandings that exist.

The CIDA officials did forward a document in which they sought approval of the recommendation for funding of the KAIROS proposal, but ultimately the decision to not provide funding was mine, as Minister of International Cooperation.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, departments do make recommendations to ministers and ministers, in carrying out their responsibilities, can agree with those recommendations or, as is the case with this issue, they can disagree. In this case, the process in place requires the department to make recommendations, not to make the decision.

There was no decision taken by the department to provide funding. It was only a recommendation. It was my decision to disagree with the recommendation based on discussions with advisers. I was fully aware that my decision was not aligned with the recommendation of the department.

Government Orders

In the matter before you, Mr. Speaker, the opposition has asked you to rule on whether I intentionally or knowingly misled the House by saying it was a department decision.

At no time have I stated that the decision for funding was that of the department. I have repeatedly and clearly stated in response to questions in the House and at committee that the funding decision was mine. The “not” was inserted at my direction.

Given the way the document was formatted, allowing only for concurrence, this was the only way to reflect my decision. If some were led to conclude that my language implied that the department and I were of one mind on this application, then I apologize.

I would, Mr. Speaker, indicate to you that the way in which this case has been handled, including by myself, has been unfortunate.

In conclusion, let me be clear. In the memo the department did make a recommendation to me, as the minister for funding. My decision, as the minister, did not concur with the recommendation of the department. My instructions were to indicate on the document my decision not to provide funding.

I have consistently taken responsibility for that decision. I have consistently informed the House of the government's aid and effectiveness agenda, stating that our government's policy is to achieve impact, making a sustainable difference in the lives of those it is intended to help. In no way have I intentionally or knowingly misled the House or the committee.

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I still do not think the minister has satisfactorily answered some questions about how it would be that the document in question would contain three signatures, two of which she now states did not accord with her decision and one of which is her signature.

The minister is giving us a different statement today than she gave in committee. When she was directly asked the question, “Who put the “not” in the document?”, she replied “I don't know”. She is now stating that in fact the document was doctored on her instructions. This is a different explanation from what we had in committee.

Some hon. members: No.

Hon. Bob Rae: I am sorry, it is. I can show you the transcript, Mr. Speaker. It is a completely different explanation.

The minister has to explain how it would be that three signatures would appear on a document, all of which would appear to be agreeing with the “not” when, in fact, the minister is stating today that two of the officials did not agree with the decision she has made.

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in response to the comments of my friend from Toronto Centre, the minister has indicated that there was a “not” on the document. It was a way to agree but not to disagree, so she made that change. In the very best traditions of the House, her statement is strong, unequivocal and it speaks for itself.

• (1520)

The Speaker: I do not think it is the time for questions. In any event, the minister has made a statement to clarify the position. Obviously the committee still has the material before it or has been looking at the material. It could be pursued there or in question

period tomorrow. However, I think that is the appropriate thing to do if there are to be questions on this issue. Submissions on a point of order are one thing, but questions, in my view, are another.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am a bit confused. In terms of the minister's response, what is most critical in this statement is the funding that was serving some 5.4 million in Canadian aid in foreign countries.

The question is this. Mr. Speaker, you have admonished the minister for potentially misleading the House. She has just now not only reiterated that it was not her fault, that in fact the “not” that was put in and the signatures that were then placed on top of it was entirely her own doing.

In your ruling, Mr. Speaker, and in seeking for clarity in this place which we all require is that the minister be forthcoming. Yet today, again, we have an apology that is not an apology. We have an excuse that is not an excuse.

The Speaker: I would suggest the hon. member perhaps read it over. I think the minister did say that she instructed the “not” to be put there and then signed the document. The member can check her wording. I do not think a dispute like that is something the Speaker is going to settle.

I made no ruling that said there was a breach of privilege in this case. I said the contrary in my ruling. Hon. members can check out the words of the ruling.

The minister has offered some clarification, and I think it can be taken as that. If members have other questions about it, they can ask the questions either in the committee or in question period. I am sure the minister will answer.

I think that solves the matter for the moment.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

DISPOSITION OF ABOLITION OF EARLY PAROLE ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

The Speaker: When this matter was last before the House, the hon. member for Abbotsford had the floor. There are four minutes remaining in the time allotted for his remarks.

I therefore call upon the hon. member for Abbotsford.

Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, before question period, I was highlighting the many different initiatives our Conservative government had taken since 2006 to make our communities safer, such as bills that strengthen our justice system and efforts to put more police officers on the streets and the funding that is required for that.

I also talked about the bill before us regarding accelerated parole review and looking to eliminate because of serious concerns that Canadian citizens have expressed.

Government Orders

I have discussed the first difference between an accelerated parole review process and a regular parole review process. I would like to now talk about the other two. Let us look at the second major difference.

For most offenders, applying for parole means attending a parole review hearing in person. They must appear before the Parole Board and persuade it that they are ready to live in society as law-abiding citizens. It is quite different for white-collar and other non-violent offenders. That process involves only paperwork. The reviews are done on paper. There are no hearings for the individuals to attend. There is no need for offenders to plead their cases to officials face to face. Again, this is akin to a two-tiered system.

We are telling these offenders and all Canadians that fraud and white-collar crime really is not so bad, that stealing hundreds of thousands and, in some cases, millions of dollars from hard-working Canadians is not such a serious crime. This is unfair to victims. Canadians who have lost their retirement savings are telling us to make changes to the system. That is exactly what we are doing.

Finally, I come to the third key difference between an accelerated parole review and regular day parole. It is perhaps the most shocking one.

As I mentioned at the very beginning of my speech, under accelerated parole first-time offenders convicted of fraud can apply for day parole after serving just one-sixth of their sentence. They can then apply for full parole after serving only one-third of their sentence.

Allow me to do the math on this. Someone convicted of 12 years in prison for defrauding seniors, for example, can apply for day parole after serving only two years in jail. Canadians are shocked. Individuals and families who have lost their retirement savings, their nest eggs, cannot recoup those losses in only two years. In many cases, the loss can be a devastating blow that tears families and relationships apart. Two years later, they continue to struggle with the significant impact of the crime, while the offender is now able to apply for day parole.

How does this compare with the system currently in place for regular day parole? These offenders can only apply for day parole six months before they are eligible for full parole. This means they have to serve almost one-third of their sentence before they can even apply for day parole. It is only fair that non-violent white-collar offenders have to wait the same amount of time before applying for parole.

Therefore, by amending the Corrections and Conditional Release Act, we are recognizing the severity of white-collar and other non-violent crimes and ensuring that the Parole Board of Canada applies the same rules to all criminals. We are sending a message to those who plan to defraud Canadians out of their hard-earned money that they will face the same system of justice as everyone else.

It is time we abolish accelerated parole review and ensure that the time spent in prison fits the crime. That is what Canadians have asked us to do and we are delivering.

I call on my colleagues in the House to work together to ensure the swift passage of Bill C-59.

• (1525)

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the first question I have for the member is this. At the justice committee two years ago, why did the Conservatives not support the amendments we put forward to ensure that those who were large scale white-collar criminals would not have the accelerated parole review provision at their disposal?

Second, if he wants to close debate and have no discussion, what are the costs? How much will this cost? Could he give us those figures and, if not, how on earth can we be asked to vote blind?

Third, I agree we have to eliminate the accelerated parole review process for large scale fraudsters. However, the fact is all evidence has shown that for individuals who are first-time non-violent offenders the process helps with rehabilitation and actually makes communities safer. Given that, can the member demonstrate any evidence, and by “any” I mean of any kind, that shows eliminating it will actually make communities demonstrably safer? In fact, I can offer many examples of the exact opposite. Therefore, could he offer one scientific study, or one jurisdiction or one example where this has worked? I can give boatloads of evidence to the contrary.

Mr. Ed Fast: Mr. Speaker, the member has asked three different questions. I do not think we have time to answer all of them, but it bears noting he is a member of a party that has consistently preferred the rights of criminals over the rights of victims.

Time and time again, I listen to Liberal members talk on our criminal justice bills and virtually never do we hear the word “victim” used. This Conservative government is here to stand up for victims and to protect victims of crime.

The member suggested that somehow removing early parole makes communities safer. That is hogwash. When we incapacitate serious criminals such as the Earl Joneses of this world who want to defraud seniors of their life savings, when we take them out of our communities for longer periods of time, our communities are, by definition, safer.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the premise from the New Democrats' perspective is a bill designed to go after Mr. Jones, or Vincent Lacroix, or others. As we have done before in the Karla Homolka case, the House can design something to make sure that a specific thing does not happen such as Earl Jones getting out on early release or parole after serving one-sixth of the sentence that my colleague talked about.

The problem with the bill the government has presented today is the process it is using which is closure, shutting down debate. Any testimony or witnesses have been restricted dramatically. Also, this will affect more than 1,000 people a year and we do not know the effect that will have because the government has not supplied us with any information.

Government Orders

The New Democrats are interested in dealing with the government on the principle of the bill, removing early parole and early sentence release, but we have reservations about the process that is being used. Closure is the most dramatic procedure that can be used in the parliamentary system. The government is ramming the bill through, closing off debate, allowing no witnesses or testimony. Can my colleague understand that?

Can he understand why this is an abhorrent form of governance? This is the thing we fight against, which his party fought against before. There are many quotations from former Conservative-Alliance members criticizing the then Liberal government for using closure. I am sure my hon. colleague actually spoke against this very procedure being used in the House.

• (1530)

Mr. Ed Fast: Mr. Speaker, I do not believe Canadians will take any lessons from the NDP on how to protect communities and get tough on crime.

As chair of the justice committee, I can say that the New Democrats oppose our efforts to get tough on drug-related crimes. They oppose our efforts to get tough on sexual crimes against children. They oppose mandatory sentences on the most prolific and dangerous offenders in our communities.

This is an effort on the part of the NDP and the Liberals to delay this legislation, which would allow people like Earl Jones to get out on accelerated release. That is exactly why we want this legislation to pass now, not six months from now.

We are getting the job done. We are standing up for the victims of crime in Canada and our Conservative government will continue to seek new ways to protect Canadians against violent as well as non-violent crimes, including fraud.

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, particularly after the last intervention we should take a look at the history of this matter.

The reality is that more than two years ago at the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights Liberal members moved amendments that would see the accelerated parole review eliminated in cases where there was large-scale white collar crime. We would make sure it would be eliminated for large-scale fraudsters. We pushed for that two years ago. We said those changes were important and we were ignored.

Some long period of time later an omnibus bill dealing with a whole host of matters was brought forward to the Standing Committee on Public Safety. I have heard several times today Conservative members stand in their place and talk about how the public safety committee delayed the bill. Here is the truth. Government members had every opportunity to bring that bill forward, but they did not do that. In point of fact, when they were given the opportunity with more than half the days to advance the bills they wanted to, the bill never made their list. Never once in committee did Conservative members talk about the urgent and sudden need for the bill.

What changed? Mr. Lacroix was let out. Something that should have been dealt with a couple of years ago was not. Mr. Lacroix was released. The government was caught with its pants down by not

acting. Suddenly there was a flurry of interest. We had to fix it and we had to fix it now. No questions were to be asked. As a result of the government dropping the ball, it told us that the bill was to be passed overnight.

Good legislation is not written on the back of napkins. Good legislation is not rammed through in a few hours with little consideration to its outcome or impact. The decisions that we make in the House have profound and lasting implications not just on community safety, but also on the budgetary capacity of this country.

With respect to this bill, the notion that we would engage closure, that we would shut down debate when the government has refused to act for so long, is reprehensible.

To the Bloc Québécois members who say we have to do this right now because of Earl Jones, that we only have two months to act, I can tell them that Mr. Jones would not be eligible for these provisions until some years from now. These considerations are electoral and political. They are not in any way based on some urgent need to fix the situation with Mr. Jones.

I said we stand firm on the principle that for large-scale fraudsters these provisions should not be in place. But it is worth mentioning why this provision exists in the first place.

One of the reasons accelerated parole review was brought in was that it is so costly to look at the alternative. We have to remember that we are talking about first time, non-violent offenders.

According to Correctional Services Canada's data, in 2006-07 the cost on average of incarcerating somebody was \$93,000. The cost can range from about \$85,000 to a high of about \$160,000, but the median is \$93,000. The cost of conditional release is \$23,000. That is a difference of some \$70,000 a year per offender.

If we are going to toss out conditional release in these instances, we had better be pretty darned sure we are getting a good result, that we are appreciably making a difference in improving community safety.

Yet when we look at Correctional Services documents around why it says that accelerated parole review is actually needed it says:

The intent of Accelerated parole review is to provide for formal recognition in law that non-violent and violent offenders should not be subject to the same conditional release process.

It also states:

The main focus of APR was to address public safety and reintegration. It was designed to ensure that lower risk offenders were released at the earliest possible date in their sentence to allow the Correctional Service and the National Parole Board additional time for dealing with more serious offenders.

Studies have shown there is a tendency for low risk offenders to be negatively impacted by the prison experience. In other words, changing this would not only cost more than \$70,000 for every inmate but, according to Correctional Services Canada and according to all data I have been able to see on this, for first time non-violent offenders, incarceration is the worst place to go for protracted periods of time.

Government Orders

• (1535)

We would end up putting a minor criminal who has had that first interaction with the law in for a protracted period of incarceration and turn out a major criminal. We are turning our prisons into crime factories.

If this were some debate in the abstract, some debate where we were debating philosophical differences, unsure of the outcomes of what we were talking about, this difference could be intellectually tolerated. In point of fact, this plan has been tried before. I am going to come to that point in a minute, but before I do want to look at some of the other ways.

It is really interesting that the government has invoked closure on a motion to ram the bill through when there are so many other elements dealing with white collar crime that it refuses to act upon. Not only did it refuse two years ago to act on our move to end it when it came to serious white collar crime, but it made cuts to the RCMP task force on white collar crime.

I had interviews today about cuts that have been made to the national police service, in general. At the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security, we recently made improvements to the sex offender registry. Yet, we find now that the federal government is throwing more of the burden of funding things such as the national sex offender registry and funding for the RCMP task force on white collar crime to the RCMP, so that the RCMP is having to cut from its services to make up from the shortfall and cuts that are being made by the federal government.

The government is waving around a big stick, saying how tough it is by moving a bill like this one, and at the same time, it is cutting things that actually stop these crimes from happening. How crazy is that? Basically, this is a government that is slashing from the things that stop the crimes, slashing from the things that stop there being victims in the first place and then loading it all up on the back end, throwing them all in jail and allowing the problem to get worse.

This is what is so offensive about the Conservatives standing and saying that the different opposition parties do not talk enough about victims. Do they not realize that if we had less crime, we would have fewer victims? I did not think that was something that we had to spell out or put on paper. Is there not an understanding that if we invest in things like prevention, or if we invest in the RCMP white collar task force on crime, or if we invest in the things that actually stop crimes before they happen, we have fewer victims?

Let us think about this. If we have fewer people in prison, we ultimately have a safer society because there are fewer criminals, and fewer criminals mean less crime.

What I find particularly concerning about this is that there is another bill that we have been dealing with for a long time, on lawful access. The House has been saying for years that we need to modernize our laws to allow law enforcement agencies to go after criminals who are conducting business through electronic media. Technology has changed dramatically but our legislation has not. Police officers have been begging for these tools. Yet, bill after bill gets killed by prorogation, by election, and it continues to languish here—

Mr. Lee Richardson: By the Liberals.

Mr. Mark Holland: Somebody said, “by the Liberals”. I would ask the member to take a look at it because we have been begging for this bill to come forward. It was a prorogation by the Conservatives that killed it not once, but twice. We have now been waiting for over a year for that bill to come back.

Police beg for those tools that are important to go after large-scale fraud and other crimes committed online, yet no priority is assigned to that whatsoever.

One of the most fundamental things in a bill, particularly when we are asked to vote on it on the spot, overnight, at lightning speed, is what is the cost? What is the financial implication of the bill before us?

It would shock Canadians to know that the House is being asked to vote on a bill that has had no cost analysis done on it whatsoever.

The Conservatives say not to worry about the cost, that it is manageable, that we should just trust them.

I remember when the House was told that before on a crime bill. I remember the minister standing in his place, talking about the fact that a bill was going to cost \$90 million. That was the two-for-one remand credit. The House was told that over a five-year period the cost would be about \$90 million.

That did not sound right to me. I called the Parliamentary Budget Officer and after conversations, I made a formal request for the real costs to be analyzed.

• (1540)

When the Parliamentary Budget Officer agreed to do a study on the costs of not only that bill but the overall crime agenda, suddenly the minister said that he had made a mistake, that the cost was not \$90 million but \$2 billion. That is not a little wrong, that is a universe wrong. However, after eight months of blocking him from getting information and not releasing data, the cost was not \$2 billion but \$10 billion to \$13 billion.

We could just keep ramming these bills through and not think about them. The net result would be exactly what happened to California, a state that is nearly bankrupt, that has no money for health care, education or infrastructure and is ravaged by the impacts of these policies.

We cannot ask Parliament to vote with a blindfold on. We cannot tell Parliament to swallow whatever bill is thrown in front of it because there are some lines we want to use or some politics we want to play. If we are going to make intelligent decisions as a House, we need to have real and honest information.

That brings me to the second point. The Conservatives say that there is no cost that is too great, that it does not matter how much it costs, that we need to vote for it because it will make us safer. All evidence says the opposite. This stuff does not make us safer. In point of fact, it makes us much less safe.

Government Orders

If we look at statistics on rehabilitation, and we are again talking about first-time non-violent offenders, all statistics from anywhere in the world tell us that things like conditional release lead to lower reoffending rates. So that I can do the math for Conservatives who will stand and attack me for not talking about victims, lower reoffending rates mean less victims, lower reoffending rates mean less crime, lower reoffending rates mean there is less victimization. We can play games with it but the point we are driving at is that we want a safer society, one where there are less victims and less victimization.

Again, I am not talking about Earl Jones. We have already agreed that for large scale fraudsters this should be off the table. That was proposed two years ago, if members will remember. What we are talking about is for the more minor offenders. The path to ensuring they do not reoffend and that they get back on track as good taxpaying citizens who contribute to their communities and societies does not occur through long periods of incarceration.

Let us look at some real world examples. Let us take a look at the father of this whole prison punishment agenda, Newt Gingrich. He gave birth to this particular philosophy and agenda. What is he saying now? In an article in *The Washington Post* dated January 7, 2011, he states:

There is an urgent need to address the astronomical growth in the prison population, with its huge costs in dollars and lost human potential. We spent \$68 billion in 2010 on corrections - 300 per cent more than 25 years ago. The prison population is growing 13 times faster than the general population. These facts should trouble every American.

Our prisons might be worth the current cost if the recidivism rate were not so high, but, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, half of the prisoners released this year are expected to be back in prison within three years. If our prison policies are failing half of the time, and we know that there are more humane, effective alternatives, it is time to fundamentally rethink how we treat and rehabilitate our prisoners.

We can no longer afford business as usual with prisons. The criminal justice system is broken....

Mr. Gingrich goes on to say:

Some people attribute the nation's recent drop in crime to more people being locked up. But the facts show otherwise. While crime fell in nearly every state over the past seven years, some of those with the largest reductions in crime have also lowered their prison population. Compare Florida and New York. Over the past seven years, Florida's incarceration rate has increased 16 per cent, while New York's decreased 16 per cent. Yet the crime rate in New York has fallen twice as much as Florida's. Put another way, although New York spent less on its prisons, it delivered better public safety.

● (1545)

As stewards of the nation's dollars and as stewards of public safety more broadly, is that not the objective? Are we in this House not charged with facilitating public safety and to do it in the most cost effective, intelligent way possible?

We all agree on this. I cannot out-punish the Conservatives but if we take that logic to its ultimate conclusion, where does it go? The Conservatives stand in the House and say that they are tougher and harder. Keep taking it out and where does it go? Where does it end? Punishment should not be at the heart of our agenda. What should be at the heart of our agenda is public safety, effective public policy and wise and prudent use of public dollars.

In the United Kingdom it is the Conservatives who are now undoing this type of punishment, this backward agenda that I have

been talking about. In the United Kingdom I recently met with a delegation that came over to study Canada's low crime rate and, simultaneously, low incarceration rate. They were here to emulate that. They saw it as something to look to like a beacon to copy and emulate. When they got here they were shocked when they found out that we were tossing it all in the garbage and that we were chasing the very thing they were trying to run away from.

One of the people in the delegation said to me, "My God. Do not do it. It is so hard to undo". As the United Kingdom now tries to undo that, it is finding enormous difficulty reversing the course because once all of those new prisons are built and all of those new costs borne, the cost of providing effective programming and effective rehabilitation is very low. Instead of focusing it on violent offenders and using incarceration to protect society, there is now a catch-all with prisons that are overflowing and bursting at the seams, situations like that of California where the Supreme Court of California had to release 4,000 inmates onto the street because there was no more room for them. Everybody is tossed into a giant pot with no money to make them better and with populations ever-growing because it feeds itself like a giant beast. In fact, in California it has seen the rate of recidivism now cross over 70%. Is this what we want to emulate?

We can look at states like Texas that is now reversing these policies. We have to scratch our heads and wonder why Canada, alone in the world, is chasing after this Californian disaster. Why, when the rest of the world has recognized that it does not work, do we keep running after it at full pace, with abandon, without asking any questions? Why are we moving things like closure motions to say how dare we even have a debate about what is best or how we best move forward, where debate, instead of being an honest exchange of ideas where we say that we are concerned with people like Earl Jones and we do not want him to get an early pardon, how do we achieve that mutually and in a bipartisan way? Instead, that debate of honest concerns about the bill, honest desire to have dialogue, is made farcical.

We are attacked as if somehow we want to release Earl Jones, even though we do not. I have come to the conclusion that the desire is not for good legislation. The desire is to play politics. It is almost as if there is a nascent desire on the part of the other side, hoping that we will vote against it because there are so many egregious problems within the bill. They hope to create some kind of political caricature instead of actually addressing the major issues that are important and where there lies common ground.

Government Orders

Soon this bill will have the opportunity to go before committee. I implore members of the Bloc Québécois, who have been deliberate and largely intelligent and thoughtful on these bills, to take a moment to think about what is being passed and to join with us in saying that amendments probably will be necessary to be sure that we do not ensnare a whole bunch of other people who are not intended in this process, but to go after a problem that is legitimate and does need to be fixed.

It is not us saying this. It is not the rest of the world recalling a disaster. Even here in Canada, churches from coast to coast have united in condemning these types of bills.

• (1550)

Health care providers have come forward and have unanimously condemned these bills. People on the front lines of rehabilitation who actually making people better are asking not to do this.

The bottom line is that we cannot vote in the dark. We should not be forced to vote for things that we already know will not work. Where there is consensus, let us be honest about the consensus and focus the debate on real differences.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Madam Speaker, in the earlier part of his speech, the previous speaker said something about differentiating between major crimes and minor crimes and not putting people who are so-called guilty of minor crimes in prison with the people who commit major crimes.

Does the member not consider people who lose their entire life savings to be victims of a very major crime?

Mr. Mark Holland: Madam Speaker, if the member had listened to my comments, he would have heard yes, absolutely, which is why two years ago we said that we must fix this, that we must end it.

For people, like Mr. Jones, who are large scale fraudsters, let us end this. We have been pre-eminently clear on this point for several years now, ever since it was first raised as a concern. I think our biggest concern is that it has taken this long to actually address it.

My problem is that I was reading about other criminals. I was reading from a Correctional Service Canada document that was talking about the implications and importance of the accelerated parole review for first-time non-violent offenders. For the member's edification, I will re-read the particular quote. It reads, "The main focus of APR was to address public safety and reintegration" by enabling Correctional Service Canada and the National Parole Board to focus their attention on dangerous offenders at a high risk of re-offending. Studies have shown that there is a tendency for low risk offenders to be negatively impacted by the prison experience.

Therefore, for large-scale offenders, absolutely. For others, where all evidence shows us that in fact longer periods of incarceration do nothing other than create more crime and less safe communities, no.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Madam Speaker, the Liberal member who just spoke always defends his opinions very fervently. He is often very convincing but, this time, he has convinced me of the Liberal Party's inconsistency on this issue.

In September 2009, the Bloc Québécois introduced Bill C-434 on the abolition of automatic parole after one-sixth of a sentence is served. We asked for the unanimous consent of the House. The Liberals and the NDP supported us but the Conservatives did not. We reiterated this request on March 4, 2010. Once again, the Liberals and the NDP supported our request but the Conservatives did not.

Now, just when we have managed to convince the Conservatives, all of a sudden, the other two parties have done an about-face for all sorts of reasons. The hon. member has presented arguments. He said that it will cost a lot of money to keep certain people in prison. Why were these arguments not discussed in the House when we asked for unanimous consent and obtained their support?

Everyone agrees that we must abolish automatic parole after one-sixth of a sentence is served; however, for reasons I do not understand, things have changed. I would like the hon. member to explain to me why, all of a sudden, they no longer agree with this.

• (1555)

Mr. Mark Holland: Madam Speaker, first of all, if the Bloc Québécois wants to work with the Liberal Party, it needs to talk to us. The discussions between the Conservative Party and the Bloc Québécois were held in secret. The Liberal Party did not have a chance to talk to the Bloc Québécois. If we had had the chance to do so, I would have certainly said that it is very important to resolve issues like the cases of Vincent Lacroix and Earl Jones, who committed very serious crimes. It is clear that there is a consensus there.

However, I would like to point out that there are a number of people who commit less serious crimes and we must therefore keep the existing process and ensure that our rehabilitation system is working properly. They should work with us and if there are things that are not working properly, the bill can be amended in committee.

[*English*]

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Madam Speaker, the argument of the Conservatives to this point is that there is a great need for urgency. This is why they are doing this super closure motion that denies all debate. It does not allow parliamentarians to do the very thing we are in the House to do, which is to scrutinize laws and try to understand their implications.

When we have asked government members for evidence on costing, on how many criminals we are talking about and who they are, they come back with PMO spin lines, which is not very much of a debate at all.

The other argument is the government blames the opposition for any delays that may have happened. However, the bill was killed twice at the government's own hands. Every time it kills it, it adds another 6, 12, 18 months to the whole process. Yet the government pretends that those prorogations, that shutting down and locking of the doors of Parliament, never happened. On the argument of urgency, obviously this was not urgent for the government because it killed it twice.

Government Orders

The argument of efficacy is that this will do something to better Canadians and stop the Earl Joneses of the world. It is too late to stop Lacroix because he has already been released. The Conservatives say that the effectiveness of this bill will somehow be everything that Canadians need with respect to white-collar crime.

On both of those arguments, we have asked the government members time and again to give us some shred of evidence that the urgency is needed now, that we must ram this through without debate, or that when this does come into law, it will actually do what the government promises to do.

My colleague sits on the committee. Has evidence been brought forward that proves this must happen now? If the bill does come into law, because of the new coalition arrangement between the Bloc and the Conservatives, will it somehow stop the Earl Joneses of the future from doing what he did to our pensioners?

Mr. Mark Holland: Madam Speaker, the hon. member's questions are extremely important questions.

The reality is the Bloc and Conservative members went off to negotiate and conjured up some deal that did not include the rest of the parties. They then stormed out the doors and said that the bill needed to be passed now, that there was no time to think, just ram it through and off we go. This is particularly curious, given the fact that there has been a long-standing debate on this.

One of the Bloc members quite rightfully pointed out that the House had dealt with the issue before. Many times it was brought up by us, including at committee, to try to stop people like Mr. Lacroix from getting out.

As I said earlier, the truth is the Conservatives were caught with their pants down. They did not fix this. They did not listen to recommendations made in justice committee or in the House to shut down these provisions for large scale fraudsters. Now they are embarrassed by it and are trying to ram something through overnight. This is about politics. The idea we have to do this overnight is a sudden urgency that has appeared out of nowhere.

As I have said, the bill has been languishing without the government making any effort to push it forward until the Lacroix case came forth.

What I find particularly disturbing is this. I hope at some point in the debate a member from the Conservatives will say something other than he or she is too busy to answer questions.

We want to know some very basic stuff. First, how much will this cost? Give us the breakdown and show us an analysis of where those costs come from. Second, from a perspective of rehabilitation, show us an analysis that the government has done that shows how this will demonstrably improve public safety. If it cannot do either of those, then perhaps it is time for it to consider how fast it is trying to move the bill.

•(1600)

Mr. Andrew Kania (Brampton West, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for standing up for recent analysis and reasonable criminal justice legislation. He is the subject matter of personal attacks almost every day in the House of Commons because the government refuses to answer in a logical and lucid manner.

I would like to ask him about Bill C-21. In the justice committee last fall, Liberal amendments were put forward that if passed and accepted, would have eliminated the one-sixth accelerated parole review. In fact, Mr. Lacroix would not have been released if the Conservatives and the Bloc had not voted to defeat those amendments. The fact is both parties are arguing for closure today for Bill C-59, which only went through first reading on February 9, Would my colleague to comment upon that logic and consistency?

Mr. Mark Holland: Madam Speaker, the hon. member is absolutely right. We need honesty in this debate. If there was an honest interest in blocking someone like Earl Jones from getting access to accelerated parole, after we introduced the idea two years ago, the Conservatives could have come to us and said that they agreed with us and that we should try to make it happen. We would have said "of course".

However, the Conservatives did not choose that course of action. They decided to go to the Bloc Québécois. Instead of getting rid of it for the cases they are talking about, they are getting rid of it in every instance. Therefore, we are now put into this situation where Bloc members are adopting something I am not even sure they have fully thought out. Perhaps they have been duped by the Conservatives.

This needs a bit more time than it is being afforded in the House today.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to join in the debate today and to support the motion before us. I am splitting my time with the member for Brant.

I listened with great interest to the comments of several of our hon. members and I appreciate this opportunity to set the record straight on a number of fronts. Some of our colleagues today suggest that the motion before us is somehow not in the best interest of a free and open debate. The implication is that our government is not listening to Canadians, that we are just moving forward without time to hear what people are telling us.

That is patently false. Canadians have spoken loud and clear since our government was first elected, and our government is listening. Canadians have told us that they want us to take action to keep our streets and our communities safe. Our government has delivered on our commitment to build safer communities in a number of different ways.

Canadians have told us that they want us to work together to get tough on crime. Again, our government has listened and we have introduced and passed a wide range of bills to deliver on our commitment to get tough on crime.

Canadians have told us that they want a justice system that will work the way it should. Again, our government is taking action to ensure that it does. That includes keeping dangerous offenders behind bars, not releasing them into the streets automatically before they are ready. That is why we have introduced new laws to end early parole for offences of murder and to prevent potentially dangerous offenders from serving their sentences in their homes.

Government Orders

Previously, there was a practice for offenders to be granted extra credit for the length of their sentences for time they had served before or during their trial. That was not acceptable to many Canadians, and our government is listening. That is why we have delivered legislation that limits credit for time served in pre-sentence custody.

We have also introduced legislation to tackle property crime, including the serious crimes of auto theft and trafficking in property obtained by crime. I am proud to note that our government has passed legislation to help reform the pardon system. In particular, we have ensured that the Parole Board of Canada has the discretion it needs to determine whether granting a pardon would bring the administration of justice into disrepute.

In addition, our government has passed legislation to strengthen the National Sex Offender Registry and the National DNA Data Bank so all sex offenders are registered. After all, our government has taken significant action that achieves results in tackling crime in our communities, and we will continue to do more.

We are doing more because that is what Canadians have told us they need. They want a government that listens. Our government has. They want a government that takes decisive action. Our government has done just that, and that is what we are doing again today.

We have heard for several years that many Canadians want to do away with the current system of accelerated parole review. We have heard it from victims of crime and other white-collar crimes, many of whom have seen their entire life savings disappear in the blink of an eye. Many Canadians are outraged that fraudsters, con artists and swindlers can be reviewed for parole after serving just one-sixth of their sentence. Many Canadians ask why offenders should be treated differently from others just because they use a balance sheet rather than a gun as a weapon.

Canadians want answers. They want us to listen and, most of all, they want us to take action today. They do not want us to take action next year. They do not want us to delay taking action. The truth is all of us know what needs to be done. Canadians want results, and again, our government is listening and taking action. Bill C-59 is all about that. It is about standing up for victims, and that includes victims of white-collar crimes and fraud.

Today, someone who commits fraud, in other words, someone who preys on hard-working, law-abiding Canadians and perhaps swindles their life savings from them is treated differently from other offenders. These offenders receive what sounds like a stiff sentence, but the sentence does not always reflect the amount of time an offender will actually spend in prison.

Today, a white-collar criminal might receive a sentence of 12 years, or perhaps in some cases more, but the reality is many are released on parole before other offenders who might receive a similar sentence.

●(1605)

Unlike other offenders who are generally eligible for day parole six months before full parole, white-collar or non-violent criminals can be free just after a few months in some cases. The general rule of thumb is they can access a process called accelerated parole review

after serving one-sixth of their sentence and full parole after one-third of their sentence.

What makes the review process expedited is that these accelerated parole reviews are accomplished through a paper review by the National Parole Board of Canada, whereas regular parole reviews are normally done by way of a hearing in person. The test for accelerated parole review is also lower.

The National Parole Board of Canada only has to have reasonable grounds to believe that the offender will not commit a violent offence, whereas with other offenders the test is whether the person is an undue risk to commit any type of crime upon release.

The bottom line is that the parole board, when dealing with these cases, has limited discretion. The test is whether someone is going to commit a violent offence.

Even if the parole board believes someone will commit another fraud, the board is still compelled to release that individual under supervision at one-sixth of the sentence. That means in many cases people who are convicted of crimes that have had devastating effects on the lives and livelihood of Canadians often spend very little in prison.

The end result is that offenders convicted of white-collar crimes are often released under supervision after a few months. Fraudsters are given lengthy sentences, but these sentences do not result in much time spent in prison.

No wonder Canadians' faith in the justice and corrections system is shaken. No wonder they want change. That is what our government is doing today.

Bill C-59 would abolish accelerated parole review and repeal sections of the Corrections and Conditional Release Act that govern the accelerated parole review regime.

It will mean that offenders who commit non-violent or white-collar crimes are put on the same footing as other offenders. They will be eligible for regular day parole review six months prior to full parole eligibility and full parole review after serving one-third their sentence.

Rather than being subject to a paper review, they will be subject to an in-person hearing. The test as to whether he or she should be released will be whether that individual presents an unmanageable risk of committing another crime.

Government Orders

The changes which our government is proposing will mean that Canadians can have faith that offenders convicted of white-collar crimes will not escape full accountability for their actions. These changes will mean that Canadians can have faith that their voices are being heard and that our government is taking action to deliver on our commitments.

I am therefore very proud to support the motion before us today so all of us can ensure that Bill C-59 receives the expeditious passage for which Canadians have called.

• (1610)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the member's speech at second reading, but we have not reached that stage yet. We are dealing with a procedural motion on the bill, which would close down debate and prescribes that we will not spend very much time debating the bill.

The member is probably aware that finance committee has asked for a costing of the various justice bills and that request has been denied on the basis that it constitutes cabinet confidence, that it is a state secret.

Would the member care to explain to the House and to Canadians why information about the impact of a piece of legislation in this place will not be available to members of Parliament so we can make good laws and wise decisions?

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Madam Speaker, it is interesting to note that whenever colleagues across the way are opposed to some action, they will always find a reason to throw up obstacle after obstacle.

In this debate, we need to get to the heart of what we are trying to accomplish. We are trying to reintroduce a measure of accountability and responsibility on the part of those who have been sentenced. Before individuals automatically become eligible for parole, they will have to show some evidence that the right has been earned. There has to be some evidence of an offender's participation in a rehabilitative program, evidence that he or she has the actual desire for change so when released, he or she will not simply re-enter society and perhaps victimize others.

We agree that white-collar crime is not a violent crime in the sense that there is physical injury. However, one cannot argue that when seniors lose their life savings to one of these people it is incumbent upon the Government of Canada to stand up and protect those victims. The best way to protect them is to not allow that person out so they can continue their schemes.

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Madam Speaker, I ask this question of the member because I know he is a thoughtful person.

I have sat through a number of debates in this House where we have moved aggressively to make it rougher and tougher for people who come in conflict with the law. We buy into an approach to criminal justice that has been tried in other jurisdictions and found to be wanting.

A police friend from Los Angeles told me how gangs are dealt with there. They tried the tough on crime approach, of giving people longer sentences, not allowing for parole and probation, that kind of thing. He found that it made the situation worse.

Would the member share with me why we would be moving with such haste on a subject on which perhaps we should be talking about what is better for the whole of society? Where do healing and reconciliation come into his scheme of things? Does he not think we should be spending more time thinking about that and looking at ways where that might be the end result? He and I know that when healing, forgiveness and reconciliation happen, we are all better for it, including the perpetrator and the victim.

• (1615)

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Madam Speaker, I accept that question in the spirit in which it was asked.

On this side of the House we are very concerned about a balanced justice system, one that, yes, does consider preventive measures. We have invested millions of dollars on prevention schemes, such as drug prevention programs, and so on.

We also are very concerned about rehabilitation. To say that keeping someone in prison is a harsh message of punishment I think misses the point. All along our members have been arguing that what we are asking for is protection for victims and potential victims. There is a huge difference between punishment and simply keeping that potential offender away from the possibility of reoffending.

Personally, I am all for forgiveness and as an individual, I can do that. However, these people have a debt to pay to society, in terms of not being reintroduced to society until, as the material suggests, they have given evidence that they want to change and that they are actually participating in a rehabilitation program to ensure that kind of change occurs.

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brant, CPC): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to rise today in support of the motion which will help ensure that we pass Bill C-59, An Act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act into law in the most timely way possible.

Accelerated parole review has been a topic of discussion and debate both here and in the public, including the media, for some time now. We have all heard the heart-wrenching stories about how hard-working Canadians have been deceived into voluntarily handing over their life savings and how their lives, and ultimately their futures, have been destroyed by the white collar criminals who defrauded them.

Canadians have told us that they want action on crime. They want the punishment to fit the crime. They also want to ensure that the rights of offenders are balanced with the rights of victims and law-abiding citizens. The bill would do just that. This legislation would ensure that white collar offenders are held accountable for their crimes and would increase justice for victims by providing tougher sentences for those responsible.

Just a few years ago fraud was considered by many to be a faceless crime as it was seen typically to be committed against big business and multinational corporations. Today, however, victims of fraud are coming forward to tell their stories about how their lives have been changed forever. These individuals and groups are working hard to protect others from suffering the same loss of financial security and confidence that they have endured.

Government Orders

Fraud comes in many forms, including securities-related frauds, such as Ponzi schemes, and mortgage and real estate fraud. In all cases, it involves deception as well as dishonest conduct that deprives the other person of his or her property or puts his or her property at risk.

Fraud can have a devastating impact on the lives of victims, including loss of life savings and feelings of humiliation for having been duped into voluntarily handing over their property or their finances. For many victims of fraud, their lives will never be the same. The crime has damaged them not only financially, but emotionally.

Currently, as hon. members know, offenders convicted of non-violent offences can apply for day parole at one-sixth of their sentence and full parole at one-third of their sentence through an expedited process called accelerated parole review. This can only occur if the Parole Board of Canada is satisfied that there are no reasonable grounds to believe that the offender, if released, is likely to commit an offence involving violence before the expiration of his or her sentence. This means an offender convicted of a serious white collar crime, for example, could be eligible for this type of early release.

Bill C-59 is an opportunity for all of us to change the current system and to stand up for Canadians who have been victimized through this type of crime. Standing up for victims of crime is, and always has been, at the forefront of this government's public safety and justice agenda.

The Government of Canada is committed to supporting victims of crime and to ensuring that victims have a greater voice in the criminal justice system. As a demonstration of this commitment, the government has contributed \$52 million over four years to enhance the federal victims strategy. This will go a long way to better meet the needs of victims.

Furthermore, in 2007, the federal government created the Office of the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime, an independent resource for victims in Canada. This office was created to ensure that the federal government meets its obligations to the victims of crime.

Additionally, the Policy Centre for Victim Issues at the Department of Justice works with other federal government agencies, as well as provincial and territorial governments, to help victims and their families understand their role in the criminal justice system and the laws, services and assistance available to them.

•(1620)

The National Office for Victims, which is within the Department of Public Safety, is a single national point of contact for victims who have concerns about offenders and questions about the federal correctional system and the Canadian justice system. This is a starting place for them to ask their questions and get them answered.

The National Office for Victims is a central resource that offers vital information to victims through a toll-free line which victims or members of the general public may call free of charge from anywhere in Canada or the United States. The office also provides input on policy and legislative initiatives, education about victims' issues for members of the criminal justice system, and networking

and support for the Correctional Service of Canada and the Parole Board of Canada.

We are also helping victims get the information and services they need online through a victim services directory, which is housed at the Department of Justice. Through this directory, victims and service providers are able to locate the necessary services and organizations they may require in their area. Through these services, this government sincerely wishes to lighten the load of Canadians who have been victimized by providing valuable information and resources that are only a click or phone call away.

We are also cracking down on crime and have introduced numerous pieces of legislation to support our agenda. Furthermore, this government has passed legislation to help combat identity theft and identity fraud which has been identified as a fast-growing problem throughout North America.

We have also introduced legislation that would ensure victims can have a voice at Parole Board of Canada hearings, while ensuring that offenders cannot withdraw their parole applications 14 days or less before a hearing date. Victims of crime have called on this government for changes to the current system and our government has delivered. Bill C-59 would only further build on and strengthen our history of standing up for Canadians who have been victimized.

Many victims of white collar crimes and fraud in particular are shocked and appalled to discover that the individuals who commit these types of crimes can be eligible for supervised release into the community shortly after they are sentenced. Unless the Parole Board of Canada has reason to believe offenders will commit violent acts if released, it must release them into the community under conditions. This means that offenders convicted of serious white collar crimes can be eligible for this type of early release.

As it stands, an offender sentenced to 12 years could be released into the community on day parole in just two years and fully paroled in four years. Is justice being served to Canadians who have been victims of this type of crime? The answer is simply no.

Canadians lose faith in the criminal justice system when they feel that the punishment does not fit the crime. Canadians must believe that our justice and corrections systems are working for them. That is why our government has made the rights of victims and the protection of society our priority. That is why we have introduced Bill C-59.

Bill C-59 would abolish the current system of accelerated parole review whereby offenders who commit non-violent crimes such as fraud can be released on day parole after serving as little as one-sixth of their sentence. Under the proposed legislation, offenders who commit fraud and other white collar crimes would be eligible for regular day parole at the earliest six months prior to full parole eligibility. Through this legislation, this government is sending a strong message to white collar offenders that if they commit the crime, they have to face the consequences of the law.

Government Orders

Canadians have spoken and we are listening. Above all, Canadians want us to work together to take immediate action to ensure that the changes our government is proposing are passed into law. This would mean victims of fraud and other white collar crimes could in fact see that justice is served. I call on all hon. members to support the bill before us today and to work together to ensure Bill C-59 receives speedy passage.

• (1625)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the arguments are becoming clear. A number of examples have been given of other jurisdictions which have increased the time served by those who commit non-violent crimes and the evidence appears to be that the recidivism rate actually goes up. In Florida that is the case. In New York it was the reverse. The time in prison was lowered and the recidivism rate went down.

I wonder if the member could assist the House by providing the basis for saying that keeping people in jail longer is going to protect people, when in fact the expectation, based on hard evidence, is that the reoffending rate is going to go up.

Mr. Phil McColeman: Madam Speaker, I thank the member for his observations on this. However, they are blatantly incorrect.

They are incorrect because they are like comparing apples and oranges. The member is not taking into consideration the things that are available to people for their rehabilitation, or if they took advantage of those things when they spent time in jail.

Our government is standing up for victims. It is clear and obvious that his party, and those across the way, have determined that it is more expedient perhaps, as they have been talking about, to save money here and to bring up statistics that are, as I said, not comparable.

We have studied and gone across Canada with the public safety committee looking at our system, and we have been looking at international systems. They differ.

The member's argument today is blatantly false.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Madam Speaker, on both the process and the product that we are discussing here today, the product being this bill before us, it is incumbent upon the government to come with some evidence that this is actually the right course. That goes back to the process, which I hope is one that the government is not in love with.

I say this because the government is using closure. When the members now sitting on the government benches were in opposition, they railed against closure. I remember it clearly. When the Liberals were in power, they grew very addicted to this process, invoking closure 80 or 90 times in one session. Members who were then with the Conservatives or Alliance railed against this because it was fundamentally undemocratic to shut down debate, to say we do not need to hear witnesses.

I am sure we can recall the passionate and vibrant speeches by some members sitting here today, saying that it was not right for a government to do that. If a government believes that something it is presenting is good for the country and makes sense, and if it has some kind of statistics, some sort of evidence, to back it up, then the

process that we have established in parliamentary democracies allows for that and for the government to make its case.

The fact is that on this particular bill, the government, by its own hand, has killed twice, not once but twice, thereby delaying the process.

My question to my colleague is very simple. Does the government feel comfortable with the process that it has chosen, essentially a deal with the Bloc Québécois in this instance, with no public disclosure at all, but just done over the weekend? Is it going to be a pattern for the government when pushing its agenda forward to have no evidence and to use backroom dealing?

• (1630)

Mr. Phil McColeman: Madam Speaker, our government looks at our legislation and knows inherently, in talking to Canadians who are the victims of this type of white collar crime, that it is the right thing to do not to allow someone convicted of defrauding people to be able to serve one-sixth of their sentence.

I personally know some people in my community who have been defrauded by others who have committed white collar crimes, people who have lost their life savings. When we talk about how much more evidence we need, I would mention the example in the speech of a person who was convicted for 12 years and yet was back out on the street within two years.

We agree that rehabilitation is required, but that is not justice for the victims.

We know inherently that this legislation is what Canadians want and what Canadians feel is the penalty to fit the crime.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am sure it is no surprise to hear that the Bloc Québécois will be supporting this government motion.

I am pleased to be speaking in the House today to share our reasons for supporting this motion to limit the time set aside for the consideration of Bill C-59 at various stages. As we all know, this bill would eliminate accelerated parole review or, in other words, eliminate automatic parole for a non-violent offender after one-sixth of the sentence has been served.

I must say that I am extremely proud to be a Bloc member of Parliament and to be part of a political party that puts the interests of Quebecers above all else. We listen to what Quebecers have to say about each and every aspect of their lives. Not only do we listen to them, but we also speak for them here in the House. Today we are speaking on behalf of Quebec's small investors, people who have been victims of white collar crime. We are also speaking for the seniors who have been tricked by these kinds of fraudsters, not all of whom are necessarily like Vincent Lacroix and Earl Jones. We are speaking for all these people so that they can be heard today in the House.

This debate has shown once again that neither Quebec nor the rest of Canada can count on the Liberals or the NDP. But before I get into why it is important to pass Bill C-59 as quickly as possible, I would like to give a little bit of history.

Government Orders

I find this situation very ironic, since twice, on September 14, 2009, and March 3, 2010, the Conservative government refused to support the fast-tracking of the Bloc's Bill C-434, which had the exact same purpose as Bill C-59: to abolish accelerated parole review. At the time, the Liberals and the NDP were not at all opposed to fast-tracking our bill. They supported us twice. Last Thursday, in good faith, I asked for the unanimous consent of the House to fast-track the government's bill, but the NDP and the Liberals refused. That is odd. Now, these two parties want to slow down the process and could bring about the release of a number of fraudsters, not just Earl Jones, who have destroyed entire lives in Quebec and all over Canada. Once we start the debate on Bill C-59, I will give examples from several ridings.

They say that they want to spend more time looking at the bill, but that is odd because they had no problem with passing it quickly in September 2009 and March 2010. I think that they are simply opposing the motion for the sake of opposing it. They have decided to play petty partisan politics at the expense of the victims, and that is not something I say often. All they want is to stall things. It is not a matter of democracy. Earlier we heard them say that they felt that their right to speak was being trampled on, that they were not being allowed to debate and hold committee meetings to talk endlessly about something they had strangely already agreed to in September 2009 and March 2010, without any debate and without asking any questions about the costs, as the Liberal critic was doing earlier. It is as though, in this case, all that the NDP and the Liberals want to do is to childishly annoy the government.

• (1635)

If they want to annoy the government, then they can go right ahead, but not at others' expense.

This is an extremely serious issue, and the attitude of these two parties is irresponsible and despicable. In his speech, the Liberal public safety critic said he was disappointed that the government did not consult the Liberals. That is so childish. They are annoyed that the government consulted the Bloc and not them. That level of childishness is not even found in the schoolyard.

Even though the Conservative MPs and their government introduced this bill and are now supporting the abolition of parole after one-sixth of a sentence, which is more than necessary for justice in Quebec and in Canada, they are responsible for the early release of economic predator Vincent Lacroix. They twice refused, once in September 2009 and once in March 2010, to support a unanimous vote to fast-track the Bloc's bill. The early release of Vincent Lacroix goes completely against the idea of public safety and damages the credibility of our justice system, where a 13-year sentence can turn into 15 months of incarceration.

Through blind partisanship—it is nothing more than that—the Conservatives have contributed to the release of Vincent Lacroix. If we leave it up to the Liberals and the NDP—I am glad we can join forces for a majority and prevent this from happening—then in December it will be the turn of Earl Jones and all those who have not been in the media but have stolen thousands and millions of dollars from people who saved their whole lives only to end up with nothing. It is not just money that vanishes, but entire lives. There are people who lose their homes and the financial cushion that allows

them to survive. These are seniors who are no longer able to work and are ending up with nothing. That is unacceptable.

I would like to read to all parliamentarians, all our colleagues, a few excerpts from what the honourable Judge Richard Wagner said on October 9, 2009, about Vincent Lacroix:

The evidence shows that the acts with which Vincent Lacroix was charged and of which he pleaded guilty led to a shortfall of close to \$100 million for 9,200 investors, rocked the structure of financial markets, and caused serious moral damages to the victims of this financial scandal, which was unprecedented in the annals of Canadian legal history.

It is true that Vincent Lacroix did not use physical violence in perpetrating his crimes... While Mr. Lacroix's crimes were not accompanied by direct physical violence, however, the court is of the opinion that his crimes caused his victims and their families considerable moral violence because of the stress, insecurity, and uncertainty experienced by those who lost their life savings intended for their retirement.

The Conservatives did not assume their responsibilities in time to avoid this mess, but we must acknowledge that they are assuming their responsibilities now. The Conservatives' failure to take responsibility was so blatant that they were publicly called out on it many times by the Bloc Québécois and by Vincent Lacroix's victims.

It took some nerve on the part of the Minister of Public Safety and that Conservative senator, who fancies himself as an elected member even though he is afraid to run, to say in a press release last Wednesday that they "called on all members of Parliament to pass the Harper government's legislation to abolish accelerated parole for white collar criminals". I do not wish to name the senator, but everyone knows who I am talking about.

• (1640)

They managed to say it with a straight face. Unbelievable. I can assure you that they are good actors.

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: That is why they did it in a press release. Otherwise, they would have been rolling on the floor.

Ms. Maria Mourani: That is exactly why they did it in a press release.

The Bloc Québécois does not care whether the Bloc or the government sponsored the bill. However, this does seem to be important to my colleague, the Liberal public safety critic. That is not what is important. What is important is that we abolish the one-sixth rule, that we get rid of accelerated parole review, and that we stop undermining our current justice system and people's confidence in our ability to protect them.

The Conservatives have not yet grasped that people do not want harsh sentences, they want sentences that are served. They want sentences to be served in their entirety. Therefore, this Conservative negligence is further proof that this government is, in my view, more concerned with putting on a show than anything else.

However, I am assuming that this goodwill could perhaps shed a little more intellectual light on their view of public safety. I invite them to support other Bloc bills that are currently in the works, effective bills that will ensure public safety and victim protection.

Government Orders

The first Bloc Québécois bill, Bill C-343, would support the families of victims of crime. I will not repeat it, but this bill has received a great deal of support, and I invite them to support it. Another Bloc bill, Bill C-608, would amend the Criminal Code to make it an offence not to report to the authorities instances of sexual or physical abuse of children. I invite them to support this bill as well as my bill on human trafficking, which would make it possible to impose consecutive sentences on traffickers and pimps and also to seize the assets of these criminals. Let us keep the momentum going: I invite them to support our other worthwhile bills.

And now I would like to discuss the urgency of this situation. Why pass this bill quickly and therefore limit the time for debate, given that there is obstruction on all sides? They would prefer to talk about it for days, months, or even years. The question is ““Why?”” The answer is: Because it is urgent. We now know—and we all know it—that this provision is absurd, that it makes no sense and that it should be eliminated. We all know it. Yes, it is true that Earl Jones will soon be eligible, but he is not the only one. There are many guys like him that the media do not talk about, who get away with it and discover that crime pays well, because they are making money. They go to prison for a few months and then they are out again.

The Liberal Party of Canada and the NDP are saying that we have plenty of time to study this bill and that the overall system needs to be looked at. That is not true. When we look at Bill C-39, which is currently before committee, we see that not witnesses have yet been heard. And so, debate on the bill at committee stage is far from complete and it still needs to be sent back to the House. I can assure you that at this pace, we can expect Earl Jones and all the others like him—in Quebec, Canada or elsewhere—to have been released.

We cannot forget that Bill C-39 includes a number of provisions. It will clearly take longer to study than Bill C-59, which has only one provision.

It would be untrue to say that splitting Bill C-39, as we did, is wrong and should never be done because it would be dreadful. That is hypocritical. In fact, last summer we split Bill C-23, much to the pleasure of the Liberals and the NDP. We kept certain provisions. Other provisions are currently being studied in committee.

I would like to remind the Liberal and NDP members that, if their current irresponsibility were copied by the majority of parliamentarians—which I hope will not be the case—it would lead to the possible early release of another economic predator, Mr. Jones.

● (1645)

Moreover, Judge H el ene Morin had the following to say about Earl Jones. She gave the example of the case of one of Mr. Jones' victims, Ms. JD—her real name has not been released. The story is quite tragic and shocking. Ms. JD's husband was killed by mass murderer Valery Fabrikant at Concordia University in 1992. While she was in mourning for her husband, she turned to Earl Jones for financial and management advice. She had accompanied her husband to a financial planning session in Pointe-Claire a few years previously.

To Ms. JD, Earl Jones seemed incredibly comfortable managing money, an area with which she was not very familiar. Over the years,

she began to allow him to make decisions on her behalf more and more frequently.

This woman suffered unbelievable grief as a result of the actions of mass murderer Valery Fabrikant and then she found herself the victim of another predator, this time a financial one, Earl Jones. Can we put ourselves in this woman's shoes? Can we imagine how she must have felt when she found out that this man was going to get out of prison after only a few months? Do we agree that this is not right? And since it is not right, this partisan attitude is even less appropriate. Such an attitude should not prevail here. The public interest should be our priority.

Judge Morin said that Ms. JD was upset when Earl Jones made the headlines. The media described him as a financial predator but she believed that he actually cared about her and her family.

I am not making any of this up. It is normal. Those who commit a fraud of this magnitude and even those who commit smaller-scale fraud are very skilled manipulators.

Judge Morin added that, after all, Mr. Jones had counselled Ms. JD following the death of her husband. Before abandoning him, Ms. JD wanted to know the truth. As she wrote in her statement, the truth was that he had abandoned them, her and the others. He did not have any pity for his clients regardless of their age or needs. In addition to having to deal with the tragic death of her husband, she also had to deal with being a victim of the accused.

This guy was absolutely merciless. And he is just one of many. Fraudsters of that ilk, and even small-time fraudsters, show no mercy for their victims. For them, it is a way to make a fast buck. We can imagine how important it is to keep these people in prison in order to rehabilitate them and to reduce the factors that led them into crime. If they get out after a few months, how can we work with these men and women—for there are also women who do this—and rehabilitate them? It takes time.

However, when a law states that they must be transferred to a halfway house after one-sixth of their sentence is served, how can they participate in any programs on the inside? Is it safe to say that all risk factors have been reduced at that point? Have they worked on their criminogenic factors? Not everything is being considered here.

The petty politics that the Liberals and NDP are playing are only going to help people like Earl Jones and Vincent Lacroix, who are merely symbols; there are many others. The Liberals and NDP are going to allow their release, even though such criminals have not necessarily had the opportunity to take programs that target their criminogenic factors.

In my riding, in Montreal and Laval, we also had our fraudster. There have been a few, but one really stands out: Leon Kordzian. He unscrupulously cheated 25 people in Montreal and Laval out of \$1 million.

Government Orders

•(1650)

He speaks several languages and is very intelligent. He defrauded a number of people of Armenian, Lebanese, Iraqi, Greek and Italian origin. He recruited them at a small, well-known, local coffee shop. He had contacts. It is even said that he might have had a contact at the bank. These people lost everything: their retirement, their homes. They are living a nightmare.

At the end of January, the leader of the Liberal Party came to my riding and was five minutes away from the coffee shop where Mr. Kordzian had operated. Did the Liberal leader meet with any of this fraudster's victims? Will he meet with them to explain that, because of his petty politics, this fraudster might get released after serving one-sixth of his sentence? Whether this happens in Ahuntsic, in Canada or in Quebec, the Liberals and the NDP will have to be accountable for this.

In closing—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The hon. member's time has expired.

The hon. member for Mississauga South for questions and comments.

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the members raises some good arguments concerning the victims of serious crimes. This is not the only kind of non-violent crime we are covering here.

I am a little concerned that there is a pattern of suggesting that parole is available within a shorter period of time; but it is not automatic. It sounds like the member is saying that it is automatic, that the person will get out after serving just a short amount of time. There is judicial discretion and there is a parole process.

Does the member have any figures on how many people would apply and get out, and whether there is any enhancement in terms of the ability to make restitution, to have restitution orders, and other factors that may in fact enhance the victim's position. The issue is not just that of a person going to jail, then our throwing away the key and that person having to stay there to be punished and then be rehabilitated.

We had a case not too long ago in Toronto where the police did not prosecute someone who defrauded a party of persons of some \$8 million. The police did not lay a charge, the reason being: do you want us to go after the murderers and the rapists, or do you want us to go after this guy who defrauded people, because there is not enough money in the system to enforce the laws that we have with regard to violent criminals?

That is the problem. Rehabilitation probably is not properly funded in any event, so maybe the question is a little broader than simply, "You do the crime, you do the time".

What about dealing with the realities of the judicial system?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Madam Speaker, I thank the member for his question, which is quite broad. We cannot deal with crime with a single bill or a single resource. It must be comprehensive.

We are talking about a provision that we could abolish, which would mean that fraudsters—whom I call economic predators—could remain in prison and take those famous reintegration programs the member mentioned. Yes, the police are in need of resources to conduct investigations, but is that a reason to sit back and do nothing when we see a problem? Of course not.

The problem here is the issue of parole after one-sixth of a sentence is served. Will this provision not penalize other people who are not at risk of committing serious offences? The accelerated parole review process is automatic, like it or not. Why is that? I worked as a parole officer for a long time. There are very specific rules regarding parole after one-sixth of the sentence is served. On a first federal sentence for a non-violent crime, we must take into account that the offender must be released after one-sixth of the sentence is served. Sometimes, as officers, we would determine that an offender should not be released, that it made no sense, but we were forced to release him because it was the law.

What we are doing here is not preventing offenders that are less violent from getting out of prison, but we are allowing officers and the National Parole Board to make that decision. It will not longer be automatic, that is all.

•(1655)

[*English*]

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Madam Speaker, I listened intently to the speech by the member. Frankly, I need to say right off the bat that I was disappointed in her accusing us. We come here every day and work very hard on behalf of our constituents and the people of Canada to do the business of the House and to do it in a way that respects the rules of the place rather than playing petty politics.

When I first came to Ottawa, what impressed me about Bloc members was their knowledge and understanding of the rules of this place and how they insisted that we follow them. I worked on committees with a number of Bloc members who, on occasion, would challenge us all to get back to the procedures of the House and ensure that everyone had a fair opportunity to participate, to ask questions and to make statements on their points.

I have been in politics for over 20 years and it seems to me in this instance we are leaping over those rules and bringing in what I have always considered a breach of my responsibilities by not allowing me the time that I and my colleagues need to participate in the process.

Another thing that disappoints me is that I see a shift here. Again, I always saw the Bloc as a group looking for broader and bigger ways to deal with issues of criminal justice. The Bloc considered the impact on society as a whole and how we might do things to fix the system that would limit the opportunity for people to do what some of these people have done, which, no question, was bad and wrong and they should be challenged and punished.

I would like the member to respond to those two observations.

Government Orders

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Madam Speaker, first, I would like to say that I did not intend to insult the hon. member. I am certain that he is very devoted to his job. But, what can I say? He is part of a political party that has made a partisan choice. I am not attacking him personally but I am attacking the entity, that is, the political party that made the partisan choice not to participate in these negotiations.

He raised the point that debate is being limited. He is somewhat annoyed because he cannot speak about this for as long as he would like. I understand but, when it comes right down to it, this issue should not be being debated today. In September 2009, they accepted this bill. In March 2010, they agreed with it. Where is the need for debate then? Why were they not horrified at the thought of not holding a debate in 2009 and 2010; then they were in favour of debate.

In fact, the debate we are having today should not even be happening. Last Thursday, when I sought unanimous consent from the House to adopt the bill, all the members should have stood up and shouted “Yea” because that would have been the next logical step. We then understood that they were trying to put off the debate and to do everything in their power to make sure that the debate was not held. So yes. I agree with what is happening today. What else can I say?

• (1700)

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to begin by congratulating my colleague from Ahuntsic on all the work she has done on this issue and pointing out not only the relevance of her work, but also her knowledge of this matter.

Today, I would like to focus on the two main reasons why the NDP and the Liberal Party are opposed to this bill. I believe it was the member for Ajax—Pickering who said it best this afternoon.

First, he said that they were not part of the debate and the negotiations—which were carried out secretly—between the Conservatives and the Bloc. We could not have been any more transparent. The Bloc leader even walked across the chamber to speak to the Conservative leader, and there was extensive media coverage. We did not talk with the Liberals and the NDP for the obvious reasons mentioned by my colleague from Ahuntsic. That is my first point.

My second point is as follows and will lead to my question. Some say that this has not been sufficiently debated. My colleague also spoke about this. We have been debating it for two years. Two years ago, the two other opposition parties said they had enough information to concur with us.

I would like my colleague to explain what she believes has changed since then and why these parties have chosen a different position today.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The hon. member for Ahuntsic has 50 seconds to answer her colleague's question.

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

Nothing has changed. This is exactly the same bill that provides for abolishing the accelerated parole review. Therefore, I expect all

parties in the House to support this bill. In fact, absolutely nothing has changed. The only thing that may be different is that we did not consult the Liberals or the NDP; we consulted the Conservatives. It reminds me of the schoolyard antics of my childhood.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise in the House to speak to this bill. I will be splitting my time with the member for Saint Boniface. I look forward to her speech.

It is not that often that I get to stand to support a colleague from the Bloc Québécois on a bill, but I am appreciative that we can do it in this case.

It is a pleasure to speak to this today and to ensure that Bill C-59 passes into law in a timely and forthright manner.

One of the reasons I feel good about speaking to the bill is this is one of those policies or issues, which 10 years ago, when I was first elected or even running in the nomination, we wanted to have changed. Indeed, it has taken a long time, but when we sense that there is a possibility of this coming into effect, it gives us reason for celebration.

Allow me to begin by emphasizing that the Government of Canada is committed to an approach to crime that places a stronger emphasis on protection of society as a guiding principle for corrections and conditional release. This approach will strengthen victims' rights. It will also increase offender accountability and help offenders to take responsibility for the acts they have perpetrated.

Under the current system, accelerated parole review provides a streamlined parole review process for non-violent offenders serving their first penitentiary sentence. Currently, non-violent offenders can access day parole at one-sixth of their sentence. Then they can receive full parole at two-thirds of their sentence.

The issue of accelerated parole review has been debated here as well as in other venues. It has been debated in the media for a very long time. We are all only too aware of the terrible consequences, both short and long term, that white collar crime, such as fraud, can and does have on the lives of Canadians. We acknowledge that Canadians want the Government of Canada to take action to ensure that white collar offenders are held accountable for their actions. Canadians also want the Government of Canada to do what is right and act in the interests of victims of the crimes. Citizens, constituents and the general public have been very clear. They want us to take action now and they want us to take action quickly, which is what the motion today is about.

We fully understand that crimes of fraud victimize a great number of people. These crimes are not only committed against large corporations, other corporations, or even governments, but individual Canadians and their families are victims as well. We are determined to put an end to such crimes and to give offenders the sentences and the prison time they deserve.

Government Orders

Certainly there is a human face of fraud. It is safe to say many Canadians are often shocked and angered by the harm caused by these acts. Savings have been wiped out. Lives have been ruined. For many victims, the sad and tragic truth is that they can never return to the financial position they were in before the crime was perpetrated. It is both unjust and unacceptable that today, under the current system, white collar offenders can be released after one-sixth of their sentence is served in prison for their crime.

Bill C-59 is one of the milestones that will make the kind of important changes needed to support Canadians who have become victims of crime. Helping victims of crime has always been at the heart of the government's public safety and justice agenda. Our government is committed to ensuring that their voices are heard and that their concerns are taken seriously. In fact, we have already taken concrete steps and have made genuine progress as part of our important agenda.

● (1705)

In June of last year, for example, this government set the stage for reforming our corrections system by introducing Bill C-39, An Act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts. The proposed amendments include key reforms in four main areas: first, enhance sharing of information with victims; second, enhance offender responsibility and accountability; third, strengthen the management of offenders and their reintegration; and fourth, modernize disciplinary actions.

We are determined to implement the kind of initiatives to ensure the scales of justice are balanced to include victims.

Other initiatives that we have already taken include the commitment of \$52 million over four years to enhance the federal victims strategy so that government can better meet the needs of victims.

We also created the Office of the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime as an independent resource for victims to access.

The National Office for Victims at Public Safety Canada is also working to give victims a greater voice in the corrections and conditional release process. It also assists victims in getting access to the information and the services that they may need.

The Policy Centre for Victim Issues at the Department of Justice is also helping the government to better meet the needs of victims, for example, by giving them resources to attend parole hearings and to seek help if they experience crime while they are abroad.

We are also helping victims connect to the services they need through the online victim service directory, which is available on the Justice Canada website. The directory helps victims search for appropriate agencies in their area according to the type of victimization that they have experienced and the type of support that they are seeking. We hope it can help ease the burden on victims of crime who, in some cases, do not know where to turn or what services are available to them. Many in rural parts of the country question whether or not a certain resource is available to them in rural Canada.

We have also made sure that victims have a greater say in this country's parole system by introducing legislation that, among other

things, would enshrine in law a victim's right to attend and to make statements at Parole Board of Canada hearings while preventing offenders in most cases from withdrawing their parole applications 14 days or less before a hearing.

Victims of white collar crime and of fraud, in particular, have been dismayed in many cases to find out that the offenders who carry out these acts can be released so soon after they have been sentenced and after they have been perhaps incarcerated.

Unless the Parole Board of Canada has reasonable grounds to believe offenders will commit a violent offence if released, it must automatically release them into the community under supervision. This means that in some cases a fraudster, for example, can be back on the streets much too early. Such an offender could be sentenced to 12 years in prison but he or she could actually be released into the community on day parole in just 2 years and receive full parole in just 4 years. This is not acceptable to many Canadians and it is not acceptable to the Government of Canada.

The status quo gives the Parole Board of Canada limited discretion in dealing with these cases. The test is whether an offender is likely to commit a violent offence. As a result, even if the Parole Board believes the offender is likely to commit another fraud, another theft or another drug offence, it is compelled to release the offender back into the community.

This offends my constituents. It offends most Canadians. It offends them because they believe there is no justice. It undermines their faith in our system. It undermines their faith in the Correctional Service of Canada. Victims want to see these sentences served.

I commend the Bloc for allowing us to proceed with this. I thank the House for the opportunity to speak to this important motion.

● (1710)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are still dealing with the motion. Second reading has not started yet but I thank the member for his second reading speech.

The member may want to check the transcript, but I think he referred to the persons we are talking about in this bill that, "they may reoffend and commit another violent offence". This bill is actually about non-violent crime.

The premise of the member's representation seems to have to do with parole as an instrument of the judicial system. Does the member feel that there is a place in our justice system for parole? Could he explain to the House and all Canadians that getting out on parole does not mean that a person is free and everything is fine? There are some terms and conditions that normally apply to parolees. The member may want to clarify that as well.

Government Orders

Mr. Kevin Sorenson: Mr. Speaker, I would like to go back to the member's first question about violent offences. He is correct. The bill does speak to non-violent offences. What I was making reference to in my speech is that the Parole Board of Canada has discretion in dealing with a number of cases but the test must be whether or not an offender is likely to commit a violent offence. Indeed, that does not even apply. However, that is the test that the Parole Board of Canada must undertake if it is going to allow earned parole.

The other question is whether or not in our justice system there is room for parole.

Our government has said very clearly over the many years here that we do believe in parole. However, we do not believe in a parole system that would automatically give a parole to criminals after one-sixth of their sentence without an interview or anything and cranking them back onto the street. Do we believe in parole? Personally, I believe in earned parole.

• (1715)

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, “earned parole” is throwing a new legal term into the debate, which is interesting because it does not exist in the legislation before us.

By the government's own hands, this bill has been killed twice already. That is a fact and no one disputes it. No one from the Conservative government disputes the fact that twice the Prime Minister made a decision that killed this bill.

The argument in front of us now is on the urgency required to get it done. After having killed it twice and delayed it more than a year and half already, the government needs to go into backroom negotiations with the Bloc. I say “back room” because they were never public. We do not know the terms. We do not know what was traded off or what modifications were made to the bill.

The House leader stood in this place before the weekend and said that negotiations were going on with the parties, but that was not true at all. The government was not, in fact, willing to work with us. It never called, never asked for suggestions and never asked if there was room to move. The New Democrats are interested in this question of these automatic paroles.

The challenge for my colleague is that a piece of legislation, a law that will affect more than 1,400 people a year according to Statistics Canada and the justice department, is being designed to go after one person. When we did this around the Homolka release, we were able to modify what the Parliament did to directly affect Karla Homolka's potential release. I am sure my colleague remembers. However, that is not what is happening here.

We have asked the government for basic costing. It is a fair question in this time of running government debt. Could my hon. colleague give us any sense of what the government's own numbers are on the cost of the bill?

Mr. Kevin Sorenson: Mr. Speaker, when I was elected 10 years ago, I always had this idea that people would come into my office, sit down and talk to me about crimes that had been perpetrated against them, which would usually be violent crimes, and they would tell me about the impact it had on their life. That has happened on a number of occasions,

One of the surprises I received was the number of people talking in Tim Hortons in Chestermere, Hanna, or other places where people would sit down and say that they had taken their nest egg from selling their farm and, with interest rates so low, they invested their money in a scam. Now they are out and do not know what their future looks like.

The member is concerned because we are trying to move this through with the Bloc but, in the meantime, his party will get up and drag the puck time after time to prevent any justice bills from being dealt with and to prevent any changes from this government that have always been spelled out clear in our platforms.

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to express my support for this motion, one that will help us deliver the essential reforms proposed in Bill C-59.

We must make no mistake that Canadians rightfully expect that white collar offenders will face consequences for their actions. Today I rise in the chamber to support this motion knowing, like other members, that Canadians have asked us to stand up for the rights of victims of white collar crime. Standing up for those rights means taking action and the motion before us today would do exactly that. It would help ensure the quick passage of Bill C-59.

There may have been a time when Canadians saw white collar crime as a faceless victimless act targeting corporations instead of households. However, I think we can all agree today that fraud and other crimes of this sort can ruin the lives of individuals and their families. The financial security that comes from years of responsible saving can simply vanish overnight. Lives can be instantly turned upside down.

We have a real opportunity before us to fix this problem through Bill C-59. This government has been unwavering in its commitment to better balance the rights of victims with those of offenders. This belief has been at the forefront in driving our public safety and justice agenda. We continue to take several steps to listen and respond to concerns from victims.

One of the early initiatives of this government was the creation of the Office of the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime as an independent resource for victims. As a further signal of our commitment to better meet the needs of victims, we committed \$52 million over four years to enhance the federal victims strategy. We wanted to ensure that victims were given more opportunity to be heard in the corrections and conditional release process and we wanted to help victims gain access to the information and services they might need.

Government Orders

The National Office for Victims at Public Safety Canada is delivering on this very important work. These efforts also extend to the Policy Centre for Victim Issues at the Department of Justice. Resources made available by the policy centre can help victims attend parole hearings or seek assistance if they experience crime while outside of the country. Not knowing where to turn for help can be an added burden on a victim, one that this government wants to help ease.

The Department of Justice Canada now offers an online victims services directory organized by type of crime experienced and support services offered locally. In addition to these steps, our legislative agenda clearly confirms our commitment to better balancing the rights of victims and law-abiding citizens with the rights of offenders.

We introduced reforms that ensure victims have the right to make statements at Parole Board of Canada hearings. At the same time, we have introduced measures in Bill C-39 so that offenders cannot withdraw their parole applications 14 days or less before a hearing date, ensuring that victims do not travel needlessly to attend a hearing that will not take place.

We passed legislation that targets identity theft and identity fraud, crimes that are growing in frequency and in damage. These reforms were asked for by victims and this government responded. Victims duped by white collar offenders are rightfully angered to learn that these offenders can be eligible for supervised release soon after they are sentenced. As it stands, these offenders will be released into the community under supervision after serving one-sixth of their sentences unless the Parole Board of Canada has reasonable grounds to believe these offenders will commit a violent offence if released. Again, this is simply unacceptable.

Let us consider this scenario, one that I, like most Canadians, would find appalling. A white collar offender, whose fraudulent acts may have victimized many, could automatically receive day parole two years into a 12-year sentence. This same individual, who may have emptied the savings of several families, could be granted full parole at four years.

The Parole Board of Canada needs to have the discretion it now lacks in dealing with these cases. The only test now is whether an offender is likely to commit a violent offence. Even when the Parole Board believes the offender is likely to commit another offence, including fraud or theft, it is able to release them if he or she does not meet that test.

• (1720)

Bill C-59 would eliminate the current system of accelerated parole review whereby offenders who commit non-violent crimes, such as fraud, can be released on day parole after serving one-sixth of their sentence.

Bill C-59 proposes the much-needed reforms that would treat those who commit fraud and other white collar crimes the same way as other offenders. They will be eligible for regular day parole review six months prior to full parole eligibility and full parole review after serving one-third of their sentence.

This government firmly believes that those who commit crimes must be held accountable for their actions, and we took steps

accordingly. Victims asked us to, Canadians asked us to and now I ask all hon. members in this House to join with me in supporting the motion before us today. We must ensure the timely passage of Bill C-59. We have a shared responsibility to answer victims and their needs. Let us deliver on that commitment.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the member about information. Right now we are debating a motion about whether we should limit the debate that we are going to have at second reading, which will not start until after we vote tonight at 8 o'clock. I assume it will start tomorrow.

One of the things she knows is that the finance committee has asked for information about the various justice bills, particularly about costing and about the impacts of those bills, so we can consider that information as part of the assessment of the legislation. Some concerns have been raised in the debate today about whether there are sufficient resources within the system to sustain a balanced approach to criminal justice where there is, yes, punishment, but also rehabilitation and reintegration.

I wonder if the member believes that the disclosure to the House and to the finance committee of the costs of this bill and other justice bills, as asked by the committee, is a matter of cabinet confidence or is in fact information that we need to do our job.

• (1725)

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Mr. Speaker, as the member well knows, the request that went to the finance committee is very different than the broad question he has asked me today.

The member asked if I felt that information was valuable. Absolutely. Am I prepared to direct information that might actually compromise cabinet confidence? Absolutely not. I am not prepared to do that.

However, when we are talking about victims and the cost of these kinds of crimes, there is absolutely no amount of money that will bring back to those victims their sense of dignity or the money they have lost. Victims are sentenced to a life of trying to recoup what they have lost.

The Conservative government has made it clear that we believe the costs involved in ensuring that victims are heard and are substantially provided for is very valuable. We will continue in that vein to support victims.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I sense a certain amount of discomfort within some of her colleagues, although I am not sure about her, with the way in which we have arrived at this moment.

Government Orders

What Canadians can understand, if they have followed the progression of the bill against white collar crime, is that New Democrats support and have expressed a willingness both publicly and privately to the government to say that if the one-sixth probation is something that we need to get at, then let us get at it.

I think the government bears at least some responsibility with what happened with some of the folks like Vincent Lacroix who is now out of jail and who should not be. He should not have had his sentence alleviated so quickly. Now we are faced with Earl Jones, who has obviously been in the news, who ripped off thousands of pensioners across the country. The New Democrats have no problem discussing terms that would keep Mr. Jones in jail for a more proper time.

The way we arrived at this point is that over the weekend the government worked with the Bloc to design a path that allowed for this closure, this super closure as we are closing on closure. Is there not a better way to run a justice system? Is there not a better way to create crime laws that involve parliamentarians doing the job we were elected to do, which is to look over bills as opposed to take it or leave it, which is where we are today?

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Mr. Speaker, I am prefacing my answer with all due respect to the member, as I have been here for only two and a half years.

I am a police officer on a leave of absence after almost 19 years. I have listened to the cries of victims who have been defrauded. I have listened to them contemplate suicide because they cannot figure out how they will recoup the loss of their life savings.

It is about time those cries were heard, and I am proud to be part of the government that is hearing them. However, since I have been here two and a half years, and with all due respect to the member, the NDP has been the worst party at delaying every crime measure we have put forward to protect victims.

I cannot truthfully say to the member that I agree with anything he has said, because I feel it would be feigned to do so, given the history of the NDP on crime bills in the House.

Mr. Andrew Kania (Brampton West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak on this issue today regarding Bill C-59.

I spoke about this matter earlier today when the Minister of Justice was answering questions and attempting to support the wisdom of invoking closure.

The first thing I want to point out about Bill C-59 is that first reading was only on February 9. While it is true that this was part of a larger bill, it should be remembered that the larger bill was in fact killed by prorogation.

We are therefore here today with the Conservative government invoking closure in circumstances where it had killed the previous bill. It only introduced Bill C-59 on February 9 and has taken the undemocratic step today of invoking closure to limit debate.

In addition to simply being undemocratic, it is not logical. We have to examine this legislation from the perspective of what the bill would do and why at this point in time we cannot make an intelligent decision on whether or not it makes sense.

I think on behalf of all of my colleagues in the Liberal Party, I want to say that nobody has sympathy for Earl Jones or Mr. Lacroix being released early. It was a mistake what happened with Mr. Lacroix. That should never have happened.

However, it never would have happened if the Conservatives had actually turned their heads to this matter and been reasonable back in the fall of 2010 when, in the justice committee, Bill C-21 on white collar crime was being studied. There was a Liberal amendment in committee to eliminate the one-sixth accelerated parole review. That would have prevented Mr. Lacroix from being released early. However, the Bloc Québécois and the Conservatives voted to defeat the Liberal amendments.

The Liberal Party was more than aware of this problem last fall, obviously, but the Bloc and the Conservatives decided to ignore it.

Thus here we are today with the government seeking to invoke closure on Bill C-59. That closure motion was obviously successful. The government did that for Bill C-59 when it was only introduced in first reading on February 9, 2011. It made the argument that this was urgent after Mr. Lacroix was released and, obviously, after voting against the Liberal amendments in justice committee that would have solved this problem.

I therefore suggest, first, that their arguments about the urgency of this bill and the reason to invoke closure and their arguments about being concerned about this type of early release are not logical. If they had been logical, the Conservatives would have supported the Liberal amendments last fall to solve this problem.

Regarding one of the serious reasons why I believe this is premature at this time, every time we pass or change one of these federal statutes, there are consequences, whatever they might be. Some are good and some bad, depending on the legislation, obviously.

However, for this particular legislation, other than cases like those of Mr. Lacroix and Mr. Jones, which are coming, what are we trying to solve? Is it a circumstances where we are trying to eliminate this one-six provision for all offenders, because that is what this would do, including for non-violent first-time offenders?

I suggest, at least in some of those cases, that would be inappropriate, because we would be defeating any chance of these persons being properly rehabilitated and reintegrated into society when, frankly, some of them do not need to be in prison any longer.

If we are going to do this, what I would like to know is how many Canadians who are incarcerated now, and obviously we do not know what will happen in the future, would this affect and what would it cost? It is a very simple question. Do we as parliamentarians not have the right to know what these measures would cost?

Government Orders

●(1730)

A number of us, including our esteemed public safety critic, asked the Minister of Justice today what this would cost. He danced around the question, not once answering it. It was a very simple question: how much would this cost and how many people would it affect, that is, how many people would be in prison longer and what would this cost?

The estimates vary, depending on who is writing the report or providing the information, but I have heard that it costs anywhere from \$77,000 to \$103,000 per year, per prisoner, to keep them in jail. Whatever the number is, we need to add that up and determine how much more this would cost while also factoring in the need for more prisons. There has to be some figure for this, and as a member of Parliament, I would like to know what it is, so when people are voting they actually know what they are doing.

We need witnesses on this bill. We need to have reasonable committee hearings on this question. We will have four hours to deal with it. I want Canadians to know this. We have a piece of legislation that is designed to fix a problem the Conservatives ignored last fall when they voted down Liberal amendments in the justice committee. However, after Mr. Lacroix's release and after they refused to stop that, they are now saying this is urgent and have invoked closure and they are now requiring the public safety committee to consider all of this, including clause-by-clause examination of the legislation, within four hours.

If it is done within four hours, that is fine. If it is not done, the bill will be reported back to the House without any amendments. If, for example, the Conservatives decided to filibuster and simply talk out the four hours tomorrow, there would be no chance whatsoever to even attempt to pass amendments. We will see what they do tomorrow, but that is something they have done frequently in the public safety committee, simply talking out the time to avoid actually having votes and trying to forward things constructively.

Thus tomorrow there will be a very limited period of time to have witnesses before the committee to examine this issue. We will be asking questions of the witnesses who do appear, including how much it will cost and the ramifications of this change in the law. However, we will not have an opportunity to call meaningful witnesses for a prolonged period of time into the future.

We will need examples of other individuals, not just those who make the press, like Mr. Jones or Mr. Lacroix, but other persons. Whom would this affect? I would like to know some of the people who are incarcerated right now who would be eligible and who would be stopped from being released on this one-sixth parole system, if this legislation were amended. We need to see what they have done, whether they have been rehabilitated or participated, whether they can make a meaningful contribution of society in the best knowledge of the parole board. I think we need to see those cases.

Another issue that will be given no consideration at this point in time is what will be the effect upon this legislation and whether it is even constitutional. Does it violate the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in having any retroactive effects? I do not know. That is not for me to decide, but it is something to be discussed and

examined and on which witnesses should be called. I do not believe it is something that will be addressed within the four hours tomorrow, because it is all very last minute from what occurred this past Friday.

There are additional solutions that could have been considered to fix this problem with Mr. Jones and Mr. Lacroix. Look at Mr. Jones. I think he received 11 years, or something in that range. Why could we not increase the sentences for such persons who commit such heinous frauds? I have no sympathy for these individuals: they have destroyed people's lives, taken their life savings. Why does the current legislation not allow maximum sentences or tough sentences?

The government likes to say that it is tough on crime. Why is it not being tough in terms of sentences for these sorts of individuals? That is a mistake, and rather than focusing on that, the Conservatives are looking at something that only seems to be politically expedient and will not actually punish the persons who might do this in the future to a more significant extent. If the government is not willing to protect Canadians in this manner, it should fess up and actually admit to it.

●(1735)

Another point is restitution. I would like persons who have been defrauded to automatically have some type of restitution order contained in the sentence. Let me use Mr. Jones as an example.

If Mr. Jones steals millions of dollars from an investor, under part of the criminal justice legislation, judges should be directed to make a restitution order for an appropriate amount of money based on how the investor was defrauded. It should not be optional. It should be mandatory as long as there are set facts.

Under the criminal justice system, we would be convicting somebody beyond a reasonable doubt, but the civil system requires a lesser balance of proof.

In my mind, because it takes more evidence to convict somebody of fraud under the criminal system, it is logical that if an individual is convicted of that fraud, a civil judgment should accompany that conviction. The innocent person would not have to hire a lawyer, go through the process again, bear those expenses and prove the case all over again. In the criminal system it is the Crown, but it is really the same evidence. That is another thing the government could have considered.

I have talked about increasing sentences, but in terms of restitution, that could possibly put money back into the pockets of innocent victims. Maybe the government could assist with some type of tracing system to help people realize something on these judgments.

We could do other things, but the restitution issue has been absolutely forgotten. Instead, we have the politically expedient dramatics of simply attempting this one-sixth possibility without having the sophistication to distinguish the persons who should not be able to avail themselves of this possibility, like Earl Jones. However, people who have committed non-violent offences on a first-time basis would also be caught by this. It would not be fair to a lot of them, it would not be logical and it would simply cost the Canadian taxpayer more money.

Government Orders

We have talked about other possibilities. Enforcement is another point. The RCMP integrated market enforcement team in Vancouver looks into these sorts of crimes, but its funding is minor. It is not up to speed in what it requires. Why are we not seeking funding for enforcement as opposed to simply seeking the elimination of early parole when, once again, there is no immediate urgency to this?

The government likes to speak about the possibility of Earl Jones obtaining early parole, but he will not be eligible for parole until at least 2012. We are not talking about anything that is immediate. It is certainly nothing that would invoke closure today and limit the right of members of Parliament to ask questions, have meaningful witnesses at committee and to ask about the costs involved with this.

Some of my other colleagues have mentioned turning Canada into the California of the north. It is a risk. I support some of the crime bills before Parliament and others I do not. However, the risk with all of them is we will have to build more prisons and the costing is not before Parliament yet. We do not know everything the bill will do.

I want to give the House an example of how the intellectual rationalization is not honest at times. That one example is the international transfer of prisoners act, which we discussed in the House last week in question period. The Minister of Public Safety rose in the House and said that the Liberals were not thinking about victims. The legislation would give the minister extra discretion to stop the transfer back to Canada of Canadians who have been incarcerated internationally, such as the transfer of a Canadian from an American prison to a Canadian prison, not releasing him or her back on the street but simply moving the individual from one prison to another.

● (1740)

The rhetoric used is we are not thinking about the victims. By trying to leave these reasonable provisions in force, we are not thinking about the victims. I think the Conservatives are referring to Canadian victims, but that is not logical because the victims in those circumstances would be international victims. If we have a Canadian person who has committed a crime abroad, the victim is there. Yet the rhetoric we hear is that we are not thinking about victims because we think it might be better to bring a prisoner from a foreign prison back to a Canadian prison so he or she can receive rehabilitation.

If we consider look at the analysis, if we do not transfer people back from foreign prisons to Canadian prisons, once they come back into Canada, which they have a right to do as Canadian citizens, they have no criminal record. There is no parole. We have no controls over them. In essence, Canadian citizens are less protected. It is better to bring them back and ensure they have rehabilitation and criminal records. Then when they are released on parole, they have ties and we can monitor them and put conditions in place.

Once again, we get the rhetoric of not protecting victims, yet the victims are abroad and it better protects Canadian citizens if they are brought back to be rehabilitated, to have criminal records and to have ties on them when they are released.

It is not logical, but we hear soft on crime. Frankly, the Conservatives are illogical on crime.

A lot of people, commentators and academics, have criticized the agenda of the government. I will give a couple of examples.

The *Calgary Sun* criticizes the Conservatives, and some may find that difficult to believe, but it is true. It says:

Tack on vast amounts of money to build more jails and watch the federal deficit soar and the public groan under the weight of unthinking ideology and higher taxes.

It goes on to say:

There's a right way to reform the justice system and a wrong way to do it.

Naturally, the Conservatives did it the wrong way, going way overboard instead of using some judicious fine-tuning to fix some glaring mistakes.

It goes on to say:

Throwing out the baby with the bathwater, however, is just a reflection of terrible policy prescriptions and Conservative shortsightedness.

That is one commentator in that regard.

We have another think-tank, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, which describes this as tough on taxpayers and lazy on crime. It refers to the government using charge rhetoric and misinformation to advance a crime and punishment agenda, which it argues may lead to more crime and cost taxpayers billions of dollars to house more prisoners.

It should be remembered that we have this entire law and order agenda. I want Canadians to know that approximately one-third of everything on the federal docket deals with law and order legislation. This is what the Conservatives have done when we have the worst recession since the Great Depression.

We have hundreds of thousands of jobs disappearing and being replaced by, what I would like to call, McJobs. We have pension and health care issues. We have lost standing around the world. We have received fossil of the year awards at environmental conferences. Essentially, we have many difficulties and problems, yet the Conservatives, according to some of their own commentators, are simply using these statistics and this agenda to try to make Canadians fearful, to try to convince them that somehow the Conservatives are the ones who will protect them.

If we look at objective statistics, the use of guns in robberies declined 15% in 2009 from 20% in 1999. The violent crime rate decreased by 14%. We have the lowest rate since 1989. I could go on and on. All of the statistics show that across Canada things are getting better, not worse. Yet during these terrible economic circumstances, rather than being responsible and dealing with those issues, we are dealing with one-third of the Conservatives' agenda on criminal law and order.

Government Orders

• (1745)

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is a closure motion, which usually occurs when there is some urgency, an emergency or a critical element of the government's agenda. It appears that for whatever reason the government will succeed in the closure motion in order to rush through Bill C-59, about which not a member in the House, possibly not even a member in the government, knows what the cost will be. The government does not have a clue.

I am told, though I do not know this for a fact, that it may affect 900 people. If we increase the incarceration of 900 people by even a year, that is an additional \$100,000 that taxpayers must pay to support that incarceration.

Does the hon. member for Brampton West have any idea what the cost of the bill might be?

• (1750)

Mr. Andrew Kania: Mr. Speaker, the answer is no. The Conservatives have refused to provide any financial statistics on the cost of the bill. We can do the math and guesstimate. If we estimate approximately \$100,000 per year per individual, factoring in how many would be affected and have to stay in jail longer, it would be quite the substantial sum.

The issue of financial disclosure has gone on for quite some time. The Parliamentary Budget Officer says that we will have to spend at least \$5 billion more just on prisons. All of this information is speculative right now because the Conservatives will not provide it. Tomorrow when the committee studies the bill for the allotted four hours, because of closure, we will ask the question of what this will cost.

This is not a surprise to the government. Members want to know. It should bring the information tomorrow. It should not tell us that it does not have it. It has invoked closure and it should bring the information.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I know the opposition parties have asked the government for a costing of this crime bill and others. The sad part about it is the Conservative government does not care what the cost is. Over and over again, it has said that it does not matter what it costs, that it simply wants the law changed.

The fact is the Conservatives' ideological cousins in the United States, led by Newt Gingrich, have actually come around. He has been working actively with other right-wing Republicans and Democrats in the states of Texas and South Carolina to do things that are smart on crime. They have cut the costs of running prisons and are operating a much more sensible system there.

The member is probably aware of Newt Gingrich's January 7 article. Would he expand on that?

Mr. Andrew Kania: Mr. Speaker, we have to spend what is required as a Canadian society to protect our citizens. There is no issue about that. I heard one of my Conservative colleagues say that we cannot put a cost on safety, and that is right. However, we cannot pay enough for wisdom and common sense, and that is sorely lacking by the government on this criminal justice legislation.

We should know how much this will cost. We should know the effects of changing the law. We have to identify a problem and then seek a rational way to solve it. We do not simply invoke closure, panic and change an entire system not knowing what the consequences might be. That is wholly irresponsible. If this is so urgent, it should not have defeated the Liberal amendments last fall in the justice committee, which would have solved this problem.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber (Edmonton—St. Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the member for Brampton West on his well-delivered speech. I know he thinks about these things very carefully.

Does the member not agree that those who commit white collar crime and deprive victims of their life savings ought to be treated similarly to violent criminals and therefore not have more or less automatic parole based on the parole board's current criteria where early release can only be denied if there is a suspicion the person might commit another serious violent offence?

• (1755)

Mr. Andrew Kania: Mr. Speaker, I respect my friend and we work well together on the public safety committee.

He is absolutely correct that the current system has not been fixed by the government to make it tough enough on serious white collar criminals. I mentioned certain ways that could have been done, such as increasing sentences and putting mandatory restitution orders in place. I would encourage the government to put those steps in place.

It is disappointing that the only thing the government can come up with at present is an en masse reduction of the one-sixth for everybody. The government is not being sophisticated enough in its analysis. It should be focusing on the most serious criminals and targeting them. I would support that sort of analysis.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am very intrigued by the hon. member's somewhat amateur calculations. I am trying to understand where these figures of 900 people and \$100,000 are coming from. If we assume that these are non-violent prisoners, then they will be put in minimum security prisons because it costs less. If they are non-violent, as he said, surely they will be granted day parole six months before they have served one-third of their sentence. As a result, they will not be in prison for even a year.

I am trying to understand where these figures of \$100,000 and 900 people are coming from. If I multiply \$100,000 by 900, then I get \$90 million. The figure is more than \$90 million for Earl Jones and Vincent Lacroix. It is \$100 million for Vincent Lacroix alone.

[*English*]

Mr. Andrew Kania: Mr. Speaker, that is an excellent point in terms of why closure is inappropriate and why this bill is being rushed through in an irresponsible manner.

Government Orders

My colleague from the Bloc does not know how many people this is going to affect. Estimates have been thrown around. One of our other colleagues estimated 900, but I do not know. That is the point. We have to find this out. The government is not telling anybody and yet it has invoked closure and is trying to pass this law in an irresponsible manner.

In terms of what this will cost, we have estimates, and they are only estimates, of anywhere from \$77,000 to over \$100,000 based on each prisoner. We do not know how many people this would encompass. That is the point. We need to have full information. Until that occurs, we cannot make reasoned decisions on behalf of Canadians.

Mr. Rob Clarke (Desnethé—Missinipi—Churchill River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Kitchener Centre.

It gives me great pleasure today to rise in favour of the motion regarding Bill C-59, which we are hopeful will be passed into law as soon as possible.

Accelerated parole review has been the subject of a great deal of media coverage in recent months. It has also been the subject of a number of debates by parliamentarians and Canadians alike.

As hon. members know, the overwhelming consequences to the victims of white collar crimes, such as fraud, have become an issue all too familiar for Canadians and their families. Canadians have been quite clear and consistent in asking that the government take immediate action to protect the rights of the victims of these crimes and to make certain that offenders convicted of white collar crimes are held accountable for their actions. This would be possible with the passage of this bill.

It was not long ago that such crimes as fraud were considered to be victimless, as many of these crimes were depicted to occur against government, institutions and Canada's business community. This is no longer the view today. Canadians are continually being reminded of the devastating financial consequences that these crimes can bring to them and to people they know and love.

I believe I am speaking for most Canadians when I say that we can no longer continue to be harmed by these acts. Many lives are filled with the agony of financial ruin, and hopes for a brighter future are dashed. For many Canadian victims, this has become the reality as they most often never return to the position where they were before.

The current parole system in Canada allows for those incarcerated for white collar crimes to be eligible for release after serving one-sixth of their sentence.

Victims of crime deserve our support. This is why we have been given the opportunity to change this with Bill C-59.

I will speak briefly about our government's commitment to victims of crime and our ambitious agenda with regard to justice and tackling crime.

The crimes that our citizens are being faced with are very real. We, in turn, must commit to protecting their rights by listening and reacting. This has been one of our consistent priorities since we first

were elected in 2006. I am happy to report that we have taken action in a number of areas.

The impact of crime on the lives of individuals, their households and the prosperity of Canadian communities is enormous. That is why we have taken a number of measures to ensure victims' rights are given the prominence and resources they deserve.

One of our first actions upon taking office in 2006 was to introduce the federal victims strategy. Since then, the government has committed over \$50 million to this strategy.

An independent resource for victims, the Office of the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime, was created as one of our first steps toward this endeavour.

Public Safety Canada manages the National Office for Victims, which plays a vital role in providing victims with an opportunity to voice their views in the corrections and conditional release process. It also does much more than that. It helps victims and their families by providing them with information and services they need during what is likely to be a very trying time in their lives.

The Policy Centre for Victim Issues, which is part of the Department of Justice, also plays a critical role in improving the experience of victims of crime in the criminal justice system. It helps victims and their families understand their role in the criminal justice system and the laws, services and assistance available to support them.

The policy centre ensures that the perspectives of victims will be fully considered when relevant federal laws and policies are developed. It also aims to increase awareness both within Canada and internationally about the needs of victims of crime and effective approaches to respond to those needs.

The online victim services directory found on the website of the Department of Justice is an example that our government has gone above and beyond to meet the needs of victims by helping them obtain the services they require.

● (1800)

The directory's numerous objectives include helping service providers, victims and individuals locate services for victims of crime across Canada and allowing victims to determine which services they may require. The directory also acts as a link between organizations and victims with a view toward helping all individuals access victim services. This is how we are ensuring that victims are being heard and that they remain a priority in the justice system.

As I mentioned earlier, our government has made tackling crime and protecting the safety of Canadians one of our chief priorities since being elected in 2006. As such, we have tabled and passed a number of pieces of legislation that are tough on crime with a view to making our streets and citizens safer.

Government Orders

We have passed two pieces of legislation in particular that speak directly to cracking down on violent gun crime and protecting Canadians from the very serious and increasingly complex issues of identity fraud and identity theft.

The government has also introduced legislation that allows victims to have a stronger voice in Canada's parole process. Our legislation will give victims the right not only to attend, but to speak at hearings presided over by the Parole Board of Canada. It will also offer more rigour and structure in the parole hearing process by, in most cases, precluding offenders from withdrawing their parole applications less than two weeks before a scheduled hearing.

Our government has delivered a bill that victims of crime have asked for, one which our government believes they deserve. Bill C-59 is another step in our government's long-standing belief that victims matter and that their voices should be heard.

It is important to note that victims of non-violent white collar crimes are often angry or disillusioned to learn that the perpetrators of those crimes are eligible for release relatively soon after they begin serving their sentence. In the current model of accelerated parole review, the Parole Board of Canada has limited discretion unless it believes that the offender in question is likely to commit a violent offence. In practical terms, that means someone who is convicted of a white collar crime is not assessed for parole using the same criteria as for other serious offenders. This is not just, in our government's view. We believe it does not properly serve victims of these often debilitating crimes.

I am sure all Canadians would agree that they would like to see the justice system prevail. Our government believes that Bill C-59 is an important step toward making that a reality.

The changes proposed by our government would put offenders who commit fraud and other white collar crimes on the same playing field as other offenders. Their eligibility for regular day parole review would commence six months prior to full parole eligibility, and full parole review after serving one-third of their sentence.

The message we are trying to send with this legislation is that offenders should be held accountable for their actions and that victims' interests should be heard.

It is imperative that we work together to ensure that the changes our government is proposing become law as soon as possible so that justice may be served.

In conclusion, I urge all hon. members to vote in favour of this motion, and by extension, stand up for the victims of white collar crime.

• (1805)

Mr. Andrew Kania (Brampton West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is simple and short and I would like a detailed, specific answer please.

If this legislation is passed, exactly how much will it cost Canadian taxpayers?

Mr. Rob Clarke: Mr. Speaker, the underlying issue really is the cost to the victims. The victims are the main priority of this government. We have introduced many pieces of legislation which

the NDP, Liberal and Bloc members always stall in committee. We have to get this bill passed to work for the victims that need it.

For instance, I have heard stories where the victims of these white collar crimes are not reporting them because they are afraid or embarrassed. The underlying issues have to be addressed. If the opposition will not help this bill to proceed, we will not be able to respect the rights of the victims. We have to respect them.

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened closely to the comments of the member in this chamber, and I am a bit surprised, because he is actually engaging in substantive debate around the bill to which the time allocation motion applies. However, what is really before us in the House today is the time allocation motion itself and the government cutting off the amount of time for debate on the bill.

We should not be debating the merits of the bill itself at all, yet I just heard the member say that all kinds of crime bills have been stalled at committee.

Let me give the House a number of the bills that have now passed through the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights: C-4, C-5, C-16, C-17, C-21, C-22, C-23A, C-23B, C-39, C-48, C-50, C-51, C-52, S-2, S-6, S-7, S-9 and S-10. Can the member really suggest that the crime agenda of the government is being stalled?

Some of us would argue they are the only bills we have been dealing with in the House. I wish the member would return to what we are really debating here tonight, and that is the time allocation motion, not the substance of the government's crime agenda.

Mr. Rob Clarke: Mr. Speaker, it is quite ironic hearing the NDP. NDP members stand and fight every crime bill we bring forward to the House. They vote against every one of them. That is a crying shame.

Coming from a law enforcement background, I would think New Democrats would have more sympathy for the victims, not the criminals. It is very disheartening. The bill came forward in October 2010. What is the NDP's position? Let us move the bill forward.

• (1810)

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me reiterate the question of the member for Brampton West, to which he did not get an answer. This is a pretty simple question. The Conservatives will increase the time that people spend in jail. There is a good argument to be made that in some instances it is a really good idea, but what will it cost? It is very simple. It is \$100,000 a year to keep somebody in jail. What is the cost of C-59? It is a simple question to which we are asking for a simple answer, not tap dancing, not little heart-rending victim stories, just tell us the number.

Mr. Rob Clarke: Mr. Speaker, what I hear is the Liberals do not want to respect the victims. It is always about the cost of the criminals. It is time for the government to stand up and protect the rights of the victims.

Government Orders

Listening to the members opposite, they are so worried about the cost. Let us look at the cost to the victims: the loss of the family income, loss of their retirement, loss of family net worth where people were actually so distraught they were suicidal. Let us look at those issues.

All the Liberals are worried about is the criminals.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth (Kitchener Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity today to offer my support for the motion concerning Bill C-59. I thank the hon. member for Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River for sharing his time with me.

I am asking all hon. members to also demonstrate their commitment to ensuring the safety of our communities by making certain that we pass Bill C-59 into law as quickly as possible.

The motion before us today will ensure that offenders are held accountable for the crimes they commit.

Not everyone is aware that the current system of accelerated parole review allows people convicted of non-violent offences to apply for day parole after serving a mere one-sixth of their sentence and full parole after serving only one-third. As a defence lawyer for many years, I can assure the House that even lawyers realize this makes it very difficult to take some Canadian sentences seriously. For example, it means that a white collar fraud criminal or a drug dealer who has been sentenced to 12 years can be released on day parole in only two years and fully paroled at just four years out of the original 12 year sentence.

This demands an answer to an important question. Are we considering the rights of victims in accelerated parole reviews? The answer is a resounding no. Parole in such cases is expedited. Unless the Parole Board has reasonable grounds to believe that an offender will commit a violent offence it must by law release the convicted criminal into the community after serving only one-sixth of his or her sentence.

The current accelerated parole review is completed on paper only. Contrast that with regular parole reviews normally done through an in person hearing.

I am sure that hon. members here can agree that when evaluating a convicted criminal's eligibility for parole it is crucial to properly assess the offender. Accelerated parole review actually limits and even prevents a proper assessment.

The victims of these so-called white collar crimes simply want justice. Victims may wonder how much justice there is in Canada after watching these offenders released on full parole after serving only one-third of their sentence. Police services and victims groups have been clear that the conditional release system must be strengthened so that it better protects Canadian communities and better reflects victim expectations.

A crime is a crime whether it was committed with or without physical violence. Crimes such as fraud have sometimes been viewed as victimless since they are often perpetrated against large organizations, corporations or even the government. This is no longer the case. More and more we are hearing about cases of fraudulent white collar crimes committed against individual

Canadians. I am sure many hon. members have family members, co-workers or friends who have been hurt by these crimes.

Although these crimes may have been committed without physical violence, the pain and suffering that is experienced as a result of personal fraud wreaks its own form of violence. Many lives have been ruined. In some cases, widows have lost their entire life savings. I am speaking for them. Families have been broken apart by the financial stress occurring as a result of having lost everything. I am speaking for them. Others have had their identity stolen and have suffered the arduous battle of reclaiming their proper identity. In addition to experiencing financial loss due to identity fraud, these victims often have difficulty obtaining credit or restoring their good name. I am speaking for them.

● (1815)

White collar crime often leaves victims experiencing feelings of humiliation for having been deceived. Sadly, it often leads to a myriad of emotional, psychological and even physical ailments. Police associations, victim advocates and ordinary Canadians have been very clear. They want the conditional release system strengthened so that it better protects our communities.

We must take action now, today. We must work quickly to pass Bill C-59. That is what the motion today will achieve for victims. By supporting Bill C-59, we are showing our support for the countless Canadians who have been hurt by these crimes.

Our government is working to ensure that the protection of society is the top priority in all of our decisions. This includes helping victims of crime and making sure that victims' needs are at the centre of our agenda. Our government is making victims' rights a priority. There are already numerous programs in place. We have delivered many measures to ensure that victims' voices are heard and that their needs are met.

Public Safety Canada's National Office for Victims, for example, is a central resource for victims who have concerns about offenders and questions about the federal correctional and Canadian justice systems. The office also provides input on policy and legislative initiatives. It provides education about victims' issues for members of the criminal justice system.

Also, the Office of the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime was created to ensure the federal government meets its responsibilities to persons hurt by crime. Victims can contact the office to learn more about their rights and the services available to them. They can make a complaint about any federal agency or legislation dealing with victims of crime. The ombudsman also ensures that policy makers and other criminal justice personnel are aware of victims' needs. She identifies important issues and trends that may negatively impact victims.

Government Orders

One of our government's first actions upon taking office in 2006 was to introduce the federal victims strategy. Since then, the government has committed substantial funding to support this strategy. We have cracked down on organized crime, including drug crime, with tougher sentences and we passed the Tackling Violent Crime Act to better protect 14 and 15-year-old victims.

In addition, we are delivering support to victims of crime directly by giving access to employment insurance benefits for family members of victims of crime. We established the right for unpaid leave for workers in federally-regulated industries. We are making the victim surcharge mandatory to better fund victim services.

I could go on and on as there are many more initiatives and actions that this government is delivering to put victims' rights at the forefront of the justice system. Bill C-59 is delivering on the changes that victims of crime have been asking for, changes that are long overdue.

The amendments being proposed would ensure that offenders who commit fraud and other so-called white collar crimes are sentenced to serve time in custody that adequately reflects the seriousness and consequences of their crime. Why would any sensible parliamentarian oppose that?

All offenders would be treated equally, regardless of the nature of their crimes. As such, eligibility for day parole would occur six months prior to full parole eligibility and full parole review still after serving only one-third of their sentences. This is a very mild change, but it is a change that sends a message loud and clear that our government is committed to ensuring that our justice and corrections systems do not put the rights of offenders ahead of the rights of law-abiding citizens. We will continue tackling crime and standing up for those who have been victimized.

I urge all hon. members today to support the motion being debated. Let us all show that we are listening to what Canadians want. Let us all stand up for victims' rights. If we take action now to fix the problem in the parole system that allows for the early release of convicted criminals, we can see to it that victims of fraud see true justice.

Let us all work together to address the concerns of ordinary Canadians and ensure that these important changes receive quick passage into law.

• (1820)

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to hear that there is some urgency to this.

The Liberal Party asked for this legislation two years ago but the government did not see fit to do anything about it. Then there was Bill C-21, where the Liberal Party proposed an amendment along exactly the same lines as the hon. member is talking about, and that was killed by the government. Now we have this bill which, apparently, is quite urgent. We will have to run this debate through and have virtually no conversation.

I will ask the same question that I asked the previous speakers. Does the hon. member have any idea whatsoever as to how much this bill will cost?

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Mr. Speaker, first let me say how encouraged I am to hear from the Liberal member opposite that this bill is something that the Liberal Party has been waiting for and that he considers to be long overdue. I can only surmise from that, that he and his colleagues intend to agree with me and will support this motion.

As to the question of cost, I wonder how much it is worth to the member who asked that question to protect victims' rights and to give them a sense of justice in this country. If I knew what price my friend and colleague opposite was asking, I would do everything possible to ensure that we could do it within the price he is asking.

As it is, I am happy to say that I do not think the victims themselves would possibly countenance the kind of question that my friend is asking about what price they would pay to assure them this peace of mind.

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague because I think he actually just agreed with the NDP position on the motion that is before us here today.

The motion before us today is about whether we have adequate time to debate this justice bill. It is a guillotine motion. It is a time allocation motion that says that the government will cut off the amount of time that members have to debate Bill C-59.

Clearly the member agrees with us here on the NDP side of the House that there is not enough time because he spent his entire 10 minutes talking about the bill itself, not about the motion that is before us here today. He repeatedly talked about the need for urgent action to help victims.

I have been here for five years and that member has been on the government side of the House for five years and suddenly today, this week, this matter is urgent. Where were those members five years ago? They have had ample opportunity to bring this bill forward.

Finally, I would like to remind members that it is our responsibility in a system of responsible government to hold the government to account and to look into the public spending of funds, and yet at every opportunity the government has made that impossible.

The finance committee asked about the detailed costing of justice bills, about analysis and projections, including assumptions, and despite the fact that such a motion passed duly in the finance committee, the government has refused to provide that costing information. It is not making it possible for us to do our job.

I want the member to comment on that and on whether he agrees that we do need more time to do due diligence which Canadians have sent us here to undertake on their behalf.

• (1825)

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate what I perceive to be a compliment paid to me by my friend in that she thinks I have been here for five years. I am glad that my performance in the House reflects that but the fact is that I was not here five years ago. So, regretfully, I am dealing with this bill as it comes to me.

Government Orders

As to why I was able to spend 10 minutes talking about things other than the closure motion and talking about other things that our government has done for victims, it is because the issue here is really very simple. Quite frankly, we did not even need all afternoon today to talk about it. We could have voted on this earlier today and passed what is a crystal clear bill to protect victims.

I want to enlighten my friend a little bit about the fact that her colleague on the environment committee, the member for Edmonton—Strathcona, helped to push through a coalition closure on debate in the environment committee which allows each Conservative member one and a half minutes to speak to each clause. She thinks that is too long. I am sure she will agree that the amount of time we are giving to this debate this afternoon is more than adequate.

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as opposed to everyone on the government side, I will actually speak to what the debate is about right now, which is about shutting down the democratic process in this House by limiting the amount of time that we are allowed to consider a significant issue.

I do not think any party is claiming that this is not a significant issue. It is a significant issue and one that probably should have been dealt with four or five years ago when the Conservatives first formed government.

What we have before us is an undemocratic shut down of debate. The government wants to shove a bill through the House with nowhere near enough time to deal with the facts and to make proper public policy. That is offensive to the democratic process. Speaking as the NDP justice critic and as a lawyer, it is particularly offensive for the government to force a bill through in this manner when we are dealing with criminal justice issues and the question of people's liberty.

What is the government doing? This motion will obviously pass later today because of the holy coalition between the Conservatives and the Bloc, which will be more than enough members to get it through.

I am being reminded that I forgot to tell the House that I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Hamilton Mountain.

This is what will happen. The government will call the bill tomorrow and we will have one day of debate. Allowing for question period and routine proceedings, that will amount to maybe four hours of debate or maybe even a bit less than that. At 5:15 p.m. tomorrow, the bill will be put to a vote. We will have one day of debate at second reading and then the bill will immediately be sent over to committee. The committee will be given until 11 o'clock tomorrow evening to report the bill back to the House. If my math is correct, the committee will have less than five hours to bring forth witnesses, debate the issues, make any amendments and go through the bill clause by clause.

We are talking about a criminal justice bill that would affect the liberty of people in this country and yet debate will be limited.

Then, and I always find this one really cute, if amendments are not approved at committee stage, members will have until 3 a.m., four more hours, to get proposed amendments to the clerk. I do not know who at the Table has been designated to be here until 3 a.m. on

Wednesday morning but he or she will need to be because I assume we will have amendments during that period of time.

Wednesday is considered a half day given that the caucus meets on Wednesday morning. The bill will be called again in the afternoon and, by the end of that day, the debate on both report stage and third reading must be completed. A vote will be held that evening and, assuming the coalition will stick together, the bill will pass and be on its way to the Senate where the unelected, Conservative dominated, not responsible, other than to the Prime Minister, Senate will pass the bill and it will become law. The Conservatives have been in office for five years and they will shove the bill through.

● (1830)

We have had one election that was contrary to their laws and two prorogations during that period of time. We had the justice committee tied up for a very long period of time due to the shenanigans of the chair. The justice committee went a whole year without sitting because of the election, the prorogation and the shenanigans of the chair.

When we are talking about the importance of timeliness here, where have the Conservatives been? What they have been doing is what they have done with so many other crime bills. They always talk about protecting the victims but the victims were there five years ago, four years ago, three years ago, two years ago and last year. When did we see this bill? The first time we saw it was about five or six months ago.

There is another thing with regard to timeliness. On two different occasions, the Bloc Québécois introduced a private member's bill seeking unanimous consent. On those two occasions, the Conservative government refused to give unanimous consent. Where were the Conservatives then on protecting the victims? They were sitting on their hands because they wanted to take credit for this. That is what this is all about.

We are now faced with the prospect of an election, potentially in the next few months, so the Conservatives want to ensure they get this through so they can run around the country and say that this is what they have done to get tough on crime. It is a joke and it is highly hypocritical by any objective analysis.

I want to go to what this issue is about. From both the experiences I have had at justice and those my colleague from Vancouver has had on the public safety committee, the information that we need as to what changes should be made in this part of the Corrections and Conditional Release Act will not be available in that 36 to 48 hour timeframe I have just given. It will not be available because this information is not on a computer any place. I want to know how many people were released last year or in the last three to five years under the one-sixth provision of the Corrections and Conditional Release Act.

Government Orders

I actually have a rough estimate for that. We have asked this of both the Minister of Public Safety and the Minister of Justice repeatedly and they do not know, or at least they are refusing to say. They always get up and talk about victims but they do not tell us what this will really do and who has used this up to this point. We have some rough figures. There may be as many as 1,500 individuals per year. This is almost speculation on how many actually get it. We know, in a rough way, that it is somewhere in the 800 individuals per year range. We do not know though by how much their sentences are reduced. If I take a rough estimate that each person is going to get out a year earlier, because these people generally will be in the minimum security sections of our prisons, the cost is about \$85,000 to have them there. I am not really great at math but I am certainly better than the government is. If we do this calculation for 1,500 individuals, it is up to about \$100 million. If it is only about 1,000 people we are going to keep in, that would be \$85 million a year.

When we go out to the public and say that we are taking care of the victims, we need to consider the taxpayers. We also will be asking who has used this. Is it all white collar crime? Is it the Earl Jones and the Lacroix of the world? We do not know that. We have had speculation that it may be people who have been involved in the drug trade. We do not know that, and if there are those, we do not know how many.

When I say “we”, I and my colleague probably has more information than the government has. However, I can tell the House that by tomorrow evening, when the committee is working on this, those figures will be no clearer than what I have at this point. Those statistics are not computerized. We know from other experiences that Correctional Service Canada and the Parole Board have to look at each individual file to tell us what an individual was convicted of, for how long and how much he or she will get off. However, we will not have that information so we will be flying blind by the time we actually have to vote on the bill when it gets back here on Wednesday.

• (1835)

Mr. Stephen Woodworth (Kitchener Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will begin by saying, first, I find it rather ironic to hear an NDP member stand in the House and accuse anyone of being hypocritical. However, I will say no more than that for fear of offending parliamentary rules.

I will also say that I am glad that the member has revealed that he has had this bill in his possession for the last five or six months. I will compliment him by saying that I am sure he has the legal savvy to have figured it out a long time ago.

I also want to thank him for confirming what the rest of us are already suspecting, that he and his caucus are bound and determined to bring us into an unnecessary election that no Canadian really wants.

Every Canadian I have talked to who has looked at this bill and seen fraudsters and others who commit non-violent crimes being released after serving only one-sixth of their sentences knows there is something wrong with that.

In his whole 10 minutes, the hon. member did not justify that proposition in any sense. Is the member that disconnected from Canadians that he does not agree with that?

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, the member for Hamilton Mountain says that I am not; and I agree with her, I am not.

It is interesting that the member talks about white collar criminals, and then he says “and others”. He has no idea who those others are.

Let me give me one example that I heard of recently. A woman who was addicted, I am not sure if it was to gambling or drugs, embezzled a large amount of money from her employer. She had young children. She was sentenced to more than two years and is now in federal prison. It is her first offence. Those children are not being cared for by other family members. If she applies for parole, she is going to get it. Is the average Canadian going to say, no, she should not get it?

She can go home and put her life back together. She has cured her addiction, which would be part of the reason for her being able to get out. She will be back in society, hopefully, being productive and caring for her children. Would the average Canadian say no to that? I do not know. However, I think the average Canadian who I know and who cares would say, yes, it is time to let her out and let her get her life back together.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can appreciate the hon. member's fact-filled speech, in distinct contrast to the freedom from facts that members opposite in the government seem to fill their rhetoric with rather than facts.

Again, I have been asking this question, and I will continue to ask it for the balance of the debate. The hon. member started to circle in on the cost of this particular measure. It is clear that either the government members do not know or they will not say. I suspect it is the former, that they actually do not know.

The member started to talk about the cost of incarceration in the order of about \$85,000 to \$100,000 on a per-year basis, per inmate. I would be interested to know if the member had some thoughts as to what the actual cost of this measure would be.

• (1840)

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, I was quite serious. It is hard to be more specific than this because we do not know what the original sentence was. That, again, has to be gathered file by file.

However, as that is being done, we have to assume that it is going to be close to one year for the average person, because we rarely get people sentenced to federal prison for exactly two years. Most of the time it will be three, four, five or six years.

If we take one-sixth off that, we will be talking in a number of cases about a year of additional time in jail. Just do the math in rough figures. There are at least 1,000 people from what we have been able to determine who are eligible for this each year, of which 800-plus receive it, and we think that number may be as high as 1,500. All of those people stay in. Even if it were the 800 figure, it would not be \$85 million, but about \$70 million or \$75 million. That is what we are talking about.

Government Orders

When the Conservatives run around the country and stir up the pot and do their fearmongering, they never put a dollar figure to it. In fact, they are hiding the figures. We have a motion before this House right now for them to deliver those figures for a whole bunch of other crime bills. We never see the figures. They never talk about what this is going to cost; they talk about prudent financial planning. However, they do not have the first idea about that when it comes to this issue.

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I too want to rise to speak to Government Motion No. 10, a motion to cut short the debate on the latest government crime bill, Bill C-59, An Act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act. The bill itself addresses accelerated parole review. That is not the substance of the motion before us in the House today.

What we are debating today is the government's draconian use of House rules to stifle debate, to undermine the democratic process and to push through its agenda without regard to due process and without giving interested Canadians the ability to engage in the policy process.

Under this motion, the Conservatives are allowing just one day of debate on second reading, a mere four hours in committee, and one day for the report and third reading stages combined.

Canadians have seen this movie before. This is hardly the first time the government has expressed its disdain for the democratic process. I do not need to remind anyone in this House about the most egregious example, the government's prorogation of Parliament.

The Prime Minister has shown himself willing to shut Parliament for reasons ranging from the politically existential to the merely expedient and, of course, he had hoped that Canadians would not notice, or at least that they would not care. However, huge demonstrations and rallies from coast to coast proved him wrong. Canadians did care, because they understood they were being silenced.

By having their elected representatives silenced, Canadians lost their voice in the single most important democratic institution in this country, and they were enraged. Canadians angrily denounced the Prime Minister's secretive behaviour and for not meeting even the minimum standards of parliamentary accountability and democracy. The reaction caught the Conservatives off guard. They were counting on the fact that Canadians would not care, but they did care, and post prorogation polling showed that the government was paying a price.

Yet here we are just a few short months later and the government has not learned a thing. It is still intent on silencing its critics. While the Conservatives may not be doing it by shutting down Parliament altogether this time, they are invoking archaic rules to ensure that their legislative agenda cannot be debated properly. They always do it when they are trying to pull a fast one.

Ontarians will remember only too well when the Conservatives pulled the same manoeuvre to silence opposition to the HST. They used a time allocation motion then too to try to sweep their culpability under the rug as quickly as possible. Ontarians were outraged. No other issue has generated as many phone calls, as many emails, as many letters or as many faxes as that reviled tax. My

office was swamped with feedback in opposition to that tax hike in the middle of the worst recession since the Great Depression. People were angry, and their anger was exacerbated by the way the government tried to silence their opposition by rushing the bill through the House.

In the end, the people who wanted to have their voices heard were right. The HST did not help them to survive the recession, and the much touted rebate for some families fell far short of making up for the increased tax burden that every Ontario family now has to bear. In fact, the average tax increase as a result of the HST is now costing Ontario families \$1,200 more a year.

Instead of pursuing its headlong rush to get the HST passed, the government should have listened more carefully to what thoughtful Canadians were saying. The HST is not an issue where businesses are on one side and Canadian citizens are on the other. Businesses too are feeling the impact of this tax.

I had the privilege of being invited to an annual get-together by the Concession Street Business Improvement Association in my riding of Hamilton Mountain. This association represents small businesses on the oldest commercial street in my riding. I had barely been there for five minutes when the then president of the association made it absolutely clear that he was 100% opposed to the HST. The additional cost imposed on his operations, on everything from heat and electricity to the cost of transportation, was making it increasingly difficult for his family-run business to survive. That sentiment was echoed by dozens of other businesses represented at the event.

Emails continued to flood in to prove that the HST should never have been rushed through the House. Here are the comments of someone who has been running a financial advisory business for over 10 years. His business not only contributes directly to the economy, but also helps local residents plan for and achieve their financial goals. He described the HST as a new tax on savings. The combined 13% tax directly impacts the savings of all Canadians who own investment funds. It costs Ontario residents hundreds of millions of dollars every year in extra taxes that otherwise could be put into their retirements savings.

● (1845)

Since it is tax time, let me spell it out for the House. Consider a small investor who has \$20,000 in mutual funds and contributes \$4,000 each year. Over a 20-year period, the HST would mean an additional \$4,000 in taxes. This investor would lose an entire year's worth of savings. Because the HST is being applied to the cost of managing the mutual fund, investors would have to pay it each and every year. It is ironic that the more people save, the more tax they will pay.

At a time when the finance minister is on the record as wanting to find a solution to the crisis in retirement income security, it is mind-boggling that he implemented a tax that only makes things worse. Considering that he still suggests that businesses in Canada wanted the HST, it is clear that he did not do enough listening.

Government Orders

Instead of rushing the implementing legislation through this House by means of a time allocation motion, he should have allowed for comprehensive committee hearings so that he could have had the benefit of learning from the experience of businesses of all sizes and from Canadians, particularly in Ontario and B.C. However, when the government curtails debate, it deprives itself of that opportunity and Canadians are worse off for it.

Here is what one senior told me:

I am a senior that must work part-time to be able to maintain my home and sustain a reasonable level of daily living and I am very concerned with regard to the blending of the two taxes.

Every day we are hearing that this utility, (hydro, water, sewer rates, bus fares, garbage collection, etc.) or real estate taxes are going up and we are just expected to be able to find the money from our meagre income to meet these new obligations. If we are able to drive a car the ever increasing cost of gasoline with the government taxes makes it almost impossible to utilize the vehicle without being required to sacrifice somewhere else in the household budget. With the cost of heating fuels going through the roof it is becoming almost impossible to heat your quarters without being deprived of some other part of your budget... Do these people have any idea what the average senior lives through each month just to get by. Where in God's name do they expect seniors to get the extra costs from - when the well is dry—the well is dry!!

Clearly, both the Conservative government here in Ottawa and the McGuinty government provincially are still paying the price for the rushed implementation of the HST, and there is absolutely no doubt that it will be front and centre in the upcoming election campaigns.

Rushing legislation through the House has a political cost. Issues cannot just be swept under the rug. Canadians demand to be heard and Canadians deserve to be heard.

For the Bloc to be complicit in muzzling elected members by teaming up with the Conservatives on this motion is shameful. Bloc members have always expressed their outrage at time allocation motions when they have dealt with back-to-work legislation and other matters of public interest. Now that it serves their own political agenda, they are selling out their principles for the sake of expediency.

Canadians want their elected representatives to study and debate bills, not to run roughshod over Parliament to play wedge political games, as the Bloc and Conservatives are doing here. It is important to study the bills that come before us. In fact, as elected members of Parliament, that is our responsibility.

While this is not the time to debate Bill C-59 itself, let me be clear that of course Canadians want to see white collar criminals who have defrauded Canadians serve appropriate sentences. We all get angry when someone like Vincent Lacroix defrauds people of tens of millions of dollars and then walks out of jail early. The law should come down hard on white collar financial crimes and sentences should be tough on criminals like Earl Jones whose actions wiped out people's life savings.

However, working for fair and appropriate sentencing that keeps our streets safe requires striking a balance. That means bringing bills to committee and hearing from expert witnesses. That is how we make Parliament work for Canadians. It is not by bringing in draconian time allocation motions that try to muzzle MPs, but by debating legislation in committee and in the House so that the interests of Canadians are heard and protected.

I urge all members of this House to vote against Motion No. 10 and allow the legislative process to proceed as it should.

● (1850)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for raising the issue.

A lot of the speeches today have been second reading speeches on the legislation and not on the process of dealing with Bill C-59, which is a very draconian measure to take place in this House, because it basically prevents Parliament from doing its job. In a sense, it limits the amount of time that a committee would have to hear from witnesses and to propose and properly debate amendments to the legislation; and then bringing it back and fast-tracking all of the stages is part of the problem. I oppose the motion for closure and the process; it does not mean that I oppose the bill.

However, I do know, and the member may want to comment on this, that the government has refused to provide information on the costing of justice bills. If we are going to do our jobs and consider legislation in a forthright and informed manner, we need to know that information. The government said it is a matter of confidence.

We have a matter of privilege before the House on the request of the finance committee for this information. The government is claiming it is cabinet confidence, and they have not even responded to the privilege issue yet. They are frustrating our ability to do the job and to do it well.

I hope the member will agree that this closure motion and what it is doing to the privileges of parliamentarians is what the House should consider first.

Ms. Chris Charlton: Mr. Speaker, I certainly agree. The process that is being used is denying members their right to debate government legislation and bring the interests of Canadians to bear on that legislation. That is a fundamental right. In fact, it is our responsibility under our system of responsible government to do that.

The member is also right that in order for us to be able to do the analysis and bring the appropriate scrutiny to bear on bills, we have to know how much these government initiatives cost. That is why the finance committee demanded that the costs be revealed by the government.

I do not often give the Liberals credit, but in fact past Liberal governments gave us five-year projections. I am going to take a minute to remind the House what bills are at stake. There are: Bill S-2, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and other Acts; Bill S-6, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and another Act; Bill S-7; Bill S-9; Bill S-10. There are 18 crime legislation bills in total and the government will not provide to members of the House the costs of implementing this legislation. It is unconscionable and it denies members the ability to do their jobs properly.

Government Orders

Ms. Lois Brown (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is a great deal of hypocrisy going on when the member accuses our side of the House of not dealing with the issue and talks about victims when she uses her time to talk about the HST, which she knows as well as my side knows, is a decision by the governments of Ontario and British Columbia, not a decision of our government. Using her time to accuse us of not using our time appropriately is inappropriate.

Some years back there was a car accident caused by an impaired driver. It claimed the life of my mother. Four other individuals in other cars were catastrophically injured. When do members on the other side of the House ever talk about the cost to society and the four individuals whose lives will never be the same? When do they discuss that?

• (1855)

Ms. Chris Charlton: Mr. Speaker, let me deal with the first part of the question. I know the Conservatives are now trying to disown the HST, but I stood in the House on three separate occasions, first debating second reading of the budget implementation bill that gave us the HST, then on a time allocation motion when the government tried to expedite the HST through the House, then on third reading of the same bill. I did not imagine that, and the member can check *Hansard*. The HST was debated in the House because it was the government that brought forward the enabling legislation.

With respect to victims of crime, of course all of us take those issues very seriously and it is incumbent upon us to support the victims of crime. Tomorrow night we will be debating a bill in the House brought forward by the Bloc, Bill C-343. It deals specifically with helping victims of crime and their families and yet the government is not going to support that bill. I do not think I need to take any lectures on hypocrisy from members on that side of the House.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes (Brossard—La Prairie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to participate in the debate on the motion to prevent debate on the content and substance of Bill C-59. I find it rather odd that the Bloc has supported the government's attempt to stifle any attempt at debate on the substance of this bill.

No one in the House can accuse the Liberals of not supporting the idea of eliminating parole eligibility after one-sixth of the sentence is served for economic crimes. Two years ago, my colleague from Bourassa, our candidate in Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert and our member for Lac-Saint-Louis participated in a press conference with several of Earl Jones' victims to call on the government to quickly bring forward a bill to eliminate parole eligibility after one-sixth of the sentence is served, especially for criminals who commit major fraud and have multiple victims.

No one can accuse the Liberals of not supporting that idea. I think it is really dishonest of the government to make that kind of accusation when it knows very well what the Liberals' position is. This was pointed out by my colleague from Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine.

Now I would like to talk about the debate and the fact that the Conservatives and the Bloc members want to limit the scope of the

debate. Just seven months ago the members of the Bloc rose in the House to criticize the government for doing the exact same thing it is doing now with Bill C-59. The government moved a motion to block debate.

Last June, the member for Saint-Maurice—Champlain rose in the House to criticize the government for moving a motion to block debate on the Canada-Colombia Free Trade Agreement Implementation Act. The Bloc member for Hochelaga also rose to oppose a government motion to block debate on Bill C-9, the Jobs and Economic Growth Act, by imposing time allocation.

We are opposed to this time allocation motion because we believe that Bill C-59 addresses a very important issue. Furthermore, for two years now, the Liberals have been calling on the government to eliminate parole eligibility after one-sixth of the sentence is served for economic crimes like those committed by Earl Jones, Vincent Lacroix and others.

I think it is a shame that some would have people believe that the Liberals do not want to protect victims. That is simply not true. When the government introduced Bill C-21 on economic crimes and it was referred to committee, the Liberal justice critic proposed an amendment to the bill to eliminate eligibility for parole after one-sixth of the sentence in cases of economic crime. The Conservatives and the Bloc defeated the motion.

Every MP is entitled to his or her opinion on bills that we are called on to debate in the House. It is a fundamental aspect of the democratic process. The operative word here is "debate", and the collusion between the Conservatives and the Bloc is preventing us from acting as responsible parliamentarians.

We would like to hear from experts. We want to know how this bill will truly address a gap in the law, how it will do justice to victims, how this bill will improve the chances of rehabilitation for those who once lost control of their lives.

Perhaps we should indeed eliminate parole after one-sixth of a sentence for offenders who have committed serious economic crimes and left a number of victims.

However, for non-violent criminal acts that are not fraud, we believe that evidence has shown that parole after one-sixth of a sentence has been very effective and that the rate of recidivism is much lower.

We will never know what the experts might have said since this closure motion eliminates any chance to consult experts. With this government so eager to control everything, it has become somewhat of a tradition to just pass a bill without any idea of the facts that might call it into question.

Government Orders

The Liberals are against this closure motion. It is not justified, and we regret that the Bloc has decided to join the Conservatives to limit the debate on this bill. As far as the substance of the bill is concerned, in the past and still today, no one could accuse the Liberals of not showing their support for eliminating parole after one-sixth of the sentence for economic crimes.

In order to illustrate the government's intellectual dishonesty, I would like to present a chronology of the Conservatives' failures in their so-called fight against crime.

● (1900)

I am referring here to the various bills that have died on the order paper for all sorts of reasons or that have remained in the House or at committee indefinitely.

Here they are. Bill C-15, An Act to amend the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act and to make related and consequential amendments to other Acts, died on the order paper when Parliament was prorogued; Bill C-19, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (investigative hearing and recognizance with conditions), died on the order paper before the House had a chance to vote on it; Bill C-26, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (auto theft and trafficking in property obtained by crime), also died on the order paper. It is certainly not the opposition that forced the government to prorogue Parliament.

Bill C-31, An Act to amend the Criminal Code, the Corruption of Foreign Public Officials Act and the Identification of Criminals Act and to make a consequential amendment to another Act, died on the order paper, and Bill C-36, An Act to amend the Criminal Code, on the faint hope clause, died on the order paper before being brought back this session. One committee meeting was held on Bill C-46, An Act to amend the Criminal Code, the Competition Act and the Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters Act, before it died on the order paper. Bill C-52, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (sentencing for fraud), which is related to Bill C-59, the bill we are dealing with today, died on the order paper when Parliament was prorogued. Bill C-58, An Act respecting the mandatory reporting of Internet child pornography by persons who provide an Internet service, died on the order paper. The prorogation of Parliament killed many bills.

Among the bills introduced by the Minister of Public Safety was Bill C-34, the Protecting Victims From Sex Offenders Act, which also died on the order paper. The bill to deter terrorism and to amend the State Immunity Act died on the order paper. Bill C-43, An Act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act and the Criminal Code, died on the order paper. Bill C-47, An Act regulating telecommunications facilities to support investigations, died on the order paper. Bill C-53, An Act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act (accelerated parole review) and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, died on the order paper. Bill C-60, An Act to implement the Framework Agreement on Integrated Cross-Border Maritime Law Enforcement Operations between the Government of Canada and the Government of the United States of America, died on the order paper.

To date, no meetings have been held to discuss Bill C-16, An Act to amend the Criminal Code. Bill C-17, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (investigative hearing and recognizance with

conditions), was given first reading 51 days after Parliament was prorogued, and the committee still has not met to discuss that bill.

Bill C-21, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (sentencing for fraud), was fast-tracked at committee in just one meeting and still has not reached second reading. Bill C-22, An Act respecting the mandatory reporting of Internet child pornography by persons who provide an Internet service, was given first reading 64 days after Parliament was prorogued, and the government delayed it for 26 days at report stage because of the debate on the short title.

Bill C-48, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and to make consequential amendments to the National Defence Act, was given first reading 89 days after Parliament was prorogued, and we are still waiting for the next step. Bill C-50, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (interception of private communications and related warrants and orders), was given first reading after 94 days, and we are still waiting. First reading of An Act to amend the Criminal Code, the Competition Act and the Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters Act took place 243 days after Parliament was prorogued. Bill C-53, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (mega-trials), was given first reading and nothing more.

● (1905)

Bill C-54, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (sexual offences against children) only made it to first reading. Bill C-5, An Act to amend the International Transfer of Offenders Act was introduced at first reading by the Minister of Public Safety 15 days after prorogation. Two committee meetings were held and nothing has happened since. As for Bill C-23B, An Act to amend the Criminal Records Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, we are still waiting. After a few meetings on the subject, the minister was supposed to come back with amendments that he felt were necessary in order to make the bill more comprehensive and definitely more respectful. Bill C-39, An Act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts was introduced for first reading 104 days after prorogation and we still have not met in committee to discuss it. Bill C-49, An Act to amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, the Balanced Refugee Reform Act and the Marine Transportation Security Act was introduced for first reading 232 days after prorogation and there it remains. Bill C-52, An Act regulating telecommunications facilities to support investigations was also introduced for first reading 243 days after prorogation and we are waiting for the next step. The Senate introduced Bill S-7, An Act to deter terrorism and to amend the State Immunity Act for first reading 49 days after prorogation and we are still waiting for the next step. Bill S-10, An Act to amend the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act and to make related and consequential amendments to other Acts was introduced for first reading in the Senate 60 days after prorogation. Bill S-13, An Act to implement the Framework Agreement on Integrated Cross-Border Maritime Law Enforcement Operations between the Government of Canada and the Government of the United States of America was introduced for first reading 237 days after prorogation.

I am pointing this out to prove that it is not the opposition parties that are slowing the process down. For all sorts of unknown reasons, the government introduces these bill and then goes no further with them.

Government Orders

To conclude, I would like to question the justification for Bill C-59 and the fact that the Conservatives and the Bloc felt this was urgent enough to warrant this closure motion, which is an affront to parliamentary dialogue.

Mr. Daniel Paillé (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we just had a very long presentation, with fancy words, grand titles and major detours. It is as though we were using the term tuber instead of potato. Or, as if someone were being told that they are unable to do something.

In this situation, the government agrees. Two years ago, the Liberals agreed; six months ago, they agreed; one and a half years ago, they agreed; and, all of a sudden, they agree. Stop ragging the puck and let us get on with it, or else Earl Jones will be released. They held a press conference with the member for Bourassa, which must have been quite something. Now, they say that it will be appalling. So, they accept. Let us get going, let us get it done. It may not be perfect, but let us do it quickly, right now.

• (1910)

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes: Mr. Speaker, I do not believe that the member for Hochelaga's remarks actually contain a question. We did not say that we would not like to do it. We said that the process was insulting to our parliamentary life and our role as parliamentarians. There is a time and a place for examining bills—in our parliamentary committees—which is what we are currently debating.

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am sure the member is well aware that the member for Kings—Hants came before the House with a question of privilege, which notified the House that the government had refused to provide five year data on corporate tax cuts as well as the costing of a whole list of justice bills. The government had claimed that this was cabinet confidence.

Would the member like to comment on whether the costing of legislation is a relevant aspect of doing a reasoned review of legislation and whether proceeding with this bill without that kind of information is in fact interfering with our ability to do our jobs?

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes: Mr. Speaker, the member asked a relevant question. I just detailed the number of bills we have had in front of us which deal with justice and public safety matters.

We have to know how much this will cost Canadians, both in terms of correctional services and in rehabilitative services. How much can we actually save by protecting victims from criminals? If we manage to rehabilitate a criminal, then we will avoid new victims. That is one of the basic ideas behind our stance on these bills.

Mr. Ben Lobb (Huron—Bruce, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-5, the international transfer of offenders act, wound its way through committee. Not once did a member of the Liberal Party ask a question about the cost of that bill or any changes to it.

Why did the Liberals ask for the costs on one bill, yet on another bill they did not? I would be interested in my colleague's answer to that question.

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes: Mr. Speaker, we have asked questions on all of the justice and public safety bills, not just one.

As Bill C-5 has not passed through committee yet, I will not comment on that issue.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for her remarks. I also serve with her on committee and I truly appreciate her. I would like to perhaps help her to understand the meaning of this bill a little better.

In fact, all we have done is to remove the small part about accelerated parole review from Bill C-39, which is already being reviewed by a committee, and to create Bill C-59. It is much like pulling a tuber out of the nourishing earth. By doing this, we made it possible for the bill to be examined in its simplicity, as we would do with a tuber. Looking closely, we would be able to see its hairy roots, for example; I am imagining the drawing. We would then be able to easily analyze the tuber in its simplest form. The same goes for Bill C-59. We extracted a component and now we can break it down and look at it in its simplest form, like the tuber with its hairy roots.

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes: Mr. Speaker, once again, I do not know if my colleague has a question. I thank her for her comments. I believe that, sometimes, we must not be overly simplistic when it comes to the studies we conduct. We must use the microscope and all the tools that science can offer to conduct a precise analysis of these bills.

• (1915)

[*English*]

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, questions come up constantly about the cost of the bills. A responsible government should always be able to project the cost of any legislation, and the Conservatives know that. The bottom line is they do not really care. At the end of the day, they just want to get the legislation through.

Through economic necessity, the United States is now revisiting what Ronald Reagan started 25 years ago. Even right-wing Newt Gingrich and others are involved in working with the Democrats in the states of Texas and South Carolina to embark on programs that actually work. The U.S. is doing some of the things we are already doing up here, like drug courts and other types of measures.

Does the member question a government that would ignore what its political cousins are doing in the United States? Is it because the Conservatives are getting ready for an election campaign? They cannot be totally ignorant of what is happening with Newt Gingrich and other conservatives in the United States on the smart on crime approach.

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes: Mr. Speaker, obviously, yes. We are all aware of the experience the United States has lived through, particularly the California experience and how much of that has been called into question. It has overloaded the system in the United States. It has created a state of chaos in the prison system.

Government Orders

I hope the government will take the time to study the impact it has had on American society and try not to repeat it in Canada. We do not need that. We do not have the kind of deep social problems that the United States has with crime. We do not need to take our legislation to those extremes and create the associated costs that our society cannot support.

Mr. Ben Lobb (Huron—Bruce, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise before the House today.

Before I start, it being Valentine's Day today, I would be remiss if I did not wish my wife at home a Happy Valentine's Day. She did get a bouquet of flowers at work. We have to do what we have to do these days to get a few points in the bank, so I now have a couple at least.

I am very pleased with the opportunity to rise in support of the motion before us today. I have listened with a great deal of interest to the comments of several hon. members. As I am the last speaker on this issue tonight, I imagine there will be a lot of repetition in my comments.

What Bill C-59 means is that all offenders will be put on equal footing when it comes to eligibility for parole. There will be no more distinction made between white-collar and other types offenders.

In essence, Bill C-59 says that all offenders must be held accountable. That has not always been the case as I will explain in a few minutes. Indeed, under the present system, Canadians today can witness con artists and fraudsters spend very little time in jail even though they may have destroyed the lives of hundreds of hard-working and law-abiding Canadians.

Canadians have a right to feel outrage when they hear of con artists, who have been handed seemingly lengthy sentences, walking right out of jail shortly after the ink has dried on the newspaper headlines announcing their conviction. We have all seen that. They have a right to be outraged that the concerns and rights of victims of crime apparently are being ignored. Victims have a right to be outraged, and, indeed, they are. The convicted white-collar offenders are apparently not held fully accountable for their actions. Our government is listening to victims and to all Canadians and taking action. Bill C-59 is about that.

The current system of accelerated parole review goes back to 1992 when the Corrections and Conditional Release Act was enacted. Back then many Canadians had never heard of offenders like Bernie Madoff or Earl Jones. Fraud seemed to be something that happened in the upper boardrooms of large corporations. Today fraud and white-collar crimes are taking on much more of a human face. They not only affect large corporations; they ruin a countless number of lives. They wipe out people's life savings and leave Canadians who have worked hard all their lives impoverished and destitute.

However, what is particularly troubling is that many victims are essentially becoming re-victimized by the relatively small amount of time that con artists and fraudsters have to spend in jail for their crimes.

When the initial provisions were enacted, accelerated parole review applied solely to full parole, and that is it applied after the offender had completed at least one-third of his or her sentence, or seven years, whichever was shorter.

Amazingly enough, the system was changed to make things even more expedited. Today, white-collar criminals who are convicted of a first time non-violent offence can actually qualify for day parole under the terms of the accelerated parole review after serving one-sixth of their sentence. For example, that means someone who has been convicted of fraud and handed a 13-year sentence, and I will return to that shortly, could be actually walking the streets again in as little as two years. Where is the justice in that? Where is consideration given to the impacted victims? It is nowhere to be found.

Under the current system of accelerated parole review, con artists, fraudsters and those who have fleeced hard-working Canadians of their life savings are guaranteed that their cases will be reviewed in advance by the Parole Board of Canada so they can get parole earlier than other offenders.

The way the present system works is white-collar offenders who might have destroyed the lives of hundreds of Canadians are in fact not even required to apply for parole. They do not have to lift a finger. They do not have to notify anyone that they might even be eligible. Everything is just taken care of.

The Corrections and Conditional Release Act currently stipulates that offenders who qualify for advanced parole review are not required to notify the Parole Board of Canada. However, the current Corrections and Conditional Release Act requires that Correctional Service Canada refer the cases of offender eligibility to the APR, to the Parole Board, before their day parole eligibility date so they may be released as early as possible.

● (1920)

That is not all. Under the existing system the parole board is not even required to hold a parole hearing to assess whether offenders eligible for advanced parole review may be released on day parole and full parole. Imagine that. Today, white collar offenders who might have fleeced a neighbour, a friend or even a family member out of hundreds of thousands of dollars does not even have to meet with anyone from the parole board to explain why they should be given parole. Everything is done via paper review. They are essentially let out on day parole after serving one-sixth of their sentence.

That is quite different from other offenders. Applications for parole by other offenders must be reviewed at a hearing at which, for example, they must persuade the parole board they are ready to live in society as law-abiding citizens and that they will comply with the conditions imposed upon them for the release. Today, as I have said, white collar criminals only have to go through a paper review with the parole board and do not ever have to meet or talk to anyone to explain why they should be given parole. It is hard to believe.

Government Orders

What is more, unlike for other offenders, the parole board must grant parole to an offender who is entitled to advanced parole review unless it determines that the offender is likely to commit an offence involving violence before the expiration of a sentence. Let us review here. The Parole Board of Canada must have reasonable grounds to suspect that someone who might never have committed a violent offence before but who has been convicted of fraud will, after he or she is released, suddenly decide to commit a violent offence. That is the only way a white collar offender can be refused parole after serving just a fraction of his or her sentence behind bars.

The standard is quite different for everybody else, of course. For all other offenders the parole board uses a general reoffending criteria to grant or refuse release. In those cases the parole board will grant parole to an offender after it decides whether the offender possesses an unmanageable risk to commit any type of offence once released. Let me repeat that. For all offenders other than white collar offenders, the national parole board must decide that he or she will not commit any offence once released, whether violent or not. It is quite a different standard.

Like many other Canadians, I am wondering why the system currently treats con artists and fraudsters so differently from other offenders. Like many Canadians, I am left wondering where the sense is in that. Where is the justice for the victims?

Perhaps I do not need to recount a few of the stories many of us heard about the way the current APR operates, but I would like to do it anyway for the benefit of hon. members across the way. These stories are not completely new. There are three I want to highlight.

In 2005 David Radler pleaded guilty in the United States to one count of fraud related to the Hollinger case, which, by some accounts, ruined many lives. Mr. Radler received a 29 month sentence and began serving his term in a Pennsylvania prison. He was transferred to a Canadian jail. Mr. Radler received accelerated day parole from the national parole board after serving less than one year behind bars.

In its decision the parole board noted that Mr. Radler “left a trail of many victims”. What the board said was that its review was limited to considering whether Mr. Radler was violent. That was it. It said that “many who have commented on your offence”, that is Mr. Radler’s offence, “would argue that the financial devastation you caused to the countless victims would constitute a form of violence”. Those are the words of the parole board, that the victims of Mr. Radler counted his actions to be a form of violence, but there was nothing that could be done about it. Again in the worlds of the parole board, “the board must apply the law in the spirit in which it was written”.

That is why all of us need to ensure that Bill C-59 receives the speedy passage it so richly deserves.

● (1925)

Nearly all Canadians have at least heard of the case of Vincent Lacroix. Mr. Lacroix was president of Norbourg Asset Management. In 2009 he pleaded guilty to 200 fraud charges, admitting he bilked investors out of \$115 million. This was one of the most massive frauds in Canadian history and Mr. Lacroix received 13 years in jail.

That, unbelievably, is the harshest sentence ever handed out to a white collar offender in Canada, and that is a whole other debate.

In January of this year, Canadians found out that this con artist, who had destroyed countless lives, had served just one-sixth of his sentence in custody and was out on day parole after spending about 18 months behind bars for this multi-million dollar fraud. Can anyone imagine? His victims were reportedly outraged by the early release and they had a definite right to feel that way.

Then there is the case of Earl Jones. Mr. Jones was somewhat of a financial adviser who created a multi-million dollar Ponzi scheme which eventually bilked investors of between \$50 million to \$100 million. Last year, Mr. Jones pleaded guilty to the charges filed and one month later was given a lengthy sentence. Guess what? We have heard the story before and we are going to hear it again. It turns out this con artist who destroyed countless lives will, under the current accelerated parole review rules, be eligible for day parole after serving one-sixth of his sentence.

Such examples are an outrage for millions of Canadians. They are an outrage to those who have been victimized. They are an outrage to our government which has made standing up for victims a top priority.

I therefore urge all hon. members to work with the government to support the motion before us today and ensure that Bill C-59 is passed into law as expeditiously as possible.

● (1930)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I first want to wish a Happy Valentine’s Day to my lovely and loving wife, Melissa Craig, and my daughter, Aurora Sage Bagnell Craig.

The member said he was the last Conservative speaker. I will not be as loving toward him, unfortunately, but I will ask him one question which all Conservative members have been asked. What is the cost of this initiative?

While he is thinking of the answer, in theory, the officials in the lobby should have provided that information long ago. They should know that before they propose an activity. Imagine when a child wants to buy something using his or her mother’s credit card and the mother asking how much it will cost and the child saying he or she does not know. Imagine a programmer who has created a new initiative and when the chairman of the board asks what it will cost, the programmer says that he does not know. The programmer would be laughed out of the office. This could explain why the government is in the biggest deficit in history. It never costs the things it gets Parliament to approve.

The member did a good job on his speech, but I would like to give the member one last chance. What will the actual cost of this bill be to Canadians?

Government Orders

Mr. Ben Lobb: Mr. Speaker, to show everyone what a small world it is, I will tell a quick story. My parents took a camping vacation in the Yukon. My dad went to get a haircut and who other than the member for Yukon was in the same barbershop getting his hair cut. It is a small world.

I would say, ask not what it costs to house a crook like Earl Jones; rather, ask what the costs are to the people that he has victimized. The point is there is a very long list of those who have committed fraud. If one were to search on Google, there would be countless numbers of hits regarding fraud in Ontario.

There is Earl Jones. In my area, a fellow who operated a business called Pigeon King, defrauded hundreds, maybe thousands of farmers throughout Ontario and yet he has the opportunity to get accelerated parole after serving one-sixth his sentence. It is a shame.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my honourable colleague a question. I listened carefully to his arguments, which were well documented. However, there is a small mistake with regard to Mr. Lacroix's case: he served 15 months of a 13-year, not 10-year, sentence. The hon. member's arguments are quite convincing, but I am surprised that he and his party did not take action sooner.

It was as a result of pressure by the Bloc Québécois and a face-to-face meeting between the Bloc leader and the Prime Minister that the party subsequently was convinced to introduce this bill. Because introduction of the bill was delayed, Mr. Lacroix, who we talked about just now, is free today. Had the Bloc obtained the unanimous consent it asked for in September 2009 and in March 2010, which was opposed only by the Conservatives, Mr. Lacroix would not have been released after serving one-sixth of his sentence.

My colleague spoke about white collar criminals. This bill was drafted to deal with the Matticks, who were sentenced for drug trafficking, and the perpetrators of the sponsorship scandal, who would not have been released.

Why did they not take action sooner?

• (1935)

[*English*]

Mr. Ben Lobb: Mr. Speaker, if that is the message they want to tell in Quebec, that is fine. Those are not the facts, though. I will give members a couple of examples of the facts.

When the House resumed sitting in the fall, there was plenty of opportunity for the opposition coalition to help us move our legislation through the public safety committee.

The International Transfer of Offenders Act—

An hon. member: Prorogation.

Mr. Ben Lobb: This is striking a chord with them now. They are getting a little agitated.

The International Transfer of Offenders Act is one and combatting terrorism is another. Bill C-23B, eliminating pardons for serious crimes, is another one. The list goes on and on. They could have focused on those bills.

I will say that the members from the Bloc who serve on the public safety committee could have brought their issues in the summer. They could have brought them in the fall. They focused on a witch hunt on the RCMP, the Toronto Police Service, the Canadian Forces, and everything else, instead of focusing on an important issue, which would have been to deal with the legislation. It is a little rich for the member now to stand and say if only this or that.

The fact of the matter is we were ready to deal with our legislation in the fall. You guys were busy focusing on something else.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): I would remind hon. members that their comments ought to be addressed to the Chair.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I hope that the member opposite will listen carefully. It is obvious that he does not sit on the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights. If he had been in that committee, he would have realized that nine government bills died on the order paper because the Prime Minister prorogued Parliament.

We are waiting to be able to examine justice bills, which we have been expecting in committee for at least four months. We do not need his lecture here. We will support the Conservatives because it is about time that we abolished parole after one-sixth of the sentence is served. I hope that my colleague will be listening to me until 8:15 p. m. because I will get back to this shortly.

My question is the following. Will the Conservatives bring back other bills? We are not the ones who prevented them from moving forward. They are the ones who did not bring them back. Take, for example, the cybercrime bill. When will the government bring it back? We want to know, since we are the ones being accused of holding back their legislative agenda.

[*English*]

Mr. Ben Lobb: Mr. Speaker, the member had one thing correct. I do not sit on the justice committee. It is called the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security.

Debate on the bill has struck a chord with the Bloc and with the coalition because we are actually dealing with facts. This fall we could have dealt with legislation that would have made a difference in people's lives and they went on a fishing trip instead.

Bill C-23, Eliminating Pardons for Serious Crimes Act is one that would eliminate the possibility for an adult who commits a sexual crime against a child to get a pardon. Opposition members could have had that dealt with this fall but they chose to drag their feet.

Canadians at home need to understand that the talk over there is fancy but there are no facts behind it. Opposition members have a chance every single day they come to committee to get this through, and if all of a sudden they have seen the light and drank the water, why do they not talk to the House leader of our party and get it all dealt with right now? They could call, PIN, text or email him. I ask hon. members, let us do it this week. Let us do something for the victims this week.

Government Orders

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we are going to talk about real concerns. I have been sitting in my office since about 4:00 p.m. or 5:30 p.m.—for as you know, I have a hard time getting around—and listening to the debates. It is unfortunate that there are not more lawyers who have practised criminal law in this House, because I think the questions, with all due respect to my Liberal and NDP colleagues, have been way out in left field. I would not go so far as to say way out in a potato field, but almost.

I was elected to the House in 2004 and as early as 2005, people have been saying that one of the major problems concerning crime, criminal law in Canada and sentencing—and it is unfortunate that not every Tom, Dick and Harry understands this—is not that people are serving sentences that are too short, but rather that the Conservatives are always pushing for more sentences and longer sentences than the sentences handed down.

And whether my colleague across the floor likes it or not, Bill C-54 is currently being examined and the Conservatives still want to impose minimum prison sentences all the time.

I hope they will listen to me. The problem is not the minimum prison sentences. When criminals are sentenced in court and the judge takes the time to explain to one of them, to Harry, for instance, that he is being sentenced to 36 months, Harry can go to prison knowing that, if he has no prior convictions, he may serve eight months. The problem is with the one-sixth rule. There is never enough time to begin treating these people.

I would like to explain something for the benefit of my colleagues across the way, the NDP and the Liberals, who have little experience in criminal law. When a criminal is sentenced—Tom or Dick or Harry, for instance—he is sentenced to exactly 36 months in prison. He is then sent to a federal reception centre, where all convicted criminals begin their sentences, and he will spend about three to six months there, for that is where inmates are classified. For example, will he be sent to Sainte-Anne-des-Plaines, Quebec, or to Kingston, Ontario? How does that work?

They look at Harry's case and tell him he will serve his 36-month sentence at La Macaza, a minimum security prison. What does Harry do? He goes. And whether my colleague likes it or not, it could be a medium-security prison or a minimum-security one. So he is in prison, but eight months have already gone by before anything is done with Harry. By the time they look at the case of someone sentenced to 36 months, he is practically released.

The best example is the alleged mafia leader, who is now somewhere between heaven and hell. He was arrested in a huge raid in 2009 and was put in detention. What did his lawyer do? Some lawyers will tell their client not to plead guilty right away, that it is better to wait. Being given a two- or three-year sentence means that when the sentence is handed down, the time already spent in custody will count for nearly double, unless the judge says that it will not count for double. If the judge agrees the time count for double, this is what happens.

● (1940)

The individual's sentence really begins at the moment it is handed down. However, time spent in pre-sentencing custody is taken into consideration.

In our friend Harry's case, he has received a three-year sentence, but he has already been in custody for two months. Two months are taken off, sometimes four. Thirty-six minus four equals 32 months. It takes four months for the case to be looked at because he was sent to the federal reception centre. That brings us to 32 minus four, which is 28 months. Things are going well. This is what happens: one-sixth of the sentence is calculated, regardless of what the Minister of Heritage thinks. He does not understand anything. I know he does not understand anything because no one in Vancouver understands how it works. He is already having a hard time with culture. We will look after culture or maybe agriculture, with all these tubers. Maybe he could look after heritage someday.

I think it is deplorable that they are trying to have us believe that if we eliminate the one-sixth sentence, it will cost more to keep someone in prison. That is a bit hard to accept since it is only normal to expect that a person sentenced to prison will serve that sentence or, at least, will prepare for his release through a parole readiness program. It simply is not possible to prepare a release plan for anyone currently being paroled after serving one-sixth of a sentence.

Mr. Lacroix, sentenced to 13 years in prison, was released after less than two years. It took four months before his case was processed at the federal reception centre. What happened? He is now in a community centre. He will do community service, because that is important for his rehabilitation. However, it would also be important for his rehabilitation for him to reflect a little more than he did when he committed his crimes. Generally speaking, these criminals are not dangerous. They are dangerous to others. They are thieves. We call them white collar criminals.

People generally are not released after serving one sixth of their sentence if they have been convicted of violent crimes, if it is not their first penitentiary sentence, etc. There are a number of examples. However, take the case of someone who was sentenced by a judge for impaired driving for the eighth time. The judge says this time, enough is enough. He sentences the individual to 40 months in prison. That individual is certainly not a danger when he is in prison. Obviously, he will not be drinking when he is in prison. Maybe he will, but I would be surprised. What does that person do when he is in prison? He sits down and watches television. If he is released after serving one-sixth of his sentence, which unfortunately happens far too often, he turns up impaired once again and he may commit another offence such as impaired driving causing bodily harm, or even impaired driving causing death.

If that individual had not been released after serving one sixth of his sentence, if he had worked with counsellors on preparing for his release, things could have been different. Parole should be earned and release should be prepared for. The purpose of Bill C-59 is to prevent people from being released too quickly.

What makes the public angry is not minimum prison sentences; rather, it is individuals who are sentenced to time in prison and who do not serve that time. That is what makes the public angry.

Government Orders

●(1945)

We try to make the Conservatives understand this in committee when they ask us to impose minimum prison sentences. They do not listen because they think that minimum prison sentences will solve the problem. That is the only thing they are interested in. But it is completely false.

All of the studies we have managed to collect, read and analyze show clearly that minimum prison sentences do not solve anything. What helps or makes individuals understand the importance of rehabilitation is to insist they serve their sentences and develop a release plan to prepare for their return to society. It is unfortunate, but such is currently the case with Bill C-59. I believe the Liberals and the New Democrats want to gain some political advantage by voting against Bill C-59; however, at this stage, it is time—

Mr. Paul Szabo: False, false.

Mr. Marc Lemay: It is all well and good for the hon. member to say that it is false. Let us carry on and I will clarify. I think it is deplorable that the Liberals and New Democrats are trying to gain political advantage from this bill by saying that they need time to examine it. We have been examining it for a year and a half. It is time to act. We know, whether the Liberals and the New Democrats like it or not, that there are no studies and there is no evidence to show that abolishing offenders' rights to parole after they have served one-sixth of their sentence would substantially increase crowding in prisons. It is not true. This would allow the Correctional Service of Canada and the parole board to work with individuals in prison. These individuals would therefore not be sitting there saying that they are not interested in the program because they will soon be released. Why do they say that? Because they can take advantage of their right to parole after serving one-sixth of their sentence since they did not commit a violent crime. They stole from people but that is not serious because they did not commit a violent crime so they have the right to parole after they have served one-sixth of their sentence.

I have heard that about 1,500 individuals could be affected by this bill, which would clog our prisons. I am sorry, but I have looked at the latest figures and that is not true. This would affect maybe 100 or so people a year. In fact, the right to parole after one-sixth of the sentence is served does not apply to just anyone, and that is the problem. It applies to someone who has not committed a violent crime, does not have ties to gangs or terrorist groups and has not committed or been an accomplice in a sex crime. It applies to someone who was not the subject of an order requiring him to serve at least half of his sentence for a drug-related offence. It applies to someone who is serving their first sentence in prison and who is not at risk of committing a violent crime. So that makes a lot of people ineligible. For crimes like robbery, armed robbery, assault causing bodily harm, assault with a weapon or attempted murder, offenders usually receive a sentence ranging from five to eight years in prison, and they are not eligible for this measure. That is the problem. Those who are eligible are repeat drunk drivers, white collar criminals, fraudsters or people who write multiple fraudulent cheques. We have seen that before; there are a lot of them. Anyone who has studied criminal law knows that at a certain point, it is enough. What we are saying is that abolishing parole eligibility after one-sixth of the sentence is served will make people convicted of a crime, and

especially judges, understand that their sentences have the possibility of allowing the person to be rehabilitated and released into society.

This has to do with someone who is sentenced to prison. We are not talking about sentences of two years less a day or a few months in jail. We are talking about prison sentences, so two years or more.

●(1950)

This person has to work on his behaviour in order to reintegrate into and become an asset to society. If he was sentenced to 30 months in prison, it will take three months to decide what to do with him and which prison he should be sent to. He knows that he has only about eight months left to serve. And he will want nothing to do with the programs; he will watch television and play pool. We need to go further, and as parliamentarians, we eventually need to study the parole legislation. Now is not the time, but we can come back to the issue of one-third and two-thirds of the sentence.

The Bloc believes that parole should be earned and prepared for. It is not right to think that someone who committed a prison-worthy crime can reintegrate into society at any time without being prepared, without any effort at rehabilitation and without having recognized that he committed a serious crime. If a judge sent him to jail, the crime he committed had to have been serious.

I do not want to go on forever, but I could talk for a few days. Those watching us tonight will realize that, on one side of the House, there are people who believe that some criminals must serve time in prison and must not be released under any condition or by any means. We do not always agree with the Conservatives. However, if not for the persuasiveness of the member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie—the Bloc Québécois leader who has the confidence of 95% of his party—his perseverance, and the fact that he met with the Prime Minister just a few days ago to tell him that enough is enough and it was time to take action, we would not be debating Bill C-59.

It is time that this bill was passed and that the debate was limited, because there is nothing more to be said. I am interested to see that the Minister of Justice is arriving. He knows that I do not agree with the Conservative Party's tough on crime stance and imposing minimum sentences everywhere.

This evening, we will take the first step. We will tell those who are sentenced that from now on they will not be released at any price, at any time and for any crime.

I will be pleased to answer questions about this bill, which we will be supporting.

●(1955)

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member spoke very well about the bill that is under consideration but we will not start second reading on it until tomorrow. What we have been talking about is the process. There is maybe a misunderstanding on behalf of the member that somehow, because of the Liberal and the NDP concerns about the fast-tracking, we are not supporting the bill. We will have to wait and see but I am pretty sure that is not the case.

Government Orders

Does the hon. member believe it is possible, just possible, that Bill C-59 could be improved upon further? Would it not be prudent to have more than four hours of second reading debate and certainly more than the restrictions being placed on the justice committee to have its report in by 3 a.m. that morning? It is restricting parliamentary privilege to do its job. I hope the member has a comment on that.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Lemay: Mr. Speaker, I would agree with my colleague if we had not already debated the issue. If this were the first time we were talking about abolishing parole after one-sixth of a sentence is served, I would agree with my colleague, because it is limiting the rights of Parliament. I am a huge proponent of democracy and I do not like the method we are adopting this evening.

I would remind my colleague that this debate has been dragging on since 2005. It is time to resolve it once and for all, and move on to something else.

• (2000)

Mr. Daniel Paillé (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, our wise, eminent, Olympian and much revered colleague is originally from a little village affectionately known as Saint-Tuber. I would like to congratulate him on his one-of-a-kind presentation. I would like to offer him the few minutes we have left so he may elaborate and explain his thoughts in greater detail.

Mr. Marc Lemay: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my bearded colleague from Hochelaga.

With all due respect, I will have him know that I was not born in Saint-Tuber, but in a thoroughly Catholic town called Amos, in Abitibi.

It is nice to have a good laugh and to have fun here tonight—such debates are rare—but this is a serious matter we are debating this evening. I know this is a matter of procedure. I also know that my NDP and Liberal colleagues are not happy about this. Nonetheless, I have a rather personal question for the Liberal MPs. I have a lot of respect for the NDP and the hon. member for Windsor. But with regard to the Liberals, I cannot help but wonder whether they have an ulterior motive for delaying the debate a bit. Nonetheless, we will not accuse them of having bad intentions.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): It being 8:02 p.m., is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the current motion.

[English]

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Call in the members.

• (2025)

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

(Division No. 180)

YEAS

Members

Abbott	Ablonczy
Aglukkaq	Albrecht
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)	Allison
Ambrose	Anders
Anderson	André
Armstrong	Arthur
Ashfield	Asselin
Bachand	Baird
Beaudin	Bellavance
Benoit	Bernier
Bezan	Bigras
Blackburn	Blais
Blaney	Block
Bonsant	Bouchard
Boucher	Boughen
Bourgeois	Braid
Breitkreuz	Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)	Brown (Barrie)
Brunooge	Brunelle
Cadman	Calandra
Calkins	Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)
Cannon (Pontiac)	Carrie
Carrier	Casson
Chong	Clarke
Clement	Cummins
Davidson	Day
DeBellefeuille	Dechert
Del Mastro	Demers
Deschamps	Desnoyers
Dorion	Dreeshen
Duceppe	Dufour
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	Dykstra
Faillie	Fantino
Fast	Finley
Flaherty	Fletcher
Freeman	Gagnon
Galipeau	Gallant
Généreux	Glover
Gourde	Grewal
Guay	Guergis
Guimond (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)	
Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord)	
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)	Hawn
Hiebert	Hoback
Hoepfner	Holder
Jean	Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)	Kennedy (Calgary Southeast)
Kent	Kerr
Komarnicki	Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Laframboise	Lake
Lauzon	Lavallée
Lebel	Lemay
Lemieux	Lessard
Lévesque	Lobb
Lukiwski	Lunney
MacKay (Central Nova)	MacKenzie
Malo	Mayes
McColeman	McLeod
Ménard	Menzies
Merrifield	Miller
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	
Moore (Fundy Royal)	

Business of Supply

PAIRED

Members

Gaudet	Laforest
Lalonde	Scheer
Smith	Toews— 6

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): I declare the motion carried.

* * *

● (2030)

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—FORILLON PARK

The House resumed from February 10 consideration of the motion.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion relating to the business of supply.

● (2035)

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

(Division No. 181)

YEAS

Members

Abbott	Ablonczy
Aglukkaq	Albrecht
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)	Allison
Ambrose	Anders
Anderson	André
Andrews	Angus
Armstrong	Arthur
Ashfield	Ashton
Asselin	Bachand
Bagnell	Bains
Baird	Beaudin
Bélanger	Bellavance
Bennett	Benoit
Bernier	Bezan
Bigras	Blackburn
Blais	Blaney
Block	Bonsant
Bouchard	Boucher
Bouhgen	Bourgeois
Braid	Breitkreuz
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Brown (Barrie)	Bruinooge
Brunelle	Byrne
Cadman	Calandra
Calkins	Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)
Cannon (Pontiac)	Carrie
Carrier	Casson
Charlton	Chong
Chow	Christopherson
Clarke	Clement
Coderre	Comartin
Cotler	Crombie
Crowder	Cullen
Cummins	Cuzner
D'Amours	Davidson
Day	DeBellefeuille
Dechert	Del Mastro
Demers	Deschamps
Desnoyers	Dewar
Dhaliwal	Dhalla
Dion	Donnelly
Dorion	Dosanjh
Dreeschen	Dryden
Duceppe	Dufour

Mourani	Nadeau
Nicholson	Norlock
O'Connor	O'Neill-Gordon
Obhrai	Oda
Ouellet	Paillé (Hochelaga)
Paillé (Louis-Hébert)	Paquette
Paradis	Payne
Petit	Plamondon
Poilievre	Pomerleau
Preston	Raiit
Rajotte	Rathgeber
Reid	Richards
Richardson	Rickford
Ritz	Saxton
Schellenberger	Shea
Shipley	Shory
Sopuck	Sorenson
St-Cyr	Stanton
Storseth	Strahl
Sweet	Thi Lac
Thompson	Tilson
Trost	Tweed
Uppal	Van Kesteren
Van Loan	Vellacott
Verner	Vincent
Wallace	Warawa
Warkentin	Watson
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)	Woodworth
Weston (Saint John)	Young— 180
Wong	
Yelich	

NAYS

Members

Andrews	Angus
Ashton	Bagnell
Bains	Bélanger
Bennett	Byrne
Charlton	Chow
Christopherson	Coderre
Comartin	Cotler
Crombie	Crowder
Cullen	Cuzner
D'Amours	Dewar
Dhaliwal	Dhalla
Dion	Donnelly
Dosanjh	Dryden
Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Easter	Folco
Foote	Fry
Garneau	Godin
Goodale	Gravelle
Harris (St. John's East)	Holland
Hughes	Hyer
Jennings	Julian
Kania	Karygiannis
Kennedy	Lamoureux
Layton	LeBlanc
Lee	Leslie
MacAulay	Malhi
Maloway	Marston
Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)	Mathysen
McGuinty	McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
McTeague	Mendes
Minna	Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)
Murphy (Charlottetown)	Murray
Neville	Pacetti
Pearson	Proulx
Rae	Rafferty
Ratansi	Regan
Rodriguez	Rota
Russell	Savage
Savoie	Scarpaleggia
Sgro	Siksay
Silva	Simms
Simson	Stoffer
Szabo	Thibeault
Tonks	Valeriotte
Wilfert	Wrzesneskyj
Zarac— 91	

Business of Supply

Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Plamondon	Poilievre
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	Dykstra	Pomerleau	Preston
Easter	Faillie	Proulx	Rae
Fantino	Fast	Rafferty	Raitt
Finley	Flaherty	Rajotte	Ratansi
Fletcher	Folco	Rathgeber	Regan
Footé	Freeman	Reid	Richards
Fry	Gagnon	Richardson	Rickford
Galipeau	Gallant	Ritz	Rodriguez
Garneau	Généreux	Rota	Russell
Glover	Godin	Savage	Savoie
Goodale	Gourde	Saxton	Scarpaleggia
Gravelle	Grewal	Schellenberger	Sgro
Guay	Guergis	Shea	Shipley
Guimond (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)	Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord)	Shory	Siksay
Harris (St. John's East)	Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)	Silva	Simms
Hawn	Hiebert	Simson	Sopuck
Hoback	Hoepfner	Sorenson	St-Cyr
Holder	Holland	Stanton	Stoffer
Hughes	Hyer	Storseth	Strahl
Jean	Jennings	Sweet	Szabo
Julian	Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Thi Lac	Thibeault
Kania	Karygiannis	Thompson	Tilson
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)	Kennedy	Tonks	Trost
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Kent	Tweed	Uppal
Kerr	Komarnicki	Valeriote	Van Kesteren
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Laframboise	Van Loan	Vellacott
Lake	Lamoureux	Verner	Vincent
Lauzon	Lavallée	Wallace	Warawa
Layton	Lebel	Warkentin	Watson
LeBlanc	Lee	Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)	
Lemay	Lemieux	Weston (Saint John)	
Leslie	Lessard	Wilfert	Wong
Lévesque	Lobb	Woodworth	Wrzesnewskyj
Lukiwski	Lunney	Yelich	Young
MacAulay	MacKay (Central Nova)	Zarac — 271	
MacKenzie	Malhi		
Malo	Maloway		
Marston	Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)		
Mathysen	Mayes	Nil	NAYS
McColeman	McGuinty		
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)	McLeod		PAIRED
McTeague	Ménard		Members
Mendes	Menzies		
Merrifield	Miller		
Minna	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	Gaudet	Laforest
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Mourani	Lalonde	Scheer
Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)	Murphy (Charlottetown)	Smith	Toews — 6
Murray	Nadeau		
Neville	Nicholson		
Norlock	O'Connor		
O'Neill-Gordon	Obhrai		
Oda	Ouellet		
Pacetti	Paillé (Hochelaga)		
Paillé (Louis-Hébert)	Paquette		
Paradis	Payne		
Pearson	Petit		

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): I declare the motion carried.

It being 8:39 p.m., the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 8:39 p.m.)

CONTENTS

Monday, February 14, 2011

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Pope John Paul II Day Act

Bill C-573. Second reading	8085
Mr. Silva	8085
Mrs. Block	8086
Mrs. Crombie	8087
Mr. Kania	8088
(Motion agreed to, bill read the second time and referred to a committee)	8089

Suspension of Sitting

(The sitting of the House was suspended at 11:33 a.m.)	8089
--	------

Sitting Resumed

(The House resumed at 12 p.m.)	8089
--------------------------------------	------

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Disposition of Abolition of Early Parole Act

Motion that debate be not further adjourned

Mr. Nicholson	8089
Motion	8089
Mr. Holland	8089
Mr. Bellavance	8090
Mr. Cullen	8090
Mr. MacKenzie	8091
Mr. Kania	8092
Mr. Lee	8093
Motion agreed to	8095

Disposition of Abolition of Early Parole Act

Motion	8095
Mr. Stoffer	8095
Mr. Szabo	8096
Mr. Woodworth	8096
Mr. St-Cyr	8097
Ms. Chow	8097
Mr. Del Mastro	8098
Mr. Holland	8098
Mrs. Mourani	8099
Mr. Rathgeber	8099
Mr. Szabo	8100
Mr. Donnelly	8100
Mr. Fast	8101

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Valentine's Day

Mr. Holder	8102
------------------	------

John MacLeod Fraser

Mr. Bélanger	8102
--------------------	------

Kyrgyzstan

Mrs. Mourani	8102
--------------------	------

Eco-Energy Retrofit Program

Mr. Donnelly	8102
--------------------	------

Lambton Chinese Canadian Association

Mrs. Davidson	8102
---------------------	------

Seniors Centre

Mr. Dosanjh	8103
-------------------	------

Birthday Wishes

Mr. Dechert	8103
-------------------	------

Quebec Athletes

Mr. Paillé (Louis-Hébert)	8103
---------------------------------	------

Depression

Mr. Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)	8103
---	------

Access to Information

Mr. Brison	8104
------------------	------

Vancouver Winter Olympic Games

Mr. Gourde	8104
------------------	------

The Economy

Mr. Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)	8104
-------------------------------------	------

Immigration

Mr. Calandra	8104
--------------------	------

Grammy Awards

Mr. Pomerleau	8105
---------------------	------

Canadians' Achievement

Ms. Murray	8105
------------------	------

Taxation

Mr. Del Mastro	8105
----------------------	------

ORAL QUESTIONS

Government Spending

Mr. Goodale	8105
Mr. Baird	8105
Mr. Goodale	8105
Mr. Baird	8106
Mr. Goodale	8106
Mr. Baird	8106

The Economy

Mr. Coderre	8106
Mr. Baird	8106

Sales Tax Harmonization

Mr. Coderre	8106
Mr. Flaherty	8106
Mr. Duceppe	8106
Mr. Cannon	8106
Mr. Duceppe	8106
Mr. Cannon	8107

Securities

Mr. Paillé (Hochelega)	8107
Mr. Flaherty	8107
Mr. Paillé (Hochelega)	8107

Employment Insurance	
Mr. Simms	8115
Questions on the Order Paper	
Mr. Lukiwski	8115
Points of Order	
Funding Application for KAIROS	
Ms. Oda	8115
Mr. Rae	8116
Mr. Baird	8116
Mr. Cullen	8116

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Disposition of Abolition of Early Parole Act	
Motion	8116
Mr. Fast	8116
Mr. Holland	8117
Mr. Cullen	8117
Mr. Holland	8118
Mr. Albrecht	8121
Mr. Bellavance	8121
Mr. Cullen	8121
Mr. Kania	8122
Mr. Albrecht	8122
Mr. Szabo	8124
Mr. Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)	8124
Mr. McColeman	8124
Mr. Szabo	8126
Mr. Cullen	8126
Mrs. Mourani	8126
Mr. Szabo	8129
Mr. Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)	8129
Mr. Lessard	8130
Mr. Sorenson	8130
Mr. Szabo	8131
Mr. Cullen	8132
Mrs. Glover	8132
Mr. Szabo	8133

Mr. Cullen	8133
Mr. Kania	8134
Mr. McKay	8137
Mr. Maloway	8137
Mr. Rathgeber	8137
Mrs. Mourani	8137
Mr. Clarke	8138
Mr. Kania	8139
Ms. Charlton	8139
Mr. McKay	8139
Mr. Woodworth	8140
Mr. McKay	8141
Ms. Charlton	8141
Mr. Comartin	8142
Mr. Woodworth	8143
Mr. McKay	8143
Ms. Charlton	8144
Mr. Szabo	8145
Ms. Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)	8146
Mrs. Mendes	8146
Mr. Paillé (Hochelega)	8148
Mr. Szabo	8148
Mr. Lobb	8148
Mrs. Mourani	8148
Mr. Maloway	8148
Mr. Lobb	8149
Mr. Bagnell	8150
Mr. Plamondon	8151
Mr. Lemay	8151
Mr. Lemay	8152
Mr. Szabo	8153
Mr. Paillé (Hochelega)	8154
Motion agreed to	8155
Business of Supply	
Opposition Motion—Forillon Park	
Motion	8155
Motion agreed to	8156

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