



CANADA

House of Commons Debates

VOLUME 145 • NUMBER 146 • 3rd SESSION • 40th PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, March 22, 2011

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

CONTENTS

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

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, March 22, 2011

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1000)
[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Gary Schellenberger (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the fourth report of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs.

In accordance with its orders of reference of Tuesday, February 8, 2011, your committee has considered votes 1c and 5c under Veterans Affairs in the supplementary estimates (C) for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2011, and reports the same.

* * *

TELECOMMUNICATIONS ACT

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-642, An Act to amend the Telecommunications Act (universal charger).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Vancouver East for seconding my bill today.

The legislation would mandate the creation of a standardized universal cell phone charger for all new mobile phones sold in Canada. It would amend Canada's Telecommunications Act through the inclusion of specific language that would compel cell phone manufacturers to create a standardized charger for newly manufactured cellular phones.

Standardizing cell phone chargers is long overdue for the Canadian telecom market. The creation of a universal battery charger would serve two goals. First, it would remove the financial burden from consumers who are almost always compelled to purchase a new charger when their old phone is broken or lost. Second, it would also significantly reduce the volume of electronic waste that Canadian consumers are sending to landfills with increasing regularity.

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

PETITIONS

AIR CANADA

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my petition has been signed by over 500 machinists from the Air Canada overhaul base in Winnipeg. These employees may be finding their jobs ending up in El Salvador over the next period of time. Air Canada has failed in its duty to comply with the Air Canada Public Participation Act by selling its overhaul bases to Aveos, formerly known as ACTS, in Winnipeg, Mississauga and Montreal.

On December 14, 2010, in the House, the Air Canada Council and Transport Committee claimed that Aeroman, the Aveos subsidiary in El Salvador, could not do Air Canada maintenance in El Salvador. This is totally untrue, as Aeroman performs maintenance on exactly the same aircraft that is overhauled in Winnipeg, namely the A320 series and the Embraer.

The El Salvador facility shops can maintain 87% of Air Canada's fleet. In fact, the El Salvador facility is expanding from four to sixteen lines. Just so members know, Aveos has four lines in Vancouver, four in Montreal, one in Toronto and five in Winnipeg, for a total of fourteen. In El Salvador alone it will have 16 lines, more than all of Canada combined.

Aircraft overhaul schedules are months and years in advance, so it is easy to schedule the work in El Salvador. In fact, we consider that machinists in Canada cost Air Canada \$90 an hour and in San Salvador only \$40 an hour. We can see where this is going.

Workers want Air Canada to comply with the Air Canada Participation Act by reverting to ownership of its overhaul centres.

• (1005)

HUMAN RIGHTS

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Madam Speaker, I present a petition from constituents in Wellington county that calls upon the House of Commons to remove section 13.1 from the Canadian Human Rights Act, indicating that it is not consistent with charter rights and charter values, such as the freedom of expression and the freedom of assembly.

I present this petition on behalf of these constituents in Wellington county.

Government Orders

MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to present another five petitions today regarding chronic cerebrospinal venous insufficiency.

MS patients are frustrated with being told to wait for Canadian replication of correlation studies. Since the fall, I have been presenting international studies that show that 80% to 97% of MS patients have one or more venous abnormalities depending on the diagnostic or treatment method used. New data from the conference in Poland earlier this month show that in Bulgaria, Jordan, Poland and the United Kingdom upwards of 93% of MS patients have evidence of CCSVI. New data from the conference in Italy last week showed 700 cases analyzed from multiple international centres with 86% of MS patients having CCSVI.

Therefore, the petitioners are calling for clinical trials with diagnosis, treatment and follow-up here in Canada.

[*Translation*]

VETERANS CHARTER

Ms. Meili Faille (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, BQ): Madam Speaker, I have the honour to table a petition on behalf of people from the 23 municipalities of Vaudreuil-Soulanges. The petition has to do with the veterans charter, which was amended in 2006. These people believe that a lump-sum payment is not enough and is ill-suited to the needs of wounded soldiers, since it does not provide them with long-term financial security. Wounded veterans have a right to compensation from the federal government, but this is woefully inadequate. The petitioners are calling on the government to restore the veterans charter as well as the lifetime monthly pension as a form of compensation for wounded soldiers.

[*English*]

JUSTICE

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am pleased today to introduce a petition signed by almost 100 individuals from my riding of Sudbury and area who are seeking justice for an aboriginal man who they believe has been wrongly convicted.

John Moore was accused and convicted of second degree murder in a case where the crown agreed that he was nowhere near the scene of the crime and where a trial determined he played no part in planning this crime.

The petitioners are asking that the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada review the conviction in the case of Mr. Moore, recognize that a wrongful conviction occurred, overturn the conviction and enter an acquittal.

AIR CANADA

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to present a petition signed by Manitobans concerning the Air Canada situation. These petitioners are asking the government to hold Air Canada accountable to the Air Canada Public Participation Act.

Jobs are being threatened in Winnipeg, Mississauga and Montreal. The government has been sitting back and doing nothing to protect these jobs and hold Air Canada to account for violation of the law. In

fact, the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers have, in the last few days, filed an application in the Ontario Superior Court. There is a need for the government to stand up for these workers.

The petitioners are asking the Canadian government to stand up and protect the jobs in these vital industries, particularly in Montreal, Mississauga and Winnipeg, and to take the action necessary to hold Air Canada accountable to the act.

* * *

•(1010)

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

CITIZEN'S ARREST AND SELF-DEFENCE ACT

The House resumed from March 21 consideration of the motion that Bill C-60, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (citizen's arrest and the defences of property and persons), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Debate. Is the House ready for the question? The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): I declare the motion carried. Accordingly, the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights.

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

* * *

[*Translation*]

DEMOCRATIC REPRESENTATION ACT

The House resumed from December 16 consideration of the motion that Bill C-12, An Act to amend the Constitution Act, 1867 (Democratic representation), be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment.

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Madam Speaker, I rise today to speak to Bill C-12, which has to do with democratic representation and which would reduce Quebec's political weight if it were passed. My Bloc Québécois colleague from Joliette proposed an amendment urging all of the parties to oppose this bill, which would reduce Quebec's representation to a level below its proportion of Canada's population.

Government Orders

This is not the first time, since 2006, that we are voting on this issue in the House. Here, in this House, we passed a motion that had to do with the recognition of the Quebec nation. The government is intent on bringing forward bills that would reduce Quebec's political weight. First, we had Bill C-56, then Bill C-22, and now we have Bill C-12. The consensus in Quebec is that this bill must not pass.

Bill C-12 would amend the formula set out in the Constitution to determine the number of seats allocated to each province. There would be a considerable increase in the number of seats in the rest of Canada. We are talking about five seats in Alberta, seven seats in British Columbia and 18 seats in Ontario, for a total of 30 new members of Parliament in the rest of Canada, not to mention the fact that Quebec's number of seats would not increase.

I would simply like to remind the hon. members that Quebec's electoral map is being redrawn. We are trying to strike a balance and resolve the dilemma between urban and rural communities. We want to give special status to rural communities that, by and large, are being threatened. We need only consider the Magdalen Islands or the Gaspé, where there are communities whose populations are dwindling with the passing years. We would like to see a balance: one person, one vote. We would also like to see the specific character of communities reflected in the National Assembly. Accordingly, a number of constitutional experts, including Benoît Pelletier, a former minister in the Liberal government, are working on just that. The Parti Québécois put forward a proposal to keep segments of the population from disappearing and to ensure that they are represented during votes in the National Assembly or where their priorities are concerned. We know that the economies and realities are different. We are trying to find a solution to strike a balance.

I can see today that we are looking for that same kind of balance that the Bloc would like to see, to ensure that all votes are equal and that there is effective representation. That is what all of the parties in the National Assembly are trying to do in Quebec so that there is a balance between urban and rural communities.

Here in this House we are not talking about urban and rural communities. We are talking about a nation, the Quebec nation, which has been recognized, and the nation of Canada, which is the rest of Canada's reality.

We can see that there are not many members in this House who will speak today, be they from the party in power—the Conservative Party, which introduced the bill—or from the opposition parties. We hope that they will explain to the people what is pushing the different parties to vote for this bill. They wanted to recognize the Quebec nation, and it must be recognized for what it represents, for the consensus in the National Assembly, for the polls showing that 61% of the people are opposed to this bill. And when push comes to shove, we will see how this House really feels about recognizing the Quebec nation.

Many seats would be added: 30 new members would sit here in the Canadian Parliament.

•(1015)

As I was saying earlier, one person equals one vote. The government claims this bill is based on that principle. In a moment I

will show how this principle has often been ignored over the years, since the Constitution was first created.

The Bloc Québécois, which represents Quebecers, opposes this bill. The Bloc Québécois defends Quebec's realities and we are consistent in our commitment. We are the voice of Quebec and we oppose this bill.

It shows a lack of respect for democracy, and the recognition of the Quebec nation is therefore a sham. We were promised open federalism, but instead, muzzling seems to be the norm when we vote on bills in the House of Commons.

The principle of one person, one vote has been breached several times since Confederation. That is why we are seeking absolute equality, in terms of each vote and effective representation. For instance, certain commitments have been made to the maritime provinces and the Northwest Territories. Thus, the fact that they have been granted special protection goes against this very principle.

Now why does Bill C-12 not grant special protection to the Quebec nation regarding its potential for representation in the House of Commons, which will be reduced by about 2%? Over the years, Quebec has never been granted this special protection. Since 1976, I believe, our population has been under-represented.

Bill C-56 and Bill C-22, which were introduced in the last two Parliaments, were very similar to Bill C-12. There was a consensus in the National Assembly and among the population on this issue. The government has introduced Bill C-12 most recently—with an election campaign probably right around the corner—in order to please Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia.

The proposed amendment to the Constitution determines the number of seats in the House of Commons allocated to each province after a decennial census. That is set out in Bill C-12.

Readjusting the number of seats, as set out in Bill C-12, would give only three provinces more seats: Alberta, British Columbia and Ontario. There would be 30 new seats. The total number of members in the House of Commons would increase from 308 to 338.

This new reality would diminish Quebec's presence, even though some would have us believe that Quebec will still keep its 75 seats. Quebec will keep its 75 seats, but 75 seats out of 308 does not represent the same percentage of the population as 75 seats out of 338. That is easy to understand. There will be 30 additional MPs and the same 75 MPs representing Quebec in the House. Quebec's current representation is 24.3%, a percentage that would decrease to 22.9% if Bill C-12 is passed.

I invite the hon. members from the other political parties to speak in the House and tell us where they stand on this. I realize that it might be difficult for the Liberal Party or the NDP to speak in favour of Quebec, but we expect hon. members to rise in the House and tell us what their party's political intentions are.

Government Orders

The Bloc Québécois is disputing this bill that is unfair to Quebec for three reasons. The first argument has to do with one person, one vote. In fact, this principle has never been applied. Historic fact proves that this statement being used by the Conservatives is false. Historic fact proves the contrary. Why not look at what is already happening in the Maritimes and in the Northwest Territories?

● (1020)

The second argument is the harmful consequences of under-representing Quebec in the House of Commons. Many people in Quebec are echoing the fear of this bill being passed.

The third argument has to do with the false impression of democracy that Bill C-12 gives. What the government is saying does not hold water, and the bill does not recognize the nation of Quebec. If the Conservative government wants to move forward with this bill, then it does not recognize the nation of Quebec. Once again, consensus in Quebec on the political intentions of the Conservative Party is being ignored.

In a democracy, there is the very simple principle of one person, one vote. The principle is very straightforward: each voter has the right to express himself or herself by exercising the right to vote, and each vote has the same worth, the same weight. We agree on that. However, in reality, this is not exactly the situation because of the nature of our electoral system. But that is an altogether different debate. One person, one vote. Since Confederation, as I was saying, the rules have been bent to reach compromise and to find a balance between absolute equality and effective representation.

I said I would give a brief historical overview. Section 52 of the Constitution Act, 1867 stated:

The Number of Members of the House of Commons may be from Time to Time increased by the Parliament of Canada, provided the proportionate Representation of the Provinces prescribed by this Act is not thereby disturbed.

That is not the case here. We have seen deviations from the principle of one person, one vote in the Maritime provinces. The Constitution was amended to ensure that each province would have a minimum number of members at least equal to the number of its senators. This is known as the senatorial clause. The Northwest Territories have had the right to representation in the House of Commons although, under the rules, their population would not justify it. If, for example, the number of people living in the Northwest Territories had been taken into account, they would not have had the right to be represented here in the House. Therefore, the one person, one vote principle was ignored.

Other changes to section 51, governing the distribution of seats, have been made in order to prevent a loss of more than 15% of the seats in a province with low population growth and to prevent one province from having fewer representatives than a less populated province. We have the examples of the Northwest Territories for the former scenario and the Maritime provinces for the latter, the 15% situation.

The approach set out in the bill, which involves increasing the number of seats in the House of Commons without compensating for the dilution of representation for provinces with low demographic growth rates, puts the government at risk of violating section 42(1) (a) of the 1982 Constitution Act. When the Constitution was

repatriated in 1982, Parliament was given the right, subject to section 32, to amend the provisions of the Constitution relating to the House of Commons. Under section 32(1)(a), any amendment to the principle of proportional representation of the provinces set out in the 1867 Constitution Act is subject to the constitutional amending procedure with which we are familiar, namely, the agreement of at least seven provinces that have 50% of the population or the 7/50 formula.

It is also important to remember that section 52 of the Canadian Constitution states that:

The Number of Members of the House of Commons may be from Time to Time increased by the Parliament of Canada, provided the proportionate Representation of the Provinces prescribed by this Act is not thereby disturbed.

We know that such would not be the case were this bill to pass.

In an effort to demonstrate that the “one person, one vote” principle has practically never been respected in the House, I would like to close by citing a study conducted by a political scientist at Laval University, Louis Massicotte. Based on a study comparing our country to other federations, he found that Canada has the highest rate of violation of the principle of proportionality. Clearly, the Conservatives violate this principle when it works to their advantage.

● (1025)

The Conservatives introduced Bill C-12, An Act to amend the Constitution Act, 1867 (Democratic representation) when it suited them. As everyone knows, this draconian approach is all about winning votes, without considering Quebeckers and their reality. Let there be no mistake about it. Bill C-56 and Bill C-22 were introduced during the last two Parliaments. And the impact of Bill C-12 on Quebec, if it passes, is clear: it would marginalize Quebec even further and diminish its political weight. I have heard the arguments of some members here, including the member for Lévis—Bellechasse. They say there would be more Bloc members if the Bloc members did not sit here in this House. They are giving us another wonderful lesson on democracy. Here is what political scientist Louis Massicotte had to say:

Under the Harper government's new approach, whereby the provinces experiencing population growth would be given fairer representation, Quebec's representation would fall below its proportion of the Canadian population.

We will see how the other parties react to this bill. As we know, for the Conservatives, recognizing the Quebec nation is a sham. They have no idea what issues are at stake in Quebec's reality. I think it is obvious that we will be undermined here, in terms of Quebec's representation compared to the increased number of members from the rest of Canada.

Quebec's political weight in the House of Commons has diminished considerably since 1867. In 1867, 36% of the seats here in the House of Commons were held by members from Quebec. That dropped to 26% in 1976. And under Bill C-12, it would drop to 22.4%.

Government Orders

So why is Quebec trying to strike a balance between rural and urban communities? If our nation were truly being recognized, this same balance could be reproduced, that is, between what it represents, what it is and what it has to defend. It is a province that is mainly francophone, the home of the Quebec nation, and Quebec must maintain a fair proportion of the seats in the House of Commons in order to address its distinct character and particular needs. As we know, the Conservatives often scoff at the particular needs of the province of Quebec, even though they are the ones who recognized it. How hypocritical.

All of the federal partners agreed to what is in the 1992 Charlottetown accord, a guarantee of 25% of the seats in the House of Commons. Today, it is a whole other story. The Conservatives' lack of good faith here is quite clear. They are proposing this to please the rest of Canada. They are abandoning Quebec and could not care less about its reaction. We need only look at the harmonization of the QST and the GST: there is a consensus in the National Assembly and among the public. And I think that in today's budget, the government will ignore Quebec's demands regarding the harmonization of the QST and the GST. We have seen a number of examples where a consensus in Quebec has been completely disregarded here in the House.

Many people are voicing their opposition and believe that Quebec is being muzzled in the rest of Canada. The National Assembly is a credible voice; its members were elected democratically to represent the interests of Quebec. There are 125 members in the National Assembly. There are 48 members of the Bloc Québécois in the House of Commons accounting for two-thirds of elected members from Quebec. This means that 87% of elected members from the Quebec nation are opposed to Bill C-12 and are calling for it to be withdrawn.

I mentioned earlier that Benoît Pelletier, Quebec's former minister of intergovernmental affairs, has spoken out against this bill and is calling for it to be withdrawn. He does not understand why there were no special measures to protect Quebec, which is home to Canada's main linguistic minority and a founding province of Canada that is losing demographic weight. This was done, for example, with the Maritimes and the Northwest Territories. We wanted to create a balance. Why could it not be done with Quebec?

In addition, the National Assembly has adopted a unanimous motion calling for this bill to be defeated.

• (1030)

We would like to see the bill defeated today at this stage.

[English]

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Madam Speaker, I listened with interest to the member's comments. I just want to point out some of the logical inconsistencies. First of all, Quebec's seat count remains constant. It is protected under Bill C-12. We know that if that member and her party had their way, Quebec would have zero seats in the House of Commons. So, there is obviously a contradiction there.

The member spoke of one person, one vote. In fact, under Bill C-12, even though other provinces are gaining more seats, the votes per person still has greater weight in Quebec because the number of

constituents in a constituency in Quebec is still less than the national average of 108,000. We could argue that votes will have more weight in Quebec.

I also find it interesting that just a few weeks ago the Bloc supported a motion to eliminate the Senate. The Senate has 24 senators from Quebec, and surely reducing the number of senators in Parliament would reduce the influence of Quebec in Parliament. So on one hand, the Bloc members say one thing and on the other hand they say something else for the other chamber.

This is a nation-building exercise for Canada and Quebec, and we know that the member does not want to build a strong, united Canada. That is really the agenda of the Bloc Québécois.

[Translation]

Ms. Christiane Gagnon: Madam Speaker, it is my pleasure to reply to the question from the Minister of State for Democratic Reform. If there are contradictions in what I say, there were contradictions in what the National Assembly says as well. There are federalist members of the National Assembly. Benoît Pelletier is neither a Péquiste nor an avowed sovereignist, far from it. He was a cabinet member with the Liberal Party of Quebec. He says he is opposed to Bill C-12. So there are a number of people in Quebec who, like us, are opposed to the House passing this bill.

The contradiction really comes from the Conservative Party. It wants to recognize the Quebec nation, but it takes away the means for it to be better represented or represented according to its population. The Conservatives are exhibiting bad faith. They are free to tell the members of the National Assembly that they are contradicting themselves. If there is a contradiction in what I say, it exists elsewhere, because I speak for the majority of Quebec's population, who object to this bill.

A moment ago the member referred to the partisan Senate, where a large number of representatives from Quebec also sit. Over 75% of Quebecers are opposed to this partisan Senate. It is not a Senate that represents the entire population, because it is not elected. We are opposed to this unelected Senate, which the Conservatives have made partisan, too. Senators are not even able to look at a bill because the Prime Minister forbids it. The Senate is the long arm of the Conservative Party, and we oppose it.

• (1035)

[English]

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to thank the member for her argument against the bill. I understand where she is coming from and her logic. However, I want to give a different perspective on this.

I believe that there is no constitutional principle that ensures that the Quebec division in this House has a certain percentage of the seats in this House. In fact, some of the members of the Bloc have mentioned that there is a guaranteed percentage of a quarter of the seats. In fact, they are below that level right now. There are 308 seats in this House and the Bloc has 75 of the 308 seats. That is, in fact, less than one-quarter. So clearly, there is no fundamental constitutional provision there.

Government Orders

There was a fundamental constitutional principle that guaranteed the Quebec division a certain percentage of the seats, but that was in the Act of Union in 1840. Between 1840 and 1867, Canada East was guaranteed half of the seats in the legislature of the day. That changed with Confederation in 1867, in part because the then leader of the Liberal Party, George Brown, argued in favour of representation by population.

That has been the fundamental constitutional provision since 1867, albeit modified by two minor provisions concerning the senatorial floor and the grandfathering of the seats in 1986 that guaranteed no provincial division would fall below that number. Nevertheless, the fundamental constitutional principle that governs the federal chamber here in the House of Commons is representation by population.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christiane Gagnon: Madam Speaker, he says there has never been an exception to that principle, and that is totally false. There are in fact exceptions to the principle of one person, one vote, or the principle of increasing and decreasing population. We need only look at the Northwest Territories or the Maritimes. The Northwest Territories did not have a large enough population to be represented, and an exception was made to the principle.

I note that section 52 also provides that the number of members of the House of Commons could be increased, as long as the proportionate representation of the provinces was not disturbed.

I would like to tell the member that 75 members out of 308 is not 75 members out of 338. I know that the Conservative Party dreams of the day when it will form a majority government and can do as it likes. Today we have seen a charge of contempt of Parliament against the Conservative Party. Now imagine how the Conservative Party would govern if it formed a majority government. We know perfectly well that it wants to get all the votes in the rest of Canada and work to make sure their candidates get elected in all ridings in the rest of Canada.

During that time, Quebec's political weight in the House of Commons will decline. This is important when you want to defend a nation.

• (1040)

Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ): Madam Speaker, I want to commend the hon. member for Québec. Her very interesting speech presents a number of arguments against this bill, which does not respect democracy. If this bill were applied, Quebec's political representation would be less than its demographic weight. What is more, this bill rejects the recognition of Quebec as a nation.

Does the hon. member find that this bill is a departure from the historical consensus? In the past there has been a modicum of recognition. It seems to me a certain Canadian consensus has already been mentioned, regarding political representation of roughly 25% of the MPs here in the House of Commons.

Ms. Christiane Gagnon: Madam Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for his question. In the Charlottetown accord, it was agreed that this representation would never go below 25%. We are far from that. With this bill, Quebec's representation is being reduced to 22.3%.

There is cause for concern. Since 1867, Quebec's representation has decreased over the years. It was 36%, then 26% in 1976, and if this bill were to pass, our representation would drop to 22.3%.

If I were the Conservative Party, I would wonder about the contradictory thinking of the Conservative Party's detractors with regard to my party's vision. That is what they are called and that is how they are viewed and perceived. Why are people like the constitutional expert Benoît Pelletier and Louis Massicotte from Laval University studying what the representation should be and how our people and nation should be represented here in the House of Commons, regardless of the party in power or the political party that wins the next election?

That is not how this should be viewed. I know they are practising short-term politics, but while Quebec is represented here, its representatives have to be spokespeople for what is happening in Quebec. We see how the spokespeople seated on the Conservative benches remain seated when it is time to speak for Quebec.

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to speak in opposition to Bill C-12.

From the outset, I would like to say that this bill on democratic representation is a deliberate affront to the Quebec nation. The bill is an attack against the Quebec nation launched by the Canadian federalist parties because it is an attempt to reduce the Quebec nation's political weight in the House of Commons. Reducing the Quebec nation's political weight in the House of Commons is unacceptable to Quebeckers.

When the Canadian federation was created in 1867, Quebec held 36% of the seats in the House of Commons. I remain hopeful that Quebec will leave this federation. I am a staunch sovereignist and when I see a bill like this before the House of Commons, I feel an even greater urgency. I believe that it is even more pressing for Quebec to leave the Canadian federation. That day will come, I hope, and that is what I am fighting for.

This bill is unacceptable to Quebeckers. In 1867, Quebec held 36% of the seats in the House of Commons. If Bill C-12 were passed, that proportion would decrease to 22.4%, which is less than the Quebec nation's current demographic weight within Canada. There is an attempt to lessen our political weight within the Canadian federation. This is another great contradiction from the Conservative Party; a party that boasts that it has recognized the Quebec nation. And yet, it is quite clear that it does not recognize the Quebec nation, Quebec's identity, Quebecker's culture or their language. The Conservative Party even wants to see Quebec's political weight diminished. That is a pity. It is an unacceptable step backwards in light of the current representation we enjoy in the House.

Many people will say that it is a Conservative Party strategy aimed at attaining a majority. That may well be true, but this bill is not democratic and in no way respects the Quebec nation. As a number of my Bloc Québécois colleagues have already stated in the House, the Bloc Québécois unanimously opposes this bill. We will do everything in our power to prevent it from passing.

Government Orders

This is a minority government and an election may be triggered within days or weeks. Our objective is for this attempt to further marginalize and diminish Quebec's culture and identity to become an issue in Quebec in the coming election. Imagine every Conservative and Liberal member of Parliament and candidate for election telling Quebecers that when there was an attempt to reduce Quebec's political weight in the House of Commons they sat on their hands and went so far as to vote in favour of a policy to diminish the political weight of the Quebec nation. I am referring here to the Conservatives and Liberals from Quebec. It is truly shameful.

Make no mistake. This bill is a direct assault on the fundamental rights of the Quebec nation. That is why we moved the following motion in the House on April 20, 2010:

● (1045)

That the House denounce the fact that the government seeks to marginalize the Quebec nation by introducing a bill to decrease Quebec's political weight in the House, and that it affirm that Quebec Members of Parliament, who represent a nation, must hold at least 25% of the seats in the House.

This motion was our response—the response of Quebecers—to Bill C-12. It was defeated by the Conservatives and by the Liberal Party of Canada, a party that continues to oppose Quebec, as evidenced by all the action it has taken against Quebec for generations.

On November 22, 2006, the Conservative government tabled a motion of which it was very proud. Clearly, it was an attempt to win votes. They wanted to win seats in Quebec. The Conservatives wanted Quebecers to believe that they recognized the specificity of the Quebec nation, its language, culture, identity and differences. The Conservatives therefore tabled this motion that recognized the existence of the Quebec nation. Our nation does not need this recognition to exist but it was still a kind gesture and it was interesting to see the House of Commons vote on the existence of this nation and to officially recognize it.

However, everything went downhill from there. The government should have followed through on this recognition and should have walked the walk by introducing a series of measures to respect the language, culture and identity of the Quebec nation. Clearly, Bill C-12 does not walk the walk when it comes to recognizing the Quebec nation. On the contrary, this bill denies the existence of this nation and marginalizes its representation in federal institutions and here in the House of Commons.

The Bloc Québécois then tried many times to introduce bills that would solidify the recognition of this nation, for instance, to have the French language charter apply to federal institutions. Once again, Quebec was recognized as a nation but everyone in the House voted against the bills. These bills would have solidified the recognition of the Quebec nation and ensured that the nation, as well as its language, culture and identity, were respected. Now Quebec's political weight is under direct attack. It is shameful.

Our opposition to this bill is also based on a consensus in Quebec. All elected members of the National Assembly of Quebec oppose Bill C-12. What are the elected Conservative representatives for Quebec doing? They are not even here in the House. None of the Conservative members for Quebec are here to debate a specific issue

● (1050)

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): I am sorry to have to cut you off.

The hon. member for Wellington—Halton Hills on a point of order.

Hon. Michael Chong: Madam Speaker, I apologize to the hon. member, but it is contrary to the rules to say whether or not members are in the House.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): I would like to thank the hon. member. He is correct.

It is against the rules to point out the absence of members. I would ask the Bloc member to refrain from such comments.

Mr. Guy André: Madam Speaker, I will continue with my speech. Our opposition to this bill is also based on the consensus in Quebec. The only people who do not agree with the general consensus in Quebec are the Conservative and Liberal members from Quebec who sit in this House.

Quebec's National Assembly unanimously voted on three occasions, and again in May 2010, to ask that this bill not be passed in the House. Members from the Liberal Party, the ADQ, Québec solidaire and the Parti Québécois unanimously voted against Bill C-12. Conservative and Liberal members from Quebec who vote in favour of this bill are voting against the interests of their constituents as well as the National Assembly.

All of the members in the National Assembly unanimously demanded that this bill be withdrawn, and all of the Bloc Québécois members condemn, without hesitation and without compromise, the reduction of the Quebec nation's political weight in the House. There seems to be a lack of representation from the other parties.

It is important in this debate to emphasize that the House of Commons or any other democratic institution can never be a purely arithmetic reflection of various proportions of the population. One criterion, which should be central to this debate, is that the recognition of the Quebec nation means that it should get the political clout necessary in federal institutions to make its voice heard.

Bill C-12 is a step in the opposite direction. Its effect will be to increase the number of seats in the House of Commons for representatives of Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia, while leaving nothing for Quebec, which is now a distinct nation within Canada, so long as it is not sovereign. In 1867, Quebec had 36% of the seats, but in 2014, it would have only 22.7%. Quebec's share of the seats in the House of Commons would be even less than its demographic weight would suggest. We think that the standard should be a minimum of 25% of the members from Quebec so that they can defend its interests in the House.

Government Orders

We should all agree on that. What we have here, though, is very far removed. For the Bloc Québécois members of this House, recognizing the existence of a nation is more than a symbolic gesture or fine words, like what the Conservative Party has offered since it was elected in 2006. The Quebec nation should not be at the mercy of the election strategies of Canadian governments that want to increase their share of the vote in Quebec. We are more than that. We are a people, a nation, a culture. We are different, and we deserve to have our differences recognized. Nations have basic rights, like the right to control their own social, economic and cultural development. This bill is an insult to all the proposals made by the Government of Quebec and the National Assembly.

• (1055)

I would remind the House that the members of the Bloc Québécois and of the National Assembly are all opposed to Bill C-12, as was previously stated by the hon. member for Quebec.

The vast majority of members are opposed therefore to this bill, just as they were opposed to the previous Bill C-56.

More than 85% of Quebec members, whether of the National Assembly or the House of Commons, are opposed to this bill. How can the other parties explain the fact that under the current setup, a voter in Prince Edward Island has three times the political clout of a voter in Quebec? How can the Conservatives and Liberals explain that?

The Bloc Québécois is fighting to ensure that at least 25% of the seats in the House of Commons go to Quebec. For a nation like ours, 25% of the political weight is still not very much. It is not enough. What we need is 100% of the political weight. Until that day, we will content ourselves with 25%. That is what is called political freedom, or in a word, sovereignty.

There are Quebeckers who have not chosen the path of sovereignty. Nevertheless, Quebec is entitled to this substantial amount of political representation.

After a lot of pressure, Quebec was recognized as the Quebec nation by the House of Commons. However, the fact that this House now refuses to recognize the need for Quebec to have a special status regarding its political weight shows that the Conservatives, like the Liberals, care very little about this recognition.

The previous rejection by the House of the Bloc's motion and the support for this bill illustrate the adverse impacts of federalism for Quebec.

These federal parties want to increase the number of seats for Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia in the House, but they do not provide anything for the Quebec nation.

This Conservative legislation will marginalize the Quebec nation within Canada by reducing its political weight in the House. Indeed, back in 1867, Quebec held 36% of the seats, but by 2014 that percentage will be down to a mere 22.7%.

Lastly, the proposed legislation shows that federalist parties get along extremely well on at least one issue: they will stop at nothing to make the recognition of the Quebec nation meaningless.

The Prime Minister promised us open federalism, but with this bill he is proposing a token federalism. It is obvious that Quebec is perceived as the guest spoiling the party for Canada, because it has its own set of values and interests, which are not recognized by the House. This nation and its culture, its language, the specificity of its social, economic and political development, as well as its institutions, are not recognized by federalist parties.

The Bloc Québécois continues to maintain that the government must immediately withdraw its legislation and guarantee Quebec 24.3% of the seats in the House of Commons. That is a minimum, given the repeated concessions made by Quebec over the past 150 years, and particularly because it needs the tools that will enable it to protect its distinctiveness, its culture and its language.

• (1100)

I conclude by asking all members of this House to vote against Bill C-12.

[English]

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Madam Speaker, I listened to the member's comments with interest.

The Parliament of Canada is a bicameral system: we have the House of Commons and the Senate.

Just a few weeks ago, the member's party voted to eliminate Quebec's representation in the Senate, where it has 24 out of 105 seats, or almost 25%. It wants to eliminate all seats that Quebec has in the Senate. Then in this chamber, it is demanding a guaranteed percentage of the seats, on the one hand, yet on the other hand its objective is to separate and, therefore, to have zero seats in the House of Commons. There is a contradiction in its position on the Senate and on the House.

I would also like to point out to the member that a vote in Quebec compared with a vote in Ontario, Alberta or B.C. will still have a greater punch, because the average constituency under Bill C-12 will be 108,000, and in Quebec it will be just over 100,000. Therefore, a vote in Quebec will still carry more weight than a vote in Alberta, B.C. and Ontario even after Bill C-12 is passed.

I think that is a fair balance. We will never get everything perfect in Canada, but this bill will help to ensure that under-represented provinces that have grown faster over the last few years will be better represented in this House, and Quebec voters will still get a greater punch per vote.

Let us face it: this bill makes Canada stronger and the Bloc Québécois wants to make Canada weaker. We are for Canada on this side of the House, and I think the other federalist parties are as well.

•(1105)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy André: Madam Speaker, I was listening to my colleague talking about the contradictions in the Bloc Québécois position on the bill before the House. The greatest contradiction that we have here, in this House, is that the Conservative Party and the Liberal Party are voting in favour of Bill C-12. I will explain.

In 2006, the Conservative Party moved a motion recognizing the Quebec nation. If you recognize the Quebec nation, you should strengthen this nation and give it more rights. The opposite has happened, and that is the contradiction.

From that point forward, the Conservatives have voted against any bill that sought to ensure respect for the French language, to ensure that the French language would be used in federal institutions. They rejected the bills introduced by the Bloc Québécois. Here, in this House, they recognized the Quebec nation. The major contradiction is that they now want to diminish the political weight of Quebec in the House of Commons. That is the fundamental contradiction.

The parliamentary secretary should admit that he is wrong, or at least think about what the recognition of the Quebec nation means. If you recognize a nation, then you ensure that it is given rights.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Madam Speaker, between 1840 and 1867, the Quebec region, Canada East, was given half the seats in the House of Commons. That was also the case for Canada West.

[*English*]

In fact, this chamber, the original building, was built for the Province of Canada. The legislature of that Province of Canada sat for one session before Confederation. In that system, the provincial division of Canada East, that is, Quebec, was guaranteed half of the seats in this chamber, as was the provincial division of Canada West.

However, during the debates that preceded Confederation in 1867, people like the Liberal leader, George Brown, and reformers like Louis-Hippolyte LaFontaine and Robert Baldwin understood that the changing demographic reality of Canada required representation by population in the people's chamber.

In 1867, the fundamental constitutional principle enshrined in our Constitution was representation by population. The Supreme Court, in its 1991 ruling, reaffirmed that, and that is what this bill before us is all about. We need to ensure representation by population in this House.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy André: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. He is not necessarily talking about Prince Edward Island, which has a much higher representation than Quebec in the House of Commons.

We know very well that the situation reversed as of 1965. Quebec's political weight has been decreasing up until now, and this bill would bring it down to 22.4%.

I maintain my position. There is a reason we are sovereignists. We are always faced with these types of situations: Canada uses all kinds

Government Orders

of strategies and tactics to swallow up the Quebec nation, to wipe it out and to assimilate it.

This is another kind of intrusion. If the Conservatives truly wanted Quebeckers to remain within the federation, they would not introduce a bill like this because Quebec is a nation with its own culture, language and identity.

I urge the members here, in this House, to vote against Bill C-12.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I do take some exception to the member making reference to the province of Quebec.

We all love and have a very strong passion for the province of Quebec. I do not think it adds to the member's argument when he brings down other provinces, like Prince Edward Island and its needs. Manitoba is a province with 14 seats. There are also concerns that Manitobans would have. We have to be fair to all jurisdictions.

Having said that, in Manitoba the capital region or City of Winnipeg has the predominate population, though at one time rural seats used to outnumber urban seats. Manitoba has used a 10% percent variance for southern Manitoba's population to keep up the number of seats in rural Manitoba.

Does the province of Quebec do likewise? Is it 100% representation by population based on the vote, or are there variances in the province of Quebec for the National Assembly?

•(1110)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy André: Madam Speaker, to answer his question, I will say that there is unanimous consent in the Quebec National Assembly to oppose the bill introduced in this House.

We are here to defend the interests of Quebeckers and we believe that the Quebec nation is different in terms of its culture and its language, and that it needs a basic democratic representation, in light of the fact that it is different as a nation, within the institution of the House of Commons.

I am happy to see the member rise in defence of the interests of Manitoba. I would have liked to see members of the Liberal Party and the Conservative Party rise to defend the interests of Quebec.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The hon. member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord has the floor for a very brief question.

Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ): Madam Speaker, first, I want to congratulate the member for Berthier—Maskinongé for his speech. I noted several things: the attack on the Quebec nation, the lack of respect for the Quebec nation and the fact that this bill is not a recognition of the Quebec nation.

Government Orders

Can the member briefly explain the consequences that putting this bill into effect would have? Could he also tell us what changes that would bring about in terms of the representation of Quebec? What would be the penalties, the disadvantages, for the Quebec nation?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The hon. member for Berthier—Maskinongé has 40 seconds to reply.

Mr. Guy André: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his excellent question. I know he defends his territory, Lac-Saint-Jean, impeccably. Recognizing francophone language and culture is of crucial importance in his region, since a majority of people there are francophone.

Reducing Quebec's political weight means increasing the political weight of the rest of Canada, and that means, as I said in my speech, that our ability to defend our interests, our needs and our aspirations in the rest of Canada is reduced.

[*English*]

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure today to speak to Bill C-12, An Act to amend the Constitution Act, 1867 (Democratic representation).

We know that in my province of British Columbia and in Alberta and Ontario, MPs on average represent 26,500 more people than their counterparts in other provinces do, and the purpose of the bill is to add some measure of greater equity to that.

The changes are as follows: Ontario would receive 18 more seats, British Columbia seven, and Alberta five, consistent with the notion of representation by population.

I want to posit the following too. There is a more fundamental and important question at play here, more important than increasing the number of members in the House. It gets to the heart of our ability to do our job. It gets to the heart of our ability to be effective members of Parliament, effective advocates for our constituents and effective people who can fight for our country, for our hopes and aspirations and those of our people.

The ability of MPs to represent the wishes of constituents, the bosses who pay our wages, I would argue, has been in decline over the last 25 to 30 years. The number of MPs has increased. In fact, in the Trudeau era, there were 264 MPs in this House, in the Mulroney era 282, and in the Chrétien era 301 and now we have 308 members. However, as the number of MPs has increased, the powers of members of Parliament have been going in the opposite direction and declining. What speaks to that is the increasing and justifiable cynicism and disheartenment of many Canadians with what has been happening in our country and within this House. The House is seen as not representative and not responsive and not listening to the needs and hopes of our citizens. This is the heart of the matter that the bill, or another bill, should be dealing with.

I have been in the House for 17 and a half years, and I will not be running again when the next election is called. For those of us who have been around for a while, we have actually witnessed this. It breaks the heart of everybody who serves in the House. Rather than being messengers of the people to the House, too many times we have become messengers of the House to the people, and our citizens know that.

From the Spicer commission to others, this message has been heard loud and clear and is resonating more loudly and clearly as time passes. As a result of that, we are seeing a decline in citizen participation and in the formal rules that we have in the House. Voter participation has not been on an increasing trajectory but in decline. That has to worry us.

I would suggest that we have a toxic situation, an undemocratic perfect storm that has to be changed, because as the disempowerment of MPs increases there has been a significant decline in the empowerment of people, and they have been shifting away. We are seeing that evidenced in the declining number of people who vote. That is an affront to the thousands of people who gave their lives for our country and our democracy, a democracy that sets us apart from so many other countries that do not have one. It is fundamental to our ability to carry on and do the things we have to do for our citizens.

The increasing power in the Prime Minister's Office and leaders' offices has been particularly evident over the last five years. There has been a move toward giving increasing power to unelected people in those offices. There has been a disarticulation of the public service. I had a chance to go to a meeting of professional public servants in Gatineau last year to find out how they were doing. As all of us know, there has been an absolute corrosion of morale within our superb public service. We are losing good people, and we are not necessarily attracting good people. How do we attract the best and the brightest in our country to our public service, which is fundamental to the ability of our country to function, if we are not attracting the best and brightest that our country offers?

Why would smart young people go into the public service if they are not allowed to use their intelligence and abilities for the pressing problems our nation faces? This is a fundamental challenge to any government and needs to be addressed now, in my view.

• (1115)

We are also feeding the 24-hour news cycle so that what is being rewarded is not the substantive and the relevant but the irrelevant and the sensational. We have always had an adversarial system. However, we have to understand that members not political enemies but political opponents. The notion that we are enemies is something that has to change within the culture of the House.

A lot of the members who served in days gone by, before any of us were here, had tough battles over big issues, but they never saw the members sitting across from them as their enemies. They saw them as their political opponents.

The choice we have is whether we want to acquire or maintain power by offering a better vision and solution, communicate them well to the people of our country and earn or maintain power through the articulation of the vision and the excellence of the solutions, or do we simply want to gain or maintain power by throwing more mud at the other side. That is the choice we have and it is a choice that we should not have. The clear option we ought to have to deal with the challenges we face is one side having a better, clearer, more compelling set of solutions and the ability to execute the solutions that the public finds relevant and important.

Government Orders

What I find disheartening, as I am sure all members do, is we know the big challenges of our state. We know that we have to have an innovation agenda for our economy. We know that we have to have a plan to deal with health care reform so it is sustainable in the future. We know we have to have a plan for the environment to deal with global warming. We know we have to put our pensions on stable footing. We know we have to deal with the demographic time bomb facing us. We know we have to empower the House and the people in it to be responsive to the needs of our citizens.

Those are the challenges we have and the big issues we have to deal with. We know that. However, while we often deal with the irrelevant and the marginal, which is disheartening to members in the House, other countries are vaulting ahead of us. China, India, the other British countries are vaulting ahead of us. For all its warts south of the border, the U.S. is having substantive debates on big issues.

We need to have the tough knock-down, drag-out debates that are meaningful and relevant for our citizens. If we fail to do that, then we are doing a disservice to our country and not using the collective wisdom and abilities of the members in the House, which I believe are underutilized. There is a lot of talent in the House and there is so much we can do. We need to have those battles if we have different opinions, which we do, but let us fight those battles. They are important battles for the benefit of those we serve, the people of our country. There are a few solutions.

Why on earth do we have confidence votes? Too many votes are deemed to be confidence when in fact they are not. We should be able to limit the confidence votes and only those should be whipped votes. All other votes should not be whipped.

If the government loses what is deemed to be a confidence vote, rather than the government of the day falling let us have a vote on whether the House truly wants the government to fall. Let us have a separate vote on the House's confidence in the government of the day to lead. That would enable the House to defeat a government bill that members do not want to support without putting the country into the turmoil of an election.

That is what we should be doing. In that way the government would be forced to come up with a better bill and listen to the opposition in order to find a better series of solutions so that at the end of the day what percolates to the top is a set of solutions that are better, smarter and more relevant to the needs of our country.

Those who serve as House officers in parties should, in my view, be chosen by the members of Parliament. The MPs in the caucus can put together a roster of those who choose to run. There could be secret ballots. A roster of options could be given to the leader of the party and then the leader could choose from those options. That way the people who are House officers would not simply be chosen by the leader of the party, but would have the faith and confidence of their colleagues because they are the ones who engage them on a day-to-day basis and it is also giving the leader the ability to have a choice, which is critically important.

On the issue of whether this is a situation due to a minority government, I would say it is not. The reason for that is what is happening across the pond in the United Kingdom, which does have

a minority government. Two parties with two leaders with significantly different views on how the world should work are actually able to resolve and have resolved many of their differences in short order.

• (1120)

Why? For the betterment of Great Britain which has huge challenges, as do we, but not in the same way. They manage to bury those differences and have the discussion, the collaboration and co-operation to put the interests of the state ahead of their own short-term political differences.

Committee chairs should be chosen on a secret ballot by the members of that committee. That would enable the committee members to have greater faith in the committee chair, that the committee chair was actually chosen by the members on that committee and not moved into that position by higher powers within the context of his or her party.

On the citizens' side of the equation, we ought to have a debate on the issue of compulsory voting, as is the case in Australia and Belgium. It is controversial where people would receive a small fine if they do not have a good excuse for not voting, but we should at least have that discussion with the citizens of our country because what is clearly not acceptable is the continued decline in citizen participation and voting in our federal elections.

Maybe that is not the solution, but we need to have that discussion and listen to our citizens to find out how can we enable them to become more active and more responsive to the system. What is more important on the other side of the equation is how can we be more responsive to the needs of our citizens, which is crucial.

While the bill is important, we have to change the effectiveness of our role as members of Parliament. If we are unable to do that then the power of this House, the power of the federal government, cannot be applied to the needs and the big challenges that we have.

There are other opportunities, partnerships and collaboration taking place now within our citizenry. The advent of new information technology tools and social networking abilities enables the public, thankfully, to mobilize, collaborate and build new partnerships. While that is important and would be effective, it still is not a substitution for this House and the power that it has.

In closing, I want to, from the depths of my heart, thank the citizens in my riding of Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca. I was first elected in 1993. Everyone in the House knows there is no greater honour and privilege. I have been honoured to serve on both sides of this House and have friends and colleagues sitting on both sides. I would like to thank them very much for being friends, partners, and collaborators. We have had many battles and many collaborations on an enormous array of issues and challenges that affect our House and I consider them all my friends. I am deeply grateful. We have had tough battles and we have been on opposite sides of many issues, but we have also been on the same side of many issues. For all of the issues that are put on our shoulders, there is not a single member of this House, I say to the public, who is not an honest, hard-working, diligent public servant, trying his or her best to work for the betterment of their constituents and for the betterment of our country.

Government Orders

My hope is that we as members of Parliament, as servants of the people, will have the ability to use the best of our intelligence, the best of our abilities, to serve our citizens in the way we hope that we can.

• (1125)

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Madam Speaker, as the member has pointed out, MPs in British Columbia, Alberta and Ontario represent tens of thousands more Canadians than MPs in other provinces. This is a violation of the fundamental constitutional principle that this House be representative of the Canadian population.

It is also a denial of the voice to new Canadians and visible minorities because the fact is that the 30 most populace ridings in this country are disproportionately made up of new Canadians and visible minorities. Those are ridings in the cities of Toronto, Calgary, Edmonton, and Vancouver. To deny those new Canadians a voice is not right. That is why the bill was introduced, to give those new Canadians and visible minorities a greater voice in this chamber and to ensure that this place properly reflects what Canada is today.

My question for the member is whether or not he will be supporting the amendment from the Bloc and whether or not he will be supporting Bill C-12?

Hon. Keith Martin: Madam Speaker, we support sending this bill to committee.

The member has a good private member's bill in the House which would empower members of Parliament, and I support his bill.

This bill should have broad, long-term deliberation at committee. Those committee hearings should be aired publicly on television so that our citizens can witness what is taking place and that the issues at hand will be at play.

A lot of our voters do not understand why their voices are not being heard in the House. They cannot understand why we are not able to represent their will and their wishes in the House. I hope this bill will act as a springboard to dealing with these more fundamental issues, in educating the public, and show the real challenges and problems that we have. The power has to be removed from leaders' offices and put back into the hands of MPs thereby giving the power back to the people.

• (1130)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Madam Speaker, I listened to the speech by my colleague from the Liberal Party. We have sat in the House together for several years.

He has raised a number of issues that speak to me particularly: the ability to do our work and to have the best tools for representing our citizens. He even said that there was cynicism among the public. We can also acknowledge that the public service feels demoralized because of the low regard in which its work is held.

The member did not tackle the heart of the debate about Bill C-12, which is the under-representation of Quebec that will result from it. The Bloc Québécois and the people of Quebec—nearly 71%, and the consensus in the National Assembly—want this bill to be withdrawn and not sent to committee.

The member said that we must listen to the voters. We listen to our voters, and that is what they have told us. We are not opposed to an increase in seats in the rest of Canada, that is not what offends us today. We are offended by the fact that no effort was made to balance the reduction in the representation of Quebec in the House. Regardless of who is elected—the Liberal Party, the Conservative Party or the Bloc Québécois—the result of Bill C-12, if it were adopted after consideration in committee, would be underrepresentation, and we oppose that.

The public is asking us seriously not to send this bill to committee because they know what is going to happen. I would have liked to hear the member this morning on what he thinks about the fact that they recognize the Quebec nation but they disregard all consensus in Quebec. We can present the consensus of Quebec in the House because we listen to the majority of the population of Quebec.

[*English*]

Hon. Keith Martin: Madam Speaker, the people of Quebec have the same concerns as all citizens across this country on the issue of their representation, their ability to have their voices heard in this House.

In order for the member to let her views and the views of her constituents be heard the bill should go to committee where in a televised meeting she and her colleagues would have a chance to articulate their points of view as well as the views of the people of Quebec. She can have that debate and make the changes that she feels respond to her citizens' views. The bill would come back to the House where there would be a vote on those changes.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the Yukon's representation would also be watered down by increasing the number of seats. Forty per cent of Canada is north of 60 and yet only 3 of 308 MPs are in this place.

I appreciate the Senate's role in representing under-represented regions and demographics.

The leader of the Green Party will be running in Saanich—Gulf Islands. I do not know whether she will win or not, but she will get a considerable number of votes. If that party does not get any seats in Parliament, the number of votes will not have contributed to this Parliament.

Aboriginal people are under-represented as well compared to their proportion of the population.

I wonder if the member has a comment on that.

Hon. Keith Martin: Madam Speaker, coming from the Yukon, my colleague has an extraordinarily large area to represent and he travels across the country every week. I do not know how he does it. He is an iron man as far as I am concerned.

Government Orders

My colleague is talking about the possibility of representation by population. I have some very serious issues with that, for a number of reasons. There are some rep by pop that are done very poorly. Israel and Italy are examples of that, where they have constant turmoil and minority governments that are continually falling. There are some that may work, such as the situation in Germany, where they have a form of representation by population. As I said before, what is much more important than how we elect members of Parliament, is their ability to represent the people and to do their job. The effectiveness as an MP is an order of magnitude more important than how many members we have in the House and how we are selected.

We can change this any way we want. We can have any rep by pop we want and have more seats. However, if the MPs are still disempowered to represent their people, then what is the point? Our citizens want us to represent them. Therefore, we have to turn this whole equation on its head. We have to empower members of Parliament to have the freedom to speak, to innovate and to vote and not have the penalties laden on us when we try to represent our constituents.

The challenge that our citizens do not understand, because we have not explained it, is this. When we do not do what we are told to do, then there is a series of penalties that comes with that. This should not happen because it is not democratic. That is what we have to change.

The empowerment of MPs and the solutions I gave might be some of ways the House may want to consider the future.

• (1135)

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Madam Speaker, first, I thank the member for his contribution to this place. As he touched on in his earlier remarks, there are some constituencies that have up to 160,000 people per constituency and one MP. Under this bill, we are trying to bring it to about 108,000 people as an average. Could the member comment on the challenges of an MP to represent 160,000 people? It seems quite a lot.

Hon. Keith Martin: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for all of his work as a leader in so many ways in the House and beyond.

The way to resolve that is changing boundaries so there is not only a redistribution of voters, but also greater resources to members of Parliament to represent the constituents relative to the number of people. We have that provision now, but a lot more has to be done. An example of that is what the United States has. A congressperson represents up to a million or more people and there are two senators per state.

There are provisions and abilities for an individual to represent a very large number of people, but that person needs the resources to do that.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Meili Faille (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise today in this debate, which gives us an opportunity to further reflect on our democratic institutions.

When an opportunity to debate such an issue arises, it is our duty to participate in it. There are several issues that are typically raised,

including representation by population, enhancing the electoral process, and access to information.

It should be universally acknowledged that traditional democratic representation is currently in crisis in Canada, Quebec and the entire world. This crisis of representative democracy is specifically embodied in Canada by the completely archaic institution that is the Senate. It is also reflected in this Conservative government's lack of transparency and its unrelenting attempts to systematically attack the Quebec nation by rejecting any and all proposals to give concrete expression to its recognition.

The bill entitled Democratic Representation Act amends the formula set out in the Constitution that alters the number of seats allocated to each province in the House of Commons following each decennial census. Unfortunately, this bill is one of a long list of bills that aim to drastically modify the system of representation by population in the House of Commons and amounts to a rejection of the heterogeneous system of representation that developed to take into account the successive addition of provinces and territories to the federation. The disproportions are not as great as in the Commons, but every territory and province enjoys some degree of representation, except for the three provinces whose populations are growing.

The Conservative government can legitimately attempt to correct this distortion, but it must guarantee real protection for the provinces whose populations are in decline. What is striking about this bill is the narrowness of the principles it sets out. By focusing too heavily on attaining pure representation by population, the government is at risk of violating paragraph 42(1)a), which enshrines a modified form of proportional representation. The Bloc Québécois is not afraid of the debate on proportional representation. Clearly, the Bloc has no firm position on the issue and would be very much open to considering a variety of proposals. In a sovereign Quebec, we certainly will not have an archaic institution such as the Senate. We will perhaps have a system of proportional representation or a chamber representing the regions; that remains to be determined. This allows me to keep an open mind as I take part in this debate regarding the need to improve all democratic institutions.

When dealing with such a crucial issue, constitutional law experts and court rulings must be consulted. In the opinion of constitutional expert Guy Tremblay, this unremitting and avowed insistence on continuously increasing the number of seats may be unconstitutional. Mr. Tremblay first quotes *Campbell v. A.G. Canada* in the first instance and refers to notation 4 on page 657, where Justice McEachern repeats the objectives set out by the then president of the Privy Council. First there is the limited ability to increase the number of seats in Parliament; then there is the guarantee that no province will lose any seats; and finally there is the bias in favour of increasing the number of seats for Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia, as set out in this bill.

Government Orders

This bill would have the effect, even according to the ministers who advocate it, of disposing of the guarantees that Quebec currently has. Some things the Conservatives said in 2008 and have said several times now in the House are tainted with a certain malevolence toward Quebec. The Conservatives' position is quite clear because the Minister for Democratic Reform at the time said it would "render the guarantee that Quebec enjoys today meaningless and ineffective". That is why we are centre stage today in this debate. That is why we want the House to defeat this bill. We will stand up for the rights of the Quebec nation and oppose any weakening of its presence or reduction in its relative political weight.

The Bloc Québécois proposed an amendment to this bill to express its opposition and highlight the particular needs of the only province with a francophone majority. Our National Assembly wants us to abandon any idea of passing a bill that would have the effect of reducing Quebec's political weight in the House of Commons. With respect to the debate on the redistribution of seats in the House, there is a set and established rule that Quebec's political weight could not be any less than it currently is.

● (1140)

This stems not only from Quebec's traditional demands but also from the spirit of the Charlottetown agreement of 1992. At the time, all parties agreed that Quebec's representation within federal institutions should be about 25%. So that is nothing new.

We are opposed to Bill C-12, which would add 30 seats for the Canadian nation, because the representation of the Quebec nation within federal institutions—essentially the House of Commons—would be less than its current demographic and political weight, something that is totally unacceptable to us.

The second point is to ensure that, regardless of the model that is decided upon, as long as Quebecers are part of the Canadian political landscape, their political weight within the current institutions, especially the House of Commons—there could be proposals to create a chamber of regions—and any future political institutions will be the same as it is now: we want about 25%. That is not only the spirit but also the letter of the amendment moved by my colleague from Québec, our democratic reform critic. That should be very clear to everyone.

My colleague from Joliette was quite right to remind us of the historical record. It is true that the high and mighty in this world have always distrusted the people. When the House of Commons was created, they wanted a counterweight, like the one in London, of representatives from what was considered the social elite to give some sober second thought to the decisions of the great unwashed, which might be less thoughtful and rational than those of the elite. At the time, the elite consisted of the nobility and the grand bourgeoisie. Now, unfortunately, it is more political organizations, Conservative organizers and friends of the government. That is how it was under the Liberals and how it is under the Conservatives. It is a kind of anti-democratic counterweight to the House, where the democratically elected representatives of the people can be found. It is totally archaic.

At the time, this fear of allowing the common people to make decisions was reflected in large American institutions as well. Tradition dictates that the electoral college votes according to the

way the people in the various states have chosen their presidential electors. If, in the state of Massachusetts, for example, the majority of voters decide that the Democratic candidate should become president, then the presidential electors of that state will not vote against the choice of the people of their state. However, there have been times when the presidential electors did not agree to vote for the candidate that had received the most support. That system was put in place after the American revolution, with the independence of the United States. It created a sort of second class. After the popular vote, there were these presidential electors who chose the president. This goes back to a time when the emerging democracy frightened the ruling elite.

The Canadian Senate is a legacy of that; it is a counterbalance. A few weeks ago, the Senate still agreed to the decisions made by the House of Commons. Now, the Conservative-controlled Senate has decided to block bills adopted in the House by the majority of the members elected by the people. This is totally unacceptable. This only further proves the importance of getting rid of this archaic institution.

We have been in favour of abolishing the Senate for a very long time. However, let us not forget that the Senate is part of a constitutional agreement. We can certainly hold a consultative referendum on abolishing the Senate—and I hope the yes side wins—but there will have to be constitutional negotiations with Quebec and the provinces to determine how the Senate will be abolished and what will replace it.

The second element, a proportional voting system, or some of its aspects, will also require constitutional negotiations with Quebec and the provinces. Obviously, the special committee could make a number of recommendations and outline some options, but all decisions would require constitutional negotiations. As I have said from the beginning, we have one immutable condition: Quebec's political representation cannot be lowered, and Quebec must maintain its current political weight, at about 25%.

The House of Commons recognized the Quebec nation some time ago. Unfortunately, none of the federalist parties has wanted to implement measures to give tangible expression to this recognition.

● (1145)

The Bloc Québécois member for Joliette introduced a bill on the use of French in corporations and by the 250,000 workers under federal jurisdiction in Quebec. We wanted Bill 101 to apply to these 250,000 workers. But once again, all the Liberals and Conservatives opposed this measure. The NDP was divided, but the majority of its members voted to not apply the Charter of the French Language to Quebec corporations under federal jurisdiction.

Although the Quebec nation has been recognized by the House, all the federalist parties have always banded together to prevent this recognition from having a tangible expression.

Government Orders

The federalist parties have not yet wanted to give tangible expression to the recognition of the Quebec nation. However, the political representation of Quebec regions in the House of Commons, and in any future institution, will have to be 25%. We believe this is imperative and it must be even clearer because the House of Commons has recognized the Quebec nation.

I would like to close by saying that, for us, the best way to guarantee higher democratic standards in Quebec would be for Quebec to become a sovereign nation with full authority. That is our first priority.

The Bloc Québécois has proven time and time again that it is not here to reform Canadian institutions or to prevent reform. We will bring the mandates given to us by the Quebec people and the consensuses of Quebec's National Assembly here to Ottawa.

In other words, we will defend our assembly, our constituents here in the House of Commons. We will protect their democratic rights.

• (1150)

[*English*]

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Madam Speaker, members of the Bloc keep suggesting that the provincial division of Quebec in this House is guaranteed a certain percentage of the seats in this chamber. We did away with that in 1867.

For 27 years, between 1840 and 1867, Canada east, Quebec, was guaranteed half of the seats in this chamber and Canada west was guaranteed the other half. However, we did away with that in the debates that led to Confederation. We went to a federal system of government. We did away with the unitary state which guaranteed both sides, in the division of Canada east and west, an equal number of seats and we went to a federal system where this chamber would be representative of the population.

Where in law or in the Constitution Act does it say that the provincial division of Quebec in this House is guaranteed a certain percentage of the seats in this chamber? It has been suggested that it was guaranteed 25%. It is below that right now. Where in law or in the Constitution Act does it state that the Quebec division is guaranteed that percentage?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Meili Faillie: Madam Speaker, the bill attacks certain sections of the Constitution and could leave room for interpretation of some of these sections, including the one I quoted in my speech.

The member opposite is free to defend positions concerning his province. We in the Bloc Québécois will defend the positions of the National Assembly of Quebec, and those of our citizens, in order to guarantee a demographic weight of 25%. That is our position, and it is for that reason that we will be voting to prevent this bill from making it through the House.

[*English*]

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Madam Speaker, I note that the previous Bloc speaker was defending 24.3% and that the present Bloc speaker is defending 25%. Hopefully they will figure out exactly what they are trying to represent.

I find it interesting that the member talked a lot about the Senate. This is a bicameral system. We have a Senate in which 24 seats belong to Quebec. However, the member's party wants to eliminate the Senate.

We have legislation to democratize the Senate, to have Senate elections and to have eight-year term limits. It would be much more productive, if the member has a problem with the Senate, to support our government's legislation to democratize the Senate.

On the second point about the seats, the member misrepresented my position. I said that the government would protect the seat count of Quebec. Quebec will always have at least 75 seats. If the population grows in Quebec at a fast rate, it will have more seats. It is really a function of how many people live in a province.

The member is advocating a position where Quebec, in the end, would have zero seats in the House of Commons. We are trying to make Canada a stronger country ensuring representation by population. Will the member accept representation by population?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Meili Faillie: Madam Speaker, I wish the minister had listened to the speech I just made. He commented on the number of seats that Quebec is guaranteed. I agree, but this objective must not be considered on its own, but as part of the whole. There are three objectives and the others seek to decrease the democratic weight of Quebec in the House of Commons and in democratic institutions.

As for percentages, I find it ironic and disconcerting to see a minister joke about democratic weight. The National Assembly was clear and adopted a motion in this regard on April 23, 2010, asking members of the House of Commons to abandon any bill that would result in the reduction of the weight of Quebec's representation in the House of Commons. It is in that context that we accepted amendments proposing a guaranteed threshold, that is, the current weight of Quebec in the House of Commons.

Consequently, if colleagues in the House wish to present such a subamendment to our amendment, we would be prepared to support it.

• (1155)

Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to commend the member for Vaudreuil-Soulanges on her excellent speech.

If Bill C-12 were to pass, Quebec's political representation would no longer match its political weight, which is completely unacceptable. This bill also does not recognize the existence of the Quebec nation. The Bloc wants representation based on historical consensuses, which establish Quebec's political representation at 25%. That is why we are calling for Bill C-12 to be withdrawn.

Does Bill C-12 appear to go against a certain number of historical consensuses in Quebec regarding the political representation of the Quebec nation here in the House of Commons?

Government Orders

Ms. Meili Faille: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his excellent question. In fact, the bill does go against a number of Quebec nation consensus that were established in the National Assembly. This bill also goes against consensus in the House of Commons.

In 2006, the Conservatives put forward a motion recognizing the Quebec nation. Unfortunately, to date, no concrete action has been taken to solidify this recognition. That is why it falls to us to use all the time allotted to this debate, to protect the rights of Quebecers, to ensure that they are fully represented and to defend their political weight here in the House.

[*English*]

Hon. Michael Chong: Madam Speaker, it is important for members of the House to understand that the 308 seats in this chamber, as well as the new seats that are to be added, do not belong to the provinces of Canada. They are simply provincial divisions for administrative purposes. These seats belong to this chamber. These seats are apportioned on provincial divisions. Therefore, the opinions of the provinces with respect to the number of seats that each provincial division should have is taken with respect and taken into account but are not relevant to the matter at hand. These are provincial divisions created for administrative purposes to decide how to apportion the seats in this chamber. They do not belong to the provinces of this country.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Meili Faille: Madam Speaker, in this House, we vote laws that affect the people in our ridings. I represent citizens of Quebec, citizens of the Quebec nation, and no member will tell us to be silent. We have here a certain percentage that must be representative of the Quebec nation. The member opposite would have us believe that his party's policies are in keeping with representation by population, but there is a danger in that—the danger of failing to recognize the Quebec nation. That is why we will stand in this House to defend the rights and interests of Quebecers.

Mr. Robert Bouchard: Madam Speaker, I have a quick question for the hon. member. What would be the consequences to the nation of Quebec of applying Bill C-12 on political representation?

Ms. Meili Faille: Madam Speaker, in essence, Bill C-12 would weaken Quebec. The problem is that this bill comes from a government that, over the past few weeks, has shown us that every democratic rule can be broken.

A bill like this one has no place at this time. As Canadians and Quebecers observe how this government behaves with regard to democracy, we need to be very careful about adopting this type of crucial and major change to reduce the demographic weight of Quebecers here in the House.

• (1200)

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to begin by thanking my friend, the hon. member for Hamilton Centre for his work on this very important matter.

It was a revelation for me to discuss this bill within the New Democratic Party caucus. We are in favour of adding more seats for British Columbia, Alberta and Ontario, but it is possible to achieve these increases without going against the unanimous recognition of the House whereby Quebecers constitute a nation within Canada.

I find it interesting that the Conservative government is pushing the hon. member for Wellington—Halton Hills out to the forefront of this debate today. Indeed, that hon. member was rather famously against recognizing the nation of Quebec when he was a member of cabinet. He has never gone back on that stance. From this I gather that the Conservative government is again going to play petty partisan politics instead of considering that, in a country like Canada, a broader perspective might be required for dealing with these complex issues.

Let the government play petty politics. What we are trying to say is that if we want to be consistent about recognizing the nation of Quebec, then Quebec's political weight in the House must never be any lower than it is at present.

In its motion, the Bloc Québécois cites the 25% that was in the Charlottetown accord. Obviously, it would be overly ambitious to want more, especially since, as history reminds us, the Bloc Québécois fought tooth and nail against the Charlottetown accord. To attempt today to pluck the best element out of something they fought so hard is a little like asking to have their cake and eat it too.

I am very attentive when my colleague says that the Bloc Québécois is open to amending its proposal, and that it now considers that the proposal has been made, as was attempted previously, to change the 25% to 24.3%, which is the exact current percentage of Quebec's seats here in the House of Commons. This is a slight but important difference, because they cannot have fought against the Charlottetown accord and now say they want it back again. On the other hand, and my colleague from Hamilton-Centre continues to insist on this date, it is the date of recognition of the Quebec nation that is now important to us, and therefore, if the political weight of Quebec ended up being reduced, that would prove the extent to which that recognition is hollow, empty and meaningless.

My colleague from the Bloc Québécois who spoke earlier said that Bill C-12 was an attempt to weaken Quebec. Allow me to express a slightly different opinion, in the following sense: I am not attributing unworthy motives, but simply making an observation of fact. Contrary to what seems to be the understanding of the hon. member for Wellington—Halton Hills, we are not in the United States here. It is true that our American neighbours have a very rigid approach to the idea of one person, one vote. Every time they get the data from their latest census, the lines are redrawn, and there are exactly the same number of voters in every electoral district.

This question was debated up to the Supreme Court of Canada, and in a decision most remarkable for its nuance and for the fact that it took account of the historical and geographic reality of Canada, it was agreed that, contrary to the American model, which allows no exception to one person, one vote, here in Canada it was necessary to recognize the existence, and this is the expression used by the Supreme Court, of different communities of interest.

Government Orders

•(1205)

This is a very interesting notion. It could be a community of interest which is regional, or geographic, or historical. What could be a more important community of interest in Canada than one of the two founding peoples? The only province with a French-speaking majority, Quebec, is now recognized here as a nation.

I respectfully submit to you, Mr. Speaker, that because its effect is to reduce the demographic weight of Quebec in the House of Commons, this bill is taking a wrong turn, and is a danger for all of those who, like me, have always fought to keep Quebec in Canada.

I would like to explain to the member from Wellington—Halton Hills that, unlike him, I did not spend my career on my sofa, watching the news on television, to find out what was happening in Quebec. I was there, experiencing it first-hand, in the trenches, during the 1980 referendum. I was a member of the Quebec National Assembly for nearly 15 years. I was there to defend Quebec's place in Canada in the 1995 referendum. I do not have any lessons to learn from the Conservatives on that. However, if there is one thing I have always known, it is that Quebecers and their inclusion in Canada must never be taken for granted. In August 1998, the Supreme Court ruled that if Quebec obtained a clear answer to a clear question, it could separate. Personally, I always keep those words in mind.

Unlike the brilliant member for Wellington—Halton Hills, I understand that it is in our country's best interest to continue working to respect Quebec and its specificity, as well as its democratic weight in the House of Commons.

Let us look at the facts and what the Conservative government has done since recognizing Quebec. My hon. colleague from Acadie—Bathurst introduced a bill that would require that in the future, in order to be appointed to the Supreme Court, judges would have to have a sufficient grasp of the French language to understand the arguments being presented in French.

By sheer coincidence, I saw the chief justice yesterday evening. She recalled a time when she had to rein in a litigant. Perhaps “rein in” is too strong. She had to ask a litigant to speak more slowly in French, to accommodate one of the justices, who did not understand a word of it. The interpreters were having a hard time keeping up.

When a case is being argued before the Supreme Court of Canada, everything is regulated and timed to the last minute. Apparently, at present, when francophone lawyers are arguing cases before the Supreme Court, they have less time, because they have to speak more slowly. I have experienced this in a parliamentary committee. What is interesting is that I have never seen the Conservatives ask an anglophone to speak more slowly, but I have seen them ask francophones to slow down, so they can understand the translation. The 10 minutes allotted are therefore cut short when the witnesses are speaking in French.

Yesterday evening I saw a Conservative member of Parliament, the minister for the Quebec City region, receive the highest honour of the Ordre de la Pléiade from La Francophonie. Yet she voted against the requirement that Supreme Court judges understand a sufficient amount of French to be able to hear cases in that language. Everything else is always done in writing and they can have help.

These days, someone who is old enough to be appointed to the Supreme Court would have necessarily completed law school after the Official Languages Act was passed in 1968. That is a part of our national identity and character.

•(1210)

If the individual did not understand the importance of this institution well enough to see the need to learn enough French to be able to understand it in his work, that could be a good indication that this person is not right for the Supreme Court, because this individual will be called upon to defend the institutions. But we are living in a fantasy land if we want the Conservatives to respect Canadian institutions, our constitutional institutions, the institutions of our Parliament. They cheated with political party financing, which was unanimously confirmed by the Federal Court of Appeal. They were found in contempt of Parliament. Once again today, they are strategically leaking information that is supposedly—note that I said “supposedly”—in the budget. At 1 p.m. we will find out whether that is true. This also has to do with respect for the institutions, but they could not care less. That does not apply to them.

With respect to Bill 101 and education in French, we currently have a rather centralizing Supreme Court. It rendered a very tough judgment last year opening the doors to English school. I had moved a motion in this House to recognize that the children of anyone choosing to settle in Quebec—to immigrate to Quebec is a choice—must learn French first and foremost.

It would have been nice if the government had supported us when we wanted to extend to federally regulated businesses the guarantees provided in the Charter of the French Language since 1977. The NDP put forward a bill to provide that protection without undermining the Official Languages Act, but of course the Conservatives are publicly opposed to the idea.

Why on earth should a woman working for the Royal Bank in Montreal have fewer linguistic rights than a woman working for the Caisse Desjardins? Those are simple issues: the right to receive communications in French from one's employer; the right to receive one's collective agreement in French, and the right to work in French without being required to be fluent in another language, unless that is necessary to perform the tasks at hand. More specifically, if you work for a cell telephone company, which is a telecommunication business and is therefore governed by the Canada Labour Code, your employer, who is arriving from another province and who does not speak a word of French, can demand that you speak English when working with him. And that is the reality on the Quebec territory today, in 2011. The NDP put forward a bill dealing with this issue, but the Conservatives are opposed to it.

As for the federal spending power in areas of exclusive provincial jurisdiction, the Conservatives were supposed to do something about it, and they have said so more than once in their Speech from the Throne. One big zero. As regards securities, the passport system is working well. The Autorité des marchés financiers in Quebec does a great job.

Government Orders

The Conservatives are centralizing everything. They fought all the way to the Supreme Court to have exclusive authority or jurisdiction in the area of competition. That is typical of the federal government. It fought all the way to the Supreme Court, and it won its case of course because that area came under its exclusive jurisdiction. The result is that we now have the Competition Act and the Competition Bureau.

Oddly, collusion is a subset of the Competition Act. That is rather strange. In all the collusion cases that have surfaced, there was a strong element that came strictly under federal jurisdiction. And what did the Conservatives do? Nothing. But now they want to go at it again: they want to fight all the way to the Supreme Court to gain another area of jurisdiction, which could eviscerate a critical sector of the economy, job creation and expertise in Montreal's financial community—to the benefit of other regions of Canada—and they claim that this is in our own best interests. We happen to disagree.

Similarly, they promised to reform the Senate. The hon. member for Hamilton Centre has suggestions about how to conduct consultations concerning the Senate and proportional representation in order to finally make changes. This year, we witnessed something that had not happened in the past 70 years: a bill was introduced by the leader of the New Democratic Party, duly adopted by the House of Commons, and defeated by the Senate, which was packed with the Conservative Party's friends. Some of them are now facing very serious charges that could have dire consequences. They are proud of that. Time after time, the Conservatives present the same defence.

• (1215)

I was again surprised last week when I watched them talking, as panel members, primarily on English television. The only defence they offered for the fact that they were spending tens of millions of dollars of public money in anticipation of a possible general election this spring, is that the Liberals did it before them, and they named the Liberal Party member who did it. In the minds of the Conservatives, two wrongs make a right. That is their moral standard; that is their logic.

When we analyzed this issue, we discovered that the Supreme Court had provided the theme of communities of interest. What can be more important in Canada for the largest linguistic minority—which must continually fight for its institutions, its language, its recognition and respect—than to ensure that, in the place where laws are made in the interest of all Canadians, Quebec does not lose its democratic weight?

It is always a revelation for us too, to learn that the Liberal Party, which loves to talk about openness toward Quebec, is in fact never there every time that something can be accomplished. When we presented our bill to extend the guarantees in Bill 101 to companies under federal jurisdiction, we saw the member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine rise to veto it and say it was not a good idea. When we tried to talk about subjects that might be under provincial jurisdiction, like securities, the Liberals were always opposed. And here the same old reflex on the part of the Liberal Party of Canada, to vote systematically against Quebec, is going to play out today as well.

We can do both. We can give British Columbia, Alberta and Ontario the number of seats it is important to give them here in the

House of Commons. But to be able to decode what is going on here today, we need only understand that we are in fact very possibly standing on the threshold of a federal general election. If this issue were of such great concern to the government, why the devil has it waited until the last second to put it forward? This is neither credible nor plausible. It is obviously a repeat performance of what we have seen in the past, trying to tick as many boxes as possible, the better to divide the country. This is the Prime Minister who, every time he comes to Quebec, puts hand on heart and swears that the Quebec nation is important, but who, every time he is faced with a concrete choice involving doing something real to give meaning to that recognition, cops out and sends his backbench puppets to tell the same tall tales, to vote against their own language.

I hear them talking about the judges of the Supreme Court, and it is unbelievable: they say we should not prevent a very good unilingual francophone lawyer from sitting on the Court. I have news for them. Never but never in the history of Canada has there been a judge of the Supreme Court who came from Quebec who did not understand English. That is not where the problem is. They are using that as justification.

In closing, the motion is proposed as a friendly one to the Bloc. It would change the 25%, which is more than the political weight at present, and set the proportion at 24.3% as of the date the Quebec nation was recognized. If it agrees, who knows, perhaps the Liberal Party will be able, for once, to do something concrete in recognition of the importance of Quebec here in this House. But you will forgive me if I do not hold my breath.

• (1220)

[*English*]

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to make a couple of observations on the member's comments.

The NDP is in favour of abolishing the Senate, but I would point out that would reduce the number of seats that Quebec has in Parliament by 24. That is a very significant number. In fact, that is the same number of seats held by Manitoba, Ontario, Saskatchewan, and British Columbia.

I wonder if the member would agree that Bill C-12 would help increase representation in faster growing provinces, those provinces containing predominantly new Canadians? Would he agree that a vote for a person in Quebec would still be worth more than a vote in each faster growing province because of the number of people in the riding?

I wonder if the member would at least recognize that aspect of what he is proposing.

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives promised, up and down before the 2006 election, before the 2008 election, that they were going to do something to fix the undemocratic Senate. All they did was pack it with Tory bagmen, some of whom are facing serious charges for suborning this institution, the House of Commons, and the free elections. That is what they have done. Those are the actual acts that they opposed.

Government Orders

With regard to the weight of Quebec in this House, I opened my remarks by saying we, of course, support as essential the increase in the seats provided for British Columbia, Alberta and Ontario. That is not what this debate is about. This debate is about the only province in Canada that has a majority French population, the only province in Canada where that population is recognized as a nation, the only province in Canada that is losing under the formula that the minister is putting before the House. That is what this is about.

If we actually believe what we say when we say that Quebec constitutes a nation, and we agree that has to have some meaning, then the last thing we should be doing is reducing the political weight of Quebec here in the House of Commons.

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, regardless of what I said in my comments on how many members we have here, this still boils down to the fundamental concern of all Canadians, including the people of Quebec, about the ability of their MPs to represent their hopes and aspirations effectively.

Does my colleague not think that a different voting structure, one where there would be fewer votes of confidence and MPs would have a greater ability to vote freely according to the will of their constituents, would be a much more fundamental solution to an enduring problem? Would he support that solution?

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Speaker, it is a bit difficult to respond to something so fundamental to someone who has announced that he no longer believes in the importance of his work here and is going to leave. If he actually thought that was important, he might have taken the many years that he was here to fight for that.

Those of us who understand the importance of these institutions will continue to fight for them. We will continue to fight for them despite what the Reform Party and the people who represented it used to say. We will continue to fight against the Conservative Party and its continual attempts to undermine the importance of this institution.

I wish my colleague well in the new career that he will follow once he leaves politics. But those of us who intend to maintain our belief that these institutions have to be defended will continue to work on concrete proposals like the one before us.

With regard to his parting words on our democratic institutions, it would have been far more interesting for us to hear him give meaning to his recognition of the fact that the Québécois constitute a nation within Canada. It would have been far more interesting to see him stand up and vote with us instead of staying there with his party and voting against us.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ): Mr. Speaker, you know that I am a sovereignist and I will definitely go to my grave as a sovereignist, but I also know how to show respect for the federalists who show respect for us. I think that the member for Outremont has just demonstrated that respect. I commend him for that. Clearly, the members opposite do not have any respect for our nation.

I would like to know whether the member for Outremont sees any similarity between the Conservative government's attitude toward

aboriginal people and its attitude toward Quebecers. In other words, the Conservatives see these people as only a number and not as a community or nation and, since they are few in number, the Conservatives can ignore them. Does the member for Outremont believe that such is the case?

• (1225)

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Speaker, I would hesitate to draw such a comparison because these are two separate cases. The suffering that the aboriginal people of Canada have endured since our country was founded in no way compares to the situations of others.

However, I know one thing to be true and that is that it has been an ongoing battle since September 13, 1759. I chose this date to remind us that, before the conquest, a society was already here with its values and institutions. In Canadian books, I often see—and its use is becoming more and more frequent—the term “the founders”, which is borrowed from the United States' Tea Party. The term is used to mean that the white men who founded certain segments of society will forever more represent all of these values.

When I walk through the village of Pointe-Claire and I see a parish that was founded before the conquest or when I pass before a row of houses that were built in that era, I remember that Quebec, as well as the French society within North America, was here long before and that it must always be defended because it will always be a minority in Canada. It is unacceptable for Quebec to lose political weight here in the House of Commons.

[*English*]

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question is with regard to nation building. As we know, Quebec has not yet signed the Constitution. It is legally under it. It follows it, but it has not joined it. So, Canada very much is still a work in progress, a nation in progress.

What are the hon. member's thoughts about recognizing the issues that have been raised here today by the Bloc and how that plays into the long-term interests of creating a fully united sovereign country where all the participant parts have voluntarily joined, recognizing that the Bloc is committed to ensuring that does not happen?

How does this fit into building and creating the conditions, the winning conditions, for Canada, in terms of Quebec ultimately signing on voluntarily?

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Speaker, I admire the nuance of the words chosen by my colleague from Hamilton Centre because it is just that. He says it so well. It is the conditions, the winning conditions, to take a term used in another event in our constitutional history, the winning conditions for Canada within Quebec and, dare I say, for Quebec within Canada. That is what this is about.

The country will always be comprised of bridge builders and bridge breakers. My colleague from Hamilton Centre is a bridge builder. He has made every effort in this important and delicate file to understand that it is possible to maintain Quebec's democratic and demographic weight here in the House of Commons. I would let those who love to use Quebec as a whipping boy to build up their own popularity and the reasons using coded anti-Quebec and anti-French language. I will leave them with their problems.

Government Orders

We are trying to build this nation of ours. We are trying to make it better. That is what this is about.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, since the member for Outremont mentioned me and my family, my father, who emigrated to this country from Hong Kong, lived in Montreal in the 1960s when mailboxes were going off. He was frightened because it took him back to the bombing that he lived through in Hong Kong. So, my family will take no lessons from the member for Outremont about the Quebec experience. I helped bury my father-in-law in Montreal only several years ago and there again, my family will take no lessons from the member for Outremont for the Quebec experience.

However, he mentions that we in this House need to set aside a certain percentage of seats for the provincial division of Quebec. I will quote from the 1991 Supreme Court ruling, which said:

A system which dilutes one citizen's vote unduly compared with another citizen's vote runs the risk of providing inadequate representation to the citizen whose vote is diluted...The result will be uneven and unfair representation.

So that, clearly, is a fundamental constitutional provision.

• (1230)

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Speaker, to correct my colleague, I invite him to read the transcripts. I never mentioned his family. When people try to throw themselves on something like that, making it up, to draw pity to themselves, it is pathetic.

The other thing that I will say is this. Those of us who want to build this great country of ours, make it stronger, understand the importance of doing this. Those who want to keep finding pretexts to divide it will keep doing what he does. He is no better than those over here who would sometimes do anything to break up the country.

I am here to try to make the country better, to build a stronger Canada. He is here to take it apart.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

FINANCIAL DISCLOSURE

Hon. Lynne Yelich (Minister of State (Western Economic Diversification), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to inform the House that, on Friday, March 18, I was made aware that I had inadvertently invested my tax free savings account in a controlled asset, which is not allowed. Once I was made aware of this, I took all necessary measures to comply with the act, and will take any additional measures that are requested.

In the interest of full disclosure, I want to make the House aware of this inadvertent mistake.

* * *

[*Translation*]

DEMOCRATIC REPRESENTATION ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-12, An Act to amend the Constitution Act, 1867 (Democratic representation), be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment.

Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ): Mr. Speaker, as I see it, Bill C-12, which is before us today, is completely

undemocratic because it bases democracy solely on numbers. There are many facets to democracy. When one nation wants democracy within a large country, this must not be based on figures and numbers alone. We must consider the fact that democracy is based on respect for the freedom and equality of the citizens of a nation. It is not based on equality of numbers, but on the equality of the powers of the citizens of a nation.

In a participatory democracy, the people of a nation participate in conservation, in working together, and in decisions. Democracy can also be a democracy of opinion. There are many definitions of democracy which do not refer to numbers alone. Democracy can, and this is the important point, be a democracy of peoples and of nations. A nation has democratic institutions that defend it. It is not just the number of participants that matters. It is all the realities of a nation's institutions that permit democracy to defend a people or a nation.

The system for each nation is established by its constitution. I think we must return to that source—not the letter, but the spirit. We are now faced with a bill that adheres exclusively to numbers. The spirit has been forgotten. They have forgotten why this was done, and they have also forgotten the importance of having a constant proportion of seats to represent a community, as my hon. colleague from Outremont has just said. In attempting to increase the number of members in just one part of the country, and based solely on the size of the population, are we not in the end creating an aristocracy in that part of the country? I sincerely believe so, for an aristocracy can be defined by various and different things. In the present case, it would result from a disproportion in representation between the Quebec nation and the rest of Canada.

Therefore this bill on democratic representation is ill conceived, for it is based on numbers alone, on mathematics. A democracy is much bigger than that. We have never seen a democracy based solely on the number of heads, even in antiquity. It may be the case in the United States, where they have their own way of counting the voters.

• (1235)

Given that it was a relatively diverse group of people who recently created the United States, that might be the only place where it would be possible.

In European countries, where there are many communities, there are different numbers of representatives, and that poses no problem. But here, they want representation to be based solely on numbers.

The Bloc is demanding that this bill be withdrawn because it is one more example of Canada's dysfunction. As such, it is surprising that the Conservatives are the ones who introduced it.

The motion concerning the Quebec nation was introduced by the Bloc Québécois and then by the Conservative government on November 22, 2006. It passed unanimously in the House. How can it be that something decided upon here is not being respected? I am having a hard time understanding that. Since then, the Conservatives have systematically attacked the Quebec nation and have rejected every proposal that would give tangible expression to that recognition, even though they claim to practise an open federalism.

Government Orders

By proposing Bill C-12, which will further marginalize the Quebec nation within Canada, the Prime Minister and his government want to continue to reduce our political weight in the House. That is quite clear. Perhaps we bother them too much. In 1867, 36% of the seats—I am referring to that number as it reflects the Constitution at that time—belonged to Quebec. In 2014, that number would be reduced to 22.4%. But just because there are fewer of us in comparison to the rest of Canada does not mean that understanding for Quebec's needs and interests should diminish.

If one believes that Canada was built by two nations, why are attempts being made to destroy one nation by whittling away the level of representation intended for that nation under the Constitution? I do not understand why this argument has not been made across the aisle.

Quebec's National Assembly unanimously demanded the withdrawal of Bill C-56, which is similar to this bill and gave 26 seats to English Canada and none to Quebec. The National Assembly called for this bill to be scrapped because it was unacceptable. The assembly of elected representatives of the Quebec nation, the National Assembly, along with the 49 members of the Bloc Québécois, who account for two-thirds of Quebec's elected representatives in the House of Commons, are demanding the withdrawal of this bill. In total, 87% of the elected representatives of the Quebec nation are demanding its withdrawal.

The argument will surely be made that only elected representatives feel this way, but 87% of elected representatives is a very high level of representation. Moreover, we have the support of genuine proponents of open federalism, people who respect us. One might venture to say that there is a majority of folks who are against Bill C-12. I refer to the speech that the member for Outremont just gave.

● (1240)

In 2007, the Conservative government introduced a bill to amend the rules for the distribution of members' seats among the provinces in the House of Commons. This bill replaced subsection 51(1) of the 1867 Constitution Act and significantly increased the number of seats. Under the bill, in 2014, the number of seats would increase from 308 to 330, which would benefit the three provinces experiencing democratic growth. We do not wish to stand in the way of that; what we will not accept however is that the nation would not have sufficient demographic weight to enjoy representation within Canada as a whole.

Consider again section 51 of the 1867 Constitution Act, formerly called the 1867 British North America Act, which established the method for the distribution of seats among the provinces in the Commons. This provision could only be amended by London, but section 52 stipulated both then and now that, "the Number of Members of the House of Commons may be from Time to Time increased by the Parliament of Canada, provided the proportionate Representation of the Provinces prescribed by this Act is not thereby disturbed."

It seems clear to me, referring to that. I am talking about the spirit and not numbers. When the drafters of the Constitution Act of 1867 wrote these words, they did so in order to preserve a certain moral weight. They did not say that thinking every last voter would be counted and when Quebec did not have enough, it would stop. Not at

all. They said that Quebec's representation should not be disturbed. That is the word that was used. The proportion that was guaranteed is not complete if they are busy destroying it.

It is essential to go to sections 51(1) and 52 to understand how important it is to preserve not only the numbers underlying the representation of the provinces but also the moral weight of a nation. The House of Commons has determined that Quebec is considered a nation.

We have quotes. The hon. member for Lévis—Bellechasse explained the Bloc's position as follows: "Of course, if the members of the Bloc were not so stubborn and single-minded in their ideological obsession of separation...". I said I would be a sovereigntist to the day I die, but I do not see myself at all as stubborn and single-minded. I see myself as someone who has a conviction and a hope some day for a country. It is not single-minded and stubborn to hope someday for a certain result.

Insofar as an ideological obsession of separation is concerned, I will not even go there. The hon. member for Lévis—Bellechasse added, "...they would see that representation by population—one person, one vote—is an underlying principle of democracy", which is not how the Quebec nation sees it. That is not the only thing, of course.

● (1245)

The government recognized the existence of the Quebec nation but refuses to acknowledge that our nation has a language, which is French. It was said a little earlier that, contrary to what some people think, this is not an economic question but a cultural one. Quebec sees itself as a nation.

By refusing to consider our national culture in the application of all its laws and the operations of all its culture-related or identity-related institutions, the rest of Canada makes it impossible for some people to hope to function in Canada. I am not saying I hope to do that, far from it. It is incredible that it is precisely those people who want to protect Canada who are busy destroying Quebec's moral weight in it. They say one thing, but do another.

They have to be consistent. If it is their hope that Quebec be recognized and be able to function, they cannot fail to recognize the moral weight of that nation. This is not the weight of numbers. That is the main thing I would like hon. members to draw from what I am saying. Democracy is not based on numbers only, on the number of people. Equality is also a consideration for nations and for communities. This is not a principle that is applied in the European democracies. Why would it be applied here? Because we live next to the United States?

The United States is a melting pot of people who come from all over the world. There is no nation within the United States. The people settled and scattered all over the country. For them the only way to have a democracy is to count the number of people. There is no moral weight to any particular place. On the other hand, this does exist in Europe. Even in England, where I have lived, there are places where there are more voters for one member. They consider the moral weight of certain regions to be more important than the actual number of voters. This bill must absolutely be approached from that standpoint.

Government Orders

We are asking the government to withdraw this bill. It makes no sense for a government to introduce a bill that does not recognize what that government has done with its other hand, a bill that does not recognize the Quebec nation.

I will close by offering this pleasantry: it is because of bills like C-12 that there will be more and more sovereignists in Quebec.

• (1250)

[*English*]

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the critic for Arctic issues, I want to reiterate the point that 40% of the country has three out of 308 MPs. If more MPs are added it will of course dilute that small representation for that huge area of the country.

There are fewer members of the Green Party, the NDP and aboriginal people in Quebec than the number of votes would warrant by population. Does the member have any suggestion on how to improve that?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Christian Ouellet: Mr. Speaker, I think there is one fundamental reason why there are fewer federalist members in Quebec, whether they be from the Green Party, the NDP, the Liberal Party or even the Conservative Party: Quebec as a whole is sovereignist. Whether federalist candidates are members of an environmental party, a party on the left or any other party, Quebeckers are not interested in voting for them. That is one of the reasons why these parties have few representatives in Quebec.

[*English*]

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I empathize with the members of the Bloc. I understand where they are coming from in opposing this bill and then proposing their amendment. However, in Canada, at the federal level, we have decided to protect the French language, the carrier of the culture, for the better part of 40 years through acts of Parliament like the Official Languages Act, through the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and through other measures we have taken.

To protect the French fact in Canada, would it not be better to promote the use of the French language, to find ways in which to ameliorate the rate of bilingualism in Canada, rather than try to set in place a new rule that would guarantee a percentage of the seats in this House for the provincial division of Quebec?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Christian Ouellet: Mr. Speaker, I will answer the hon. member for Wellington—Halton Hills that it is not the rest of Canada that has protected French in Quebec, it is Quebec that has protected its French, and it is having a lot of trouble protecting it.

It is obvious that we are having difficulty, even with the federal government, in selecting the immigrants who come to Quebec. I do not think that the federal government can congratulate itself right now for having preserved French in Quebec. It is Quebeckers who are protecting their French and their culture. Furthermore, to add to what I have just said, democracy depends on the moral weight of the nation and not on the weight of numbers.

Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague from Brome—Missisquoi on his speech.

Certain points stood out for me. For instance, Bill C-12 makes no sense and does not recognize the Quebec nation.

I would like to know what the consequences for Quebec representation in the House of Commons might be if Bill C-12 is passed.

• (1255)

Mr. Christian Ouellet: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his question.

The consequences will be immediate and obvious. We will forever be seen as Quebeckers from a small nation, people with no power. And nothing we bring forward in the House will be considered important. They will think that we are fewer in number and less powerful. And they will say that it does not matter because Quebec is no longer important to Canada and we will be forgotten.

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his considered input into the debate on Bill C-12.

We are presently debating an amendment proposed by the member for Joliette that the bill not be read a second time. However, in the discussion from the member for Outremont, he referred to a further proposed Bloc amendment which I understand would anchor the total number of Quebec seats at no less than the seats that were held by the Bloc on the date at which Quebec was recognized as a nation in this House.

Is that a correct understanding of the possible amendment or feeling coming from the Bloc? Could the member address how that would fit in with the intent of the bill?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Christian Ouellet: Mr. Speaker, our position is very clear right now. We do not want this bill to be studied any further. In other words, we want this bill to be withdrawn. Our position is clear and precise. If other amendments are eventually put forward, I think that they should only be studied once this bill has been rejected in its entirety and permanently set aside.

Mr. Pascal-Pierre Paillé (Louis-Hébert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague on his speech. With the introduction of this bill, the government's inconsistent attitude towards the people of Quebec is quite clear.

In 2006, the Conservatives brought forward a resolution regarding the Quebec nation. Now they have introduced a bill that completely flies in the face of that motion dated November 22, 2006.

I wonder if my colleague would agree that the Conservatives' rhetoric has been completely inconsistent.

Mr. Christian Ouellet: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question, for it is really very pertinent.

Government Orders

Yes, the Conservative government has been inconsistent, on several points. The Conservatives say they want open federalism. First inconsistency: they slam the door on that. Second inconsistency: they move a motion to recognize Quebec as a nation, they vote in favour of that motion, and then they no longer recognize it as such. Third inconsistency: they always work from an American mentality based on numbers. In reality, a country like Canada cannot be based solely on numbers. It must be based on moral values and on the value of communities. That is what the Constitution was trying to establish in 1867; that much is perfectly clear. Thus, they are inconsistent in that, as well. They do not respect the spirit that they say epitomizes their Canada. They do not abide by Canada's spirit. Thus, they are inconsistent.

I thank my hon. colleague, because there really are three inconsistencies. And it is rare for a government to create that many with a single bill.

Mr. Robert Bouchard: Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the hon. member another question.

Does he not think that we have here two different philosophies or visions? On one hand, the government is saying that Quebec must be a province like the others under Bill C-12 and, on the other, the Bloc is saying that Quebec is a nation and that we must protect and defend that nation by ensuring that it has 25% of the seats in this House.

• (1300)

Mr. Christian Ouellet: Mr. Speaker, I think that it is very appropriate to look at this bill from the perspective of basic philosophies because that is what is at work here. We have two philosophies stemming from two different cultures and so it stands to reason that we would apply or want to apply completely different rules. This is an issue that comes up all the time; it is not a new issue pertaining only to this bill.

I do not know if you have ever read any public opinion surveys, but there is always a difference between the opinions of Quebec and Canada.

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have an opportunity to make some comments on Bill C-12.

The issue of democratic reform means different things to different people, and, quite frankly, the starting point for us is in this chamber itself. A reform of this chamber would certainly the problem in the democracy level here and we could lead by example.

We are presently debating an amendment at second reading. That amendment is that the House proceeds with the bill no further and that it not be read a second time, so it would just die. That came from the member for Joliette, a member of the Bloc Québécois.

I honestly believe that the government does not want the bill either. In 2006, the Conservatives presented that they were in favour of working on proportional representation and looking at it seriously. In 2008, we had the same thing again. Here we have Bill C-12, which was introduced in the House last April 1, almost a year ago. That means the bill has a number and it sits there until the government decides it will start debate. Debate started on December 16 past. We went from April Fool's Day to December 16 before it got

the very first words in the House on the bill. That was the last day the House sat before it took its Christmas break. The bill then languished and here we are on March 22, which is budget day, and we are continuing the debate.

Any objective observer would suggest that if this were a bill that dealt with a substantive matter of importance to Canadians that had the government's full support and intent to pass at all stages through the other place, get royal assent and become law in Canada, we would not be here almost a year later dealing with an amendment that the bill be not read a second time, and in fact just die.

When we look at bills, it is important to understand whether there is the enthusiasm of government to deliver or whether it is words that we will continue to recycle. It is much like the justice bills. A litany of justice bills have been presented to the House. There might have been 20 different bills and then the House prorogued. We could have reinstated them at the same position, some of them were already moving forward, but the government decided to put two or three of those together. However, when we put them together into a consolidated bill, all of a sudden we have to start at the beginning with all of them in that one bill. Others were never reintroduced. Some were changed and therefore could not be reinstated at the same position.

We have been going through this since 2006 and many of those bills are still there. I just looked at the list and the status of various justice bills today. I think faint hope is coming back. I think it was about a year and a half ago we debated that bill.

I am not sure whether Canadians would understand that if we have a bill, we should put it on the floor of the House, have a robust debate, intense questioning and come to a decision.

There is another option that I have talked about with regard to many bills. The public will understand that when a bill comes forward to be debated for the first time, it is called second reading. At second reading, we go through the process. We have a vote at the end of debate and, if the bill is approved at second reading, that is approval in principle, and substantively, once it goes past second reading and goes to committee, we cannot tinker around with the fundamental foundation of that bill. We can make some amendments to try to make it a little bit better, but we cannot just create a whole new, unthought of, undebated part of the bill that we wanted to amend. Therefore, second reading is very important.

• (1305)

However, we do not need to have a bill come to us when it is tabled at first reading and then second reading. There are occasions when it would be more appropriate that the bill be referred directly to a standing committee for consideration, with expert witnesses and with all parties represented on the committee, to get to the fine details.

Here we are at second reading, a year after the bill was tabled, and I do not think there is very much new information on the table. New information would not come out until we have talked with representatives of the various provinces, particularly those that are significantly impacted, such as Ontario, Alberta, B.C. and Quebec. It is not just the members of Parliament.

Government Orders

The fact that the bill is before us at second reading, spinning its wheels, and will likely never go forward, should be a message to Canadians that the government is not serious about this bill. There are a number of other bills on which the same could be said. We are going to spend our time here having these debates. I think every time we come to these situations the point has to be made.

Some years ago, a former colleague, the hon. Diane Marleau, was a minister in this House. As a matter of fact, when I first came here in 1994, she was the minister of health. She represented a remote riding in northern Ontario. She had a private member's bill in which she argued the case that she came from an area that was extremely large in terms of land mass but which had a very small population. For her to travel from one part of a community in her constituency to another could take several hours and sometimes even requiring her to fly.

We have a member here whose riding is the size of France. There are some times during the year that the member cannot get to his constituents until it freezes over and there are ice roads. That is so constituents can see their member of Parliament and vice versa.

The point of the bill was that if we continue to do redistribution based on the idea that every riding must have 108,000 voters, or population, then what will happen is rural and remote ridings will become ever greater as the population diminishes, as the agriculture science evolves and shows us how fewer people can grow more. This has been going on for years. All of a sudden these ridings will be getting bigger and bigger.

The former member's bill basically said that we needed to understand that proportional representation, or one person, one vote as some people like to refer to it, is laudable, but having representation at all is even more important. If constituents cannot see their MP more than once a year, or something like that, how is their community being served?

There is another argument for saying that a model which says that we start with the premise that we are going to have in this bill, one member, one vote, proportional representation among the provinces, and then we are going to initially base that on the centennial census, which I think was 108,000 the last time it was done, then we are going to make the adjustments because some provinces have grown substantially since the last time there was a redistribution of seats.

This process really takes a long time, as members will know. We have been through this before, at least since I have been here. It takes a long time and a lot of public consultation. We are dealing with boundaries and communities of interest which are subjects that have often come up in this debate.

● (1310)

It is a very complicated thing because everybody wants it to be perfect. However, we need to understand that there is no way that we will ever have a perfect representation by population system in Canada because there are exceptions already built in and this bill seeks to make other exceptions.

For instance, coming into Confederation, the province of P.E.I. was granted four seats in the House of Commons and four senators. That means that a member from Prince Edward Island represents about 30,000 to 35,000 constituents each, whereas all the other

ridings are over 100,000 each. This means that one member of Parliament in a small land mass has just 30,000 to 35,000 constituents. One might wonder how that works. That is guaranteed by the Constitution. It was granted in perpetuity to P.E.I. for entering into Confederation. That is one problem.

Then we have this other situation of Quebec where Quebec traditionally has had approximately 25% of the seats. That dates back some time. The debate that has been going on now with the Bloc, primarily, is that the Bloc wants to ensure that it retains 25% of the seats, notwithstanding its population.

Therefore, if we are going to require the other provinces to have sufficient numbers of members of Parliament to have at least 108,000, or whatever the number will be adjusted to, the size of our Parliament will grow. Maybe the starting point would be to ask Canadians whether they want more members of Parliament in Ottawa to manage our country. I suspect there would be an interesting debate on the streets of Canada if Canadians were engaged in that.

However, the point is that if we want mathematics to work to get this best effort at proportional representation that is what would need to happen. If we cannot take away from those who cannot meet the average constituent population, we will need to make it up by giving more seats to others, and in this place right now we are talking about Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia.

I must admit that I did not catch all of it but I do understand from the member for Outremont, who had mentioned it during his speech, that the Bloc has talked about the possibility of making an amendment or proposing that there could be an amendment that might be acceptable in some circumstances whereby the number of seats to be granted to Quebec would equal the number of seats that it held on the date on which the House voted to recognize Quebec as a nation. That would, in terms of percentage, reduce it from 25% down to, I think, 24.3%, but given the numbers involved it would probably be close enough to effectively achieve the representation.

Where do we go from there? The issue really comes down to making some initial corrections and then the bill provides for what happens when we get to the next centennial census when we do again a redistribution.

The population certainly did shift to the west with the energy boom and with free trade as well. A lot of people migrated as a result of free trade where jobs were lost in certain regions of the country. I remember that it was during that debate that we were talking about the fact that Canadians would need to be more mobile in terms of filling the positions that will be available in other regions of the country that have the growth occurring, which has certainly happened in the west.

● (1315)

Bill C-12 includes some principles that the bill and the formula should represent. It is interesting to note the repetition of the word "whereas" in half the bill, indicating the assumptions being made. However, the word is not operable. It is there simply to refresh or remind people of some of the foundational principles the government is trying to reflect in the bill.

The first one is that the House of Commons:

Government Orders

—must reflect the principle of proportionate representation of the provinces and the democratic representation of the Canadian people.

That certainly describes the intent of the bill. Then, the second states that the:

—proportionate representation of the provinces must balance the fair and equitable representation of faster-growing provinces and the effective representation of smaller and slower-growing provinces.

When I read that I understood that the situation of Ontario, Alberta and B.C. requires those provinces getting a larger proportion of members of Parliament in the House of Commons, simply because their populations warrant it mathematically.

Although there is no “whereas” here, this all presumes that if a province has 30% of the members of Parliament as a whole, due to the size of its population, it will have a significant influence over virtually every piece of legislation brought forth in the House. Imagine what would happen if there were a province that had more than 50% of the population of the country and in fact was legislated to have more than 50% of the members of Parliament. I raise the point because that situation is possible. I do not know whether it is probable, but it is possible.

The next item has to do with the issue I talked about when I mentioned the bill the hon. Diane Marleau, namely the effective representation of the smaller and the slower-growing areas. This is a complicated issue. It is an important debate whether having one person and one vote is more important than having representation, having a member of Parliament to represent one's interests and not somehow being impaired in one's ability to utilize the services of that member of Parliament simply because of being in a rural or remote community. Canada is one.

I think the representation of rural and remote areas of Canada, whether Nunavut or the Yukon, would generate much interesting discussion, particularly as it relates to first nations as well. I am quite sure that first nations would say they also wanted a guarantee of effective representation in Parliament. The last I heard, first nations represented about 1% of the population of Canada and, therefore, should have a 1% share of the seats in the House. That level should remain there rather than first nations' share dropping below it. That is certainly another interesting aspect of the issue.

I must admit, I am disappointed that this bill did not go to committee before second reading so that we could have had input not only from the members of Parliament of the various parties but also from stakeholders and those who have a special interest to ensure that all members of Parliament were thoroughly informed about the facts they were faced with and the consequences of doing one thing versus another, so that we, as we say in our prayer each and every day when we start in this place, can make good laws and wise decisions.

• (1320)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to speak today to Bill C-12 and more specifically to the amendment proposed by the hon. member for Joliette.

The amendment states:

That the motion be amended by deleting all the words after the word “That” and substituting the following:

“the House decline to give second reading to Bill C-12, An Act to amend the Constitution Act, 1867 (Democratic representation), because the Bill would unacceptably reduce the political weight of the Quebec nation in the House of Commons and does not set out that Quebec must hold 25 percent of the seats in the House of Commons.”

When we look at this bill from the angle of the amendment proposed by the Bloc Québécois, it is very clear that every MP from Quebec, whether they are Conservative, Liberal, NDP or Bloc, is going to vote in favour of the amendment, at least I hope so. This is a fundamental issue for Quebec society and for the nation of Quebec.

It was almost five years ago, on November 22, 2006, that the Conservative government moved a motion calling on the House to recognize the nation of Quebec. This motion was adopted. Since the House of Commons recognized that Quebec formed a nation, we thought this motion would be followed by other positions or policies to strengthen this concept, for example by strengthening culture and communications. Furthermore, a bill was introduced on the matter. I was the sponsor of the bill to recognize that Quebec could control its own culture and communications and could create a Quebec radio-television and telecommunications commission. The federalist parties voted against that bill and made themselves perfectly clear on the matter, even though this decision was in direct contradiction to their vote recognizing the nation of Quebec.

We also expected more support for the French language, the language of Quebecers and the official language of Quebec. French is a language that must be protected, since Quebecers are a minority within Canada. The culture and language of that minority must be protected.

We might have thought that the Conservative government would introduce bills that would strengthen this protection. For example, it could have recognized Bill 101, which has protected the French fact in Quebec since 1977 or 1978, since the first Parti Québécois government came to power. We would have thought that the government would introduce a bill to do that.

Far from introducing a bill to strengthen the French language, the government and the Liberals voted against the bills we introduced that put in place a structure that would have brought people in establishments where there are workers under federal jurisdiction, like banks and airports, under Bill 101. That was rejected.

In addition to not taking the initiative themselves to strengthen the recognition of the Quebec nation, every time we gave the federalist parties an opportunity to support us, they did not do it and they sidestepped it.

• (1325)

Today, Bill C-12 proposes to change the democratic representation. This bill could have been acceptable if it had been to strengthen the idea of the Quebec nation, but the opposite is true. They are presenting a bill that reduces the political weight of Quebec, of the Quebec nation. This is completely unacceptable.

Government Orders

Since that motion was passed, in November 2006, the Conservatives have systematically attacked the Quebec nation. They recognize the Quebec nation, but they attack it. They have rejected any proposal that was intended precisely to give tangible expression to the recognition of the Quebec nation, whether in terms of language, culture or communications. By introducing Bill C-12, which will marginalize the Quebec nation even further within the broader whole of Canada, the Conservative government clearly intends to diminish the political weight of Quebec in the House of Commons.

In 1867, 36% of the seats were assigned to Quebec. With Bill C-12, Quebec's representation will fall to 22.4% of the seats in 2014. We have before us a government that recognizes the Quebec nation and that promised open federalism, but in fact it practises a muzzled and closed federalism. This is the complete opposite of what it says.

In Quebec in particular, this bill, this measure, this intention has never been, is not and never will be a matter on which there is consensus; the opposite is true. Twice, all of the members of the National Assembly of Quebec have passed motions calling on the federal government to withdraw bills that reduced Quebec's political weight. If we add the 125 Quebec members of the National Assembly, all parties combined, to all of the Bloc Québécois members of Parliament, who account for nearly two thirds of the seats representing Quebec in the House of Commons, that makes 175 out of 200 Quebec representatives who reject that position. The Conservative and Liberal members and the New Democrat member from Quebec absolutely must support our efforts and the amendment brought forward by the Bloc Québécois, to have this bill completely withdrawn. That is the form in which our amendment is presented.

All elected representatives from Quebec, in both the National Assembly and the House of Commons, represent 87% of the elected representatives of the Quebec nation and are calling for the bill to be withdrawn. That percentage must be increased, and it is up to the other members to make sure it is. They absolutely must take up the defence of the Quebec nation, starting now.

The former Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs of Quebec, Benoît Pelletier, in fact stated his government's position on May 17, 2007:

I appreciate that the House is based on proportional representation. But I wonder whether there might be special measures to protect Quebec, which represents the main linguistic minority in Canada, is a founding province of Canada and is losing demographic weight...Why could Quebec not be accommodated because of its status as a nation and a national minority within Canada?

That is the question. In their speeches, my colleagues were saying that it was not simply a matter of numbers or proportion.

• (1330)

This bill seeks to raise the number of MPs in those provinces where the population is increasing more significantly than elsewhere. However, Parliament also has a duty to assess all the factors. The number of people living in a riding is not the only criterion to determine how many MPs a province should have. For example, if I am not mistaken, Prince Edward Island has four ridings. However, the population in these ridings is less than one quarter of the national average. In Prince Edward Island, we apply a principle whereby a province with a somewhat smaller population should still be represented by a minimum number of MPs. A certain degree of

strength is necessary. However, the government refuses to grant this protection to Quebec, which is one of the founding nations of Canada. Political weight is important to Prince Edward Island, but it is also important for the Quebec nation.

Other bills have been introduced regarding this issue. In fact, after the Conservatives and the Liberals voted against the Bloc Québécois' motion, the Quebec National Assembly passed a third motion on April 22, 2010, almost one year ago, reaffirming that Quebec, as a nation, must be able to enjoy special protection for the weight of its representation in the House of Commons. In that motion, elected members from all political parties in Ottawa were asked not to enact any bill that would diminish the weight of the representation of Quebec in the House of Commons.

That is basically what I deemed important to point out. We should not look strictly at the numbers and figures when the time comes to establish a degree of proportionality with the number of members in the House. We must also be mindful of other commitments made by the House of Commons, including those that have to do with the representation of certain provinces. We must not look merely at the numbers, but also at the moral aspect of the decision and ensure that it is consistent with the fact that the House of Commons has recognized Quebec as a nation.

Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague from Saint-Maurice—Champlain on his speech.

In a nutshell, he mentioned in his remarks that the Conservative government passed itself off as an open government, but that by introducing Bill C-12, it instead demonstrated that it was a closed government. He also remarked that the National Assembly voted twice in favour of urging the House of Commons to reject the proposal to reduce Quebec's political weight.

I would like the member to tell us what message Bill C-12 would send to Quebecers should it pass.

• (1335)

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

I will answer the second part of his question about how Quebecers would react to the passage of Bill C-12. I think that people are starting to open their eyes. The government says that it is going to practise open federalism. Over the course of the 2006 and 2008 election campaigns, the government said that it was open to the notion of the Quebec nation and that it had helped pass a motion to recognize this nation. But the government says one thing and ultimately—through its actions and its bills—does quite the opposite to what is meant by recognizing a nation. Quebecers actually expect the government to pass legislation that strengthens their culture and their language; they do not expect it to pass bills such as Bill C-12, which reduces Quebec's political weight.

[*English*]

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, I appreciate the debate that the members of the Bloc are contributing to the amendment to the bill, but I want to reverse the question. If we do not do this, what are the consequences?

Government Orders

One consequence may very well be that the Supreme Court of Canada may rule the current distribution of seats unconstitutional, as reinforced in its 1991 ruling on the fundamental constitutional principle of representation by population.

The other consequence of not enacting the legislation is that it would become more difficult politically in 10 years to do this than it would be to do it now. In 10 years the gap would be that much larger than it is today.

There are serious consequences both in the constitutionality of the current structure and in the political difficulties in achieving change if we do not enact the legislation.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest: Mr. Speaker, the Conservative member just proved our point. Judges recently confirmed sections of a Constitution, which Quebecers never signed. This decision only demonstrates to Quebecers that the Canadian Constitution was not written with them in mind and that all it does is set roadblocks in their way.

When the government recognized the Quebec nation, it should have made sure that that also meant it would give Quebec the tools it needed to flourish. Bill C-12 does quite the opposite.

Mr. Robert Bouchard: Mr. Speaker, Bill C-12 is basically an attack on the Quebec nation. It shows a lack of respect for the Quebec nation. My question is for the hon. member for Saint-Maurice—Champlain. If Bill C-12 passes, what would be the consequences for the Quebec nation?

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest: Mr. Speaker, it is obvious that there would be disastrous consequences. When a nation loses its political weight in a place like Parliament, where Quebecers send half their taxes, when it is deprived in a single stroke of a certain amount of balance in its representation, and when its weight is not recognized in Parliament, it is being told that it is not important and decisions can be made without it. That is the very negative message that Quebecers are getting. According to the polls, the vast majority of Quebecers totally disagree with a bill like this.

• (1340)

Mr. Robert Bouchard: Mr. Speaker, in the past there were historical agreements recognizing Quebec's political representation as 25% of the total. If Bill C-12 is implemented, would it break the historical agreements over the Quebec nation? What does the hon. member think about that?

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest: Mr. Speaker, there were major historical agreements going back to the very beginning, to 1867. This bill breaks these agreements despite the disapproval of 87% of the Quebec members of the House of Commons and the National Assembly. This bill is an assault on a very strong position held by all elected members who represent their constituents.

The federalist parties that support this bill do not want the Quebec nation to prosper. They do not want us represented any more. Instead of helping us to emerge and become an even more productive nation, a bill like this smothers us.

Hon. Michael Chong: Mr. Speaker, I believe in the promotion and protection of the French language. I think we should have francophone members in the House.

[*English*]

If we look at the number of francophones in the House, it is proportionate to the francophones in the Canadian population, and it should be. However, one of the reasons for this bill is many Canadians are under-represented in the House. In particular, the 30 most populous ridings in our country are disproportionately made up of visible minorities in cities like Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton and Toronto. If we are to give these new Canadian citizens a better representation in the House, where they are only currently about 10% of this chamber and they should be double those numbers, we need to apportion more seats in those four large city regions. That is the purpose of this bill.

I think we can accomplish that while, at the same time, ensuring the number of francophones in the House from across Canada is proportionate to their numbers in the population and through other measures, ensuring the protection and promotion of the French language in Canada.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest: Mr. Speaker, that is part of the problem with Canada. In any case, it is not by reducing the representation of some in order to improve it for others that we can succeed in ensuring that everyone is well represented.

The hon. member said there is a problem with the representation of the more populous ridings. We do not think the solution is to reduce Quebec's political weight. They should find other solutions.

[*English*]

The Deputy Speaker: I wish to inform the House that the first five hours of debate are completed. Therefore, now speeches will be 10 minutes and questions and comments will be 5 minutes.

The hon. member for Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Bill C-12 on behalf of the Bloc Québécois and to discuss the amendment proposed by the Bloc Québécois, which we are presently debating. It reads:

That the motion be amended by deleting all the words after the word "That" and substituting the following:

"the House decline to give second reading to Bill C-12, An Act to amend the Constitution Act, 1867 (Democratic representation), because the Bill would unacceptably reduce the political weight of the Quebec nation in the House of Commons and does not set out that Quebec must hold 25 percent of the seats in the House of Commons."

As far as we know, the Bloc Québécois is the only party that rises every day in the House to defend the interests of Quebec. That is the case again today. It is the only party that has speakers constantly rising in the House. The Bloc Québécois, with the strength of its members, will continue this debate in the House for as long as possible.

This is symptomatic of the Canadian federation and of the Conservative government. There is a reason why Bill C-12 has come around at this time. I would like people watching to know that we are debating a bill that will go nowhere if an election is called in the next few days. A similar bill, Bill C-56, died on the order paper when the Conservatives prorogued Parliament.

Government Orders

Why are we debating this bill today? The Conservatives want to send a political message, which hearkens back to their throne speech of November 19, 2008. I would like to read a tersely worded excerpt from that Conservative Party speech.

Our Government will introduce legislation to move toward representation by population in the House of Commons for Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta.

This is a political choice. And naturally, today the members from the Liberal Party and the NDP are more or less silent, complicit in this political strategy that would give more political power to Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta, as laid out in the 2008 throne speech. They are defending their Canada, but we are defending our Quebec.

It is income tax time, and the people watching us are quite aware that they are paying their hefty share of taxes, half of which is going to Ottawa. As long as they are paying taxes to Ottawa, they will be entitled to elect members from the Bloc Québécois to defend their interests and their values. That is what we are doing, and that is why we have put forward this amendment. I will reread our amendment to Bill C-12: that “the House decline to give second reading to Bill C-12,...”.

This is what we will be demanding as long as this bill does not stipulate that 25% of the members elected to the House of Commons are to come from Quebec. We want this because the Canadian Constitution has guaranteed and protected proportionality in Quebec. Since the beginning of the history of Canada, Quebec has not always had a number of seats proportional to its population—far from it. Quebeckers have adapted well to this situation. I will give a few figures. In 1976, Quebeckers represented 27% of the population and had 26% of the seats. In 1941, they represented 28.96% of the population and had 26.53% of the seats.

Even though Quebeckers have not signed the Canadian Constitution, they are always respectful of the enactments that govern them. The Canadian Constitution applies to Quebec and it has always been respected.

● (1345)

I do not think there is a political party in the House that can find fault with the work of the members of the Bloc Québécois. These men and women rise every day in the interest of Quebec, but they respect the House of Commons, the work that is done there, and the British parliamentary system. As long as Quebeckers pay taxes to Ottawa, they will have the right to send the members they want to Ottawa. They mostly choose members of the Bloc Québécois because they know that these members rise in the House to defend their interests on a daily basis, without ever changing their minds.

In this case, it is crystal clear that the National Assembly of Quebec passed motions for the withdrawal of Bill C-56, which, as I was saying, died on the order paper. It was the forerunner of Bill C-12, which is before us today. The National Assembly was unanimous in calling for the withdrawal of that bill.

At the time, even Benoît Pelletier, who was the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, had asked that this bill be withdrawn. I will not quote the transcript because my colleagues have already done so, but he was a Liberal and federalist minister. There are still some of this ilk in Quebec. Federalists in Ottawa do not even honour

the requests of federalists in Quebec. That is why things are going so poorly in the Canadian federation. Indeed, aside from the fact that the Conservative Party recognized the Quebec nation, there is no desire to safeguard Quebec's political strength within Canada. I repeat, it is clear: in the 2008 Speech from the Throne, the Conservatives, for purely partisan reasons, wanted to give British Columbia, Alberta and Ontario greater representation. It was a political choice. They made no attempt to conceal this. They enjoy the tacit support of the other political parties in the House, which do not really dare to stand up for Quebec for the simple reason that Quebec is more of a bother than anything else for the Liberals and the NDP.

And yet we are still here, steadfast throughout, standing up for the interests of Quebeckers. There was an Angus Reid poll on April 7, 2010, that revealed that 71% of Quebeckers were against legislation such as Bill C-12, which would diminish Quebec's political strength within Canada. Moreover, only 37% of those Canadians polled were in favour of this amendment. Federalists in the House do not even have the support of all Canadians.

There is a good reason Bill C-12 is being discussed. It is for purely political and partisan reasons. The government could have chosen to discuss other bills, but this particular bill is being discussed right now because in a couple of hours we will know the answer to the question: will there or will there not be an election? This bill has no chance of being passed before the next election. The government should not be trying to confuse people by having them believe that because this bill is being discussed today, British Columbia, Ontario and Alberta will be better represented and have more members. That is not true. The same electoral map will apply whether an election is triggered in a couple of hours or a couple of days.

The Conservatives are again trying to make people believe that they have given it their best shot. They fail to mention, however, that Bill C-56 died on the order paper when the government prorogued the House. The Conservatives themselves killed a similar bill that would have given those provinces greater representation.

The Bloc Québécois is calling for the same thing as Quebec's National Assembly: that Quebec's political representation within Canada not be modified while hard-working Quebeckers continue to pay taxes to Ottawa. Quebeckers are generous. Every year, they pay their taxes and that is why they choose those who represent them in Parliament. It is why the majority of Quebec members are from the Bloc Québécois and will continue to be, regardless of any election held in any place, at any time.

Federalists must try to respect Quebeckers in the House and not modify their political representation. That is what the Canadian Constitution says. They must honour the pledge they made in 1867.

● (1355)

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is no principle in the Constitution Act of Canada that gives Quebec division 25% of the seats in the House of Commons. We had a principle under the Act of Union, 1840, but that act was cancelled in 1867.

Statements by Members

[English]

We had a principle of equal representation between Canada east and Canada west for 27 years under the Act of Union, 1840. However that act was cancelled with Confederation that took place in 1867.

Once again I say that the proof is in the pudding. The number of seats accorded to the division of Quebec today in the Canadian House of Commons is not 25%, it is 24.4%. So if it were a constitutional provision, we would have at least 25% of the seats in the House accorded to the provincial division of Quebec. That is not the case today, it is 24.4% and that is proof that this is not a constitutional principle.

The fundamental constitutional principle is representation by population. That has been the case in this country since 1867, and that is what this act purports to do, restore representation in the three fast growing provincial divisions of this country.

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Mr. Speaker, my Conservative colleague knows very well that British Columbia's Court of Appeal has already ruled on section 42. Any amendment to representation must be approved by seven provinces that represent 50% of the population. That is in the Constitution Act, 1982. I can understand that he does not want to abide by it, since he is a Conservative who does not abide by any laws, even those enacted by the House of Commons. That is what the Conservatives do.

Once again, we will never go along with this. Quebeckers are too proud.

[English]

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my friend and all Bloc members through him, if he thinks that a much larger problem is not the redistribution or the increase in numbers in this House, but empowering members of Parliament to be able to represent their constituents and to deal with the democratic deficit that has been around for a few decades but worsening over the last few years?

Does the member think that empowering members of Parliament would enable us to invigorate our public, to get them engaged in the public process, to improve public engagement on the development of policy? Does the member not think that is a much more fundamental challenge to the democracy of our country than changing the number of seats we have in this House?

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Mr. Speaker, I think that is another debate. My colleague is partly right. We need only look at how the Conservative Party is making changes to parliamentary democracy. That would be worthy of a debate.

However, one thing is certain: Quebeckers, represented by the Bloc Québécois and the Quebec National Assembly—which passed a unanimous motion calling on the government to not change electoral representation in Canada—deserve to have all parties in this House respect the will of the Quebec National Assembly, which is asking the government not to tamper with Quebec's representation in this House.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Brome—Missisquoi has the floor for a very quick question or comment.

Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would just like to ask my colleague from Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel if he thinks this bill is only about the numbers. Is this democracy based on numbers, as in the United States, rather than on values, nations and communities, as in Europe?

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Mr. Speaker, my colleague is right, especially given that Quebec's representation has not always been based on its population. I mentioned years in which Quebec had a far larger population than its number of seats in this House reflected, and we accepted that. Now, it is time that the rest of Canada respected Quebec, as Quebec has always respected Canada. We are asking the members of the other parties in this House to respect Quebeckers and not reduce their political clout.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

HOCKEYVILLE

Mr. Gordon Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for months now communities across Canada have been competing for the coveted title of Hockeyville 2011. The preliminary votes are in and on Saturday night, during *Hockey Night in Canada*, we learned that Wolfe Island in the riding of Kingston and the Islands is among the final five.

Krafty, the Hockeyville wolf and some 300 islanders gathered in the Wolfe Island volunteer fire department hall this past Saturday to watch the results come in. The hall burst into cheers of joy and excitement when they heard that Wolfe Island received the third most votes in the country to become the national finalist from Ontario. With over 265,000 votes, Wolfe Island is proving that it is a strong contender for this year's Hockeyville title.

Finally, I would like to congratulate the Wolfe Island Kraft Hockeyville committee which is busy planning for a celebration on April 2 when the winner of the 2011 Hockeyville will be announced.

Wolfe Island for Kraft Hockeyville, the puck stops here.

* * *

● (1400)

JEWISH REFUGEES

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I rise to acknowledge an issue that has not been discussed much in this House or by the current government: the plight of Jewish refugees from Arab lands, not only the forgotten exodus but also the forced exodus.

Following the United Nations partition resolution of November 29, 1947, and over the following decades, approximately 850,000 Jews were uprooted and displaced from Arab countries.

In 1945, there were around 900,000 Jews living in the Arab world. Today, there are fewer than 8,000.

Statements by Members

It has been documented that state-sanctioned repression and persecution in Arab countries targeted Jewish populations and led to the anti-Jewish pogroms. This is a story that must be acknowledged and must be repeated.

As my colleague from Mount Royal has said:

Where there is no remembrance, there is no truth; where there is no truth, there will be no justice; where there is no justice, there will be no reconciliation; and where there is no reconciliation, there will be no peace - which we all seek.

* * *

[*Translation*]

JEAN-LUC LABRECQUE

Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to Jean-Luc Labrecque, a city councillor in Terrebonne and the president of the Association québécoise du transport intermunicipal et municipal. For over 20 years, Mr. Labrecque has been devoting himself to promoting sustainable development and the use of public transit.

Mr. Labrecque's exemplary commitment has been recognized by Transport 2000 Québec, which awarded him the Guy Chartrand prize in the "outstanding individual in public transit" category. Created in 2005, this honour recognizes the achievements and contribution of individuals who play a role in the creation and implementation of a sustainable transportation policy for Quebec.

On behalf of my Bloc Québécois colleagues, I wish to congratulate Mr. Labrecque and thank him for his commitment to our community. We are privileged to be able to count on someone of his stature and we appreciate his efforts to move the Quebec nation towards a greener future.

* * *

[*English*]

THE BUDGET

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the contents of the federal budget are secret for good reason. Knowing where \$300 billion of public money is being spent is valuable information.

A reporter once leaked details of the federal budget and was charged with possession of stolen goods.

Recently, a Conservative staffer was caught red-handed shopping around budget information to lobbyists for his own financial gain.

Just three days ago, someone from the office of the science and technology minister contacted the newsroom at the Thunder Bay *Chronicle-Journal* directly and released specific details of budget items.

It gets worse.

Local Conservative candidates, with no security clearance and no accountability, also leaked budget details this week and have tried to use this information for electoral gain.

Who else knows the contents of the budget? Conservative donors? Lobbyists? And are the Conservatives giving this information away or are they selling it?

Should these leaks be proven true, I will be asking the RCMP to investigate this Conservative government, once again.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Andrew Saxton (North Vancouver, CPC): Mr. Speaker, members of the government have said repeatedly that we do not want an unnecessary election. We want to focus on the economy. We want Canadians to keep their jobs and we want the fruits of their labour to stay in their pockets.

Canadians, including those in my riding of North Vancouver, have been clear. They have said plainly that they want their government to focus on creating jobs and protecting the economy, not wasting millions on an unnecessary and costly election.

Will the opposition stop playing their partisan and political games, and do the right thing: stand up for Canadians, support the budget, and help get Canadians back to work?

* * *

WORLD WATER DAY

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today is World Water Day, a day to reflect on a resource we too often take for granted, a day to reaffirm our commitment to water as a public good.

There are over one billion people in the world without access to safe drinking water. Over 2.5 billion lack access to proper sanitation. Contaminated water kills over two million people annually, the majority of them children. One-half of the world's hospital beds are occupied by patients suffering from water-borne diseases.

In Canada, too many first nations must cope with having to boil their water before drinking it.

We need to pay more attention to our domestic freshwater supplies. For example, whether the Great Lakes, the St. Lawrence River, or Lake Winnipeg, the federal government has not focused enough on these world-renowned water bodies.

The responsible stewardship of this fundamental resource requires that we prevent water from becoming a private good.

Water is vital to human health, to the integrity of our ecosystems, and to the strength of our economy. We need federal leadership on the issue of water. We need a true national water vision.

* * *

● (1405)

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Greg Rickford (Kenora, CPC): Mr. Speaker, communities across northern Ontario are telling us they are benefiting from Canada's economic action plan.

It appears that NDP MPs in northern Ontario agree. In a recent mailout, the MP for Thunder Bay—Superior North said:

Statements by Members

Not only is it creating jobs and stimulating our economy, the funding is retraining workers, improving water quality, supporting our artists and fixing our roads.

Imagine that.

In a recent letter to the editor of the Thunder Bay *Chronicle Journal*, a constituent questioned her MP taking credit for this government's work. It is perplexing.

The NDP have consistently voted against Canada's economic action plan and strategically against other important legislation like repealing the long gun registry.

I am confident the next phase of Canada's economic action plan will continue to benefit the people of northern Ontario in a number of key areas. It is time their MPs put the interests of northern Ontario first and support the next phase of Canada's economic action plan.

* * *

[Translation]

LUC PICARD

Ms. Monique Guay (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Luc Picard has been named the Richelieu LaSalle Club's Francophonie personality of the year for 2011.

This honour was bestowed on him in recognition of the role he plays in promoting French language and culture and for his commitment to Quebec's young people. In honour of this occasion, a donation will also be made to the Regroupement des Maisons de jeunes du Québec, a group sponsored by Luc Picard.

Without a doubt, his prolific career and his social commitment make this actor a well-rounded and unique human being. He has appeared on television, on stage and in film and is also a director and writer. His first television role in the series *Omertà, la loi du silence* quickly made him known and loved by the Quebec public. He has been an outstanding personality in the arts world ever since. He is socially involved, supporting the Regroupement des Maisons de jeunes du Québec. He is a staunch sovereignist and was a spokesperson for Development and Peace.

The Bloc Québécois is proud to acknowledge this honour and wants to congratulate Luc Picard.

* * *

[English]

GLOBAL TRANSPORTATION HUB

Mr. Andrew Scheer (Regina—Qu'Appelle, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week the Government of Canada delivered support for Regina's newest transportation facility. The funds went to help aggressively market the global transportation hub to attract new investments in Saskatchewan.

Increased trade and investment with emerging economies in the Asia-Pacific region means there are growing opportunities for the global transportation hub in Regina since it combines rail, truck, and air cargo facilities.

The federal government's contribution will enable the transportation hub to brand itself as an attractive destination for international business and investment.

The project will also highlight the Regina area as an important transportation hub along major North American shipping routes and as a link into the Asia-Pacific region.

It is estimated that this project will help the global transportation hub authority attract up to \$300 million in new investments to Saskatchewan and create up to 500 jobs.

I have been proud to work with municipal leaders, the business community in southern Saskatchewan, and the provincial government on this important project.

Thanks to this kind of forward-thinking from Saskatchewan entrepreneurs and community leaders, we have a new economic engine that is already bringing jobs to Regina.

* * *

CHINESE CANADIANS

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very proud of the work SFU's David Lam Centre, named after the much admired late Lieutenant Governor of B.C., David Lam, has done to educate and celebrate the many ways in which Chinese Canadians have enriched our country.

A group led by Dr. Paul Crowe of the David Lam Centre and David Choi of the SFU Chinese-Canadian Heritage Fund has produced a commemorative and educational chronology of Chinese Canadian history entitled "From Segregation to Integration" in English, French and Chinese.

This chronology, digitized by SFU and UBC, will be launched in Toronto on April 15 and will be available to the public.

Chinese Canadians have made Canada their home for the last 223 years. It is their story, our story, that will be captured and exhibited by this project, bringing to life the early Chinese settlers, including railway workers and veterans, and their struggles, sacrifices and contributions to nation building in Canada.

We are all very proud of the contributions of Chinese Canadians to the building of this country.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while the global economic recovery is still fragile and our trading partners are still struggling, our Conservative government is focused on Canadians' top priority: jobs and the economy.

Our Conservative government is fighting for hard-working Canadians and their families. The next phase of Canada's economic action plan is critically important to Canada's economic recovery.

A low tax plan is of critical importance to the financial security of Canadian families. Our Conservative government is focused on completing Canada's economic recovery and implementing our low tax plan for Canadian families.

Statements by Members

Meanwhile, the Liberals, and the NDP and Bloc coalition partners are putting their political ambitions ahead of Canadians' financial security. The reckless political opportunism will force an unnecessary election, Canada's fourth in just seven years.

Our Conservative government's focus remains on hard-working Canadians and their families notwithstanding the political opportunism of the Liberal leader and his coalition partners.

* * *

● (1410)

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government and the Prime Minister must remember that under our parliamentary system the Prime Minister is not all-powerful.

The Prime Minister is like the CEO of a company with Parliament as its board of directors. As with any company, it is the job of Parliament to protect the interests of the shareholders, who, in this case, are the Canadian people.

Mr. Speaker, you have ruled against the Conservative government on four separate occasions. Just yesterday, a House committee released a report declaring that the government should be found in contempt of Parliament for withholding important information concerning the cost of its programs.

Were Canada a company and the CEO tried to withhold from the board of directors important information of the organization's operating costs, the CEO would soon find himself threatened with his job.

Shortly, Canadians may well be going to the polls and I believe they will show this Prime Minister who the boss really is.

* * *

[*Translation*]

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our Conservative government has made massive investments in all regions of Quebec. Whether it is \$7.6 billion in equalization payments, more than \$42 billion in tax reductions for Quebec taxpayers, \$2.1 billion for our universities, or \$3 billion for Quebec infrastructure, we deliver the goods. However, the Liberal-Bloc coalition opposes all these measures and votes against Quebec.

This afternoon, the Minister of Finance will table the second phase of our economic action plan. Will the Bloc members continue to sit on their hands? Will the Bloc members again abandon Quebecers? Will the Bloc members abandon our youth, seniors and workers?

Fortunately, instead of the Bloc's blackmail, Quebecers can count on the Conservative members to rise and say yes for Quebec.

* * *

GOVERNMENT ADVERTISING

Mr. Robert Vincent (Shefford, BQ): Mr. Speaker, during the meeting of the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates that was held just before the break, we learned from

witnesses from the Treasury Board Secretariat and Public Works and Government Services Canada that no one in these departments had any say about the content of the government advertising.

I find it unbelievable that all these communications specialists were unable to do their jobs—everything was decided by the ministers, led by the Prime Minister, and then approved by the Privy Council Office if necessary.

We know that the development of these government advertisements had to support the Conservatives' priorities. This partisan exercise in self-promotion denounced by all the opposition parties cost taxpayers a mere \$136.3 million in 2009-10, and that is not counting the contract with Cossette Communication Group, which is, of course, a secret.

It is time to put an end to the Conservatives' all-you-can-eat buffet approach to spending public funds.

* * *

[*English*]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the finance minister tables his budget today I would like to remind the opposition parties and all Canadians of how history has proven over and over again that one cannot trust anything he says.

[*Translation*]

Since the time when he was the Ontario finance minister for the Harris government, he has done nothing but make false statements about how he left the province deficit free. However, when the Liberal government took power, it discovered an exorbitant deficit of \$5.6 billion.

[*English*]

In 2007 he said there would be no recession. A few months later, Canada was hit with one of the worst economic downturns in history.

He said there would be no deficit. But then he plunged Canada into a deficit even before the recession began. All this led us to a historic \$100 billion deficit.

He talks about austerity in spending, meanwhile his wastefulness and poor fiscal management has driven up government spending by 18%.

● (1415)

[*Translation*]

He therefore made his government the biggest spending government in history.

[*English*]

Why would anyone believe a word the finance minister says?

* * *

WOLSELEY BARRACKS

Mr. Ed Holder (London West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada is privileged to have the best trained and most professional soldiers in the world.

My city of London, Ontario is home to Wolseley Barracks, where the Royal Canadian Regiment has produced an incredibly strong reserve unit. These soldiers undergo the same rigorous training as full-time soldiers, which is critical when they are asked to contribute to Canada's sovereignty and Canadian interests throughout the world.

We are proud of London and Canada's reservists for their commitment and we honour their service. A soldier is a soldier, whether full time or balancing both a commitment to their country and another career.

Someone once told me, "A soldier is someone who, at one point in his or her life, writes a cheque, leaves the date open, makes it payable to Canada" and under the dollar amount writes "up to and including my life". Today we stand to honour them.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Hon. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government is facing a cascade of scandals, accusations of election fraud, influence peddling and contempt of Parliament, but the issue here is the Prime Minister's own responsibility. He appointed Mr. Carson to a position of trust. He appointed two senators now accused of election fraud. He put his trust in these individuals. Will he now take some personal responsibility for their miserable conduct?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, as has been pointed out many times, to our knowledge this has nothing to do with any government contracts, any government money. The fact is this government has instituted strong rules. This government ensures those rules are respected and enforced.

[Translation]

Hon. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, they are not taking any responsibility. The government refuses to tell Parliament the real price of the fighter jets, the American-style megaprisons and the corporate gifts. But that is exactly why it is being brought before Parliament for contempt.

How can the Prime Minister think that we will support a budget when he is hiding the truth about his wasteful spending from Canadians?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, this information is absolutely available. It is the duty of this Parliament to focus on the real priorities of Canadians. This country's economy is our government's priority.

[English]

Hon. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, no government in the history of Canada has come this close to being found in contempt of Parliament. Why? Because over four months it refused to tell Parliament the true costs of its choices on prisons, jets and corporate tax breaks.

Oral Questions

Now the question becomes this. With a budget a couple of hours away, how can we trust its numbers and how we can trust a budget when we cannot trust the government?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, all the additional information given to the committee last week indicated that all the core information had been available all along. The numbers have been absolutely true and correct.

The Leader of the Opposition is simply trying to seek reasons to manufacture a coalition among himself, the NDP and the Bloc Québécois. The fact is our focus is the economy. That is what Canadians want us to focus on and that is what he should focus on.

* * *

[Translation]

CHAMPLAIN BRIDGE

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know the budget priorities of the Conservatives: fighter jets for the forces and megaprisons. They have billions of dollars available for those purposes. Money is no object. Meanwhile, since the Conservatives took office, the number of troubling reports on the deterioration of the Champlain Bridge has been increasing.

Did it not occur to members opposite that, if there had been a tendering process for the F-35, we could have saved a few billions of dollars and done more than just patching up the bridge and in fact build a new one?

• (1420)

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government made a clear commitment with respect to the Champlain Bridge. That is why we invested a lot of money in that corridor.

I want to tell the House that no compromise will be made regarding the safety of the Champlain Bridge and the thousands of people who cross it daily. I am also pleased to inform the hon. member that, yesterday, we tabled a letter from the Federal Bridge Corporation in the House, confirming that the Champlain Bridge is safe. It is still safe.

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I did not put a question to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food about crumbs to fix potholes, but rather about people's safety, about getting the straight goods. We do not want a letter, we want tests. That is the problem. I did not hear anyone challenge the experts who said there are problems and related risks, to the point where the Champlain Bridge should be replaced with a new structure. They said that some part or a span of the bridge could collapse. Every day, 7,000 vehicles cross that bridge.

The clock is ticking. What is the government waiting for to build a new bridge? Does it not prefer that option, rather than being taken to court for criminal negligence?

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food does not agree with the hon. member.

Oral Questions

It is inappropriate to talk about a new bridge until the final feasibility study on the future of the Champlain Bridge has been received. Once we have received that study, we will look at the findings and we will consider all the options, including replacing the Champlain Bridge.

* * *

ETHICS

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's attitude towards the issues of his former deputy chief of staff, Bruce Carson, is worrying at best. Not only did Carson act as a lobbyist when it was illegal for him to do so, but he did so in order to obtain a contract for his girlfriend, an escort. The most surprising part was learning that Mr. Carson had been disbarred for embezzlement and sentenced to prison.

Will this Prime Minister, who loves to be in control, admit that he made a terrible error in judgment by appointing Bruce Carson to an important position within his office?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, he is talking about the goings-on in a person's private life. There is nothing to indicate that a government contract or government money is implicated in this affair. We have instituted very strong rules and it is clear that they will be enforced.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this is the height of hypocrisy. He says they have instituted strong rules. But after the Prime Minister appointed someone to his office who made important decisions, someone who had been disbarred, someone who was sentenced to a prison term, how can he stand here today and say that there are strong rules? If those are strong rules, I would like to see lax ones.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the rules are clearly strong ones. That is why no government contract or money is involved in this affair. That is the reality. We established rules. And we were the ones who reported this incident. We are determined to ensure that the rules are followed.

* * *

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Mrs. Carole Freeman (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in a damning report, the Information Commissioner has found the office of the former public works minister guilty of political obstruction and interference under the Access to Information Act. Her finding was unequivocal: the minister's political office tried to block the disclosure of an embarrassing document. The file has been referred to the RCMP.

How does the current Minister of Natural Resources expect us to believe that he did not sanction this illegal activity, when obstruction and political interference were common within his office?

[English]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when I received the Information Commissioner's report in February, I immediately asked the department to implement all of her recommendations, and they have been all fully implemented.

● (1425)

[Translation]

Mrs. Carole Freeman (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on another issue, the Information Commissioner found that the Privy Council Office violated the Access to Information Act by obstructing a Canadian Press journalist who was trying to obtain documents on the listeriosis crisis.

If the Prime Minister will let his own department show such contempt for the law, why should we be surprised that obstruction, political interference and secrecy are so rampant within the Conservative government?

Hon. Stockwell Day (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the rules are very clear when it comes to situations with a potential for interference. In fact, it was our government that put those rules in place and clarified them. We expect all employees to respect those rules.

* * *

*[English]***ETHICS**

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Bruce Carson, an adviser to the Prime Minister, knew everything about lobbying laws. He knew all about the loopholes, the same loopholes the NDP tried to close, loopholes the Conservatives would not close. Now we know why. The Federal Accountability Act was just for show. Former government officials, right out of the PMO, are still able to sell their services to people looking for access to power, despite the five-year ban.

When will the Conservatives close the loopholes and prevent another Carson from doing the same?

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as a matter of first priority, this government brought in the Federal Accountability Act that got tough on people who leave government for five years. The law is very clear.

When issues arose with respect to one individual, we did the responsible thing. We immediately referred the matter, not just to the RCMP and to the Ethics Commissioner but also to the Commissioner of Lobbying.

Let me be very clear. Those who break the law should face the full force of law.

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Bruce Carson was out there selling access to government to the environment minister, to the Indian affairs minister using his girlfriend as a front. The truth is that the Conservatives would never have called the police if it had not have been for the work of the APTN. Bruce Carson would have kept right on doing it if he had not been caught out.

How can the Conservatives still tolerate these loopholes in their Federal Accountability Act?

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the fingerprints of the NDP members were all over that act. They unanimously supported the act.

Oral Questions

Some very serious allegations were brought to the attention of the government. We did the responsible thing and immediately referred the matter to the relevant authorities.

Rather than letting the member for Vancouver East be judge, jury and trial lawyer, we will let the police and the courts deal with the matter.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the ethical problems of this government are very serious. We have not seen anything like it since Paul Martin's Liberals.

The Conservatives are accused of contempt of Parliament. The RCMP is investigating two former advisors. The Minister of Immigration is fundraising with all the weight of his office. Documents are altered by hand by a minister's staff. There is also the in and out scheme to circumvent election laws.

Can there be any explanation other than the fact that the Conservatives have been corrupted by power?

[*English*]

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not think it will come as a surprise to any member of the House that I completely reject the premise of the hon. member's question.

It is this government who has been focused like no other on jobs, on the economy and on our low tax plan to help Canadian families. We have come very far over the past few years. The 480,000 net new jobs is nothing more than a good start.

The Minister of Finance will present the next phase of Canada's economic action plan in the next few hours.

Mr. Todd Russell (Labrador, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on March 21, the Indian affairs minister announced his supposed plan to address water safety in first nations communities. The announcement was full of self-praise. It was announced in 2006, five years ago, long enough for the Prime Minister's former chief of staff, Bruce Carson, to come up with a scheme to cash in on the water woes of first nations communities.

Selling water filters or selling access to power, it was all just business as usual, but this time for the Prime Minister's right-hand man.

How far does this rot go?

• (1430)

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what we are talking about are the actions of a private citizen. There is no indication whatsoever that the individual received any grant or any favour from the government.

Any individual who does not respect the tough new laws that this government has put in place should face the full force of law. When it was brought to our attention, we immediately forwarded the matter to the relevant authorities. That was the responsible thing to do.

Mr. Todd Russell (Labrador, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first nations communities are suffering from poor water quality and need action, not Conservative insiders hawking their wares, not Conservative

insiders breaking the Conservatives' own lobbying rules and not a half decade of Conservative inaction.

How can the Prime Minister or anybody on that side expect us to believe they did not know what Bruce Carson was up to? How could the Prime Minister and his ministers turn a blind eye to this serial scam artist who tries to profit off the backs of aboriginal people?

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is making some rather outrageous claims. If he has any information to back up what he has said, he should table it in the House. If he refuses to, I would ask the hon. member what he has to hide.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in addition to the Conservatives' electoral fraud, the RCMP is now investigating Bruce Carson, the Prime Minister's former chief of staff.

How can a man who was disbarred as a lawyer and imprisoned for fraud become the Prime Minister's chief of staff?

The Minister of the Environment allegedly discussed files pertaining to safe drinking water for aboriginal communities with Mr. Carson in violation of lobbying laws.

Was the Minister of the Environment also reported to the RCMP?

[*English*]

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians count on our government to do the right thing. When allegations about Bruce Carson came to light, we did the right thing and referred the matter to the Lobbying Commissioner, the Ethics Commissioner and the RCMP.

I did meet with the individual once on February 7 to discuss the environment and the energy sector in his then capacity as the head of the Canada School of Energy and Environment. However, he did raise first nations water issues but, as these issues do not fall within the jurisdiction of Environment Canada, that conversation ended there.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am wondering if the member also met with the RCMP.

Mr. Carson acted as a witness to a contract stipulating that 20% of the sales from water-filtration systems in cultural communities would be paid to his fiancée. She stood to gain up to \$80 million from the contract. Oddly enough, Mr. Carson allegedly met with his Conservative minister friends to discuss access to clean drinking water in aboriginal communities.

Did the Conservatives fill Ms. McPherson's hope chest at the expense of the first nations?

[*English*]

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is no indication of one single dollar being paid to the individual. If the member opposite has any evidence to suggest that was the case, she should table it before this House.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

CHAMPLAIN BRIDGE

Mrs. Josée Beaudin (Saint-Lambert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the business community in Montreal and on the south shore is devastated at the idea of the Champlain Bridge being out of service for safety reasons. Some \$2 billion worth of goods cross that bridge every year and 165,000 vehicles cross it every day. If the bridge had to close, the situation would be catastrophic, according to representatives of the chambers of commerce.

Does the government intend to listen to the engineers, the business community and the commuters who are calling for a new bridge?

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is why we have invested a great deal of money in that corridor. It is very important for Montreal and for the Canadian corridor. I am also pleased to inform the hon. member that we tabled a letter in this House yesterday afternoon confirming that the Champlain Bridge is safe.

[English]

In fact, in a personal conversation I had a month ago with both the CEO and the engineers for the bridge, they said that the bridge was safe and that it would be that way for the next 10 years.

•(1435)

[Translation]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr (Jeanne-Le Ber, BQ): Mr. Speaker, an announcement of a joint project to replace the Champlain Bridge needs to be made immediately. When it came to the Windsor bridge and ensuring the flow of trade between Ontario and the United States, the government found the necessary money. However, when it comes to replacing the busiest bridge in Canada, which happens to be in Quebec, the minister is unable to find the necessary funding. It is outrageous.

How does the government explain treating Quebec so unfairly?

[English]

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, just to remind the member, when I was in Montreal holding a stakeholders' meeting about a month or so ago, the people in Montreal said, that 25% of all the goods that come out of Montreal go across the Windsor Bridge. They are intensely interested in an additional bridge at the Windsor crossing.

However, to get back to the Champlain Bridge, we are awaiting the final report that will make recommendations on what should happen to the Champlain Bridge. We look forward to receiving the final recommendations. We are working with the Quebec government and stakeholders to ensure the bridge is safe in the meantime and will be replaced in the long term.

* * *

[Translation]

CANADA—U.S. BORDER

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Mr. Speaker, when the time comes to help Ontario, they will find any excuse. In the name of keeping trade with the United States flowing smoothly, the Conservatives are putting \$5.5 billion into projects in

the Windsor-Detroit corridor. Yet in Quebec, services at three border crossings will be reduced and two crossings will be shut down. That is the case with the Franklin Centre crossing in my riding.

Does the minister realize that this nickel-and-diming will jeopardize public safety and the economy in our regions?

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us look at the facts. This decision was made with local CBSA officials who have knowledge and understanding of the needs of the region. For example, Jamieson Line, Quebec, sees an average of 12 travellers a day and no commercial vehicles. There is a port of entry 10 kilometres away that is open 24/7.

Franklin Centre in Quebec also sees an average of 56 travellers a day, 3 commercial vehicles and there is a 24/7 port of entry 16 kilometres away.

We look at all of these issues to ensure that the best decision is made for the taxpayer.

[Translation]

Mr. Christian Ouellet (Brome—Missisquoi, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the unilateral decision by the Canada Border Services Agency to cut the business hours at the crossings in Morses Line, East Pinnacle and Glen Sutton will have an impact on the economy in the Eastern Townships. We are particularly concerned that this decision could jeopardize the development of tourism. The associations that are trying to develop cycle-touring are worried that tourists will choose other destinations.

Does the government realize that this nickel-and-diming will jeopardize the economic development of our region?

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, these decisions are made with local CBSA officials who have knowledge and understanding of the needs of the region. They are done in consultation.

The Bloc should be honest with Canadians. There will not be any job related losses from this decision nor any danger to public safety. In fact, our government has increased front line border guards by 26.5%

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for years the government has hidden the cost of its megaprison agenda, worked to hide the tens of billions it would cost and the fact that it has been a disaster everywhere it has been tried.

Now the Speaker has ruled and a committee of Parliament has found the government in contempt and the Parliamentary Budget Officer confirms that the Conservatives are still hiding nearly 60% of the information.

Oral Questions

When we have no truth, we have no democracy. When the budget is tabled today, very simply, how could Canadians trust a single word the government says?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what I find interesting is that rather than standing up for victims, the member for Ajax—Pickering is getting ready for an unnecessary and opportunistic election.

He did not vote in the interests of his constituents when he voted to let drug dealers get out of jail after serving one-sixth of their sentence. He voted to put white collar criminals back in the comfort of their offices and even voted to continue giving pardons to those who commit sexual offences against children.

Why does he never stand up for victims?

• (1440)

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the minister wants to keep pushing fear and fiction, he should go write Stephen King novels.

Here is the fact. The Conservatives have been hiding information from this House. The Parliamentary Budget Officer said that almost 60% of the information on how much their agenda costs is hidden.

This is about how much debt would be put on the shoulders of Canadian families. This is about how much money would be taken from health care and education. This is about the Prime Minister who has broken his word to be transparent.

Where are the numbers? Where are the facts? Where is the information?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is an individual who consistently stands up for prisoners rather than victims. The last time he toured a prison, he came out and said that the morale among prisoners was bad. That is his focus.

Our government's focus is on protecting ordinary Canadians and we are prepared to pay the cost in order to ensure that the hon. member's community is safe and that his streets are safe, even if he does not want it.

* * *

[Translation]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, anyone who is independent of the government and who looks at the procurement process for the F-35s will see the many problems: cost overruns and delay after delay.

The minister initially told us that the aircraft would cost only \$9 billion, then it was \$16 billion. Now the Parliamentary Budget Officer is saying they will cost \$30 billion.

When will the minister admit this is costing Canadians too much money? When will he stand up and defend the men, women and children who will pay for this irresponsible process?

[English]

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the non-partisan, professional DND procurement experts stand by their cost projections. In fact, those costs are based on

actual detailed estimates that were calculated from a multinational joint strike fighter program. They were not based on extrapolations that were made from drawing upon historical data of other aircraft from 50 years ago. They were not based on a flawed calculation that included the weight of the aircraft. They did not project out 30 years. They went with the 20 year standard.

I wish the hon. member would get his facts straight.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the problem is last week the United States Pentagon joined Mr. Page in saying that the costs of the F-35 are “simply unacceptable in this fiscal environment”. Delays keep getting longer. Costs keep going up. Yet the minister gets up over and over again with the same story. Canadians are not buying it.

When will the Conservatives finally scrap this reckless procurement process and save taxpayers billions of dollars by having a real competition in Canada to get the air force the plane it needs at the best value for taxpayers?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is exactly what we are doing.

The reality is there was a competition, there was a process. Do members know how we know this? We know this because the party of the member opposite started the process.

There was a time not that long ago, in September 2010, when the member opposite said that the Liberal Party wanted to replace the CF-18 with the next generation fighter aircraft. There is only one next generation fighter aircraft. That was confirmed by the Parliamentary Budget Officer. That member used to be the biggest cheerleader for that plane.

* * *

THE BUDGET

Mr. Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the government House leader could please tell the House if any member of the ministry is selling access to Canadians in return for a secret briefing on the budget that will be tabled in the House later this day?

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government would never do that.

The Minister of Finance, the Prime Minister and members of this government caucus have fanned out right across the country to listen to Canadians' views on the budget.

But look at what the Liberal Party is doing. It is now charging people to “ensure your opinion is represented in the Liberal caucus room. All you have to do is make a donation to the Liberal Party of Canada”. I have here an email and it is very simple: “Taking part is simple. Just make a donation of as little as \$10 and they can ensure your views are heard in the Liberal caucus”.

Canadians reject this pay to play attitude from the Liberal Party and call on them to cancel this call this afternoon.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Oral Questions

●(1445)

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Edmonton—Strathcona.

* * *

ETHICS

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, at the climate change conference in Cancun, Canada committed to develop a national low carbon, clean energy strategy for Canada.

Bruce Carson has been the lead on a national strategy for energy and for oil sands expansion. He met with the previous and current environment ministers responsible for climate change and regulating the oil sands. The Prime Minister has forbidden further communications with Mr. Carson.

Will the government also be cutting the generous federal grants to the organizations led by Mr. Carson?

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when information was brought to our attention in this regard we did the responsible thing and forwarded it to the relevant authorities. We will let them conduct an investigation. We sent it to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the Ethics Commissioner and the Commissioner of Lobbying. These are the independent officers who can look into this matter.

Anyone who breaks this very important law should face the full force of the law.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the truth is that Carson never left the Prime Minister's inner circle and the money is still flowing.

This is a man who was given \$15 million of taxpayers' money to orchestrate the green washing of the oil sands with government and big oil. At the table were senior members of the government along with industry executives.

Everyone knew that this man was still connected to the Prime Minister, that he had the blessing of the Prime Minister, and that he had the confidence of the Prime Minister.

How can the government be trusted when it puts so much faith in someone with such an obviously broken moral compass?

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is this government which brought in the Federal Accountability Act that established this five-year ban because we believe it is important that Canadians who want to serve in government come with the best interests of Canadians and not to enrich themselves.

When information was brought to our attention, we immediately referred them to the relevant authorities. We are going to let them conduct an investigation and if anyone has broken the law, he or she should face the full force of the consequence of that same law.

[Translation]

SHIPBUILDING INDUSTRY

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Minister of Public Works and Government Services told us that the Davie shipyard had until July to prove its solvency. That is not true. The request for proposals was changed along the way. Davie has to be solvent in May. The Conservatives are taking away precious weeks for Davie to restructure itself.

How can the hon. member for Lévis—Bellechasse be complicit with a government that changes the rules midstream in order to disqualify the shipyard in Lévis?

[English]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the fact is that the solvency requirement has never been changed in any part of the process. The requirement to be solvent was well known by all shipyards across the country from the very beginning of the RFP process and it is standard that all government contracting requires that a company must be solvent in order to be awarded a contract.

I can also assure the hon. member that KPMG was brought in as an independent party to validate the financial requirements. As well, we asked an independent fairness monitor to endorse this process and it has said that this is a fair, open and transparent process.

[Translation]

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, when it came time to rescue GM from bankruptcy, the Conservative government did not hesitate to free up billions of dollars to acquire shares in the company in order to save jobs in Ontario. In contrast, when it comes to rescuing the shipyard in Lévis, the Conservative government is doing everything it can to sabotage that shipyard by imposing solvency conditions and by changing the request for proposals in order to exclude the Davie shipyard from the contract.

Why does the Conservative government not value jobs in Quebec as much as jobs in Ontario?

[English]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me be clear. The solvency requirement was not changed at any point during this process. The requirement to be solvent is a standard practice for all government contracting. Companies must be solvent in order to be awarded a contract.

I would remind the hon. member and all members of the House that it was this government last year that supported this particular company with a \$270 million loan through EDC to support this shipyard when it was in a very difficult time.

Oral Questions

•(1450)

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mrs. Bonnie Crombie (Mississauga—Streetsville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism's attempt to turn his ministry into a political arm of the Conservative Party is out of control. Yesterday his fired staffer admitted that bureaucrats were forced to prepare fundraising letters for the Conservative Party and this is in addition to using government letterhead, as well as a government-issued cell phone as the RSVP line.

The Prime Minister called in the RCMP to investigate Bruce Carson. When will the Prime Minister put a stop to the abuse in the immigration minister's office?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, you would think that an opposition member could read a committee transcript and actually develop a factual question. Apparently, she failed.

Bureaucrats were not involved in any respect in the matter for which my former political staff member took responsibility by submitting his resignation, which I accepted, and also informed you and the Ethics Commissioner about, Mr. Speaker. He gave very fulsome testimony before the relevant committee yesterday. He regretted, of course, the administrative error that was made in the office. Corrective action was taken.

Mrs. Bonnie Crombie (Mississauga—Streetsville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is the minister that is failing.

We already know that the minister had the audacity to bring Parminder Gill, an unelected Conservative candidate in Brampton—Springdale, to India in 2009 as part of an official Government of Canada delegation, but now we have learned that while he was in India, Mr. Gill made immigration policy announcements on behalf of the federal government. Back in Canada, Mr. Gill was set up to be the go-to guy for permits and visas.

We are all wondering, what are the terms and conditions to qualify for a visa which Mr. Gill would issue?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, all complete utter rubbish. The individual in question was not part of an official Government of Canada delegation, period. The person in question has never made announcements on behalf of the government in question. I am the individual responsible for exercising the authority of the minister under IRPA to exempt people from the temporary visa requirement and I should point out that last year I issued a third fewer permits than my Liberal predecessor.

* * *

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, access to drinking water should not be a privilege for Canadians. We do not live in a third world country. We have plenty of water. Yet, many people living in first nations communities do not have access to safe drinking water. Illegal lobbying and influence peddling by a notorious fraudster like Bruce Carson is scandalous. However, what is worse is the absence of water filtration systems for aboriginal people.

Could the minister explain why, after all this time, so many first nations communities are still without access to safe drinking water?

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, this government has taken strong action on water since coming into government in 2006. After 13 long years of neglect, we have invested strong resources into upgrading water and waste water systems across the country, and the member knows it.

* * *

HEALTH

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I recently sat on a panel on health care organized by the seniors health advisory committee in my riding. Leaders from different health organizations, including the Local Health Integration Network, the Sault Area Hospital, and the Red Cross all agreed that more assisted housing was the most important need in our region. In the estimates, we see support for this program coming to an end.

Matthews Memorial Hospital and the Finnish Resthome Association have projects ready to go. Will the government renew this important initiative?

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we believe that health care is an incredibly important priority, particularly when it comes to those in first nations, and those in northern Ontario and northern Canada. We have made an unprecedented commitment to health care, and we would be very pleased to look into the matter that the member raised.

* * *

[Translation]

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government is the proud defender of all Quebecers in all regions. Unlike the member from the Plateau and his political party that is out of touch with reality, we take the concerns of all Quebecers in all Quebec regions to heart.

Could my colleague, the minister responsible for the Quebec City region, inform the House of the recent measures implemented in the Quebec City region by our government?

Oral Questions

●(1455)

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 would like to thank my colleague for his excellent question. In fact, our government has supported all regions of Quebec, and especially the Quebec City region, since 2006. On March 11, we announced a major investment in the National Optics Institute. Last week, accompanied by the Prime Minister, we announced a major investment in the Quebec City airport. Unlike the Bloc, which has no track record, we continue to add to our record while reducing taxes.

* * *

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, March 20 was the International Day of La Francophonie. However, the Conservatives have clearly abandoned the francophones of this country. When they appeared before the Standing Committee on Official Languages, Service Canada officials confirmed that the Atlantic region was now designated as a unilingual anglophone region.

Can the minister explain what she is doing with the 450,000 francophones living in the Atlantic region? What will they have to do to be respected?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can assure the House that the Atlantic region has not been designated as a unilingual region by Service Canada. That is not the case at all. There has been no change in the bilingual services provided by our offices. All Canadians still have access to services in the official language of their choice, in every office of the country.

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Impératif français, which is a group from the Outaouais region dedicated to the promotion of the French language, was told in a letter written in English only that it would not get a subsidy from Canadian Heritage. Incidentally, I should point out that the letter was sent by the Montreal regional office.

Does the Minister of Canadian Heritage find it normal that his Montreal office is unable to write a letter in French to a francophone organization from the Outaouais? Could it be that, at Canadian Heritage, Quebec would also have been designated as a unilingual English zone, without being aware of it?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, indeed a letter was sent. An administrative mistake was made.

[English]

My department processes thousands of applications every single year, for everything from Canada Day events to support for artists, to events all across the country. Yes, accidentally, one letter out of thousands sent to applicants was sent to somebody in one of the two official languages and not both. For this one error on this one application out of thousands, I give my sincerest apologies.

G20 SUMMIT

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative G20 photo ops cost Toronto businesses tens of millions of dollars. Just the restaurant industry alone lost \$84 million in sales. These businesses desperately need to be compensated. First, the Conservatives mired them in red tape and then stiffed them with a complicated system that is neither fair nor transparent. Downtown Toronto businesses desperately need compensation. They are fed up.

To get the compensation they deserve, do they need to hire a Conservative insider like Bruce Carson?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I take note of the member's question. There is a formula in place and a process in place for compensating those who made claims. If a claim is made, it will be properly considered in accordance with those guidelines.

* * *

RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

Ms. Dona Cadman (Surrey North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, every year, nearly one million people die from malaria. It is especially serious in Africa, where one in five childhood deaths is due to the effects of the disease.

Would the minister of state inform the House how our government's investments in research and development are contributing to the fight against malaria and supporting Canada's maternal, newborn and child health initiatives?

Hon. Gary Goodyear (Minister of State (Science and Technology) (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario), CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is very committed to improving the health of women and children in developing countries.

I would like to congratulate the NRC scientists in Saskatoon, who have discovered a way to produce a treatment for malaria that is safe and affordable and will help save the lives of millions of women and children in Africa.

This new malaria treatment represents a major development in the fight against this disease. I congratulate our Canadian scientists. It will strengthen Canada's position as a world leader in health research and provide a reliable and affordable treatment.

* * *

●(1500)

TAXATION

Hon. Helena Guergis (Simcoe—Grey, Ind. Cons.): Mr. Speaker, I continue to advocate for family-friendly policies like income splitting. Research shows that income splitting can have a positive impact on families, providing tax savings and increased birthrates as more parents have the freedom to choose whether to go to work or stay at home with their children.

Research predicts that family income splitting could address growing concerns over labour shortages and rising social program costs.

Government Orders

There is still time before the budget is tabled this afternoon. Would the finance minister please consider this very important family-friendly tax policy?

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for the question. As everyone knows, I am thrilled to talk about the economy, finally, during question period.

I want to assure all members here that consultations were held across the country and with members of the House of the Commons and senators alike. The budget will be released by the finance minister at 4 p.m. today, and we will await his answer to any further questions in that regard.

* * *

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of the recipients of the 2011 Governor General's Awards in Visual and Media Arts: Geneviève Cadieux; Robert Fones; Michael Morris; David Rimmer; Barbara Sternberg; Shirley Wiitasalo; Nancy Tousley; and Kye-Yeon Son.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

* * *

PRIVILEGE

MAIN ESTIMATES—SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I am now prepared to rule on the question of privilege raised on March 1, 2011 by the hon. member for Windsor—Tecumseh concerning the premature disclosure of information contained in the main estimates for 2011-2012.

[Translation]

I would like to thank the hon. member for Windsor—Tecumseh for having raised this matter, and the President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and the members for Winnipeg North, Hochelaga and Mississauga South for their submissions.

[English]

In presenting his case, the member for Windsor—Tecumseh pointed out that specific information about the main estimates was published in a newspaper article, as well as in a web blog and Twitter postings by QMI reporter David Akin. It was clear, he stated, that Mr. Akin had had some knowledge of the contents of the main estimates before they were tabled in the House on March 1, 2011.

[Translation]

The member argued that the Speaker had ruled on a number of occasions that the House had an absolute right to expect the government to provide information, whether on a bill or on the estimates, to the House before it was disclosed elsewhere. For him, it was a matter of being able to respond, as a member of Parliament, to enquiries in a meaningful and intelligent way.

● (1505)

[English]

In his response, the President of the Treasury Board admitted that the untimely release of the material in question was improper and not in keeping with past procedures and practices of this House. Furthermore, he committed to taking steps to prevent it from happening again. The minister went on to cite *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition, at page 894, thus quite rightly pointing out that, in the past, similar matters, namely of budget secrecy, have been treated more as matters of parliamentary convention rather than matters of privilege.

[Translation]

The member for Windsor—Tecumseh is certainly not misguided in his expectation that members of the House, individually and collectively, must receive from the government particular types of information required for the fulfillment of their parliamentary duties before it is shared elsewhere. However, in such instances when there is a transgression of this well-established practice, the Chair must ascertain whether, as a result, the member was impeded in the performance of parliamentary duties.

[English]

While in the matter before us there may be a legitimate grievance, as admitted even by the President of the Treasury Board, there has been no specific evidence to suggest that any member was impeded in the performance of his or her parliamentary duties, and thus there can be no finding of *prima facie* privilege. Further, the minister has recognized the seriousness of this matter and given his assurance that measures will be in place to prevent a recurrence.

Consistent with the manner in which incidents of this kind have been viewed by my predecessors in the past, and given the prompt assurances provided to this House by the President of the Treasury Board, the Chair is satisfied that appropriate steps will be taken. In the circumstances, therefore, I will consider the matter closed.

[Translation]

I thank the House for its attention on this matter.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

DEMOCRATIC REPRESENTATION ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-12, An Act to amend the Constitution Act, 1867 (Democratic representation), be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment.

Government Orders

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to take part in the debate on Bill C-12. This is the kind of bill where we tell ourselves how lucky we are that the Bloc is here. We represent the people of Quebec when we stand for election. In its hateful advertising, the Conservative Party is preparing for an election and attacking the Bloc Québécois from all sides. It is appropriating the foremost quality of the Bloc Québécois, being the representatives of their regions. When this kind of bill is introduced, one party stands up for Quebec in the House of Commons, and that is the Bloc Québécois.

There is a consensus in the National Assembly of Quebec, where no fewer than three motions have been passed by all parties—the Liberal Party, the Parti Québécois, the ADQ, Québec solidaire—to oppose this bill. Only one party here will rise to say no to Bill C-12: the Bloc Québécois.

As well, according to a survey, over 70% of the population of Quebec, no small proportion, is opposed to Bill C-12. And still only the Bloc Québécois rises in the House to reject this bill. It is always quite bizarre to see the Quebec members from other federalist political parties trying to justify the desire to marginalize Quebec by imposing Bill C-12. We are quite shocked to have before the House a bill like this one.

Bill C-12 is not a tangible expression of the recognition of the Quebec nation. The Conservative Party said that it recognizes the Quebec nation within Canada, as the Bloc Québécois called for, but after that came nothing. No measure has been agreed to in the House to truly recognize the Quebec nation. Insult is then added to injury by presenting a bill like this.

Bill C-12 is a flat denial of the existence of the Quebec nation, which marginalizes its representation in federal institutions, in the House of Commons. Proportion of the population cannot be the only factor in determining the representation of each of the regions of Canada. If that were the case, Prince Edward Island, where there are four members of Parliament, could not have that many members, because its population is approximately equivalent to the population of the Central Quebec region, where I come from. The Bloc Québécois is not opposed to Prince Edward Island having representation in every area. That is reasonable. That province can have four members, even though its population is not particularly large.

In Quebec, they do the same thing. Of the 125 members of the Quebec National Assembly, one represents the Magdalen Islands. They are not very big, Mr. Speaker. I hope you have had a chance to visit this magnificent area. Not a lot of people live there, but the countryside is absolutely fabulous. These are islands, and Quebec decided there would be a member to represent the people living there. If only mathematical considerations were taken into account, there would certainly not be a member for the Magdalen Islands, or four federal members for Prince Edward Island. The mathematical argument to increase the representation of Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia and reduce Quebec's political weight does not hold water.

One factor that ought to be crucial in this debate is the recognition of the Quebec nation, which means it should have the political weight needed to make its voice heard in federal institutions. I could

also mention the two founding peoples argument. Everyone knows it, but the only party that recognizes these facts is the Bloc Québécois.

The Quebec nation was not really recognized in the House of Commons, despite all the pious wishes and attempts to pretend they did so. In actual fact, the federalist parties in the House attach very little significance to this recognition. I remember the defeat of the Bloc motion in the House criticizing the harmful effects for Quebec of the Conservative government's Bill C-12, which would increase the number of seats for Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia but provide nothing for Quebec.

● (1510)

The Bloc motion was debated on its opposition day in April 2010.

The Conservatives' bill will have the effect of marginalizing the Quebec nation in the Canadian whole by reducing its political weight in the House of Commons. From 36% of the seats in 1867, Quebec's representation in the House would be reduced to 22.7% in 2014, which is just around the corner. Statistics show that if Quebec has only 22.7% of the seats in the House, it will actually be below its demographic weight within Canada.

As I was saying earlier, the members of the Quebec National Assembly have voted unanimously for the withdrawal of this kind of bill. They have done so three times because the message was not getting through. It was not because they enjoy adopting unanimous motions saying the same thing. It was because the message was not being heard by the Conservative government.

If the recognition of the Quebec nation has any real significance for the federalist parties in this House, they should have opposed this disastrous reform and supported our motion. The Bloc Québécois continues to say that the government must withdraw its bill and guarantee Quebec that it will have 25% of the seats in the House of Commons. That is a minimum, given the numerous concessions made by Quebec over the past 150 years or so, and particularly since Quebec must have the tools that will allow it to protect its distinctiveness.

As I said, the Quebec National Assembly unanimously demanded that this legislation be withdrawn. I think it is worth revisiting the issue. At the time, it was Bill C-56, which became the legislation that is now before us, namely Bill C-12, and which, if passed, will give 26 additional seats to English Canada and none to Quebec. That is why all elected members of the National Assembly and the then 49 Bloc Québécois members, who accounted for two thirds of elected Quebec members in the House of Commons, demanded that this bill be withdrawn. In all, 87% of the elected members of the Quebec nation demand this withdrawal.

Government Orders

As I mentioned, there are other members of the House who are Quebecers and who represent other parties. That is what happens in a democracy and I have no problems with that. I am asking them to stand up for Quebec, to ensure that Quebec's voice is heard. Again, 87% of elected representatives from Quebec are opposed to this bill, more than 70% of Quebecers are also opposed to it, as well as all the members of the National Assembly. What more does a Quebec member of Parliament need to oppose this type of legislation?

In Quebec, a former Liberal minister of intergovernmental affairs, Benoît Pelletier, expressed his government's position in 2007, at *Maisonnette en direct*, a well-known radio show in Quebec, regarding the reforms to the number of seats in the House of Commons. I will quote him. I know that other colleagues have also quoted him, but since I have some time left, I think it is worth repeating.

Mr. Pelletier said:

I appreciate that the House is based on proportional representation. But I wonder whether there might be special measures to protect Quebec, which represents the main linguistic minority in Canada, is a founding province of Canada and is losing demographic weight... Why could Quebec not be accommodated because of its status as a nation and a national minority within Canada?

In conclusion, as I mentioned just a few moments ago, Quebec's weight in the house keeps decreasing. In 1931, Quebec had 65 seats and its population accounted for 27.70% of Canada's. Even then, we had fewer seats by percentage, 26.53%, and it is the same story now. Now, Quebec has 75 seats and our population is not proportionally represented in the House. Any self-respecting Quebecer who is sitting in the House of Commons must rise and declare loud and clear that he or she plans on voting against Bill C-12.

• (1515)

[*English*]

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to address a few points the member made, particularly his opening comments.

What is fortunate is the people of Quebec have Conservative members of Parliament here to represent the interests of Quebec. In fact, any federalist member does more for Quebec than the entire Bloc has done in 20 years. Voting for a federal member, particularly a Conservative member, is in the best interests of Quebec, because it is only a federalist party, particularly the Conservative Party, that can bring anything to Quebec.

Moreover, the member talked about representation in Parliament. It was just a few weeks ago that his party tried to take 24 seats away from Quebec with the abolition of the Senate because the Bloc supports its abolition. Thank goodness we have Conservative members to ensure that Quebec is well represented. We are protecting the seat count in Quebec. This means that Quebec not only will keep its seats, but a vote in Quebec will actually mean more than a vote even in Ontario, Alberta and B.C. after this change.

This government stands up for Quebec and I wish the member would stand up for Quebec as well.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance: Madam Speaker, the minister's remarks illustrate exactly what I am saying. He says that it is fortunate that

there are Conservative members in Quebec who represent Quebec well. I do not think he heard the numbers that I read out. Regardless of party, 87% of members from Quebec, be it members in the National Assembly or here in the House of Commons, said no to Bill C-12. But what do the Conservative members from Quebec do? They stand up to try and feed us the minister's lines and make us believe that reducing Quebec's political weight in the House of Commons is a good thing.

He is telling us that the Conservative members from Quebec are in favour of the Senate. Ask Quebecers what they think. In fact, that has already happened, and the vast majority of Quebecers want to see the Senate abolished. Senators are appointed, not legitimately elected, and they represent no one and nothing.

If the Conservative members from Quebec want to come to Quebec during the election campaign and say that the Senate is wonderful and that it does a great job of representing us, they are welcome to do so. I would like to see that happen. The problem is that they do not represent Quebec's opinion. The Bloc is standing up for Quebec here.

• (1520)

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Madam Speaker, I hope the hon. minister responsible for this bill will have the opportunity to ask me the same question he just asked the member for Richmond—Arthabaska. He probably would not like my answer. It is time he read something other than newspapers from the west.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Order, please. We are still on questions and comments. The member may ask a very brief question, for we are running out of time.

Mr. Marc Lemay: Madam Speaker, how many members from Quebec, who represent Quebec in Canada, voted in favour of withdrawing Bill C-12, which is not in the best interests of Quebec? That is my question.

Mr. André Bellavance: Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague. It is not complicated. On three separate occasions, the National Assembly moved a motion calling on the House to withdraw Bill C-12, which marginalizes Quebec. That means all 125 members, whether federalist or sovereignist. Indeed, there are two sovereignist parties and two federalist parties in the Quebec National Assembly. All of those members voted against Bill C-12.

Here in the House of Commons, there is only the Bloc Québécois, but fortunately, we represent most of Quebec. Overall in Quebec, nearly 90% of Quebec's elected representatives want Bill C-12 to be withdrawn. Unfortunately, a few Liberal and Conservative members from Quebec continue to toe their party line. I would like them to explain to Quebecers how reducing Quebec's political weight in the House of Commons is a good thing. Those members are the only ones who would say so. That is indefensible in Quebec.

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Madam Speaker, you will rarely see me speak to a bill that has not been debated much, in this case Bill C-12.

Government Orders

Usually I speak to matters involving justice and aboriginal affairs. But I had to speak up to denounce what this government was preparing to do in Quebec. I am glad I was in my seat to hear the question by the Minister of State for Democratic Reform. He knows absolutely nothing about the situation. In Quebec, we talk about two solitudes and I can say that the minister responsible for this matter belongs to a very large solitude. I hope he will be the only one in the House to vote in favour of this bill, but unfortunately that will not happen.

The idea behind Bill C-12 seemed interesting at first. Some of the provinces are out of balance. Some have a larger population now and should be given more seats in order to have slightly greater representation in the House of Commons. Perfect. So far, so good. But things go downhill from there. The minister should listen and understand this: he forgets that there are two founding nations in the country called Canada and Quebec was one of them. This bill is a vehicle for reducing or even destroying Quebec's contribution to the founding of Canada.

Obviously aboriginal peoples were here first, but two nations took part in founding what is called Canada and those nations are France and Great Britain. However, when I read the preamble of this bill, it is clear that the purpose is to reduce the role or presence of Quebec in the House by increasing the number of MPs from the other provinces.

You have to have done a bit of reading. You have to read about the history that led to the Constitution of 1867, the creation of the provinces, and what was said. It is odd. Some have forgotten what it means. I am not the one who put in section 52. It was there in 1867; it was not written last week.

The Number of Members of the House of Commons may be from Time to Time increased by the Parliament of Canada, provided the proportionate Representation of the Provinces prescribed by this Act is not thereby disturbed.

The minister did not read this. I did not put it in. I will repeat it because I believe that the minister did not understand: "provided the proportionate representation of the provinces prescribed by this Act is not thereby disturbed." That is not what will happen with Bill C-12. The proportion is not perfect—that is clear—but what the government is preparing to do is to reduce the weight of Quebec.

I will also repeat what Benoît Pelletier said because I believe it is important to point it out. I hope no one opposite or in the federalist parties will think that he is a sovereignist. I will repeat what my colleague from Richmond—Arthabaska said because it is important. Benoît Pelletier said:

But I wonder whether there might be special measures to protect Quebec, which represents the main linguistic minority in Canada, is a founding province of Canada and is losing demographic weight...Why could Quebec not be accommodated because of its status as a nation and a national minority within Canada?

● (1525)

There is something that we find to be of key importance. It was not me; it was the federal government who, through the Prime Minister, tabled a motion to recognize the Quebec nation, except the Conservatives refuse to recognize our language. They refuse to consider the existence of our national culture in the administration of all laws. They refuse to recognize the continuity of our national culture, which depends on our ability to ensure that newcomers embrace it. They refuse to recognize that our society, because it was

developed by a different nation, is also different. They refuse to even consider the possibility that Quebec could have a radio-television and telecommunications commission, etc.

What the minister does not understand and what he must understand is that Bill C-12 would indirectly cause the weight of one of the founding provinces of Canada to become reduced. Maybe that is what the Conservatives want. On the other hand, whether the minister likes it or not, this will likely increase support for sovereignty. We do not have any objection to that. If they want to take Quebec's 75 seats, they can take them. It is perfect. We will create our own country next door. That is what we want. So let us go. Stop buying votes at referendum time. Stop renting buses and planes to invite people to come tell us that they love us. As soon as possible after this, at the first opportunity, we will try to pass a bill to this effect.

Being the nice people that we are, we proposed an amendment:

That the motion be amended by deleting all the words after the word "That" and substituting the following:

"the House decline to give second reading to Bill C-12, An Act to amend the Constitution Act, 1867 (Democratic representation), because the Bill would unacceptably reduce the political weight of the Quebec nation in the House of Commons and does not set out that Quebec must hold 25 percent of the seats in the House of Commons."

It is not complicated: it is what is provided for in section 52 of the so-called British North America Act. Let us respect section 52 and let Quebec continue to have the same representation as it does at present. Is there no way to find other accommodations for other provinces in their current situations? It is up to the minister to find them.

The minister says that for 20 years the Bloc Québécois has served no purpose in the House. I would respectfully remind him that we supported his first budget, and if we had not, he might not be here. In a few moments, in about half an hour, we shall see what we shall see with a minority government. When something is good for Quebec, we vote in favour of it; when something is not good for Quebec, we vote against. That is precisely the situation. I know that is not what the federalists want, but that is our job here. Over 45% of the population of Quebec has the right to be represented by members, and those members have but one thing to do here, and that is to defend the interests of Quebec. That is what we shall continue to do, whether the minister likes it or not.

● (1530)

[English]

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Madam Speaker, I listened to the member with interest. Canada was founded by two founding nations, the French and the English, but we must not to forget the aboriginal first nations as well.

The point of Bill C-12 is to ensure that faster growing provinces are adequately represented in the House of Commons. That is the very simple premise. Ontario, B.C. and Alberta have far more people per member of Parliament than any other province. All we are trying to do is make it more fair because Canadians believe in fairness.

Government Orders

The challenge that the member has in his logic is that he does not want to make Canada stronger. It is his *raison d'être* to destroy Canada. If the member had his way, there would be zero seats in the House of Commons for Quebec because that is what he wants to do. Would the member just admit that he wants to destroy Canada?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Lemay: Madam Speaker, the minister will not be pleased by my response. It is not true: I do not want to destroy Canada.

Canada is a lovely country for Canadians. I am a Quebecker and my country is Quebec. If the majority of Quebeckers were to decide that Quebec should become a country, then we could talk, nation to nation, something you dare not do with the first nations—and yet you call yourselves defenders. It is not true that we want to destroy Canada.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): I would ask the hon. member to address his comments through the Chair.

Mr. Marc Lemay: Excuse me, Madam Speaker.

I will say one thing: it is not true that we want to destroy Canada. This is false. However, the Conservatives are succeeding in doing it. By the way they are acting, they will achieve this goal and we will be there to thank them.

We do not want to destroy Canada. We are here to defend Quebec's interests. This is why we were elected and this is why we will be re-elected, whether you like it or not, if the Conservatives have the gall to call elections.

[*English*]

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Madam Speaker, I respect the member opposite and his arguments but I must disagree with him.

If we read section 52, it states:

The Number of Members of the House of Commons may be from Time to Time increased by the Parliament of Canada, provided the proportionate Representation of the Provinces prescribed by this Act is not thereby disturbed.

I think the member has wrongly interpreted the proportionate representation of the provinces prescribed by the act. I think that means that the number of MPs in each provincial division should be proportionate to the population from those provincial divisions, which means representation by population. That is consistent with how the Supreme Court has interpreted the act. It is subject to the two provisions of the senatorial floor and the grandfathering clause of 1986.

However, those two restrictions aside, the fundamental principle is representation by population, as has been the case for the better part of 140 years.

• (1535)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Lemay: Madam Speaker, I am not going to give a lecture in law but if my colleague is talking about the Campbell vs. Canada decision, I would tell him that I have read it. We will discuss that outside the House between poker games.

Indeed, proportional representation must be respected. We want it to be known that Quebec is a founder of this country and has to be respected. Ways must be found so that Quebec is not put at a disadvantage if it is necessary to increase the number of seats for provinces that need more. I can understand that, but Quebec must maintain its weight. This is what we want and it is the only thing we are asking for. This is why we cannot vote in favour of Bill C-12.

However, we understand the position. The only thing we want is respect for the fact that Quebec was a founding nation, together with the anglophones from England. Quebec was one of the two founding nations of the country called Canada. We have to work to find ways to do this.

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thériault (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Madam Speaker, when the Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot constituents elected me, they did so knowing that I would stand for them in this House, and that I would serve their interests at all costs. I have often taken the floor to denounce government decisions that were going against the needs of my riding. I have kept my word and will keep doing so unconditionally.

Since members opposite do not consider regional development very important, I am convinced that only the Bloc Québécois is promoting ideas and real solutions in order to increase the wealth and power of regions. Regions stand to lose the most if Bill C-12, which we oppose today, is passed. I do not approve of the Conservative government decision to reduce the relative weight of Quebec in Parliament. I strenuously oppose, along with my Bloc colleagues and members of the Quebec National Assembly, the Conservative decision to marginalize Quebec in Parliament.

I really wonder why the Conservatives so stubbornly want to implement Bill C-12. I remind you it would be a disaster for the Quebec nation. Would their main reason to do this be their Conservative ideology and their will to achieve a majority government at all costs? We should not overlook the fact that Quebeckers elected only a handful of Conservative members and that they keep electing a majority of Bloc members, one election after another. They know that they can count on a coherent party which will not hesitate to stand up for them here.

The proof that the Conservatives will never meet our aspirations is that not a single one of them has opposed the blatant injustice to Quebec proposed in Bill C-12. Is it because they cannot have elected members in Quebec that they so badly want to increase the number of seats in other Canadian provinces?

As many of my colleagues have explained to the House, the Conservatives, although they boast about their recognition of the Quebec nation, have done nothing to show that this recognition is anything more to them than hot air. Their attempt to diminish Quebec's political weight in this House is but the last of numerous examples. I repeat that Bill C-12 is one of many examples that show that the recognition of the Quebec nation, for the Conservatives as well as the Liberals, means absolutely nothing here. Indeed, after pretending to recognize the existence of this nation, Conservatives and Liberals have dismissed all our differences and our choices out of hand.

Government Orders

One can only ridicule the ads in which the Conservatives claim they are working for the benefit of the regions. Passing Bill C-12 would greatly prejudice the preservation and development of the regions. Without the significant contribution of the Bloc Québécois in this House and also without its important representation of Quebec, I cannot imagine what would happen to the issue of regional preservation and development.

Need I remind the House that the interests of Quebec and Western Canada are very different and that, for political reasons, the Conservatives and Liberals choose to respond first and foremost to the requests of Western Canada and Ontario? This is why it is vital to maintain Quebec's present political weight as much as possible. For us, the oil sands and the giveaways to oil companies and banks are not part of our values and priorities.

With a diminished representation of Quebec in the House of Commons, the Conservatives and Liberals will use new tricks in order to marginalize the Quebec nation, as they already do. With less political weight, how would it be possible to force the Conservative government to pay the billions of dollars it owes Quebec for the harmonization of its sales tax? How would it be possible to get it to make new investments in our social programs, such as social housing, employment insurance, the GIS, support programs for older workers, environmental issues, the manufacturing and forest crisis, land occupancy, securities, culture and so on?

• (1540)

Not only do the regions stand to lose, but the whole province of Quebec would sustain important losses.

When the Quebec National Assembly and Bloc Québécois members requested special federal assistance to give timely support to those affected by the forestry and manufacturing crisis, the Conservatives kept pumping billions into the auto industry, which is heavily concentrated in Ontario. In Quebec, the manufacturing and forestry industries got a mere pittance. In my own constituency, the furniture and textile industries are starving to death for lack of government support. Just imagine the importance this House would give to these issues if the Bloc Québécois did not have a strong position in this House and if Quebec had less political weight

Injustices like the ones I just mentioned are far too numerous. Quebec is still waiting for a program to promote the development and accessibility of broadband communication services like high-speed Internet in many communities, especially rural communities.

The Bloc Québécois urged the Conservatives to announce grants to our CFDCs, which are essential economic instruments in our rural communities. Do the Conservatives realize that rural people and the Quebec nation are not second-class citizens? How bad would the situation be, were it not for this significant contingent of Quebec members in this House?

As concerns agriculture and supply management, it is crucial to be able to rely on a strong Quebec representation. The same can be said about the environment. Despite all the efforts made in Quebec since 1990, the Canadian position in Copenhagen was a rigid position in favour of the oil sands.

Once again, how could Quebec's interests be advocated without a strong contingent of Quebec members in this House? I repeat:

Quebec must keep all the political weight it has now in this House, because, on a whole range of issues, there are big differences between the interests of Quebec and those of Canada.

In the time remaining before Quebec becomes a sovereign country, I can be counted on to stand for my constituents in Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot.

• (1545)

[*English*]

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Madam Speaker, I want the member to be clear that nothing in this bill takes anything away from Quebec or its regions because this government is protecting the seat count in Quebec. Quebec will have at least 75 seats and if the population warrants it, it will get more seats. It depends on the population growth of the provinces.

The fact is that there are provinces like Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta that have grown faster and are under-represented in this place. Another fact is that one Conservative MP does more for Quebec in one hour than the Bloc party has done in 20 years for the people of Quebec.

Electing any federalist MP is better than electing a Bloc MP because the Bloc Québécois will never have power. The Bloc will never stand up for the people of Quebec. In fact, it votes against many of the funding measures that this government and others have brought to Quebec. If the Bloc party had its way, it would have zero seats in the House of Commons. It is ironic that the member asks for more seats when the Bloc wants zero seats.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thériault: Madam Speaker, my answer to the Minister of State for Democratic Reform is that in the Senate, Quebec has many more seats than Ontario, Saskatchewan, Alberta or British Columbia, although its population is declining. Why is it that something that is good for the Senate would be bad for elected members from Quebec?

The minister says that the Bloc has been useless in the last 20 years, but I should remind him that his government was not in power during this whole 20 year period. What did the Conservatives do when they sat in opposition? They were siding with us, asking for measures that were important for both Canadians and Quebecers. Since they formed the government, they have pushed Canada 20 years back into the past.

[*English*]

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to ask my colleague a simple question. In my province of British Columbia and in her province of Quebec we are Canadians. We suffer from the similar challenges of a lack of economic innovation, health care reform, pension stability, and a good plan to deal with reducing carbon emissions.

Government Orders

Does the member not think that a much more fundamental question is not the number of members in this House but the liberation of members of Parliament to represent their constituents, to vote freely in this House, to have freedom of speech, and to use the collective knowledge we have to apply ourselves to the big challenges that our country faces, not nibbling around the edges and the margins of issues that are irrelevant to the citizens of our country?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thāi Thi Lac: Madam Speaker, the Quebec National Assembly is currently having a debate on electoral redistribution. Some would like to take seats away from remote regions in order to give more to the area surrounding Montreal.

Many Quebecers think we should fight migration from rural areas, but first, sparsely populated regions should have representation that gives them the same political weight as the more densely populated areas. It is important that these communities be heard and that they maintain their political weight, even if their population does not warrant one more seat in the National Assembly.

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Before I move to the next speaker, I would like to ask for a little order in the House please, as the debate continues until 4:00 p.m.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert.

• (1550)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Madam Speaker, it is a great pleasure to rise on this somewhat eventful afternoon. In a few minutes, the Minister of Finance will deliver his budget speech. I hope all members will have the opportunity to listen to what I have to tell them, because the message that the Bloc Québécois wants to convey about Bill C-12 is very important.

Madam Speaker, I see that you are concerned. Sure, you can call members to order and tell them to listen to me. Go ahead, that is fine with me.

Bill C-12, An Act to amend the Constitution Act, 1867 (Democratic representation), is a bill that reduces Quebec's political weight within Canada. Unlike the Liberal member who just spoke, I do not think that is acceptable. Reducing Quebec's weight within Canada is yet another attack by this government—and the previous Liberal government—against Quebec.

The Bloc Québécois, which stands up for Quebec's interests, cannot accept this legislation, and it is asking the House to refuse to give second reading to Bill C-12, An Act to amend the Constitution Act, 1867 (Democratic representation), because it would reduce in an unacceptable fashion the political weight of the Quebec nation in the House of Commons.

In the Charlottetown accord of 1992, all the partners of the Canadian federation had agreed to guarantee Quebec 25% of the seats in the House of Commons. Even though the accord was rejected through a referendum, the specific needs of Quebec, the

only province with a francophone majority, were highlighted. That specific issue had been recognized by all the partners of the Canadian federation. Not only was the issue recognized, a solution had also been found. Indeed, Quebec was guaranteed 25% of the seats in the House of Commons.

A few years later, after the referendum was lost, people began to say that this was a minor issue, that it was not important and that what really mattered was that elected members should express their views in the House.

Last Sunday, I watched a television program on Radio-Canada. I know that 75% of the members of this House do not listen to Radio-Canada on a Sunday evening, but that program is watched by over one million people in Quebec, somewhere around 1.2 million, 1.3 million or 1.5 million, depending on who the guests are. The ratings for last Sunday have not yet been released, but the TV show *Tout le monde en parle* is very popular in Quebec.

Jean Lapointe used to be a Liberal senator. Do you know what he said? He was reminiscing about his experiences as a senator and he was clearly not too proud of himself or of what he had seen and heard. He said this: “Since I left the Senate, the federalist in me has died a bit. I am not yet a separatist or a sovereignist, but it would not take a very big push to make me one.” Of course, he said that in his own characteristic manner. We understand that to mean that federalists who come here to Ottawa to this House or the other one and who see all the injustices against Quebec and all the attacks by Quebec and who care about Quebecers are a lot less federalist when they leave here or the other place. As Jean Lapointe said, “it would not take a very big push” for them to become sovereignists.

But do not worry, Madam Speaker, the Bloc Québécois will give him that little push. As a senator, Mr. Lapointe witnessed many injustices against Quebec. He saw those injustices up close and he saw Canada attack Quebec, try to take away its place, try to impose its values on Quebec and ignore its needs, as is the case with Bill C-12. That bill is a good example of an injustice against Quebec. It shows once more that Quebec and Canada are two distinct countries in one, two solitudes. We do not talk to each other or if we do talk, we do not say much. Anyway, the conversations are often difficult because we do not speak the same language. When we talk to each other, we do not understand each other. Bill C-12 is proof of this.

Quebec federalists arrive in Ottawa with a romantic image of Canada as a great bilingual country with beautiful Rocky Mountains. The reality in Ottawa is quite different; the reality is Bill C-12, and there is nothing romantic about it.

Government Orders

•(1555)

This Conservative government is multiplying its injustices, aggressions and attacks. Yesterday morning, I was speaking to someone in my riding I did not know at all. She was determined to talk to me. She could not understand why the Conservative government is so aggressive towards Quebec. She wanted to know why the government was rejecting tax harmonization and refusing to pay the \$2.2 billion it owes Quebec. It would only be fair since it paid compensation to Ontario, British Columbia and the maritime provinces, but not to Quebec. We have been pushing for this for years. For the past year, we have been asking questions every week and demanding that the government pay Quebec \$2.2 billion as compensation for the sales tax harmonization it implemented several years ago, but the government is not responding. It is not giving us the real reasons. If we knew the real reasons, perhaps we could do it. Is it a matter of negotiation? Do they think we do not deserve it? We are not getting any answer. Once more, this is an unjustified attack against Quebec. Quebecers do not understand why this government is always attacking Quebec.

While the Bloc Québécois is defending Quebec's interests, the Conservative government is attacking Quebec. Quebecers cannot understand why this is happening, and yet there have been countless attacks. We can try to understand the government's attitude, but it is beyond comprehension. In November 2007, this House recognized Quebec as a nation, which was only fair since it is indeed a nation. In French, we call this a *lapalissade*, which means stating the obvious. La Palice was a man who used to say obvious things. For instance, he would say that a man was dead because he was not living any more. This is a *lapalissade*. For those who are watching, I am very pleased to enrich their vocabulary with this word. Recognizing Quebec as a nation was therefore a *lapalissade*, a truism. Yet Quebec's numerous claims remain unanswered.

Quebec has been asking for a long time that the responsibility for arts, culture and communications be transferred. Even the Conservative Minister of Foreign Affairs, when he was the Liberal Minister of Communications in the Quebec government, asked that the responsibility for telecommunications be transferred to the Quebec government. On March 23, 2009, Quebec Minister of Culture Christine Saint-Pierre asked the Minister of Canadian Heritage to set up a negotiating committee to transfer the responsibility for communications, arts and culture.

On June 19, 2010, Claude Béchar, the former Minister responsible for Canadian Intergovernmental Affairs who is now deceased, said to the daily *Le Devoir*:

... we are working on "a new approach" to conduct successful bilateral negotiations with the federal government in order to obtain certain constitutional amendments...These amendments would deal with "culture and communications"... "It might also be interesting to include the whole issue of the nation in the constitutional talks."

Those words are from Claude Béchar, the former Quebec Minister of Canadian Intergovernmental Affairs and MNA for Rivière-du-Loup, who is now deceased. He was stating, on behalf of the Quebec government, his intention to continue to ask for the responsibility over arts and culture, because it is normal, because we are a nation, because those are our values, because in Quebec we respect our artists, our culture and particularly—because these days

this is very important—we respect the value of the work done by artists. In its Bill C-32, this government did not add insult to injury, it added contempt to injury by depriving artists from \$126 million in copyright revenues annually.

•(1600)

We are not talking about subsidies but copyrights. This is money that artists deserve. It is their salary. However, the bill introduced by the Minister of Industry and the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages is going to deprive artists of \$126 million every year. Such an attitude is totally mind-boggling. As I said, it is not an insult to artists. To deprive people who earn an average of \$23,000 annually of the money that they used to get is showing contempt towards them. Bill C-32 is totally unacceptable. It is another attack on Quebec, as is Bill C-12.

In conclusion, Bill C-12, which is against a fair representation for Quebec in the House of Commons, should be withdrawn.

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I understand the frustration that my colleague is experiencing. After 20 years, she is still a member of the opposition and has nothing to show for it. I am proud to know that we resolved the fiscal imbalance and that we have done a lot for the people of Quebec. This afternoon, the Minister of Finance will have excellent news for Quebec. I am anxious to see whether the member will support the budget and, in doing so, ensure that Quebec's economy will continue to prosper and create jobs.

I find it surprising that my colleague did not mention René Lévesque, given that she is pro-sovereignty. Many people here in the House have the greatest respect for this man, who was a great democrat. The principle of representation by population—one person, one vote—was very important to him.

Is my colleague a democrat? Does she think that it is right for the members of this House to represent the people in their part of the country, taking into account population growth, as true democrats, or does she have a narrow vision of Quebec, seeing it as surrounded by walls? This bill protects the interests of Quebec and may even give it the opportunity to receive additional seats should its population grow.

Is the member a true democrat? Does she intend to support the best budget Canada can have for Quebec?

Mrs. Carole Lavallée: Mr. Speaker, rather than siding with his Minister of Finance, the member for Lévis—Bellechasse should side with his constituents, the workers at Davie Shipyards.

The Speaker: The hon. member will be able to continue with questions and comments the next time the bill is before the House, but I must interrupt her now. She will have two and a half minutes left.

It being 4 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of Ways and Means Proceedings No. 11 concerning the budget presentation.

*The Budget**[English]***THE BUDGET**

FINANCIAL STATEMENT OF MINISTER OF FINANCE

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC) moved:

That this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

He said: Mr. Speaker, today our government presents to Canadians the next phase of Canada's economic action plan, a low tax plan for jobs and growth.

Since 2006, our government has worked hard to deliver real benefits to Canadians, real support for the challenges of the real world. We cut the GST twice, from 7% to 6% to 5%. We introduced the \$1,200 per year universal child care benefit. We established the tax free savings account. We removed more than one million low income Canadians from the tax rolls. The list goes on. We delivered these benefits to support the financial security of Canadian families, while protecting health care and pensions.

In good times and challenging circumstances, our government has made responsible choices. When times were good, we paid down debt. We strengthened our already strong financial sector. We delivered more than 120 tax cuts for Canadian workers, families and job-creating entrepreneurs. We also rejected calls from the opposition to impose a job-killing carbon tax.

Most important, when the global recession hit, Canada was able to meet the challenge head on. Through Canada's economic action plan, we delivered further tax cuts to help stimulate our economy.

●(1605)

[Translation]

We enhanced unemployment benefits and expanded retraining for those hit hardest by the global recession. We also made historic investments in roads, bridges, public transit and higher education—creating jobs across the country, and building the foundation for long-term growth.

[English]

As a result, Canada is emerging from the global recession as one of the world's top performing advanced economies. Throughout the recession, the world has looked to Canada as a model and an inspiration, but still there is more to be done. The global economy is still fragile. The U.S. and other trading partners are facing challenges. Compared to other countries, Canada's economy is performing very well, but our continued recovery is by no means assured. Many threats remain.

[Translation]

In this period of global uncertainty, our government is focused on the number one priority of Canadians. We are focused on securing our economic recovery. We are focused on improving the financial security of Canadian workers, seniors and families. We have a plan to achieve these goals—a plan that is working—and we need to stay on track.

[English]

The next phase of Canada's economic action plan is critically important.

To secure our recovery from the global recession, Canada needs a principled, stable government. Now is not the time for instability. It would make it harder for Canadian businesses to plan and to expand. It would drive investment away to other countries. It would jeopardize the gains we have made.

Our government will provide a steady hand needed to secure our recovery and strengthen the financial security of Canadians. We have a balanced plan to achieve these goals, a low tax plan for jobs and growth.

Today, Parliament faces a choice. It is a choice between stability and uncertainty. It is a choice between principle and opportunism.

Our government is focused on securing our recovery from the global recession. We will keep taxes low. We will undertake additional targeted investments to support jobs and growth. We will control government spending and stay on track to eliminate the deficit.

We will not cut transfer payments for crucial services like health care and education. We will not cut those transfers for health care and education like the previous Liberal government did. We will not give in to opposition demands to impose massive tax increases. This reckless policy would lead to continuing deficits and higher taxes for all Canadians. It would stall our recovery, kill hundreds of thousands of jobs and set families back.

Sustained growth comes from the private sector.

●(1610)

[Translation]

We will help businesses to create jobs. We will not raise taxes on growth. This is a key principle moving forward in the next phase of Canada's economic action plan. I encourage all the hon. members of this House to examine in detail the comprehensive plan we are presenting today. For now I will mention just a few highlights.

[English]

First is our low tax plan to create jobs.

Since July 2009, the Canadian economy has created more than 480,000 new jobs, more than were lost during the recession. Still we remain concerned about the number of Canadians looking for work. We need to keep protecting and creating jobs now. We need to keep building the foundation for long-term growth. A key part of that foundation is low taxes.

Our government has delivered tax relief for all Canadians. There are cuts to the GST and personal income tax. The average Canadian family of four today is saving more than \$3,000 each year. Our tax cuts are also helping employers to invest, grow and create jobs.

The Budget

Our commitment to low taxes is supported by strong consensus that protecting Canada's tax advantage is key to securing our recovery. It is key to creating jobs now and to ensuring long-term growth. That means greater job security for workers and greater financial security for their families. Our government will preserve this advantage for Canada. We will keep taxes low to keep creating jobs for Canadians.

Even so, in the current global economic climate, many businesses remain hesitant to invest and hire. Now it is time for the private sector to invest again. Our government will take further action to encourage it to expand and create jobs.

To encourage small business to hire new employees, we will provide a new targeted incentive. The hiring credit for small business will provide a one year EI break for some 525,000 Canadian small businesses. This measure will reduce payroll costs for new jobs and encourage hiring.

We will also take further action to help the manufacturing and processing sector to encourage investment and job creation. We will extend the 50% straight-line accelerated capital cost allowance for manufacturing or processing machinery and equipment by an additional two years. This will help businesses and exporters to invest, improve productivity and stay competitive. It will benefit a broad range of industries, including pulp and paper, primary manufacturing, computers and electronics, and the automotive industry.

[Translation]

To support the Canadian forestry industry, we will extend the current forest innovation and market development programs.

In addition, through a consultative process involving the Aerospace Industries Association of Canada and their member firms, we will conduct a comprehensive review of policies and programs to develop a federal policy framework to maximize the competitiveness of Canada's aerospace and space industry.

•(1615)

[English]

Beyond this, we will promote new export opportunities for all Canadian businesses. Canada is one of the world's great trading nations. We need to keep expanding our access to foreign markets to create new jobs here at home.

Our government has signed a trade agreement with 8 countries and we have launched negotiations with some 50 other countries, including India and the European Union. To support these expanding trade relationships, we will modernize Canada's customs tariff legislation. This will cut red tape and make it easier for Canadian businesses to compete internationally.

Also, we will extend Export Development Canada's temporary powers to support Canadian businesses in the domestic financing market for an additional year.

We will also enhance Canada's engagement with India through stronger bilateral ties among businesspeople, public servants, researchers and academic institutions.

In the next phase of Canada's economic action plan, our government will also take further action to support families and communities to build a higher quality of life for all Canadians. We will provide greater financial security for Canadians and practical help to help make ends meet.

[Translation]

Canadians work hard, looking after their families and contributing to their communities. Many individuals and families have added responsibilities in caring for infirm parents or relatives. These family caregivers make special sacrifices, often leaving the workforce temporarily and forgoing employment income. One may be caring for her mother, just as her mother once cared for her. Another may be at home full-time to look after her young son, who has a disabling illness. Another may be helping his wife as she faces the challenges of MS. Each family caregiver is unique, but all of them are generous Canadians. They are our neighbours, our friends, our family—and they deserve some extra help.

To recognize and support Canadians caring for infirm loved ones, we will establish a new Family Caregiver Tax Credit. This new tax credit will be on an amount of \$2,000 and will benefit more than 500,000 Canadians caring for loved ones. It will include, for the first time, those caring for infirm spouses, common-law partners and minor children.

[English]

We will also take action on other fronts to help families make ends meet.

For so many Canadian children, involvement in the arts is a part of growing up. Whether it is dance, music lessons or art camp, it is a great way to make friends and develop their creativity. However, for some families the fees and other costs involved can be beyond their reach. To help parents in providing these important opportunities for their children, we will establish a new children's arts tax credit covering up to \$500 per child in qualifying expenses for eligible arts and cultural activities.

In addition, we will further help families make their homes more energy efficient by extending for one year the eco-energy retrofit homes program. This will help families lower their energy bills and support jobs in home renovation.

The Budget

We will also take action to help low-income seniors. In communities across our country there are seniors struggling to pay their bills each month. Often they are women. Often they are widowed. They worked hard their whole lives for their families and communities but lack any pension income. To provide greater support to seniors most in need, we will provide a top-up benefit to the guaranteed income supplement. This new measure will provide up to \$600 extra per year for single seniors and up to \$840 per year for senior couples. It will improve the financial security of some 680,000 Canadians who helped build our country to help them live their senior years in dignity.

• (1620)

[Translation]

Our government will also provide additional help to Canadians saving for retirement, including self-employed Canadians, through a new, affordable pension option. We will work with our provincial and territorial partners to implement the pooled registered pension plan as soon as possible.

Federal, provincial and territorial governments are continuing work on options for a modest enhancement to the Canada pension plan. Any changes to the CPP will require a consensus among governments and reflect the need to protect Canada's economic recovery.

[English]

As I mentioned earlier, through Canada's economic action plan, we have implemented the largest federal investment in infrastructure in over 60 years.

Going forward, we will work with the provinces, the territories, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and other stakeholders to develop a new long-term plan for public infrastructure. We will also introduce legislation to confirm permanent funding for municipal infrastructure through the gas tax fund. This will ensure a stable and predictable source of revenue for the renewal of local infrastructure, to improve the quality of life in our cities and towns.

Our government will also take action to strengthen rural and remote communities.

The number of doctors and nurses in Canada has increased in recent years, but Canadians in some regions of the country continue to experience a shortage. We will help address this problem by forgiving a portion of federal student loans for new doctors, nurses and nurse practitioners who agree to practise in under-served rural or remote areas.

We will provide \$52 million over the next two years to support programs for aboriginal communities across the country, including those in the territories. These investments include support to assist first nations to upgrade and replace their essential fuel tanks on reserve.

We will also take action to support volunteer firefighting services in rural communities. Volunteer firefighters sacrifice their time, and some incur expenses, to provide a crucial service. As we were reminded just days ago by the tragic fire in Listowel, Ontario, they are also willing to sacrifice their lives to protect others. We will recognize the importance of this noble, necessary work, and help

sustain volunteer fire departments by establishing a new volunteer firefighters tax credit.

In addition to these concrete measures to strengthen communities, our government will keep investing in the knowledge and skills Canadians need to prosper over the long-term in the global economy.

Since 2006 we have made major investments in research and development, in post-secondary education, and skills training. As noted in a recent issue of *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Canada is increasingly attracting top talent from around the world. Canada has gone from "brain drain" to "brain gain", and the world is taking notice.

• (1625)

[Translation]

In supporting research and development our goal is to promote innovation—and ultimately to create good, new jobs for Canadians. In the next phase of Canada's economic action plan, we will build on our successful investments so far.

We will establish additional Canada Excellence Research Chairs. We will invest in world-class research through support for the Perimeter Institute, Brain Canada and the Institut national d'optique. We will extend advanced research funding to students and researchers at Canada's colleges and polytechnics.

We will establish 30 Industrial Research Chairs at colleges and polytechnics across Canada. We will also provide new support for joint commercialization projects between colleges, universities and companies.

Alongside our investments in research and development and in higher education, our government has also made substantial investments in skills training. Our goal is to help Canadian workers reach the next stage of their careers and to seize new opportunities in the years to come.

[English]

To foster competitiveness in the digital economy, we will encourage colleges to work with small businesses to accelerate the adoption of information and communication technologies. We will promote student enrolment in post-secondary science, technology, engineering and mathematics programs.

We will also provide tax relief for Canadians who are required to certify their skills in carpentry, in medicine, and other fields by making their exam fees eligible for the tuition tax credit.

To respond to increased demand for help in career transition through post-secondary education, we will enhance the Canada student loans program for part-time students.

To help older workers who may need special help to re-enter the workforce, we will extend the targeted initiative for older workers.

The Budget

Over the past two years, work-sharing has protected almost 280,000 jobs. Our government will continue helping businesses to retain employees and keep Canadians working. To continue protecting Canadian jobs, we will enhance and extend the work-sharing program.

We will also take further action to support the outstanding Canadians who have served our country in uniform. We will build on our continuing, substantial support for career transition services through Veterans Affairs Canada. In addition, our support for the helmets to hardhats program will help former Canadian military personnel to find work in the construction industry. Our brave Canadian veterans have earned our deepest gratitude and highest respect. This is just one more practical way to provide the support they deserve.

The next phase of Canada's economic action plan is designed to build on our actions so far. It is our plan to create jobs now and sustain economic growth for years to come.

Looking ahead, Canada's leading private sector economists project steady growth over the next few years. Still, the plan our government is presenting today is based on a cautious estimate of Canada's economic growth in the near term. It reflects our government's consistent, responsible and balanced approach to the economy.

● (1630)

[*Translation*]

A key part of that balanced approach is our commitment to sound fiscal policy.

Among other things, sound fiscal policy requires that we protect the integrity of the tax system.

As promised in the Speech from the Throne last year, we will keep taxes low, while taking action to close unfair tax loopholes that allow a few businesses and individuals to take advantage of Canadians who pay their fair share.

[*English*]

Beyond this and most of all, sound fiscal policy requires that we return to balanced budgets. Canada's deficit is much smaller than that of most other advanced countries. We are emerging from the global recession with the lowest net debt to GDP ratio of any G7 economy, by far. Even so, we must not be complacent.

We must ensure that Canada remains financially sound, so that we can continue building a future of hope and opportunity for all Canadians.

The global recession required extraordinary investments to protect Canadians, to stimulate our economy, and to create jobs. Canadians understand that a temporary deficit was necessary to limit the impact of the global recession in Canada and all parties in Parliament agreed.

Going forward, to secure our recovery we must now focus increasingly on controlling government spending. We must complete the transition from providing temporary stimulus to ensuring long-term economic growth.

To that end, we will continue implementing our plan to eliminate the deficit and return to balanced budgets by 2015-16.

First, we will complete our stimulus package, as promised.

Second, we will continue specific measures to restrain the growth of government program spending.

Third, we will complete, within the next year, a comprehensive review of government spending. This strategic and operating review is designed to realize substantial additional savings through greater efficiency and effectiveness. It will place us in a strong position to resume paying down government debt, and to continue investing in priorities and supporting Canadian families.

● (1635)

[*Translation*]

Our government has laid out the next phase of Canada's economic action plan—a low-tax plan for jobs and growth.

It is based on our extensive consultations with Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

It reflects their values and responds to their priorities.

Our plan does not say “yes” to every demand; it does not contain massive new spending—because that's not leadership.

[*English*]

Leadership is about finding a balance between needs. It is about staying focused on our number one priority: securing our economic recovery by creating jobs and growth now and in the years to come.

We believe that the hon. members of the opposition will recognize that our plan addresses practical concerns with responsible solutions. As I said earlier, today Parliament faces a choice, a choice between opportunism or working together to secure our recovery and strengthen the financial security of Canadians.

Our government is focused on providing the principled, stable government our country needs at this challenging but promising time in our history. We will keep taxes low and preserve Canada's advantage in the global economy to keep creating jobs for Canadians. We will strengthen the financial security of Canadian workers, seniors and families.

By implementing the next phase of Canada's economic action plan, we can keep building a higher quality of life for our families and communities. By choosing to act in the best interests of our country, we can ensure a bright future for our children and grandchildren.

We invite all hon. members to support our low tax plan for jobs and growth.

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with this budget, the finance minister continues his record as the biggest spending, biggest borrowing finance minister in Canadian history.

The Budget

The Conservatives continue to stonewall Canadians in Parliament. They refuse to tell Canadian taxpayers what they are intent on spending on U.S. style mega-prisons. There is a \$43 billion black hole in this budget. There is no mention of the \$30 billion for fighter jets. There is no mention of the \$13 billion in costs for their U.S. style prison agenda.

The minister speaks about principles. What is so principled about treating Parliament and taxpayers with contempt? What is so principled about spending a thousand more on fighter jets than on post-secondary education? What is so principled about spending a thousand on prisons than investing in youth crime prevention? What is so principled about wasting more on one day on the G8 than a year of investment in seniors?

Hon. Jim Flaherty: Mr. Speaker, I think there was a question in there somewhere. There may have been a question in there.

This is the same member opposite who voted in favour of the economic action plan. This is the same opposition that supported the economic action plan, that knew that we were in what is now called the great recession, and now we show our way out. Now we follow the plan, we show the way that we reduce the deficit and move to a balanced budget by 2015 and 2016, and we do that in a reasonable, moderate way so that we can sustain economic growth and create more jobs in our country.

• (1640)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Daniel Paillé (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, once again, Quebec is expected to wait patiently in line while others get all the treats. Where is the \$2 billion for sales tax harmonization? Nowhere to be seen. Where is the EI reform? Nowhere to be seen. Where are the flow-through shares for the forestry industry, and the loans and loan guarantees? Where is our \$10 billion for the forestry industry? Nowhere to be seen. Where is the contribution for the Quebec City arena? Nowhere to be seen. Where is the support for new businesses? Nowhere to be seen. Where are the tax incentives to encourage graduates to go back to their home regions? Nowhere to be seen. Where are the homelessness and social housing dollars? Nowhere to be seen. Where is the court challenges program? Nowhere to be seen. Where is AgriFlex? Nowhere to be seen. Where will this leave us? Nowhere.

This budget and this government—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Hon. Jim Flaherty: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question. I have a question for him too: where is the Bloc Québécois?

Some hon. members: Nowhere to be seen.

[*English*]

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I did not hire a choir behind me so I hope everyone will just give me a few minutes.

The people I have been speaking to back home have raised again and again the issue of pensions.

What I see over there is a group of clowns led by the vaudeville carnival barker. They tell us that the only thing people in northern

Ontario ever cared about was guns, because they have nothing for pensions. A pooled pension plan is not a stop-gap. It is a bony little finger in a leaky dike. We need improvement in the Canada pension plan and we are not getting that.

The government continues to play games, it continues to walk away, and for the people back home who ask us again and again when the government is going to take the HST off the home heating fuels, there is nothing.

Hon. Jim Flaherty: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite refers to the “people back home”.

Where I am from in Whitby—Oshawa, the people back home expect me to vote according to what I say to them during an election campaign.

When the member opposite, in election after election tells his people back home that he will vote to get rid of the gun registry and then stands in this place and votes in the contrary direction then I think he has a lot to explain to them.

Mr. Scott Armstrong (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of all members, let me applaud the finance minister for tabling the sixth consecutive budget in a minority Parliament.

The next phase of Canada's economic action plan is on the right track for jobs and growth. It shows our Conservative government is listening to and working for all Canadians, especially those in Atlantic Canada. I want to especially applaud the new volunteer firefighters tax credit. This will help recognize the hard work and dedication of the men and women who place their lives in jeopardy to protect our communities.

Could the Minister of Finance please inform the House how this new tax credit will work and benefit volunteer firefighters across this country?

• (1645)

Hon. Jim Flaherty: Mr. Speaker, first of all I want to thank the hon. member for his support and his advocacy for Canada's volunteer firefighters.

I want to also acknowledge the work of the long-standing member for Lethbridge who originally championed this measure in Parliament.

The way the credit will work is a new tax credit on \$3,000 available to those men and women who perform 200 hours of service annually or more.

I want to recognize those who serve our communities as volunteer firefighters. Although we can never truly repay them for risking their lives as they do to protect us, we can give thanks to them. To the wives, families and friends of Raymond Walter and Ken Rea, along with the community of Listowel, Ontario we send our deepest condolences on the loss of those two brave Canadians.

*The Budget**[Translation]*

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, who could look at Canadians in the eyes and say without shame that he or she agrees to spend more on a one-day G8 meeting than for vulnerable seniors in one full year? Who would dare say without shame that he or she agrees to spend a thousand times more on fighter jets than on our future prosperity by supporting the youth who pursue post-secondary education? Who would dare say without shame to the Canadians that he or she will spend more on military equipment and prisons than in health transfer to provinces? Who—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

[English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty: Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member was in the chamber when I read the budget speech. I know she has the budget documents. I commend the budget documents to her and to all hon. members of the House. It is an excellent read. It is one of the shortest budgets in the last 20 years or so in terms of pages.

I know the member can manage it. She can do this.

I am sure this hon. member can read the budget. She can read it on behalf of the constituents of Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine. When she reads the story in the budget, she will see all the initiatives that will help her constituents in Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine and I am sure she will want to communicate it to them.

Hon. Marlene Jennings: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I am sure that the Minister of Finance will want to retract the statements he just made.

He probably does not know, but I am now officially visually impaired. I am offering him the opportunity, because I know that he is not a man who would make that kind of comment. I am sure he did not know this last piece of information.

Hon. John Baird: Mr. Speaker, I would like to respond to the point of order. The member opposite did yell out that she had read it.

The Speaker: I do not think this is a matter of procedure. It is not a point of order.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Kings—Hants.

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, over the last four months, the Conservative regime has refused to provide this Parliament and Canadian taxpayers with the real numbers, the true cost of its agenda.

With today's budget, the Conservatives continue to stonewall Canadians and show contempt for Parliament and taxpayers. This budget has a \$43 billion black hole. The Conservatives do not mention their \$30 billion for fighter jets or their \$13 billion-plus in costs for U.S.-style megaprisons.

Mr. Speaker, it appears that even after your ruling, the Conservatives have learned nothing. There is no respect for your ruling in this budget. At first glance what we do know is that this is a budget with out of control spending that is out of touch with the priorities of Canadian families.

The Conservatives are spending a thousand times more on fighter jets than they are investing in students who are struggling to pay for post-secondary education. They are spending a thousand times more on prisons than they are investing in youth crime prevention. The government wasted more on the G8 in a single day than today's announcement on seniors will cost over an entire year.

With this budget, the Conservatives had an opportunity to finally come clean with Canadians, to tell Canadians the truth and to give Canadians the real costs of their agenda. At first glance, there is nothing in this budget that demonstrates that the Conservatives can be trusted to provide Canadians with the truth about the state of Canada's books or the costs of the Conservative agenda.

At this time, I move:

That the debate be now adjourned.

(Motion agreed to)

● (1650)

[Translation]

The Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 83(2), the motion is deemed to have been adopted and the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m.

(The House adjourned at 4:51 p.m.)

CONTENTS

Tuesday, March 22, 2011

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Committees of the House

Veterans Affairs

Mr. Schellenberger 9073

Telecommunications Act

Mr. Thibeault 9073

Bill C-642. Introduction and first reading 9073

(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed) 9073

Petitions

Air Canada

Mr. Maloway 9073

Human Rights

Mr. Chong 9073

Multiple Sclerosis

Ms. Duncan (Etobicoke North) 9074

Veterans Charter

Ms. Faille 9074

Justice

Mr. Thibeault 9074

Air Canada

Mr. Lamoureux 9074

Questions on the Order Paper

Mr. Lukiwski 9074

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Citizen's Arrest and Self-Defence Act

Bill C-60. Second reading 9074

(Motion agreed to, bill read the second time and referred to a committee) 9074

Democratic Representation Act

Bill C-12. Second reading 9074

Ms. Gagnon 9074

Mr. Fletcher 9077

Mr. Chong 9077

Mr. Bouchard 9078

Mr. André 9078

Mr. Fletcher 9080

Mr. Chong 9081

Mr. Lamoureux 9081

Mr. Bouchard 9081

Mr. Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca) 9082

Mr. Chong 9084

Ms. Gagnon 9084

Mr. Bagnell 9084

Mr. Fletcher 9085

Ms. Faille 9085

Mr. Chong 9087

Mr. Fletcher 9087

Mr. Bouchard 9087

Mr. Mulcair 9088

Mr. Fletcher 9090

Mr. Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca) 9091

Mr. Ouellet 9091

Mr. Christopherson 9091

Mr. Chong 9092

Points of Order

Financial Disclosure

Mrs. Yelich 9092

Democratic Representation Act

Bill C-12. Second reading 9092

Mr. Ouellet 9092

Mr. Bagnell 9094

Mr. Chong 9094

Mr. Bouchard 9094

Mr. Szabo 9094

Mr. Paillé (Louis-Hébert) 9094

Mr. Szabo 9095

Mr. Laforest 9097

Mr. Bouchard 9098

Mr. Chong 9098

Mr. Laframboise 9099

Mr. Chong 9100

Mr. Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca) 9101

Mr. Ouellet 9101

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Hockeyville

Mr. Brown (Leeds—Grenville) 9101

Jewish Refugees

Ms. Neville 9101

Jean-Luc Labrecque

Ms. Bourgeois 9102

The Budget

Mr. Rafferty 9102

The Economy

Mr. Saxton 9102

World Water Day

Mr. Scarpaleggia 9102

The Economy

Mr. Rickford 9102

Luc Picard

Ms. Guay 9103

Global Transportation Hub

Mr. Scheer 9103

Chinese Canadians

Mr. Dosanjh 9103

The Economy

Mr. Dreeschen 9103

Government Accountability	
Mr. Marston	9104
Regional Development	
Mr. Blaney	9104
Government Advertising	
Mr. Vincent	9104
The Economy	
Mr. Pacetti	9104
Wolseley Barracks	
Mr. Holder	9104

ORAL QUESTIONS

Government Accountability	
Mr. Ignatieff	9105
Mr. Harper	9105
Mr. Ignatieff	9105
Mr. Harper	9105
Mr. Ignatieff	9105
Mr. Harper	9105
Champlain Bridge	
Mr. Coderre	9105
Mr. Strahl	9105
Mr. Coderre	9105
Mr. Strahl	9105
Ethics	
Mr. Duceppe	9106
Mr. Harper	9106
Mr. Duceppe	9106
Mr. Harper	9106
Access to Information	
Mrs. Freeman	9106
Ms. Ambrose	9106
Mrs. Freeman	9106
Mr. Day	9106
Ethics	
Ms. Davies (Vancouver East)	9106
Mr. Baird	9106
Ms. Davies (Vancouver East)	9106
Mr. Baird	9106
Mr. Godin	9107
Mr. Baird	9107
Mr. Russell	9107
Mr. Baird	9107
Mr. Russell	9107
Mr. Baird	9107
Ms. Folco	9107
Mr. Kent	9107
Ms. Folco	9107
Mr. Baird	9107
Champlain Bridge	
Mrs. Beaudin	9108
Mr. Strahl	9108
Mr. St-Cyr	9108
Mr. Strahl	9108

Canada—U.S. Border	
Mrs. DeBellefeuille	9108
Mr. Toews	9108
Mr. Ouellet	9108
Mr. Toews	9108
Public Safety	
Mr. Holland	9108
Mr. Toews	9109
Mr. Holland	9109
Mr. Toews	9109
National Defence	
Mr. LeBlanc	9109
Mr. MacKay	9109
Mr. LeBlanc	9109
Mr. MacKay	9109
The Budget	
Mr. Stanton	9109
Mr. Baird	9109
Ethics	
Ms. Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	9110
Mr. Baird	9110
Mr. Cullen	9110
Mr. Baird	9110
Shipbuilding Industry	
Ms. Gagnon	9110
Ms. Ambrose	9110
Ms. Gagnon	9110
Ms. Ambrose	9110
Citizenship and Immigration	
Mrs. Crombie	9111
Mr. Kenney	9111
Mrs. Crombie	9111
Mr. Kenney	9111
Aboriginal Affairs	
Mrs. Hughes	9111
Mr. Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	9111
Health	
Mr. Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)	9111
Mr. Baird	9111
Regional Development	
Mr. Généreux	9111
Ms. Verner	9112
Official Languages	
Mr. D'Amours	9112
Ms. Finley	9112
Mr. Nadeau	9112
Mr. Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	9112
G20 Summit	
Ms. Chow	9112
Mr. Toews	9112
Research and Development	
Ms. Cadman	9112
Mr. Goodyear	9112

Taxation	
Mrs. Guergis	9112
Mrs. Glover	9113
Presence in Gallery	
The Speaker	9113
Privilege	
Main Estimates—Speaker's ruling	
The Speaker	9113

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Democratic Representation Act	
Bill C-12. Second reading	9114
Mr. Bellavance	9114
Mr. Fletcher	9115
Mr. Lemay	9115
Mr. Lemay	9115
Mr. Fletcher	9116
Mr. Chong	9117

Mrs. Thi Lac	9117
Mr. Fletcher	9118
Mr. Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)	9118
Mrs. Lavallée	9119
Mr. Blaney	9120

The Budget

Financial Statement of Minister of Finance	
Mr. Flaherty	9121
Motion	9121
Mr. Brison	9124
Mr. Paillé (Hochelega)	9125
Mr. Angus	9125
Mr. Armstrong	9125
Mrs. Jennings	9126
Mr. Brison	9126
Motion	9126
(Motion agreed to)	9126

MAIL  POSTE

Canada Post Corporation / Société canadienne des postes

Postage paid

Port payé

Lettermail

Poste-lettre

**1782711
Ottawa**

If undelivered, return COVER ONLY to:

Publishing and Depository Services
Public Works and Government Services Canada
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0S5

En cas de non-livraison,

retourner cette COUVERTURE SEULEMENT à :
Les Éditions et Services de dépôt
Travaux publics et Services gouvernementaux Canada
Ottawa (Ontario) K1A 0S5

Published under the authority of the Speaker of
the House of Commons

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its Committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the *Copyright Act*. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a Committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the *Copyright Act*.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its Committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Additional copies may be obtained from: Publishing and
Depository Services
Public Works and Government Services Canada
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0S5
Telephone: 613-941-5995 or 1-800-635-7943
Fax: 613-954-5779 or 1-800-565-7757
publications@tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca
http://publications.gc.ca

Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the
following address: <http://www.parl.gc.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité
du Président de la Chambre des communes

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

On peut obtenir des copies supplémentaires en écrivant à : Les
Éditions et Services de dépôt
Travaux publics et Services gouvernementaux Canada
Ottawa (Ontario) K1A 0S5
Téléphone : 613-941-5995 ou 1-800-635-7943
Télécopieur : 613-954-5779 ou 1-800-565-7757
publications@tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca
http://publications.gc.ca

Aussi disponible sur le site Web du Parlement du Canada à
l'adresse suivante : <http://www.parl.gc.ca>