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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, June 19, 2012
(Part A)

—

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, June 19, 2012

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

•(1005)
[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the third report of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development in relation to its study to provide recommendations regarding the development of a national conservation plan.

Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee requests the government table a comprehensive response to this report.

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CANADA GENUINE PROGRESS MEASUREMENT ACT

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP), seconded by the member for Thunder Bay—Superior North, moved for leave to introduce Bill C-436, An Act to develop and provide for the publication of indicators to inform Canadians about the health and well-being of people, communities and ecosystems in Canada.

She said: Mr. Speaker, I rise with great pleasure today to introduce a bill that had come before this House in previous incarnations by previous members of Parliament. I have updated it. It is looking to provide indicators of the measurements that really matter.

There has been a lot of work done on the issue of genuine progress indicators in contradistinction to simply measuring the health of our society through the gross domestic product and other indicators which are simply measurements of the exchange of cash in transactions.

I draw particular attention to the recent work that was performed by Professor Joseph Stiglitz, in conjunction with Professor Amartya Sen and Professor Fitoussi. It was done at the behest of the French government, but has now picked up general support through the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

I would like not to use my own words, but to briefly quote the late Senator Robert Kennedy, who said just weeks before his death in 1968:

Too much and too long, we seem to have surrendered community excellence and community values in the mere accumulation of material things. Our gross national product...counts air pollution and cigarette advertising, and ambulances to clear our highways of carnage. It counts special locks for our doors and the jails for those who break them. It counts the destruction of our redwoods and the loss of our natural wonder in chaotic sprawl. It counts napalm and the cost of a nuclear warhead, and armored cars for police who fight riots in our streets. It counts [the] rifle and [the] knife, and television programs which glorify violence in order to sell toys to our children.

Yet the gross national product does not allow for the health of our children, the quality of their education, or the joy of their play. It does not include the beauty of our poetry...the intelligence of our public debate or the integrity of our public officials. It measures neither our wit nor our courage; neither our wisdom nor our learning....

In fact, Senator Kennedy concluded:

—it measures everything, in short, except that which makes life worthwhile.

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

* * *

CANADA SHIPPING ACT, 2001

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-437, An Act to amend the Canada Shipping Act, 2001 (prohibition against the transportation of oil by oil tankers on Canada's Pacific North Coast).

She said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to introduce an act to amend the Canada Shipping Act, 2001, which would exclude oil supertankers from the inland waters of Canada's Pacific north coast, known as Queen Charlotte Sound, Hecate Strait and Dixon Entrance.

As this House well knows, Canada's quality of life is closely connected to the health of our oceans, which are integral to our environmental, social and economic services and capital.

I join the majority of British Columbians who believe that transporting oil by supertankers in certain turbulent and hazardous inland coastal waters poses an unacceptable risk to the marine environment, to the communities and the businesses that depend upon that environment, and to all Canadians who share the common heritage of healthy oceans.

I am therefore pleased to introduce this bill, which would legislate the long-term Liberal policy of prohibiting supertanker traffic from the waters around Haida Gwaii, in order to protect the Pacific north coast of Canada from oil spills.

Routine Proceedings

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

* * *

SAFE DRINKING WATER FOR FIRST NATIONS ACT

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CPC) moved that Bill S-8, An Act respecting the safety of drinking water on First Nation lands, be read the first time.

(Motion agreed to and bill read the first time)

* * *

PETITIONS**ASBESTOS**

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to present a petition signed by literally tens of thousands of Canadians. They call upon the House of Commons to take note that asbestos is the greatest industrial killer the world has ever known and that more Canadians now die from asbestos than all other industrial causes combined. These petitioners also point out that Canada remains one of the largest producers and exporters of asbestos in the world, spending millions of dollars subsidizing the industry and blocking international efforts to curb its use.

Therefore, the petitioners call upon the Government of Canada to ban asbestos in all its forms and to institute a just transition program for asbestos workers and the communities they live in, to end all government subsidies of asbestos both in Canada and abroad, and to stop blocking international health and safety conventions designed to protect workers from asbestos, such as the Rotterdam convention.

● (1010)

ABORTION

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I also have a petition that has been signed by tens of thousands of Canadians.

It points out that Canada is the only nation in the western world, and is in the company of China and North Korea, without any laws restricting abortion, and that Canada's Supreme Court has said it is Parliament's responsibility to enact abortion legislation. They therefore call upon the House of Commons to speedily enact legislation that restricts abortion to the greatest extent possible.

PENSIONS

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a number of petitions from Canadians from coast to coast to coast, who object to the government's decision to raise the age of eligibility for OAS from 65 to 67. The extent to which Canadians are disappointed and upset about this decision can be measured by the number of protests we have received in my office in the constituency and in Ottawa. The most vulnerable Canadians would be impacted by this decision, which is why Canadians are speaking out. Single parents, women in particular, will be impacted by this. The petitioners are asking that the government reconsider its decision, recognizing how difficult it would make life for those who would be impacted.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have three petitions to present.

The first petition asks the government to change the payment dates for old age security. It asks the Government of Canada to enact regulatory changes to divide the OAS pension dates into two separate dates for each month. A payment set during the first week of the month shall be used for those OAS pensioners whose 65th birthday occurs during the first half of the previous month, and a payment date set for the last of the month shall be used for those OAS pensioners whose 65th birthday occurs during the second half of the previous month.

LABELLING OF GENETICALLY MODIFIED FOODS

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my second petition is to do with amending the Food and Drugs Act.

This petition tells the government that Canadians have a right to make informed choices about the food they eat by having adequate information provided on food labels. The petitioners call upon the House of Commons to support an act to amend the Food and Drugs Act with respect to mandatory labelling for genetically modified foods.

GENETICALLY MODIFIED ALFALFA

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): The final petition is also to do with genetically modified foods.

This is calling for a moratorium on GM alfalfa. The petitioners point out that organic farming prohibits the use of genetic modification and that the organic sector in Canada depends on alfalfa as a high-protein feed for dairy cattle and other livestock, as well as an important soil builder. The petitioners call upon Parliament to impose a moratorium on the release of genetically modified alfalfa in order to allow a proper review of the impact on farmers in Canada.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition about the Experimental Lakes Area.

As many people know, this is an area in northern Ontario consisting of over 50 lakes, which is internationally renowned as an area where freshwater ecosystems and the effect of pollution on freshwater ecosystems are studied in their whole over a period of many years and decades. It is a unique laboratory for studying the freshwater ecosystems that we need here in Canada to live.

The petitioners ask the federal government to not cut federal funding for the Experimental Lakes Area.

Routine Proceedings

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition signed by citizens of Canada who are concerned about the proposed megaquarry in Melancthon Township in Dufferin County, which would be the largest open-pit quarry in Canada at over 2,300 acres.

The petitioners are concerned with a number of things. They are concerned that the proposed megaquarry would remove from production some of Ontario's best farmland. They are asking that the Government of Canada conduct an environmental assessment under the authority of the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act on the proposed Highland Companies' megaquarry development.

ANIMAL WELFARE

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am presenting a petition signed by residents of the riding of Kenora who are concerned that stray and wild animals are not sufficiently protected by animal cruelty laws under the property section of the Criminal Code. They are calling on the Government of Canada to recognize animals as beings that can feel pain, and to move animal cruelty crimes from the property section of the Criminal Code and to strengthen the language of federal animal cruelty law in order to close loopholes that allow abusers to escape penalty.

•(1015)

MERCURY

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, mercury is one of the most toxic substances. Mercury used in dentistry may contaminate the environment by the disposal of solid waste products and contaminate air from dental clinics. Burial, cremation and human waste may also contribute mercury to the environment.

The petitioners request that the government recognize that the World Health Organization recommends the phasing out of dental amalgam and recognize the work of the intergovernmental negotiating committee. The petitioners request the government assume global leadership in recommending the phase-out of dental mercury and the phase-in of non-mercury alternatives within Canada at the upcoming UNEP intergovernmental mercury treaty negotiations.

HEALTH OF ANIMALS ACT

Ms. Mylène Freeman (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition signed mostly by people in the region of Sarnia, Ontario, who wish to call attention to the fact that Canadian horse meat products that are currently being sold for human consumption in domestic and international markets are likely to contain prohibited substances. They call upon the House to bring forward and adopt into legislation Bill C-322, An Act to amend the Health of Animals Act and the Meat Inspection Act (slaughter of horses for human consumption).

FISHING INDUSTRY

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition on behalf of residents of Prince Edward Island who are concerned over the plans with respect to fleet separation and owner-operator policies. They point out that these policies have been the backbone of the Atlantic inshore fishery for many years, that the

removal of these policies would directly affect over 30,000 jobs in the fishing industry, and that there has been an abject lack of consultation with fishers on the issue, in fact, an outright refusal to answer some questions. They point out the problems that have arisen with respect to the control of the fishery by corporate interests in other jurisdictions.

They therefore call upon the Prime Minister to maintain and strengthen the fleet separation and owner-operator policies.

HEALTH

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition from many residents of Thunder Bay, Toronto, Neebing, Dryden, Ear Falls, Murillo, and all over Canada, who are concerned that the closure of Canada's only dedicated blood plasma clinic in Thunder Bay could jeopardize the Canadian supply. U.S. plasma will be imported to make up the supply shortfall, but U.S. plasma is often from paid donors, which is against World Health Organization guidelines because it is risky. The petitioners are calling on the government as a regulator to take action.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is from many residents from across Canada, including Ontario, Quebec, and Ymir, B.C. They draw the attention of the House to the current moratorium on the oil tanker traffic along the rugged coast of British Columbia, which has so far kept that wilderness free of oil spills since 1972. They feel the federal government has a constitutional responsibility to protect the environment and the rights of first nations and are calling on the House to halt the partisan support for the northern gateway pipeline.

Routine Proceedings

FUKUSHIMA DAIICHI NUCLEAR POWER PLANT

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am presenting a petition from residents of metro Vancouver who are concerned that the collapse of the Fukushima Daiichi unit 4 reactor could lead to catastrophic radiologic consequences with grave and long-term health, environmental, and economic impacts worldwide. They call on Canada to acknowledge that risk. They specifically request that the Canadian government write to the UN Secretary General and the Japanese prime minister urging that a nuclear safety summit be organized to have a global ability to address this risk. They also ask that the UN establish an independent assessment team on the Fukushima Daiichi unit 4 reactor to coordinate international assistance, and that the Canadian government pledge to participate in both the summit and the independent assessment team.

RIGHTS OF THE UNBORN

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren (Chatham-Kent—Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I too have a rather lengthy petition from constituents in my riding who call upon the government to enter debate on when human life becomes human life.

PENSIONS

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, constituents of Winnipeg North want a message to be sent to the Prime Minister in regard to our old age pension programs.

The petitioners believe that people should continue to have the option to retire at the age of 65, and that the government not in any way diminish the importance and value of Canada's three major senior programs: OAS, GIS and CPP.

• (1020)

THE ENVIRONMENT

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

The first includes petitioners from coast to coast. It starts with a lot of residents of Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, and areas around Charlottetown and extends all the way to the British Columbia coast, to my riding, to Saanich, to Sidney, as well as to Sechelt and Roberts Creek.

These petitioners ask the Government of Canada, particularly the Privy Council, to stop supporting the Enbridge pipeline, the so-called northern gateway, to risky supertankers, and to ensure that the hearings are impartial.

BILL C-38

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, my second petition, which I had hoped to present yesterday before the final vote on Bill C-38 in this place, is from over 1,560 petitioners. The petitioners are literally from coast to coast, from Halifax, Calgary, Point Alberni, Port Moody, Orillia, Vancouver, Sidney, Saanich, as well as Toronto and Ottawa.

These petitioners all call on this House of Commons to reject the so-called budget omnibus bill which was neither a proper budget bill nor a proper omnibus bill, but which rammed through changes to 70 laws. The laws will be changed, repealed or amended in fundamental ways. Canadians will wake up to discover the damage once the bill clears the Senate.

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the following questions will be answered today: Nos. 647 and 652.

[Text]

Question No. 647—**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay:**

With regard to the Department of Fisheries and Ocean's (DFO) fleet separation and owner-operator policies: (a) what are the exact dates these policies were put in place, and for what reasons were the policies implemented; (b) is the government conducting an analysis of the possibility of removing these policies; (c) does the government possess any analysis which indicates that economic, social, or cultural benefits would arise from the removal of these policies, and, if so, what are these benefits; (d) does the government possess any analysis which indicates that economic, social, or cultural damage would arise from the removal of these policies and, if so, what are these damages; (e) with regard to the removal of these policies, has the government been lobbied by any (i) companies, (ii) organizations, (iii) individuals; (f) if the government has been lobbied, as per (e), what are the details of each meeting that has taken place to discuss the matter with the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, the Parliamentary Secretary for Fisheries and Oceans, or other senior Ministerial or departmental staff, specifying (i) the names of the people present at the meeting, (ii) the date the meeting occurred, (iii) the location of the meeting; (g) has the government studied how these policies are perceived internationally, and, if so, what are its conclusions concerning whether the policies are perceived as state subsidies or trade barriers on the international stage; (h) has the government, in the course of any free-trade deal or negotiation or for other reasons, documented international pressure of any kind from any group or country to remove these policies; (i) has the government had any meetings or discussions with any individual, as a result of that individual's authorship of an editorial or column advocating the removal of these policies or the implementation of market-based fisheries reforms for Atlantic Canadian fisheries, and, if so, for each such meeting or discussion, (i) with whom, (ii) on what dates, (iii) at what locations; (j) if the government has not conducted any analysis as per (c) and (d), does it plan to do so before any change to the policies takes place; and (k) has the government conducted an analysis of any other jurisdictions as a model for implementing market-based fisheries reforms and, if so, which jurisdictions?

Hon. Keith Ashfield (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with regard to the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, DFO, fleet separation and owner-operator policies, with respect to (a), the fleet separation policy was implemented in 1979 to separate the harvesting and processing sectors. It does not permit the issuance of licenses to corporations such as processing companies, in the inshore fisheries in Atlantic Canada and Quebec that are restricted to using vessels less than 65 feet in overall length. At the time, it was seen as a way to limit the processing sector's influence on supply chains.

Routine Proceedings

The owner-operator policy was adopted in 1989 and requires inshore licence holders in Atlantic Canada and Quebec to fish their licences personally. Following the implementation of the fleet separation policy, processors were unable to obtain licences to fish as part of the inshore fleet, but independent harvesters were able to hold licences while not fishing their vessels and pursuing other activities, including working in the processing sector. The owner-operator policy was developed to address this issue.

With regard to (b), (c) and (d), no, these policies have been the subject of previous fisheries management consultations, including the Atlantic fisheries policy review. The views expressed during this consultation can be found online at http://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/afpr-rppa/home_e.htm.

With regard to (e)(i), (e)(ii), (e)(iii) and (f)(i), (f)(ii) and (f)(iii), DFO recently conducted a national consultation seeking the views of all Canadians on how fisheries management could be improved. Though the owner-operator and fleet separation policies were not the focus of the consultation process, DFO received commentary from stakeholders outlining their views on these policies.

During the consultation, the department has heard from many companies, organizations, and individuals on many fisheries management policies, including the owner-operator and fleet separation policies. No other meetings have been held at the senior level outside of these consultations to specifically discuss the owner-operator and fleet separation policies.

With regard to (g), (h) and (i), no, the government has not documented anything, because the issue has not been raised in any free trade negotiation. The government has also not met with any individual following their authorship of an editorial or column advocating for the removal of the owner-operator and fleet separation policies.

With regard to (j), no decisions have been made concerning how any fisheries management policies may change, including the owner-operator and fleet separation policies. The department's work on policy research and analysis is ongoing, and the department will consider what further forms of analysis may be needed to support the development of fisheries management.

With regard to (k), DFO routinely scans the literature and monitors best practice around the world, and within Canada, regarding fisheries management.

Question No. 652—Mr. Marc Garneau:

With regard to 444 Combat Support Squadron: (a) how many aircraft were in the squadron on April 10, 2012; (b) how many aircraft were in the squadron on April 12, 2012; (c) is the aircraft which the Minister of National Defence references in his press release of April 12, 2012, an aircraft allocation which was not previously present at the squadron, or is it the restoration of an aircraft allocation which was previously seconded to other duties; (d) if the aircraft referenced in (c) was previously seconded to other duties, what were the nature and duration of those duties; (e) what is the mandate of the squadron; (f) in what orders, instructions, or other documents is that mandate set out; (g) what is the date or what are the dates of those orders, instructions, or other documents; and (h) did the mandate of 444 Squadron change at any point during the present calendar year, and if so, what was the nature and date of any such change in the mandate?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC):
Mr. Speaker, with regard to (a), on April 10, 2012, 444 Squadron had two CH-146 Griffon aircraft on strength.

With regard to (b), on April 12, 2012, 444 Squadron had three CH-146 Griffon aircraft on strength.

With regard to (c), the aircraft that the Minister of National Defence references in his press release of April 12, 2012, has restored 444 Squadron to the full establishment of three helicopters for which it was originally created.

With regard to (d), in October 2005, a CH-146 Griffon was transferred from 444 Combat Support Squadron to 424 Transport and Rescue Squadron, 8 Wing Trenton. The Griffon referenced in (c) was transferred to 424 Squadron to support the CH-149 Cormorant search and rescue fleet when it was recognized that the Cormorant fleet was not able to sustain primary search and rescue operations at four main operating bases alone. CH-146 Griffons continue to be stationed at 424 Squadron to support search and rescue. The aircraft that is now being used to provide a third CH-146 Griffon to 444 Combat Support Squadron was provided by 438 Tactical Aviation Squadron, Saint-Hubert.

With regard to (e), (f) and (g), the mandate of 444 Combat Support Squadron is to provide support to air operations at 5 Wing Goose Bay. This role is set out in Canadian Forces Organization Order 7697, dated October 18, 2001, which superseded Canadian Forces Organization Order 2.2.5.2, dated May 15, 1993.

The roles, tasks and responsibilities of a combat support squadron are further defined by the operational document 3010-7, A3 Tactical Aviation Readiness, Concept of Operations—Combat Support Capability, dated March 25, 2002. This document provides that combat support squadron roles are as follows: primary role, to provide rapid search and rescue response to air emergencies resulting from local military flying operations; secondary role, to provide administrative and utility airlift in support of Wing operations; and tertiary role, to provide national secondary search and rescue and civil assistance capabilities.

In its tertiary role, a combat support squadron can be expected to respond within 12 hours of notification. However, within the context of the Canadian Forces search and rescue response, this does not imply a mandated response posture. Such secondary search and rescue resources are considered for assistance only when circumstances permit, and are not accountable to the search and rescue system for the provision of a dedicated resource.

With regard to (h), the mandate of 444 Combat Support Squadron has remained to provide support to air operations at 5 Wing Goose Bay.

Routine Proceedings

[English]

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if Questions Nos. 642, 644, 645, 646, 648, 649 and 651 could be made orders for returns, these returns would be tabled immediately.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Text]

Question No. 642—**Hon. Judy Sgro:**

With regard to government expenditures for advertising and communications relating to changes to the Old Age Security system: (a) what is the total combined dollar amount of all public resources expended within the past 12 months; (b) what is the total combined dollar amount of all public resources that are currently budgeted for expenditure within the next 12 months; and (c) what is the total combined dollar amount of all public resources under consideration for expenditure within the next 12 months?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 644—**Mr. Frank Valeriote:**

With regard to the Voluntary Household Survey: (a) in the 2011 census process, how many Voluntary Household Surveys were mailed to Canadians; (b) how were recipients chosen; (c) what was the cost to implement the Voluntary Household Survey; (d) how many of the Voluntary Household Surveys were returned; (e) how many Voluntary Household Surveys were completed (i) correctly, (ii) incorrectly; (f) did Statistics Canada establish a target or targets for the 2011 Voluntary Household Survey response rate, and, if so, what were those targets; (g) what activities were undertaken by Statistics Canada or the government to encourage Canadians to complete the Voluntary Household Survey, and what was the cost of these activities; (h) what activities, if any, were undertaken by Statistics Canada or the government to follow up with Canadians who did not complete the Voluntary Household Survey; (i) what was the cost to carry out the mandatory long-form census in 2006 and in 2001; (j) how many mandatory long-form census forms were mailed in 2006 and in 2001; and (k) how many mandatory long-form census forms were returned in 2006 and in 2001?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 645—**Mr. Frank Valeriote:**

With regard to the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC): (a) what are all rehabilitation, motivational, reintegration and/or educational programs currently available in each federal institution managed by CSC; (b) what are all rehabilitation, motivational, reintegration and/or educational programs currently available in each Community-Based Residential Facility managed by CSC; (c) what is estimated to be the total CSC spending on all rehabilitation, motivational, reintegration and/or educational programming in fiscal year 2011-2012; (d) what is the detailed breakdown of the total CSC spending on all rehabilitation, motivational, reintegration and/or educational programming in fiscal year 2011-2012; (e) what was the total CSC spending on all rehabilitation, motivational, reintegration and/or educational programming in each fiscal year since 2004-2005; (f) what was the detailed breakdown of the total CSC spending on all rehabilitation, motivational, reintegration and/or educational programming in each fiscal year since 2004-2005; (g) how much is spent per inmate and per former inmate on rehabilitation, motivational, reintegration and/or educational programs; and (h) does the per capita amount differ by institution, region or province, and, if so, what are the details of how those amounts differ?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 646—**Mr. Frank Valeriote:**

With regard to Strategic Reviews, what are all the particulars of the total savings identified for each of the following departments or agencies for each of the following Strategic Reviews and fiscal years, namely: (a) Canadian International Development Agency in Strategic Review 2007, (i) \$52.2 million in total savings for 2008-2009, (ii) \$107.6 million in total savings for 2009-2010, (iii) \$136 million in total savings

for 2010-2011; (b) Foreign Affairs and International Trade in Strategic Review 2007, (i) \$73.1 million in total savings for 2008-2009, (ii) \$92.8 million in total savings for 2009-2010, (iii) \$105.1 million in total savings for 2010-2011; (c) Statistics Canada in Strategic Review 2007, (i) \$11.5 million in total savings for 2008-2009, (ii) \$17.9 million in total savings for 2009-2010, (iii) \$21.5 million in total savings for 2010-2011; (d) Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada in Strategic Review 2008, (i) \$130.227 million in total savings for 2009-2010, (ii) \$143.172 million in total savings for 2010-2011, (iii) \$143.605 million in total savings for 2011-2012; (e) Correctional Services Canada in Strategic Review 2008, (i) \$42.048 million in total savings for 2009-2010, (ii) \$46.323 million in total savings for 2010-2011, (iii) \$43.3 million in total savings for 2011-2012; (f) Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council Canada in Strategic Review 2008, (i) \$13.27 million in total savings for 2009-2010, (ii) \$27.07 million in total savings for 2010-2011, (iii) \$40.42 million in total savings for 2011-2012; (g) Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council in Strategic Review 2008, (i) \$2.57 million in total savings for 2009-2010, (ii) \$7.04 million in total savings for 2010-2011, (iii) \$10.5 million in total savings for 2011-2012; (h) Veterans Affairs Canada in Strategic Review 2008, (i) \$3.866 million in total savings for 2009-2010, (ii) \$7.253 million in total savings for 2010-2011, (iii) \$24.037 million in total savings for 2011-2012; (i) Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation in Strategic Review 2009, (i) \$97.02 million in total savings for 2010-2011, (ii) \$99.93 million in total savings for 2011-2012, (iii) \$102.2 million in total savings for 2012-2013; (j) Canadian Tourism Commission in Strategic Review 2009, (i) \$896,000 in total savings for 2010-2011, (ii) \$4.2 million in total savings for 2011-2012, (iii) \$4.2 million in total savings for 2012-2013; (k) Environment Canada in Strategic Review 2009, (i) \$13.669 million in total savings for 2010-2011, (ii) \$19.714 million in total savings for 2011-2012, (iii) \$19.72 million in total savings for 2012-2013; and (l) Public Safety Canada in Strategic Review 2009, (i) \$7.518 million in total savings for 2010-2011, (ii) \$13.402 million in total savings for 2011-2012, (iii) \$14.924 million in total savings for 2012-2013?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 648—**Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse:**

With regard to each department, agency and Crown corporation's expenses for engraved or embossed letterhead since 2007: (a) by vendor name, what is the (i) date, (ii) cost, (iii) content, (iv) occasion for the purchases; and (b) was each contract an open competition?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 649—**Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse:**

With regard to hydraulic fracturing or "fracking": (a) what are all potential consequences of this technique with regard to (i) water safety or groundwater contamination, (ii) seismic activity, (iii) environmental contamination, (iv) effects on wildlife, (v) effects on flora, (vi) effects on humans, (vii) atmospheric emissions, (ix) greenhouse gas emissions; and (b) what are all reports authored on any of the subjects listed in (a)(i-ix) since the year 2000?

(Return tabled)

*Routine Proceedings***Question No. 651—Hon. Mark Eyking:**

With respect to National Parks and Historic Sites, for each of the following locations, namely, Abbot Pass Refuge Cabin National Historic Site, Alberta; Athabasca Pass National Historic Site, Alberta; Banff National Park, Alberta; Banff Park Museum National Historic Site, Alberta; Bar U Ranch National Historic Site, Alberta; Cave and Basin National Historic Site, Alberta; Elk Island National Park, Alberta; First Oil Well in Western Canada National Historic Site, Alberta; Frog Lake National Historic Site, Alberta; Howse Pass National Historic Site, Alberta; Jasper National Park, Alberta; Jasper House National Historic Site, Alberta; Jasper Park Information Centre National Historic Site, Alberta; Rocky Mountain House National Historic Site, Alberta; Skoki Ski Lodge National Historic Site, Alberta; Sulphur Mountain Cosmic Ray Station National Historic Site, Alberta; Waterton Lakes National Park, Alberta; Wood Buffalo National Park, Alberta; Yellowhead Pass National Historic Site, Alberta; Chilkoot Trail National Historic Site, British Columbia; Fisgard Lighthouse National Historic Site, British Columbia; Fort Langley National Historic Site, British Columbia; Fort Rodd Hill National Historic Site, British Columbia; Fort St. James National Historic Site, British Columbia; Gitwāngak Battle Hill National Historic Site, British Columbia; Glacier National Park, British Columbia; Gulf Islands National Park Reserve, British Columbia; Gulf of Georgia Cannery National Historic Site, British Columbia; Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve and Haida Heritage Site, British Columbia; Gwaii Haanas National Marine Conservation Area Reserve, British Columbia; Kicking Horse Pass National Historic Site, British Columbia; Kootenae House National Historic Site, British Columbia; Kootenay National Park, British Columbia; Mount Revelstoke National Park, British Columbia; Nan Sdins National Historic Site, British Columbia; Pacific Rim National Park Reserve, British Columbia; Rogers Pass National Historic Site, British Columbia; Stanley Park National Historic Site, British Columbia; Twin Falls Tea House National Historic Site, British Columbia; Yoho National Park, British Columbia; Forts Rouge, Garry and Gibraltar National Historic Site, Manitoba; Linear Mounds National Historic Site, Manitoba; Lower Fort Garry National Historic Site, Manitoba; Prince of Wales Fort National Historic Site, Manitoba; Riding Mountain National Park, Manitoba; Riding Mountain Park East Gate Registration Complex National Historic Site, Manitoba; Riel House National Historic Site, Manitoba; St. Andrew's Rectory National Historic Site, Manitoba; The Forks National Historic Site, Manitoba; Wapusk National Park, Manitoba; York Factory National Historic Site, Manitoba; Beaubears Island Shipbuilding National Historic Site, New Brunswick; Boishébert National Historic Site, New Brunswick; Carleton Martello Tower National Historic Site, New Brunswick; Fort Beauséjour – Fort Cumberland National Historic Site, New Brunswick; Fort Gaspereaux National Historic Site, New Brunswick; Fundy National Park, New Brunswick; Kouchibouguac National Park, New Brunswick; La Coupe Dry Dock National Historic Site, New Brunswick; Monument-Lefebvre National Historic Site, New Brunswick; Saint Croix Island International Historic Site, New Brunswick; St. Andrews Blockhouse National Historic Site, New Brunswick; Cape Spear Lighthouse National Historic Site, Newfoundland and Labrador; Castle Hill National Historic Site, Newfoundland and Labrador; Gros Morne National Park, Newfoundland and Labrador; Hawthorne Cottage National Historic Site, Newfoundland and Labrador; Hopedale Mission National Historic Site, Newfoundland and Labrador; L'Anse aux Meadows National Historic Site, Newfoundland and Labrador; Port au Choix National Historic Site, Newfoundland and Labrador; Red Bay National Historic Site, Newfoundland and Labrador; Ryan Premises National Historic Site, Newfoundland and Labrador; Signal Hill National Historic Site, Newfoundland and Labrador; Terra Nova National Park, Newfoundland and Labrador; Torngat Mountains National Park, Newfoundland and Labrador; Aulavik National Park, Northwest Territories; Nahanni National Park Reserve, Northwest Territories; Sahoyué-šehdacho National Historic Site, Northwest Territories; Tuktu Nogat National Park, Northwest Territories; Wood Buffalo National Park, Northwest Territories; Alexander Graham Bell National Historic Site, Nova Scotia; Beaubassin National Historic Site, Nova Scotia; Bloody Creek National Historic Site, Nova Scotia; Canso Islands National Historic Site, Nova Scotia; Cape Breton Highlands National Park, Nova Scotia; Charles Fort National Historic Site, Nova Scotia; D'Anville's Encampment National Historic Site, Nova Scotia; Fort Anne National Historic Site, Nova Scotia; Fort Edward National Historic Site, Nova Scotia; Fort Lawrence National Historic Site, Nova Scotia; Fort McNab National Historic Site, Nova Scotia; Fort Sainte Marie de Grace National Historic Site, Nova Scotia; Fortress of Louisbourg National Historic Site, Nova Scotia; Georges Island National Historic Site, Nova Scotia; Grand-Pré National Historic Site, Nova Scotia; Grassy Island Fort National Historic Site, Nova Scotia; Halifax Citadel National Historic Site, Nova Scotia; Kejimikujik National Historic Site, Nova Scotia; Kejimikujik National Park, Nova Scotia; Marconi National Historic Site, Nova Scotia; Melanson Settlement National Historic Site, Nova Scotia; Port-Royal National Historic Site, Nova Scotia; Prince of Wales Tower National Historic Site, Nova Scotia; Royal Battery National Historic Site, Nova Scotia; St. Peters National Historic Site, Nova Scotia; St. Peters Canal National Historic Site, Nova Scotia; The

Bank Fishery - The Age of Sail Exhibit, Nova Scotia; Wolfe's Landing National Historic Site, Nova Scotia; York Redoubt National Historic Site, Nova Scotia; Auyuituq National Park, Nunavut; Quttinirpaq National Park, Nunavut; Sirmilik National Park, Nunavut; Ukkusiksalik National Park, Nunavut; Battle Hill National Historic Site, Ontario; Battle of Cook's Mills National Historic Site, Ontario; Battle of the Windmill National Historic Site, Ontario; Battlefield of Fort George National Historic Site, Ontario; Bellevue House National Historic Site, Ontario; Bethune Memorial House National Historic Site, Ontario; Bois Blanc Island Lighthouse and Blockhouse National Historic Site, Ontario; Bruce Peninsula National Park, Ontario; Butler's Barracks National Historic Site, Ontario; Carrying Place of the Bay of Quinte National Historic Site, Ontario; Fathom Five National Marine Park of Canada, Ontario; Fort George National Historic Site, Ontario; Fort Henry National Historic Site, Ontario; Fort Malden National Historic Site, Ontario; Fort Mississauga National Historic Site, Ontario; Fort St. Joseph National Historic Site, Ontario; Fort Wellington National Historic Site, Ontario; Georgian Bay Islands National Park, Ontario; Glengarry Cairn National Historic Site, Ontario; HMCS Haida National Historic Site, Ontario; Inverarden House National Historic Site, Ontario; Kingston Fortifications National Historic Site, Ontario; Lake Superior National Marine Conservation Area of Canada, Ontario; Laurier House National Historic Site, Ontario; Merrickville Blockhouse National Historic Site, Ontario; Mississauga Point Lighthouse National Historic Site, Ontario; Mnjikaning Fish Weirs National Historic Site, Ontario; Murney Tower National Historic Site, Ontario; Navy Island National Historic Site, Ontario; Peterborough Lift Lock National Historic Site, Ontario; Point Clark Lighthouse National Historic Site, Ontario; Point Pelee National Park, Ontario; Pukaskwa National Park, Ontario; Queenston Heights National Historic Site, Ontario; Rideau Canal National Historic Site, Ontario; Ridgeway Battlefield National Historic Site, Ontario; Saint-Louis Mission National Historic Site, Ontario; Sault Ste. Marie Canal National Historic Site, Ontario; Shoal Tower National Historic Site, Ontario; Sir John Johnson House National Historic Site, Ontario; Southwold Earthworks National Historic Site, Ontario; St. Lawrence Islands National Park, Ontario; Trent-Severn Waterway National Historic Site, Ontario; Waterloo Pioneers Memorial Tower National Historic Site, Ontario; Woodside National Historic Site, Ontario; Ardgowan National Historic Site, Prince Edward Island; Dalvay-by-the-Sea National Historic Site, Prince Edward Island; Green Gables Heritage Place, Prince Edward Island; L.M. Montgomery's Cavendish National Historic Site, Prince Edward Island; Port-la-Joye-Fort Amherst National Historic Site, Prince Edward Island; Prince Edward Island National Park, Prince Edward Island; Province House National Historic Site, Prince Edward Island; 57-63 St. Louis Street National Historic Site, Quebec; Battle of the Châteauguay National Historic Site, Quebec; Battle of the Restigouche National Historic Site, Quebec; Carillon Barracks National Historic Site, Quebec; Carillon Canal National Historic Site, Quebec; Cartier-Brébeuf National Historic Site, Quebec; Chambly Canal National Historic Site, Quebec; Coteau-du-Lac National Historic Site, Quebec; Forges du Saint-Maurice National Historic Site, Quebec; Forillon National Park, Quebec; Fort Chambly National Historic Site, Quebec; Fort Lennox National Historic Site, Quebec; Fort Ste. Thérèse National Historic Site, Quebec; Fort Témiscamingue National Historic Site, Quebec; Fortifications of Québec National Historic Site, Quebec; Grande-Grave, Quebec; Grosse Île and the Irish Memorial National Historic Site, Quebec; La Mauricie National Park, Quebec; Lachine Canal National Historic Site, Quebec; Lévis Forts National Historic Site, Quebec; Louis S. St. Laurent National Historic Site, Quebec; Louis-Joseph Papineau National Historic Site, Quebec; Maillou House National Historic Site, Quebec; Manoir Papineau National Historic Site, Quebec; Mingan Archipelago National Park Reserve, Quebec; Montmorency Park National Historic Site, Quebec; Pointe-au-Père Lighthouse National Historic Site, Quebec; Québec Garrison Club National Historic Site, Quebec; Saguenay-St. Lawrence Marine Park, Quebec; Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue Canal National Historic Site, Quebec; Saint-Louis Forts and Châteaux National Historic Site, Quebec; Saint-Ours Canal National Historic Site, Quebec; Sir George-Étienne Cartier National Historic Site, Quebec; Sir Wilfrid Laurier National Historic Site, Quebec; The Fur Trade at Lachine National Historic Site, Quebec; Batoche National Historic Site, Saskatchewan; Battle of Tourond's Coulee / Fish Creek National Historic Site, Saskatchewan; Cypress Hills Massacre National Historic Site, SKFort Battleford National Historic Site, Saskatchewan; Fort Espérance National Historic Site, Saskatchewan; Fort Livingstone National Historic Site, Saskatchewan; Fort Pelly National Historic Site, Saskatchewan; Fort Walsh National Historic Site, Saskatchewan; Frenchman Butte National Historic Site, Saskatchewan; Grasslands National Park, Saskatchewan; Motherwell Homestead National Historic Site, Saskatchewan; Prince Albert National Park, Saskatchewan; Dawson Historical Complex National Historic Site, Yukon; Dredge No. 4 National Historic Site, Yukon; Former Territorial Court House National Historic Site, Yukon; Ivavik National Park, Yukon; Kluané National Park and Reserve, Yukon; S.S. Keno National Historic Site, Yukon; S.S. Klondike National Historic Site, Yukon; and Vuntut National Park, Yukon: (a) during the 2011 operating season, what was the total employment, broken down by (i) full-time, (ii) part-time,

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(iii) seasonal employees, (b) what are the total number of employees who have been issued affected notices, broken down by (i) full-time, (ii) part-time, (iii) seasonal employees; and (c) what are the total number of positions which have been eliminated, broken down by (i) full-time, (ii) part-time, (iii) seasonal positions?

(Return tabled)

[English]

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, I ask that the remaining questions be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER—SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I am now prepared to rule on the point of order raised on June 7 by the member for Mount Royal concerning the government's response to written Question No. 588.

[Translation]

I would like to thank the hon. member for having raised this matter and the hon. Leader of the Government in the House of Commons for his intervention.

The hon. member for Mount Royal claimed that the response provided to Q-588 was so insufficient and incomplete as to constitute a non-answer. He took care to differentiate this case to a similar one on which I delivered a ruling on April 3, 2012, by noting that the government had given him no indication of an intent to provide further information.

The lack of correlation between the question and the response caused the hon. member to ask the Speaker to refer this failure to respond to the Standing Committee on Finance, as per the Standing Orders.

[English]

The government House leader pointed out that given the difficulties in providing the information requested, the information, although using general terminology, was actually quite accurate.

As members know, objections about the quality of the responses to written questions have been raised numerous times in the past. My predecessors have invariably pointed out to the House that it is not the role of the Chair to judge the quality of the responses provided by the government.

The member for Mount Royal himself acknowledged this in referring to my ruling of April 3, which can be found at pages 6856 to 6858 of *Debates* in which I quoted a ruling on February 8, 2005.

Any dispute regarding the accuracy or appropriateness of this response is a matter of debate. It is not something upon which the Speaker is permitted to pass judgment.

[Translation]

Furthermore, there is a passage in *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, Second Edition, which has been quoted by previous speakers when addressing similar concerns about written questions, and which bears repeating. At pages 522 and 523 it states:

There are no provisions in the rules for the Speaker to review Government responses to questions... The Speaker has ruled that it is not the role of the Chair to determine whether or not the contents of documents tabled in the House are accurate..."

[English]

With regard to the member's written question, he indicated when he placed it on notice that he was requesting a response within 45 days pursuant to Standing Order 39(5)(a). Under the provisions of paragraph (b) of the Standing Order, if a question remains unanswered, that is if no response has been tabled, at the expiry of the requested 45-day period, then:

...the matter of the failure of the Ministry to respond shall be deemed referred to the appropriate Standing Committee

Under the terms of the Standing Order, the failure of the minister to respond to a question applies only if the government fails to provide any reply at all within the stipulated deadline.

Although the member for Mount Royal may feel that the content of the government's answer to Question No. 588 constitutes a failure to respond, the government did in fact table a response on June 4, within the requested 45 days and thus complied with the basic requirements of the Standing Order.

Therefore the remedy he is seeking is not applicable in this instance, and the Chair cannot unilaterally refer this matter to committee.

● (1025)

[Translation]

I thank all members for their attention on this matter.

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[English]

CANADA-PANAMA ECONOMIC GROWTH AND PROSPERITY ACT

The House resumed from June 7 consideration of the motion that Bill C-24, An Act to implement the Free Trade Agreement between Canada and the Republic of Panama, the Agreement on the Environment between Canada and the Republic of Panama and the Agreement on Labour Cooperation between Canada and the Republic of Panama, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the motion that this question be now put.

The Speaker: Resuming debate, the hon. member for London West has six minutes left to conclude his remarks.

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Mr. Ed Holder (London West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to resume my comments with respect to the Canada-Panama free trade deal, which we hope will have the same success as Jordan did this past week. I want to acknowledge the members of the opposition who came together to help us move the arrangements for the trade deal with Jordan along. I hope that vision and support that they showed in the last free trade deal carries on this time. I would say to our friends in the loyal opposition, let us not do this for the sake of the opposition members being able to say that they have passed the deal so they as a party can never be told that they do not support free trade deals. I do not believe that is the case. Therefore, as my Cape Breton mother would say, the proof of the pudding is in the eating. I would like to encourage members opposite to share that same vision as we look towards Panama.

When I consider why Canada is doing any trade deals, let alone this free trade deal with Panama, it is really clear from my four years on the international trade committee that with the deals that we have signed, a very aggressive agenda with respect to free trade deals, we do it because it is in Canada's interest. We also acknowledge that it is in the interests of the countries that we trade with as well. What we tried to do is raise the level of quality of life of individuals. Without the ability to work or without solid employment, they do not have those same opportunities.

We trade with every country in the world. That is absolutely clear. Therefore, what we are looking for with Panama, as with the other trade deals that we have negotiated, is a rules-based system that will assist us when there are disputes and will make sure that we eliminate tariffs going from Canada to Panama and from Panama to Canada. That makes a dramatic difference for our country and certainly for theirs. However, there are a few advantages. If it were not in the interests of Canada, why would we consider doing this at all? It would be helpful for members of this House to have a strong sense of what it does mean for all of us to be able to put this deal together.

Clearly, the free trade agreement would require Panama to provide Canada with improved market access in a variety of areas. For those members of Parliament who have agriculture in their ridings, access to Panama in terms of imports of beef, cattle and pork matters. That is done through a combination of tariff cuts and transitional tariff rate quotas. That is very dramatic.

It is rather interesting that in August 2009, Canadian ministers announced that Panama had approved Canada's meat inspector system and lifted its BSE ban on Canadian beef. Those were progressive steps that were being taken with the long-term intent of putting the free trade deal in place.

In June 2010, our ministers announced that Panama had lifted its ban on Canadian cattle. As a result now, federally registered beef and pork meat establishments are able to export to Panama, as are Canadian exporters of cattle.

In addition to that, we put in what has now become a Canadian standard. We put in a labour co-operation agreement and an agreement on the environment. We look to standards for countries that are not as developed as Canada. We ask them to raise their standards as we deal with them. We think that is very important for the quality of life for Panamanians. In some sense it justifies the

involvement that we have with them well. We think it is important and necessary for Panama to proceed on that basis.

All provinces would benefit in terms of the improvements of the framework that governs this free trade deal. Quebec, for example, would benefit from the elimination of Panamanian tariffs on exports relating to agriculture. I mentioned pork and in addition to that industrial and construction machinery, pharmaceutical and aerospace products. To my province of Ontario and my city of London, some key export areas are industrial and construction machinery, electrical and electronic equipment, pharmaceuticals, chemicals and furniture. The western provinces benefit. The Atlantic provinces benefit. There is not one part of Canada that does not benefit as a result of this free trade deal.

Therefore, I would encourage members opposite, as I know that members on this side will when we look to complete Panama, to give their full support, because it is clear that we almost had this done in the last Parliament. Then an election was put upon the Canadian people and as a result of that election the free trade deal with Panama died on the order paper. That can happen.

● (1030)

We have had debate upon debate about this. Frankly, I do not believe, as members from both sides may choose to ask some questions today, that there is any question that has not already been asked and answered, both in committee and in the House. That is to be fair to those members who were more recently elected because we covered this at length in our last Parliament.

For any questions members have, we will be candid and clear. I would ask for the sake of Canadian businesses to please help us pass the Panama free trade agreement.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for basically asking us what we do not like about this deal with Panama. Quite clearly, Panama is a country that encourages tax evasion and money laundering. Its structure is one where there are literally hundreds and hundreds of paper corporations established in that country to take advantage of its lax rules. Does the hon. member have an understanding of what it is costing the Canadian economy for these types of activities: tax evasion, money laundering and the kinds of things the Panamanian government has refused consistently to fall in line on with international standards? Does the member have an answer to that?

Mr. Ed Holder: Madam Speaker, as I indicated in my earlier comments, there is not a question that has not been asked at least once. The question my colleague, the member for Western Arctic, has asked has been answered very candidly several times in the House, both in the last Parliament and this one.

To assure the member I do have some understanding, I would like to think that with my 30-plus years of business before I got into politics I have some understanding of business. I also have some understanding of business relationships, contractual and legal.

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I would like to share something with him and the House. I do not know if we can put this to bed forever. Regardless of the answer, it will continue to come back up. However, let me be clear about one thing. Canada committed to implement the OECD standard for the exchange of tax information to combat international tax evasion in 2002. Let me update that now. In 2011, the OECD formally placed Panama on its list of jurisdictions that have substantially implemented international standards for exchange of information.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I look forward to a candid answer. In principle, we in the Liberal Party have supported the Panama free trade agreement. Having said that, while the government has been so focused on a couple of free trade type of agreements, it has been very negligent in other areas. The United States entered into an agreement with Korea which is going to have a huge negative impact on Canada, in particular within the pork industry in provinces like Manitoba.

What is the government doing for the Prairie farmers, particularly the pork farmers in Manitoba, to ensure they will be able to secure those critically important markets in Korea for Manitoba's pork?

Mr. Ed Holder: Madam Speaker, when it is time to speak to Korea, I would be happy to have that discussion. The issue has come before my international trade committee from time to time. Today the debate is about Panama and I do not want us to lose focus on today's debate. Frankly, the divide and conquer approach confuses issues. We want to be extremely clear that today we are talking about Panama.

Let us talk about Manitoba and western provinces. The Liberal Party in the past has been supportive of our various trade agreements and I hope it will again. When it looks at Panama, Canada will have a unique advantage over other countries because of the arrangement that we made with some \$123 billion of business both ways today between Panama and Canada. The western provinces will benefit from Panamanian tariffs on key support interests that include processed food products, cereal, precious stones, fats, oils, paper and paperboard. The western provinces, including Manitoba, will benefit very well by this free trade deal.

• (1035)

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is nice to get back to work again and stay focused on additional issues after we unfortunately passed Bill C-38, the budget bill, last night. Today we have to move on to a variety of other issues, whether we like it or not, and I am happy to add a few comments on the Canada-Panama free trade agreement.

The Liberal Party has been in support of this agreement for some time and, in spite of some concerns, which I will outline, we will continue to be in support of free and fair trade.

One of the key concerns with respect to expanding our trading relationship with Panama has been evident with respect to the government's free trade agenda. We must not put aside our domestic practices within the countries with which we are seeking new trade agreements.

As we negotiate free trade agreements, there are some very important issues that we need to keep in mind. Whether they are issues of money laundering, tax evasion, human trafficking or issues of human rights, areas in which we could use our leverage on the

agreement to make some improvements in the quality of life for people in those countries with which we are making agreements, but also to have some clear benefits over and above just the dollars and cents factor for Canada.

An additional point that should be kept in mind and one that the government would do well to carefully consider was raised by Jim Stanford of the Canadian Auto Workers, someone we see often on the Hill when we are dealing with issues in the auto industry, who recently spoke at the international trade committee. Part of his presentation outlined the following with respect to the lack of apparent benefits, as far as he was concerned, that was being derived by the free trade agreement.

Mr. Stanford pointed out a variety of things and the five longest-standing trade agreements were some of the things he talked about. He referred to the trade agreement with the United States, Mexico, Israel, Chile and Costa Rica. Canada's exports to them grew more slowly than our exports to our non-free trade partners, while our imports surged much faster than with the rest of the world.

Mr. Stanford went on to say that if the policy goal was to boost exports and strengthen the trade balance, then signing free trade deals would be exactly the wrong thing to do in his opinion.

With Colombia there are outstanding issues related to labour and human rights issues that I referred to earlier. The same concerns apply to Jordan as they do to Panama.

With respect to Panama, one of the outstanding concerns has been the issue of tax havens and issues relating to money laundering, which has been talked about a lot in this House over the several years that we have been discussing and debating this particular agreement, as with other agreements.

I will put this concern into context. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, in response to issues relating to the Canada-Jordan FTA, in violation of human and labour rights and Canada's response, told this House:

...what both hon. members fail to realize is the entire issue of extraterritoriality. There are certain things we can do when negotiating with another country and certain things we cannot do because they are beyond our sphere of influence.

Even if it is beyond our sphere of influence, we should always push right to the wall to get clear benefits for Canada. Whether we are talking about human rights, money laundering or other issues pertaining to that, if we can use our leverage, we should be doing it far more forcefully.

Clearly there are benefits on both sides but there are far more benefits in my mind to Panama. Therefore, we should be using that opportunity with these agreements to get everything possible we can get out of it, not only for our country but also for the people who live in the other areas of the world that are affected by many of these agreements.

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The question that must be raised is that where there are concerns and issues that would not be acceptable to Canada, we need to know what mechanisms within the agreement should be in place with countries where issues of concern are found to exist and persist. It is a question of signing an agreement and then raising it every once in a while, issues, again, about human rights or money laundering, but being able to do absolutely nothing about it and having them ignore the concerns we are raising.

● (1040)

What kind of strength do we have with these agreements? How many years would we allow all of this to go on before deciding to cancel an agreement because of clear violations of the rules?

Canada is earmarked out there when it comes to doing things right, or at least it used to be. We were well respected in the world because we would follow the agreement, we would ensure the agreements were fair on all sides and we would be respectful of the countries that were trying to grow, better themselves and make a better life for their people. Often we do not use enough of our country's strength to insist that there should be some improvements to areas that we have concerns about.

An example would be the Panamanian situation. When federal government officials testified before the international trade committee earlier last fall, they could not adequately address the money laundering and tax haven issues relating to Panama.

In December 2010, Panama signed a tax information exchange agreement with the United States, not with Canada. In testimony before the U.S. house ways and means subcommittee on trade on March 30, 2011, the research director of Public Citizen's Global Trade Watch also raised concerns with respect to the money laundering issue in the wake of the agreement between the U.S. and Panama. He said:

Panama promised for eight years to sign a Tax Information Exchange Agreement.... Yet when it finally signed a TIEA with the Obama administration in November 2010, the agreement did not require Panama to automatically exchange information with U.S. authorities about tax dodgers, money launderers and drug traffickers.

Those areas have weaknesses and, because of everybody's interest in signing these agreements, they often take one particular part of the puzzle and accept it and continue to work on the tax information issue or whatever other avenue to ensure that we stop money laundering and drug trafficking. We need to be stronger on these issues and use them as leverage.

In the previous Parliament, concerns were raised with respect to Panama being a tax haven in which instances of tax evasion and money laundering were found. Concerns were raised as to whether a free trade agreement should be proceeded with prior to a clear tax information exchange between Canada and Panama being in place.

We would be far better off to keep going slowly with this process until we have what we want, which is both of those agreements when it comes to sharing the tax. We would then be eliminating opportunities for money laundering, tax havens and other issues rather than signing the agreement and going forward in good faith, which is clearly what the government wants to do and what our party has decided to do as well. As of yet there is still no tax treaty or tax

information exchange agreement signed between Canada and Panama nor an intention that it will be done.

The history, as we understand it, is as follows. Panama has asked that Canada enter into a more comprehensive double taxation treaty. Canada refused, asking instead for a more limited TIEA. Panama, which at that time had only entered into double taxation treaties, insisted on a double taxation treaty. Canada has not yet responded to this second request.

I will go back to who is in charge. I think the benefits to Panama are far better than the benefits to Canada so why would we turn around and continue to water down our leverage?

Members should note that all of the DTA's include tax information and exchange obligations between signatory countries based on article 26 of the OECD model convention. As of November 2010, Canada was party to DTA's with 87 countries, with 8 more signed but not yet in effect. As of November 5, 2010, Canada had signed 9 TIEA's, none of which are in effect.

In testimony before the international trade committee on September 29, reference was made to correspondence between Canada and Panama in which the latter was asked whether Panama had responded to the concerns expressed by Canada on the tax haven issue. According to DFAIT officials, no such response had been received.

There are a variety of concerns as we move forward. I know the government is anxious to move this forward but I hope we put in what is best for Canada first and Panama second, not Panama first and Canada second.

● (1045)

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, I was shocked to learn in my research on the subject that there are almost 400,000 corporations registered in Panama, which is four times the number of corporations that we have in Canada. It makes one think that this is not just another developing nation but quite a unique developing nation.

I listened to the member's remarks regarding her fears about money laundering, the tax haven situation and the lack of tax treaties. Would she not agree that Panama itself, through a deliberate strategy, has become a magnate for these corporations that are trying to hide behind the lack of reporting requirements and the lack of transparency? Transparency International has spoken out about countries like Panama.

Did the hon. member watch the national news on TV last night? It had an exposé on Canadian mining companies and what they were doing in Panama. Does she make any kind of connection between Bill C-300 in the last Parliament, which was sponsored by her colleague, about corporate social responsibility and the egregious, outrageous behaviour of Canadian mining companies—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I must give the hon. member time to respond.

Hon. Judy Sgro: Madam Speaker, my colleague got all his points in order and just about took up the whole five minutes for a response.

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I am very concerned with some of those issues and I think I had made those remarks. Signing free trade agreements are good and I believe in free in trade but I also believe in using the leverage that Canada should have to ensure we are doing our job of protecting Canadians and our companies, eliminating opportunities for money laundering and the drug trade, and all the rest.

My colleague for Scarborough—Guildwood had introduced his bill on what goes on in mining. All kinds of exploitation happen around the country and these agreements need to be clear. We need to know the check marks to get out of these deals. Where are our markers on these things when it comes to issue of human rights and so on? Where are the lines where we cancel these agreements, or are we just leaving ourselves wide open to 10 years of complaining and doing nothing if things do not go in the direction we want them to?

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, Ind.): Madam Speaker, I agree with the member. Basically I am in favour of free trade, especially if it is fair trade, if it benefits all parties and if it does not harm the environment or workers.

I am particularly interested in the issue of signing a free trade agreement with a country that is so well-known for money laundering and will not sign international conventions to prevent it. I would like to hear a little more about how the member feels about that.

Hon. Judy Sgro: Madam Speaker, I suppose that goes back to Canada being the one to sign the agreement when it meets a level of standard that we can say, "It is great that we got this agreement signed". I would like to ensure that we have everything we need in there to protect Canada's interests and also protect the world's interests.

We should not just be looking at the ultimate dollars and cents that would be transacted. We need to look at what is good for the world. It is not a question of living in isolation and thinking only about Canada. We need to have the safeguards in place to ensure the world will be better off, not just Canada or Panama, within the agreement?

With a variety of things that continue to move forward, I would like to see more safeguards put on this issue. I think it would be very beneficial for the government to ensure there are some safeguards where, if within 12 months of an issue not being dealt with, the government would be able to cancel the agreement. I would much rather see that kind of clause in this agreement.

• (1050)

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House of Commons today to speak on what I think is an important matter for our country and its standing in the world, and that is the Canada-Panama free trade agreement. Specifically, I would like to address one important element of the Canada-Panama free trade agreement that has not received a lot of attention, and that is the provisions on government purchasing.

Our government has been at the forefront of efforts to expand and secure access to foreign government procurement markets. Why? According to OECD statistics, government purchasing plays a significant role in the economy of most countries. It accounts for approximately 10% to 15% of a country's GDP, amounting to hundreds of billions of dollars annually around the globe.

These markets present significant opportunities for Canadian suppliers. Through the negotiation of international trade obligations in this area, our government is working hard to enable Canadians to take advantage of these market opportunities. These obligations also support our own domestic interests in obtaining best value for Canadian taxpayers in government procurement. Increasing access, competition and fairness in government procurement serves this overall policy objective.

Lastly, our government actions help to promote an international framework for procurement, a framework that strengthens good governance through efficiency and effective management of public resources and through reducing corruption and conflict of interest in government purchasing around the globe. More accountability, more transparency and more value for taxpayers' dollars all help suppliers, governments and taxpayers to benefit from these efforts.

We seek to accomplish these goals by negotiating agreements such as the World Trade Organization Agreement on Government Procurement and specific chapters in Canada's comprehensive free trade agreements. I am happy to report that our government recently welcomed the successful conclusion of negotiations to modernize the WTO Agreement on Government Procurement. This agreement was recently tabled before Parliament. As the tabling period ended on June 12, the government will now proceed to implement the agreement. However, our efforts to secure and expand opportunities for Canadian suppliers go well beyond the WTO.

Most of Canada's bilateral free trade agreements, from the North American Free Trade Agreement itself, NAFTA, to those with Chile, Peru and Colombia, have obligations on government purchasing, as they should. These obligations are based on a core set of principles: non-discrimination between domestic and foreign suppliers, transparency and fair process. These principles provide greater public access to information on government purchasing and a fair opportunity for suppliers to compete. The Canada-Panama free trade agreement being debated here today is another step in our efforts to fulfill these objectives and create jobs and economic prosperity for hard-working Canadians and to reach out to partners who we believe are making progress.

As many would know, Panama has a dynamic and rapidly growing economy, as has been referenced in the House many times, and Canada's businesses have long been interested in gaining or expanding access to this emerging market. Despite the global economic downturn since 2008, Panama's economy continues to show strong signs of growth and improvement in many areas, including some of the expressed concerns we have heard about tax laws. In fact, it is of interest to note that its political stability and progressive business environment have helped Panama achieve consistent average growth of 6% to 7% over the past several years.

Panama is also an ideal location for Canadian businesses seeking to expand and build long-term business ventures in the region. Often the most difficult contract to secure is the first one, so this agreement would make it easier for Canadian businesses to establish a credible presence in the region.

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Panama's government and its markets, particularly in the areas of infrastructure, transportation and services, represent a significant opportunity for Canadian suppliers, particularly those in the engineering and construction industries and environmental technology. Perhaps the greatest example is the ambitious \$5.3 billion project to expand the Panama Canal, which would be at the top of the list. Here was an opportunity for Canadian engineers and construction companies to bid on contracts, on what is, of course, a significant gateway for the shipping industry here in North America. The Panama Canal, as we know, serves as a key transportation hub between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. It is a significant driver of Panama's economy and many economies, including the Canadian economy.

● (1055)

Its expansion will lead to increased container traffic, some of which will access Canadian ports to supply the North American market. We know that post-Panamax vessels and super-post-Panamax vessels are now coming into ports around our country. This is a significant driver for the Canadian economy.

That said, the project for this canal's expansion is already well under way, so there is a timeliness aspect to moving forward on this free trade agreement. We must act quickly to ensure that Canadian companies will be given a fair opportunity to compete for a broad range of opportunities overseen by the Panama Canal Authority.

The opportunities exist well beyond this canal. In 2010, the Panamanian government announced an infrastructure plan valued at \$13.6 billion over five years. This enormous infrastructure project has many projects that are well under way and progressing to build and improve roads and hospitals, social housing, bridges and airports. Among these projects is the Panamanian government's plan to construct a metro system, estimated at \$1.5 billion.

These projects underscore the ambition of Panama's infrastructure plans and present, as I mentioned earlier, opportunities for Canadian companies and workers. These are just a few of the innovations that are happening in the region, where Canadian firms can position themselves and take advantage of this opportunity, should we enter into this free trade agreement in the region.

SNC-Lavalin is an obvious Canadian leader when it comes to these types of contracts. It was recently awarded a contract to help design and build the project infrastructure for the world-class copper mine in Panama. This award represents a tremendous opportunity, covering project infrastructure valued at \$3.2 billion. The project is scheduled to be operational in 2016, and the mine is expected to have a life of about 30 years.

The Royal Canadian Mint has also been active through its production of the commemorative Balboa coins. B.C.-based Helitech supplies helicopter avionics technology to the Panamanian police. Kubik, a leading museum and gallery space creator from Mississauga, Ontario, has been awarded the design, development, installation and commissioning of Panama's biodiversity museum.

Canadian companies clearly have the expertise to meet Panama's development plans. These are competitive companies that are world leaders in many of these areas, particularly in engineering and design and construction.

The Canada-Panama free trade agreement would guarantee access for Canadian suppliers to these types of procurement opportunities, reducing the risk of doing business in the region. Moreover, the free trade agreement would ensure that Canadian suppliers can compete and win on the same basis as their main competitors, mainly in the United States of America.

It is our job, as parliamentarians, as members of the government, to ensure that Canadian companies have secure access to opportunities of this nature.

This is very much in keeping with the plans and vision this government has for our country: to increase opportunities, to see our companies thrive in the international marketplace and continue to expand into areas like Panama and the region of the Americas.

They do this so that they can create opportunities, so they can create jobs, meaningful employment for Canadians, and prosperity for the shareholders in many of these companies, the employees and the communities.

I would now ask for the support of all members for the Canada-Panama free trade agreement. I believe this would be good for Canada. It would be good for our relationship in the region and continued opportunities that will open.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Madam Speaker, the minister is looking for the support of the New Democratic Party, obviously, for this free trade deal. We have said over and over again that free trade must be based on consistent ethical behaviour on the part of those countries in the development of these relationships.

Quite clearly Panama, with its reputation for money laundering and its worldwide reputation for tax evasion, is one of those countries that is under question. We have heard some evidence that it has made some improvements in tax evasion, but at the same time, how are we guaranteed that this relationship will not actually lead to Canadian companies having more opportunities to move into areas of ethical behaviour that are really not appropriate?

If we are going into a free trade arrangement with a country that has a lower moral and ethical business environment, and we are bringing our companies in there on the basis of increased free trade, how is that going to improve the standing of Canadian companies in the world in a way we can respect as Canadians?

● (1100)

Hon. Peter MacKay: Madam Speaker, it is a legitimate question. The short answer is engagement. I would suggest to my colleague that the answer is through engagement, through encouraging countries like Panama to live up to those standards, the standards we expect of companies here in Canada.

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We do know and he did reference the fact that Panama has come a long way. In fact, information that I have been provided, and that has been referenced by my colleague from London West earlier, indicates that in July the OECD formally placed Panama on a list of jurisdictions that have substantially implemented international standards for exchange of information.

We know it is a signatory to the labour organization. We know it has, in 1998 in fact, under the declaration of fundamental principles of rights to work, come forward with greater attempts at fairness and transparency, all of those things that we encourage here in Canada. So, there are strong signals that are being sent that Panama is improving.

I would suggest that giving Canadians opportunities, the ability to compete, to set a standard and to lead by example would improve Panama's overall quality of life and its standards, and it would look to Canada for example.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Madam Speaker, I listened carefully to the two speakers from the Conservative Party, and I am wondering about a few things. One of the issues the last speaker talked about was development opportunities for Quebec and Canadian companies, including engineering companies like SNC-Lavalin.

I am wondering about the comments the previous speaker made about the hog industry in Quebec. He said that Quebecers would potentially deprive themselves of exports in that sector. I checked my information and I noticed that we do not have any trade with Panama in pork. We trade with the United States, Canada, Japan, Russia, North Korea, and the list goes on, yet we have nothing with Panama.

I have a question that I would like to ask the hon. member: what are the chances that Panama would export more pork to Canada, rather than the other way around?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her question. It is obviously important to have opportunities in agriculture and other industries.

[*English*]

What I can tell my hon. friend is that the elimination of tariffs is what the free trade agreement would accomplish. That certainly has implications for the Quebec hog industry, for the forest industry in my own region of Atlantic Canada and, in fact, across the country.

I am told that the pharmaceutical industry, the aerospace industry and all of these are just a few examples of industries that would benefit from the reduction or the elimination of tariffs.

We also, as I mentioned in my remarks, would see companies like SNC-Lavalin and engineering firms have the ability to compete on a more level playing field for construction and projects such as the Panama Canal.

I would encourage my colleague and all my colleagues opposite to support the free trade agreement. There has been significant debate in this Parliament and the last Parliament. Time is of the essence and time is wasting.

For our economy, this is important. We need to move forward productively.

• (1105)

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak to this bill today.

This bill started life as Bill C-46 in the last Parliament. The bill came to an end when the election was called. It was introduced in November of this past year and is now called Bill C-24.

I point that out because nothing has changed. There was an opportunity for the government to listen to all the debate, in committee and in this House, on the old bill and to make some adjustments and changes so the rest of the House could find it acceptable, and it did not. As a result, New Democrats continue to oppose this bill, for that reason and a number of others.

In the last Parliament, compelling testimony was heard from witnesses regarding the tax haven situation in the Republic of Panama, as well as the poor record of labour rights in the country. Motions and amendments that would address the glaring issues in the agreement were introduced by our member for Burnaby—New Westminster, but were opposed and defeated by both the Conservatives and the Liberals. The new legislation, despite a new and inspirational short title, does nothing to address the fundamental flaws of its previous manifestation, most importantly the tax disclosure issues that have yet to be meaningfully addressed, despite protestations to the contrary from the Panamanian government, and undoubtedly from the Conservative government, as we raise this issue.

Just before the clause-by-clause review of the old Bill C-46, our member for Burnaby—New Westminster proposed to the Standing Committee on International Trade a motion that would stop the implementation of the Canada–Panama trade agreement until Panama agreed to sign a tax information exchange agreement. The member's motion was defeated by both the Conservatives and the Liberals, who argued that the double taxation agreement Panama had agreed to sign was satisfactory.

Unfortunately, the double taxation agreement only tracks legal income, while a tax information exchange agreement would track all income, including that made through illegal means. Considering Panama's history and reputation on such matters, it should be clear why such an agreement is necessary before signing a free trade deal.

Another issue is human rights in Panama and the complete failure of this trade agreement to ensure that these rights would not be denied to Panamanian workers as they have been in the past. Two amendments put forth in committee would have protected trade union workers in Panama by offering the right of collective bargaining as well as requiring the Minister of International Trade, as the principal representative of Canada on the joint Panama–Canada commission, to consult on a regular basis with representatives of Canadian labour and trade unions.

Like all other amendments, these were defeated by the Conservatives and Liberals. Unfortunately, this would create a free trade zone that belittles the rights of labour, a serious problem already prevalent in Panama.

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In addition, two amendments regarding definitions were proposed. The first was regarding the definition of sustainable development. The amendment would define sustainable development as:

development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs, as set out in the Brundtland Report published by the World Commission on Environment and Development.

The second amendment was regarding the definition of sustainable investment. The amendment would define sustainable investment as:

investment that seeks to maximize social good as well as financial return, specifically in the areas of environment, social justice and corporate governance, in accordance with the United Nations Principles for Responsible Investment.

The NDP prefers a multilateral approach, based on a fair and sustainable trade model. In fact, bilateral trade deals amount to protectionist trade deals, since they give preferential treatment to a few partners and exclude the rest. This puts weaker countries in a position of inferiority vis-à-vis the larger partners. A multilateral fair trade model would avoid these issues while protecting human rights and the environment.

New Democrats reaffirm our vision for a fair trade policy that puts the pursuit of social justice, strong public sector social programs and the elimination of poverty at the heart of an effective trade strategy.

• (1110)

Canada's trade policy should be based on the principles of fair, sustainable and equitable trade that builds trading partnerships with other countries that support the principles of social justice and human rights, while also expanding business opportunity.

The federal government should stop exclusively pursuing the NAFTA model at the expense of all other alternatives, and then it should invest in other avenues of trade growth, including, above all, a vigorous trade promotion strategy that builds the Canadian brand abroad, along the lines of the Australian experience.

For example, it is shocking to see that the European Union spends in excess of 500 times more than Canada in promoting one single industry—in this case, its wine industry.

Fair trade should be the overarching principle, not just an afterthought of trade negotiations. The NDP strongly believes in an alternative and a better form of trading relationship that can be established with Panama and any other country, one that includes within an overall fair trade strategy the points that follow.

The first is to provide a comprehensive common sense impact assessment on all international agreements that demonstrates that trade deals Canada negotiates are beneficial to Canadian families, workers and industry. The government does not sign any trade agreement that would lead to a net job loss.

Second is ensuring that the trade agreements Canada negotiates support Canada's sovereignty and freedom to chart its own policy, support our ability to be a competitive force on the world stage and support the principles of a multilateral fair trade system.

Third is the fundamental principle that all trade agreements must promote and protect human rights by prohibiting the import, export or sale in Canada of any product that is deemed to have been created under sweatshop conditions, forced labour or other conditions that

are not in accordance with fundamental international labour standards and human rights.

The fourth is the fundamental principle that all trade agreements should respect sustainable development and the integrity of all ecosystems.

The fifth is that any time the Government of Canada signs a free trade agreement, the decision to proceed with enabling legislation must be subject to a binding vote on whether or not to accept the terms of the agreement. The current system, which consists of tabling FTAs in the House for a period of 21 sitting days prior to ratification, is not mandatory and does not bind the government to a decision in the House.

In the last Parliament during the study of the bill, the committee heard testimony from Todd Tucker of the Public Citizen's Global Trade Watch. Mr. Tucker made a compelling case that Panama is one of the world's worst tax havens and that the Panamanian government has intentionally allowed the nation to become a tax haven. The tax haven situation in Panama is not improving under the current government and conditions in Panama. In addition, a trade agreement with Canada would only worsen the problem and could cause harm to both Panama and to Canada.

Teresa Healy of the Canadian Labour Congress spoke to the committee regarding the agreement on labour co-operation. She testified that while the International Labour Organization's core labour standards are invoked, the agreement is still weaker than it should be. As well, the current Panamanian government has been increasingly harsh on labour unions and workers in recent years.

It is interesting to note that when my colleague from London West spoke, he indicated that there is some agreement on another trade deal, the Canada-Jordan trade deal.

While New Democrats are not against free trade, we believe it is important that it should always be fair trade. Unfortunately, in this situation it does not happen.

• (1115)

To be fair to the Conservatives, they have moved a little toward the centre. There was a time not so long ago when they would not have even talked about the environment or human rights.

I see my time is up. I look forward to any questions the House may have.

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, Ind.): Madam Speaker, as usual, the hon. member for Thunder Bay—Rainy River has done a very thoughtful analysis of this bill. He talked a lot about what others have talked about here, such as money laundering and the lack of democracy and workers' rights, but I would like to raise a point to see if he finds it a concern also.

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Panama's environment has a wealth of biodiversity. It is one of the countries with the most biodiversity in the world. The agreement does not deal with that at all, or with any protections for the environment. Panama has a lot of serious problems, including water pollution from agricultural runoff, threats to the fishery resource, endangerment of wildlife habitats and biodiversity, deforestation on a massive scale, land degradation and loss of wetlands.

I wonder if the hon. member is also concerned about that and wants to add anything.

Mr. John Rafferty: Madam Speaker, I thank my friend for Thunder Bay—Superior North for that question. It allows me an opportunity to continue with the line of thought that I had a moment ago, that is, talking about the environment and human rights.

The government has moved on these areas. Before, it did not talk about it; now it has some side deals on it.

To answer my friend's question, the problem with the side deal on the environment is that it does not have any teeth. There is no enforcement. My question to the government with this and all of the other trade deals is this: if the government has started talking about human rights and the environment, why leave them as side deals? Why not put them into the body of the agreement so that there is some enforcement capability, so that the environment and human rights become part of the whole trade agreement and there is some enforcement? I think government members would be very happy to see that.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to build on what my colleague was saying a minute ago. We know that even with NAFTA there is a framework for oversight on the environment and on labour, and that there is a panel to which citizens have recourse if they have a concern around what is happening with respect to the environment. It can be from Mexico, the United States or Canada.

That is not in this deal.

The notion that we cannot have binding and enforceable mechanisms in trade deals does not seem to make any sense. The government has said that is the best it can do, but we want responsible trade on this side, and the government wants to just simply sign off on whatever.

What does the member think about the mechanisms we have in existing trade deals, such as the ones I mentioned, and the ability to put those into future trade deals so that we actually have responsible trade?

Mr. John Rafferty: My friend from Ottawa is absolutely right. Responsible trade is the goal. Unfortunately, the Conservatives see having any kind of mechanism to protect the environment or to protect human rights built into the body of an agreement as frivolous. They see it as an opportunity for people to voice their concerns, but they are not interested in their concerns.

Those mechanisms can be built. They can be built in to work for all of the parties. It is distressing to see that the government does not seem to be interested in trade deals or in any other matter in which there is some questioning of its decisions. I do not think that is good for democracy and I do not think it is good for free trade agreements.

There are models, and it would be very easy to build these into free trade agreements so that there is a possibility for discussion and for enforcement and so that the world would see Canada as a leader in fair and responsible trade.

● (1120)

Mr. Peter Braid (Kitchener—Waterloo, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to speak today about the Canada-Panama economic growth and prosperity act. At a time when Canadian businesses are faced with tough economic challenges, the benefits that the Canada-Panama free trade agreement will provide are tremendously important to our economy.

This government clearly demonstrates that our top priority continues to be jobs, economic growth and long-term prosperity, growth and prosperity that will benefit Canadian businesses, workers and their families. That is why the implementation of the Canada-Panama free trade agreement is a priority for this government.

The economic benefits of the agreement are clear. A free trade agreement with Panama will give Canadian exporters, investors and service providers preferential access to one of the fastest-growing markets in the Americas.

Panama has a dynamic and rapidly expanding economy, with real GDP growth, estimated at 10.6% in 2011. Such remarkable growth produces tremendous economic opportunities. Once implemented, the Canada-Panama free trade agreement will help facilitate access to these opportunities for Canadian companies. The Canada-Panama free trade agreement will provide Canadian businesses with improved market access for goods and services, as well as a stable and predictable environment for investments in Panama.

Upon implementation of this agreement, Panama will immediately eliminate tariffs, representing approximately 90% of recent imports from Canada. Let me explain what these benefits actually mean for the various sectors of our economy.

First, for our agricultural sector, which in 2011 exported \$23.6 million worth of agriculture and agrifood to Panama, the free trade agreement will immediately eliminate tariffs on 89% of Canada's current agricultural exports. This is important considering the current tariffs on Canada's main agricultural exports to Panama range from zero to as high as 70%. Products that will receive immediate duty-free access include beef, pork, frozen potato products, pulses, malt, oil seeds, maple syrup and Christmas trees, a cornucopia of Canadiana.

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The free trade agreement will also benefit exports in non-agricultural sectors through the elimination of Panamanian tariffs, including pharmaceuticals, wood, pulp and paper products, electrical and industrial machinery, vehicles and auto parts, information and communications technology, the aerospace sector, plastic products, fish and seafood, as well as iron and steel products.

For the pharmaceutical sector, the elimination of Panamanian tariffs, ranging from 5% to 11%, will benefit Canadian exporters of many of these goods. For the pulp and paper sector, which exported to Panama \$5.3 million worth of goods in 2011, the elimination of Panamanian tariffs, ranging from 5% to 15% on certain paper products, will benefit Canadian exporters of goods, such as books, wallpaper, packing materials, boxes and corrugated cardboard.

Tariff elimination of aerospace products will also enable Canadian exports to be more competitive in Panama. In 2011 Canada exported to Panama \$8.1 million of aerospace products, including various ground flying trainers, turbo propellers and airplane and helicopter parts. The immediate elimination of Panama's 3% to 15% tariffs on aerospace products will promote the competitiveness of Canadian exporters of these products.

• (1125)

The information and communication technology sector, a sector of particular importance in my riding of Kitchener—Waterloo, will also benefit from this agreement. Canada exports a variety of information and communication technology products to Panama, representing about \$4 million in 2011, and these include examples such as radar systems and machines for the reception and conversion of voice images or other data. The elimination of Panama's 3% to 15% tariffs on information and communication technology products will help Canadian exporters expand their presence in the Panamanian market.

While Panama is a signatory to the WTO information technology agreement, or the ITA, which eliminates duties on certain information technology products, the majority of Canada's information and technology exports to Panama are not covered by the WTO ITA and will therefore benefit from the elimination of Panama's tariffs through this free trade agreement.

However, there is more. This agreement is also expected to have a positive impact on the Canadian manufacturing sector, which as we all know has experienced some challenges in recent times.

In 2011 Canada exported \$18.6 million of a variety of electrical and industrial machinery to Panama, including machinery for working rubber and plastics, machine tools for forging and stamping, as well as electrical switch boards and panels. A variety of Canadian machinery exports are currently subject to Panamanian tariffs, ranging from 3% to 15%. Tariffs on these products would also be eliminated.

As an additional case in point, I should also highlight the vehicles and auto parts sector. The elimination of Panamanian tariffs on vehicles and parts, which range from 3% to an astonishing 20%, will help Canadian businesses exporting these products.

As we can see, numerous sectors of the Canadian economy will benefit from this free trade agreement. By opening up foreign markets, we create opportunities for Canadian businesses in a wide range of sectors, which is crucial in our export-driven economy.

Certain members of Parliament continue to criticize the Canada-Panama free trade agreement, claiming that Panama is a "tax haven". I would like to kindly remind those members that, in July 2011, the OECD formally placed Panama on its list of jurisdictions that had substantially implemented international standards for the exchange of tax information, commonly known as the white list. This important achievement demonstrates Panama's commitment to combat international tax evasion, and I trust it will appease the concerns regarding taxation.

Panama is committed to the implementation of this free trade agreement and has already completed its domestic ratification process. Canada cannot stand by while other countries forge closer economic ties with this strategic partner. Panama's FTA negotiations with the European Union were concluded in May 2010 and this agreement could possibly enter into force before the end of this year.

Even more important to Canada, however, our main competitor in the Panamanian market, the United States, has completed an FTA with Panama that the United States Congress has already approved. The United States-Panama trade promotion agreement could very well enter into force this fall.

Both the United States and the European Union will soon benefit from their trade agreements with Panama. If Canada does not quickly implement its free trade agreement with Panama, Canadian companies will be at a competitive disadvantage as competitors benefit from preferential access to the Panamanian market.

For all of these reasons, I ask all hon. members to support the swift implementation of the Canada-Panama free trade agreement.

• (1130)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Mylène Freeman (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, NDP): Madam Speaker, I rise in this House today to express my opposition to Bill C-24, An Act to implement the Free Trade Agreement between Canada and the Republic of Panama, the Agreement on the Environment between Canada and the Republic of Panama and the Agreement on Labour Cooperation between Canada and the Republic of Panama.

[*English*]

In spite of what Conservatives accuse, New Democrats do believe in trade. We do want to expand Canadian business and we do want to generate economic growth. However, the bill overlooks distressing concerns when it comes to Panama's record on environmental issues and workers' rights. New Democrats believe that we can do trade without it being ultimately harmful to the citizens of those countries and to the environment.

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[Translation]

The NDP believes in free trade that is fair, viable and realistic, a fair trade policy that, as part of an effective trading strategy, prioritizes social justice, strong public sector social programs, poverty elimination, and a trade policy based on sustainable fair trade. These should be the guiding principles for trade negotiations, not afterthoughts.

The NDP is calling on the federal government to stop focusing exclusively on the NAFTA-based model and consider other alternatives. It should explore other ways to increase trade. There is another, better model of trade relations that could be established with Panama or any other country, a model that would include the following elements within a comprehensive fair trade strategy.

First, it includes a comprehensive and rational impact analysis for all international agreements to determine whether the trade agreements being negotiated by Canada are good for Canadian families, Canadian workers and Canadian industries. The government should not sign any trade agreement that is likely to lead to a net loss of jobs.

Second, this model includes a guarantee that trade agreements negotiated by Canada will strengthen Canada's sovereignty and its freedom to establish its own policy, that they will help make us a force to be reckoned with on the world stage and that they will support the principles of a fair multilateral trade system.

Third, this model follows the fundamental principle whereby all trade agreements must protect and promote human rights by prohibiting the import, export or sale in Canada of any products considered to have been manufactured in sweatshops, by forced labour, or under any other conditions that do not meet basic international standards for labour or human rights.

Fourth, this model includes the fundamental principle whereby all trade agreements should respect the notion of sustainable development, as well as the integrity of all ecosystems.

Fifth, under this model, every time the Government of Canada signs a free trade agreement, the decision to adopt the enabling legislation must be submitted to a mandatory vote on whether or not the terms of the agreement are acceptable. The current system, which consists of tabling a free trade agreement in the House for a period of 21 sitting days prior to ratification, is not mandatory and does not bind the government to accept a decision of the House.

[English]

Canada's trade policy should be based on the principles of fairness, sustainability and equity. This is how we can and should pursue real and sustainable economic growth, because sustainability will result in long-term economic health and prosperity for our country and the countries with which we do trade.

[Translation]

The NDP opposes this bill on free trade between Canada and Panama for one specific reason: we are worried about the rights of workers in Panama and we suspect that this trade agreement contains no provisions to ensure that the rights of Panamanian workers are not violated, as they have been in the past.

●(1135)

[English]

The New Democrats want the kind of growth that is mutually beneficial for our trading partners and their citizenry, not only because it is ethically right to do so but also because it is a safer long-term investment that will yield better growth over time.

Canada and Panama are not equals in trade, but the types of agreements and trade policies in the bill are meant to be between equal industrialized nations. One size does not fit all. We cannot be using this kind of trade agreement when we are talking about a country that is developing.

The reality is that our negotiations with Panama are exploitative. One-third of its population lives in extreme poverty. We want its resources but it will not act in good faith with its citizens to sell them to us. Canada must not take advantage of the needy in developing countries for us to grow economically.

We need to be more flexible in our trade policies so that they are suitable to the countries that we are brokering our deals with.

It should be clear by now that the NDP can only support trade deals when Canada can ensure that the foreign workers who labour to put money in our pockets and in the pockets of Canadian corporations and shareholders are entitled to the same human rights that Canadian workers enjoy. To strive for anything else would be pure hypocrisy.

If we sign a deal with Panama, it should offer Panamanians the right to collective bargaining, just like Canadians enjoy.

[Translation]

Panama has a bad human rights record. The House of Commons committee that studied this agreement heard some very compelling testimony about the fact that the Republic of Panama is a tax haven.

A tax haven is not exactly the type of country with which we should be negotiating this type of agreement. We should be negotiating with industrialized countries. This is a sign of problems to come for Canada.

Panama has refused to sign a tax information exchange agreement, which is a red flag. It is very troubling, given the high volume of money laundering activities in Panama, including laundering of money from drug trafficking.

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[English]

This is extremely worrying. Panama refusing to sign a tax exchange information agreement is hugely problematic because such an agreement tracks illegal income, as well as legal income. There is an utter lack of transparency around Panama's tax system because, as the OECD has recognized, it is a tax haven for illegal activities, such as harbouring drug cartel money from Mexico and Guatemala. These drug cartels are wreaking havoc on the populations of countries like Mexico and Guatemala.

A few weeks ago, I was in Chile at the ParlAmericas delegation meeting about the summit for women parliamentarians of the Americas. We were talking about the violence against women in these countries, which is often linked to drug money, to illegal trafficking and to very well-coordinated problems that happen in South America, in Central America specifically. We should not be negotiating trade agreements with countries like Panama that do not allow us to see where this money is going when there is a problem that, collectively as the Americas, we are trying to solve. Canada cannot turn a blind eye to this extremely destructive source of illegal drug trade and the systems that facilitate that trade, such as Panama's tax havens.

[Translation]

The NDP cannot support this bill. We have tried to propose amendments to it. For example, my colleague from Burnaby—New Westminster proposed amendments on sustainable development and responsible investment. Since the amendments were rejected by both the Conservatives and the Liberals, it is clear that there is no hope left of working together to conclude a good agreement.

● (1140)

That is why the New Democrats will not be supporting Bill C-24.

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel for her excellent speech. I would like to reiterate a few things she said. For one, the NDP are not against free trade agreements. However, we want good agreements that are well thought out. Unfortunately, there are shortcomings in this agreement, as my colleague pointed out.

Moreover, at the end of her speech, she mentioned amendments moved by our colleague from Burnaby—New Westminster concerning workers' rights. He proposed an amendment that would define sustainable development as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs, as set out in the Brundtland Report published by the World Commission on Environment and Development. Unfortunately, the amendment was rejected, to the detriment of workers in Panama.

I would like my colleague to comment on that.

Ms. Mylène Freeman: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Alfred-Pellan for her question and the points she has made.

Our colleague from Burnaby—New Westminster moved amendments that would give workers the right to collective bargaining and would require the Minister of International Trade, Canada's main representative, to regularly consult with workers' representatives and

unions. He also moved an amendment to define sustainable development as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

I do not understand why there would not be support for such amendments. We are talking about social justice, the environment and long-term investments in people, our environment and our earth. Development must be sustainable in the long term for future generations.

[English]

Mr. Peter Braid (Kitchener—Waterloo, CPC): Madam Speaker, I need to understand why the hon. member and the NDP believe in protectionism as an effective economic strategy for Canada. Why does she not see the value in Canada engaging with countries like Panama to negotiate free trade agreements, separate agreements on the environment and important labour standards and principles? Why would that not help bring countries like Panama into the community of nations and advance the important principles that we are so fortunate to adhere to here in Canada?

Ms. Mylène Freeman: Madam Speaker, one important point is that Panama is not a major trading partner of Canada. The two-way merchandise trade between the two countries only reached \$149 million in 2008, which is less than 1%.

According to the U.S. department of justice, Panama is a major financial conduit for Mexican and Colombian drug traffickers' money laundering activities.

The NDP believes that NAFTA agreements were initially designed for trade between highly industrialized developed countries. However, Panama is a developing nation, as I mentioned in my speech. This trade deal will not help Panama grow sustainably or increase the standard of living for its citizens.

The amendments proposed by my colleague for Burnaby—New Westminster would have helped this agreement but, unfortunately, the other parties voted them down. Instead, this trade deal will increase the role and incentive for exploitation by multinational corporations and inequality will grow at a far greater pace and scale than was the case before because this is a developing nation.

That is why we are opposing this trade agreement. However, that does not mean that we oppose all trade. We want a fair trade agreement that is environmentally sustainable and fair for workers. That is what we want to see in these trade agreements and I do not think it is too much to ask.

● (1145)

[Translation]

Ms. Eve Adams (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to speak about the Canada-Panama free trade agreement. I would like to spend a few minutes explaining how this agreement fits into Canada's larger economic plan.

Government Orders

The government understands the importance of trade and the benefits it brings. As an export-driven economy, Canada must open its borders. One in five Canadian jobs is dependent on international trade. Thus, bilateral and regional trade agreements are key to ensuring Canadians' continued prosperity. That is why expanding Canada's trade relations to rapidly growing foreign markets, such as Panama, is an important part of our government's pro-trade plan to create jobs, growth and long-term prosperity.

[English]

With the challenges in concluding the World Trade Organization Doha round, regional and bilateral trade agreements have taken on increased significance. The government also recognizes that there are a growing number of countries where Canadian companies are at a competitive disadvantage because their competitors have preferential market access under some form of preferential trade agreement.

Canada cannot afford to sit on the sidelines while other countries vigorously pursue trade deals to secure better market access for their products and services for their country. That is why our government is in the midst of the most ambitious pursuit of new and expanded trade and investment agreements in Canadian history.

The Canada-Panama free trade agreement is yet another step this government is taking to help Canadians compete and succeed in the global market. It supports the global commerce strategy which will ensure that Canada maintains its current economic strength and prosperity in an increasingly complex and competitive global economy.

With 60% of our GDP dependent on trade, it is completely clear that jobs and communities across Canada depend on the business we do with other countries. Our Conservative government's pro-trade plan is an essential contributor to Canada's prosperity, productivity and growth.

By improving access to foreign markets for Canadian businesses, we are supporting domestic economic growth and creating new opportunities for Canadian workers. Canada's exporters, investors and service providers are calling for these opportunities. Business owners and entrepreneurs want access to global markets.

This government is committed to expanding the various opportunities created by free trade agreements. Our track record speaks for itself.

[Translation]

Since 2006, Canada has established new free trade agreements with nine countries: Colombia; Jordan; Peru; the European Free Trade Association countries of Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland; and more recently Honduras and Panama.

We are also negotiating with many other countries, including the European Union. A free trade agreement with the European Union would be the most significant Canadian trade initiative since the North American Free Trade Agreement and could increase trade with this important partner by 20%. Such an agreement would also give a \$12 billion boost to the Canadian economy, which is equivalent to a \$1,000 increase in the average national family income or the creation of 80,000 new jobs in Canada.

Canadian businesses recognize the many benefits a trade agreement between Canada and the European Union would have for workers and businesses.

[English]

We are also intensifying our focus on Asia. During the Prime Minister's visit to China in February 2012, leaders announced that Canada and China will proceed to exploratory discussions on deepening trade and economic relations on the completion of a bilateral economic study.

Also, this past March, the Prime Minister announced the launch of negotiations toward a free trade agreement with Japan and the start of exploratory discussions with Thailand.

Canada also continues to explore the possibility of participating in the trans-Pacific partnership, the TPP negotiations.

● (1150)

The potential benefits of these initiatives are enormous. However, that is not all. Canada is also committed to advancing our ongoing free trade negotiations with other partners, including India, Ukraine, Morocco, the Caribbean community and Korea. In addition, Canada is working to modernize its existing bilateral free trade agreements with Chile, Costa Rica and Israel, as encouraged in the exploratory discussions with Mercosur, the largest trading bloc in Latin America, made up of Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay.

All of these initiatives are critical for the economic future of our country. With the global economic recovery remaining fragile, it is important that Canada continue to deepen its trade and investment ties with strategic partners. Expanding Canada's trade and investment ties around the world will help protect and create new jobs and prosperity for our hard-working neighbours and for all Canadians.

The Canada-Panama free trade agreement is be yet another step in the right direction. This agreement represents an opportunity for Canadian businesses to grow and expand their operations in the growing and dynamic Panamanian economy.

Government Orders

The agreement would also reduce tariffs for Canadian producers who want to export to Panama. Upon implementation of the free trade agreement, Panama will immediately lift tariffs on 89% of all non-agricultural imports from Canada, with the remaining tariffs to be phased out in five to fifteen years. Tariffs will also be lifted on 89% of Canada's agricultural exports to Panama. This reduction in trade barriers will benefit a wide range of sectors across the Canadian economy, including fish and seafood products, paper products, vehicles and parts in the greater Toronto area, construction materials and equipment, industrial and electrical machinery and many more. This agreement will provide Canadian service providers with a secure, predictable, transparent and rules-based environment, which will facilitate access to Panama's \$20 billion services market.

Panama is an established destination for Canadian direct investment abroad, particularly in the banking and financial services and construction and mining sectors. This proposed agreement will provide greater stability, transparency and protection for Canadian investments in Panama.

The free trade agreement will also better enable Canadian companies to participate in large projects, such as the \$5.3 billion expansion of the Panama Canal, by providing non-discriminatory access to a broad range of government procurement opportunities in Panama to Canadian suppliers. This is an enormous opportunity for Canadian companies to compete.

[*Translation*]

For all these reasons, the free trade agreement between Canada and Panama is a good thing. It will support more Canadian jobs by improving our ability to export more products and services to this market. That is why implementing free trade agreements is a priority for our government.

I ask all hon. members to support Bill C-24, which aims to implement the free trade agreement between Canada and Panama, as well as the side agreements on labour co-operation and the environment.

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member opposite for her speech, and especially for how well she addressed the House in French. It was most pleasant to listen to.

I have a fairly simple question for my colleague about Bill C-24. We know that a tax information exchange agreement has not been signed with Panama. The only thing that has been signed is a double taxation treaty. However, that is not necessarily enough because it concerns only legitimate revenues. So any revenues or means that are considered illegal are not included. Illegal revenues could be included in a tax information exchange agreement.

I would like to know why we have not signed this tax information exchange agreement, since Panama has already signed them with major partners, including the United States.

• (1155)

[*English*]

Ms. Eve Adams: Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from the other side for her very kind words. In fact, as we enter into free trade negotiations with a number of countries, we are looking at providing greater stability and transparency for our companies. The

ability to go out and trade freely and to compete on the global stage is something for which all Canadians are clamouring.

We will continue to negotiate with countries to ensure they have the most reliable regulatory framework possible. It is our intention to ensure that the rule of law prevails. That is exactly why countries engage in free trade negotiations, so their companies can compete and have some confidence that if they need to avail themselves of legal recourse, the laws will apply to them as foreign nationals.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Madam Speaker, the Canada-Panama agreement is a bilateral agreement between two countries. When we look at the resources and trading power that Canada has compared to Panama at this stage, does she not feel that is an unbalanced relationship, that it actually opens the door for transnational corporations to exploit the people of Panama and does not lead to sustainable development, which is what Panama needs?

Ms. Eve Adams: In fact, Madam Speaker, what we have found historically is that when countries engage in free trade and residents prosper, people do better. They want opportunities and would like to compete. As I mentioned during my comments, a massive \$5 billion construction project is about to get under way in Panama. We would like to provide our Canadian companies the opportunity to go there to compete and ensure that they are not at some sort of disadvantage because other countries have negotiated preferential agreements.

Panama is also a very critical hub to Central America and will allow an important foothold for our companies to go there, establish their beachheads and compete and create wealth for Canadians and foreign nationals.

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, Ind.): Madam Speaker, my question for the hon. member is this. Is she aware that the United States has resisted, based on advice in a 2009 report from its state department, signing any free trade agreements with Panama because of the serious problems in money laundering, banking, civil rights abuses, et cetera? If she is aware of that, why would Canada go where the U.S. fears to tread?

Ms. Eve Adams: Madam Speaker, I want to reassure the House that in fact Canada wants to send a very strong signal to ensure that the rule of law will always prevail. Panama has committed to implementing the OECD's regulations on the exchange of tax information. I would like to reassure the hon. member that we are actively considering this matter.

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Madam Speaker, in my riding of Simcoe—Grey many of the local businesses are very pleased with new free trade agreement. What type of impact is that having on the local businesses in my colleague's area.

Government Orders

Ms. Eve Adams: Madam Speaker, whether it is folks involved in the manufacturing of electronics, or auto parts or in the services industry, many of my neighbours and residents are chomping at the bit to compete on the world stage. They have great products and expertise and they do awfully well when they compete on the world stage. It means additional wealth for my neighbours.

• (1200)

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to talk about the Canada-Panama free trade agreement.

I think all hon. members will agree that this agreement opens up a wide range of exciting new commercial opportunities for Canadian businesses as well as investors.

In these difficult economic times, Canadians depend on governments to work together to pursue new opportunities in markets around the world. Opening new markets and promoting trade is a key part of this government's plan to create new jobs and improve the well-being of Canadians over the long term.

This government is committed to broadening Canada's trade relationships with regional partners like Panama. We will continue to fight to open markets for Canadian businesses to ensure they are well placed to compete in these difficult economic times.

The Canada-Panama free trade agreement is about more than just trade and investment. This government is committed to protecting the environment. Indeed, the government believes that trade liberalization and environmental protection can be mutually supportive goals. That is why, as part of the comprehensive free trade agreement, Canada and Panama are committed to strive for good environmental governance in order to protect the environment, while reaping the benefits of increased economic activity flowing from liberalized trade.

In addition, when Canada and Panama signed this free trade agreement, we also signed a parallel environmental agreement. The parallel environmental agreement commits both countries to pursue high levels of environmental protection and to continue to develop and improve their environmental laws and policies.

Recognizing the importance of environmental conservation and protection, as well as the promotion of sustainable development, the environmental agreement will require Canada and Panama to enforce their domestic environmental laws effectively and to ensure that they do not relax or weaken those laws to encourage trade or investment.

The agreement also includes important commitments to encourage voluntary best practices of corporate social responsibility by enterprises and to ensure that appropriate environmental assessment procedures are maintained in each country. In addition, the agreement reaffirms both countries' commitment under the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity to strengthen the protection of biological diversity and respect, preserve and maintain traditional knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities.

Furthermore, the agreement contains commitments to promote public participation and transparency. It includes the mechanism for

residents of Canada and Panama to ask questions of either party about the obligations or co-operation under the agreement.

In addition to these commitments and obligations I have mentioned, the agreement also establishes a framework between Canada and Panama for undertaking co-operative activities. Most specifically, Canada and Panama have agreed to work together to develop a co-operative work program to support the environmental objectives and obligations of the agreement, address environmental issues of mutual concern and enhance overall environmental management capacity.

Themes for co-operation would include topics ranging from conservation of biodiversity and migratory species to parks and protected areas management to cleaner production technologies and best practices for sustainable development.

In order to oversee the implementation of the agreement, it provides for a committee on the environment to be established. This committee would be made up of government representatives from Canada and Panama.

Finally, the agreement contains mechanisms to manage differences that may arise under the agreement. We recognize that in some cases non-compliance with the environmental agreement may be more a question of limited environmental capacity than a lack of commitment to the obligations. Therefore, our approach focuses on collaboration in order to seek constructive solutions and build an environmental management capacity rather than impose additional burdens.

Beyond the environmental agreement itself, the Canada-Panama free trade agreement includes a principles-based environmental chapter as well as environmental-related provisions in other parts of the FTA, highlighting the importance of environmental protection and conservation and the promotion of sustainable development.

For example, in the exceptions chapter of the agreement, Canada negotiated important environmental-related provisions stipulating that Canada and Panama could take environmental measures that were necessary to protect human, animal or plant life or health, provided that they were not applied in a discriminatory manner or represented a disguised restriction on international trade or investment.

• (1205)

In addition, Canada negotiated provisions that allow certain multilateral environmental agreements with trade-related provisions to prevail over the free trade agreement in the event of an inconsistency. As we can see, the parallel environmental agreement and the environmental-related provisions in the Canada-Panama free trade agreement are an important part of this initiative that would ensure increased trade does not come at the expense of the environment.

Through these agreements, Canada and Panama have demonstrated our commitment to protecting the environment. The agreement is yet another clear example of the government's approach to mutually supporting trade liberalization and environmental protection.

Government Orders

As the government continues to open doors for Canadian businesses abroad, we want to ensure that our presence is positive and that our activities are sustainable. We believe that free trade can play a positive role around the world. The environmental agreement with Panama is an example of just this. The Canada-Panama free trade agreement, complemented by its parallel environmental agreement, would create new commercial opportunities for Canadian businesses while ensuring the protection of our planet for future generations.

For these reasons, I ask all members of the House to support the Canada-Panama free trade agreement.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is interesting that the bulk of the member's speech focused on the environment. The agreement says that neither party will do any damage to their domestic environmental laws. Could the member comment on what she feels Bill C-38 would mean in terms of Canada's environmental laws in the context of this free trade agreement? Does she see that many of us feel that Bill C-38 actually reduces Canada's environmental protection and what does she think it means in this context?

Ms. Kellie Leitch: Mr. Speaker, quite simply, Bill C-38 enhances environmental protection and creates an opportunity for sustainable environmental development.

I would just like to stay focused on what we are contemplating today. From the standpoint of provisions with respect to the environment and the Canada-Panama free trade agreement, as I mentioned in my speech, the agreement on the environment commits both countries to pursue a very high level of environmental protection, to improve and enforce environmental laws effectively and maintain appropriate environmental assessments. We are making sure that we have sustainable development while still having protected environmental programs in place, whether through this trade agreement or others that we will do in the future.

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we worked on this issue with Panama in previous Parliaments, as was mentioned by others. Why is it important for Canada to be moving forward with free trade agreements around the world, including this one with Panama? What will that do for the Canadian economy, and why is it important at this time, based on the world economic situation?

Ms. Kellie Leitch: Mr. Speaker, the member for Burlington has done such great work in the House.

The bilateral agreements between Canada and Panama have totalled, just in 2011 alone, over \$235 million. The member asked what the benefits are. My riding of Simcoe—Grey is here in the province of Ontario and the benefits are substantive, whether that be the elimination of tariffs on key exports in this province, focused mainly on construction machinery, electronics, chemicals, or pharmaceuticals like Baxter, in Alliston, or making sure that they have the opportunity to expand their markets, thereby expanding what they are exporting, and create jobs. That is what this is all about. It is about creating jobs in the long run for Canadians so they can have a better quality of life.

• (1210)

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I just want to drill down a bit more on this agreement. Last night on CBC

we saw a documentary on mining in Panama and the effects that it is having on the population and the environment, killing fish and lakes. Could the member tell me exactly where the binding framework is for Panama and Canada when it comes to the environment under this agreement?

We can have a side agreement, but if we do not have a binding framework agreement where citizens can come forward and raise concerns, like we do in NAFTA, it is only worth the paper it is written on, which is not a lot.

Can the member point out what section of this agreement would allow for a binding framework agreement when it comes to the environment?

Ms. Kellie Leitch: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned in my speech, there is a separate agreement on the environment that would commit both countries to pursue a high level of environmental protection. The agreement on the environment includes provisions for encouraging the use of best practices in corporate social responsibility, and a commitment to promote public awareness so that members of the public may step forward and express their concerns with respect to environmental laws.

The agreement reaffirms the country's international commitments under the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity to promote conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity, as well as to respect, preserve and maintain the traditional knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous peoples.

We are moving forward substantially on this. As I mentioned before, we want to be focused on sustainable development while we are still focused on environmental protection. That is exactly what this free trade agreement is doing.

Mr. Brad Trost (Saskatoon—Humboldt, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am no longer a member of international trade committee, but I enjoyed my time there immensely. Over a year ago, prior to the previous election, we were working on this same agreement then. Checking with one of the people in the lobby, we worked out that there were over 50 hours of debate on this minor treaty alone. To those who are wondering about whether the House sufficiently debates issues, the answer most clearly is yes. I do not blame the people of Panama or the government for being a bit frustrated with Canada that we have yet to implement this treaty.

I am pleased to rise today to talk about Bill C-24 and the Canada-Panama free trade agreement. This agreement would provide benefits to Canadians in numerous sectors, and hopefully I will have time to get through most of them. In particular, I wish to speak about the services sector.

As many hon. members I am sure are aware, the Panamanian economy is built on the service sector. Panama is not known as a manufacturing hub. It is perhaps best known for its canal and for the strategic position it provides to the world in the transportation of goods.

Government Orders

Panama offers opportunities for Canadian service providers in a broad range of commercial services, financial services and temporary entry for business persons. This free trade agreement would expand opportunities in these key areas and others.

In 2009, which according to my notes is the latest possible data, Canadian commercial services exports to Panama amounted to \$48 million. During the negotiations with Panama, our government's approach was to develop substantive provisions to govern cross-border trade in services as well as to provide a level of market access similar to that afforded under NAFTA. Canada sought similar treatment as afforded to the U.S. under its free trade agreement with Panama. This is important because we are going to be competing with American businesses as we try to sell to Panama.

When it comes to free trade, a lot of the benefits are derived from buying and importing from countries so that we acquire lower-cost goods, but we are also interested in selling to Panama and obtaining the same treatment so that we are on level ground with the United States, one of our major competitors. This is yet another example of how our government is committed to achieving a level playing field for Canadian businesses around the world.

Free trade is a cornerstone of our economic success as a nation. Our ambitious pro-trade plan is helping to open doors for our businesses around the world, including in Panama.

The free trade agreement contains strong provisions to provide access on a competitive basis. The agreement provides market access beyond Panama's obligations under the WTO and GATT, particularly in areas of Canadian expertise and export interests, which include mining and energy-related services, professional services, which involve engineering and architectural services, environmental services, distribution and information technology.

The services and services-related provisions of the agreement would benefit Canadian exporters, particularly small to medium-sized enterprises, through the implementation of principles and conditions of regulatory stability as well as fair and equitable treatment. Regulatory stability is important not just as has been demonstrated in our current budget, but in our agreements around the world.

Canadian services exporters would also benefit from provisions designed to increase transparency of regulations, including increased transparency on access for temporary entry for a broad range of service providers.

The agreement also provides a framework for the negotiation of mutual recognition agreements respecting professional licensing and qualification requirements and procedures.

Consistent with past practice, Canada has taken reservations in this free trade agreement to maintain full policy flexibility in areas of domestic sensitivity, including social services, health and public education. There is no concern or fear-mongering necessary in those areas.

Another area of service that is of particular interest in dealing with Panama is financial services. In this area the agreement establishes NAFTA equivalent access for all financial services in respect of right

of establishment, full national and most favoured nation treatment, certain cross-border commitments and various other carve-outs.

• (1215)

In terms of provincial government measures, the openness of the provincial financial sector framework was bound at existing levels. As members probably know, Canadian firms are among the top financial providers in the world, and we are proud of their success.

This free trade agreement would enable them to succeed in the dynamic and growing Panamanian market. In terms of sector-specific market access commitments, the levels of access Panama offered to Canada achieved parity with what was offered to the U.S. through the trade promotion agreement.

The portfolio management commitment, however, would only take effect at the time the U.S. trade promotion agreement comes into force. Importantly, Canada has achieved the same treatment as the U.S. in respect of ownership of insurance brokerages, pension fund management and securities dealers' requirements.

Canadian financial institutions expressed significant interest in expanding relations with Panama through a free trade agreement. If members have ever been to Latin America, they will have seen that Scotiabank very much plants the Canadian flag all over the continent of South America and Latin America. Scotiabank, for example, currently operates 12 branches in Panama City that offer a wide variety of banking services. These include corporate and commercial lending facilities, project and trade financing, cash management services and personal retail banking services.

These institutions supported a free trade agreement to better position Canadian business vis-à-vis competitors in this market, particularly those that already benefit from preferential trading agreements with Panama, and to institutionalize investments and dispute settlement protection for existing investments.

I will wrap up with just a few brief words about the temporary entry for business purposes, again, something that helps to expand the delivery of services to Panama and increases our service sector in Canada with its export.

The service provisions of this trade agreement address the important question of temporary entry for business people. The temporary entry chapter takes important steps to address barriers that business persons might face at the border, such as limits on the categories or numbers of workers who can enter the country to work or provide services.

Government Orders

Temporary entry provisions are important because they facilitate entry for covered business persons by eliminating the need to obtain a work permit for business visitors and by eliminating the need to obtain a labour market test and/or economic test for other categories. They also would exempt certain occupations from numerical restrictions, such as domestic/foreign proportionality requirements and quotas with respect to the hiring of foreign nationals at a single enterprise.

This free trade agreement would ensure the secure, predictable and equitable treatment of service providers from both Panama and Canada. It would give Canadian companies enhanced access to the Panamanian market, which offers numerous opportunities including the ongoing multi-billion dollar expansion of the Panama Canal. This is a free trade agreement that would benefit service providers and all Canadians.

Let me also add that one of the things we must always recognize with all free trade agreements is that all parties can benefit. Trade is not a zero-sum game; it is something that expands the possibilities for both consumers and exporters on both sides of the equation. This has been recognized by economists for hundreds of years. In fact there are many people who will look at trade as one of the best ways to alleviate poverty in countries that have not achieved the economic success of Canada, including in areas of income inequality, an area about which I am sure opposition members will be most interested in asking questions.

I encourage all hon. members to vote for this agreement, an agreement that would bring Canada and Panama closer together and increase the wealth of all Canadians.

•(1220)

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I mentioned earlier that there was quite an interesting documentary on CBC last night, *The New Conquistadors*. It was focused on Panama, specifically mining in Panama. It talked about the toxic tailings ponds that are killing fish in lakes and water and the fact that indigenous people are being pushed off the land. Canadian mining companies are the ones that are involved here. We have indigenous people protesting in front of Canadian embassies. As a result, sadly, of the protest two people have been killed recently.

I say that because one of the issues around this trade deal is: Where is the binding framework agreement when it comes to environmental standards? I asked the member's colleague earlier if he could point out where it is in this agreement. He basically said that it was a side agreement and would promote the ideas of sustainability, et cetera, but there is no binding framework agreement that is actually going to be solid, like we have in NAFTA.

If I am missing something here, maybe the member could enlighten me. If not, why do we not have a solid binding framework agreement that is going to be something we could actually show people, to demonstrate we are being responsible when it comes to the environment?

Mr. Brad Trost: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question, but there is a presupposition there that I do not necessarily buy into, which is that the democratic government of the country of Panama cannot protect its own citizens.

I did not see the documentary last night, but I am aware of documentaries that have said similar things about Canadian mining projects in Canada. Possibly sometimes those are true. Does that mean Canada has had poor environmental practices? Does that mean that the Panamanian democratically elected representatives cannot implement their own environmental laws?

We should not stereotype countries that are less economically developed than Canada that they do not have their own democratic institutions to defend and decide their own responses to environmental, labour and other issues. That there are protesters and discussion about it means there is a good democratic and robust discussion in Panama that the Panamanian people will resolve.

It is positive that we have an environmental agreement, but do we absolutely need a binding agreement with them? Not necessarily.

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question relates to concerns expressed in this and previous Parliaments with respect to Panama being a locale for money laundering and a tax haven.

My concern specifically relates to the protracted negotiations that went over some eight years before the United States was finally able to sign a tax information exchange agreement with Panama. Even within that tax information exchange agreement, the level of disclosure was not ideal. It was certainly less than ideal. In other words, the Panamanians were quite reluctant to provide the level of disclosure the Americans wanted. What concerns me is that after all that, Canada does not yet have a tax information exchange agreement with Panama, and here we are passing legislation with respect to free trade.

Does my colleague opposite share my concern with respect to a tax information exchange and entering into a closer business relationship with a country where these concerns with respect to money laundering and a tax haven have been expressed?

•(1225)

Mr. Brad Trost: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question and I am glad to note that he did not make the mistake that some other members have made in this House when they referred to old data that Panama was on the OECD's watch list. In fact, Panama has made enough agreements with enough countries that it has been pulled off the black list or grey list, and now that situation has changed.

With respect to dealing with the United States, I would remind the hon. member, and I am not familiar with all the details, that Canada right now is having a little problem with the overreaching elements of the American Internal Revenue Service with its demand for financial institution on Canadians and Canadian institutions that have dealings with Americans or are American born. We all have constituents who were born slightly south of the line who are now being hassled or have the fear of being hassled. Therefore, I would not necessarily share that concern, because the United States can be extraordinarily aggressive in reaching out to the world.

Government Orders

The final point I would make to the hon. member is the fact that Canadian financial institutions, which are deeply tied into Canada on an economic basis, are going to be expanding there, and I mentioned Scotiabank in my speech. I think they would provide some reassurance that the standard business practices in Panama going forward would be increasingly aligned with countries like Canada. Scotiabank has a vested interest there to make sure their reputation is spotless in actions, words and deeds.

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak on Bill C-24. The Liberal Party has long been in support of opening new markets on the basis of fair trade. We will be supporting this particular legislation. We do have some concerns, given the obvious bipartisan support, that this is yet another instance where time allocation has been imposed, but nonetheless, the Liberal Party stands in support of the content of the legislation.

One of the key concerns with respect to our trading relationship with Panama, and this has been evident with respect to the government's free trade agenda, is about the domestic practices within some of the countries where we are seeking to have new trade arrangements. An additional point to be kept in mind, and one the government would do well to carefully consider, was raised by Jim Stanford of the Canadian Auto Workers, who appeared recently at the international trade committee.

Part of his presentation outlined the following, with respect to the lack of apparent benefits derived from free trade agreements. Mr. Stanford, before the committee, reviewed the five longest-standing trade agreements. He said:

...with the United States, Mexico, Israel, Chile and Costa Rica. Canada's exports to them grew more slowly than our exports to non-free-trade partners, while our imports surged much faster than with the rest of the world.

Mr. Stanford went on to say:

If the policy goal (sensibly) is to boost exports and strengthen the trade balance, then signing free-trade deals is exactly the wrong thing to do.

Looking back on some of the previous free trade agreements, with Colombia there were outstanding issues with respect to labour and human rights, and the same concern applied in Jordan. With respect to Panama, one of the outstanding concerns, as I raised in my question just a few moments ago, is the issue of tax havens and issues related to money laundering.

Just to put this in context, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, in response to issues on the Canada-Jordan free trade agreement and violations of human and labour rights and Canada's response, told the House

...what...members fail to realize is the entire issue of extraterritoriality. There are certain things we can do when negotiating with another country and certain things we cannot do because they are beyond our sphere of influence.

The question that must be raised, of course, is: What mechanisms within any agreement should be in place with countries where issues of concern are found to exist and persist?

For example, with respect to the Panamanian situation, when federal government officials were testifying before the international trade committee last fall, they could not address adequately the matters of money laundering and the tax haven issues related to Panama.

Again, as I indicated earlier in my question to the hon. member for Saskatoon—Humboldt, in December 2010, Panama signed a tax information exchange agreement with the United States. In testimony before the United States' House ways and means subcommittee back in March of last year, Public Citizen's Global Trade Watch research director raised concerns with respect to the money laundering issue in the wake of the agreement signed between the U.S. and Panama. He said:

Panama promised for eight years to sign a Tax Information Exchange Agreement (TIEA). Yet when it finally signed a TIEA with the Obama administration in November of 2010, the agreement did not require Panama to automatically exchange information with U.S. authorities about tax dodgers, money launderers and drug traffickers.

In the previous Parliament, concerns were raised with respect to Panama as a tax haven in which instances of both tax evasion and money laundering were found. Concerns were raised as to whether a free trade agreement should be proceeded with, without a clear tax information exchange between Canada and Panama in place.

• (1230)

There is as yet no tax treaty or tax information exchange agreement between Panama and Canada.

The history, as we understand it, is this: Panama asked that we enter into a double taxation treaty, which is more comprehensive than a tax information exchange agreement; Canada refused and asked for a more limited, less all-encompassing agreement; Panama, which at the time had only entered into double taxation treaties, insisted on a double taxation treaty; Canada has not yet responded to this second request.

All double taxation treaties include information exchange obligations between signatory countries. That is because of the model convention of the OECD. As of November 2010, Canada was party to double taxation agreements with 87 countries, with eight more signed but not yet in effect. As of November 2010, Canada had signed nine tax information exchange agreements, the less robust agreements, and they were yet to come into effect.

In testimony this past fall before the international trade committee, reference was made to the correspondence between Canada and Panama, in which the latter was asked whether Panama had responded to the concerns expressed by Canada on the tax haven issue. According to Department of Foreign Affairs officials, no such response had been received.

This past December, during debate on Bill C-24, the parliamentary secretary went to considerable lengths to express his confidence in the commitment by Panama to improve its exchange of tax information and went to great lengths to reference the OECD statement acknowledging the progress of Panama in that regard. However, the issue of tax havens and money laundering is and should be of concern to the government.

It is unfortunate that the parliamentary secretary apparently did not read the statement issued last July by the OECD, which states that the OECD's Global Forum:

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...must still evaluate whether Panama's domestic laws will allow for effective availability, access to and exchange of information.... The government has introduced domestic changes so that the agreements can be effective. The Global Forum will follow up to make sure they work as intended. It is important that Panama continues to work to fully implement the standards.

Article 6 of the agreement between the United States and Panama on the issue of tax co-operation and information, entitled "Possibility of declining a request", states that the "The competent authority of the requested Party may decline to assist".

To conclude, the Liberal Party will be supporting this agreement. We feel, in the circumstances, that the discussions and negotiations between the two countries with respect to the exchange of tax information should be at a more advanced stage before we as parliamentarians consider this legislation and we raise that as a concern, but it will not be a significant enough concern to prevent us from supporting the agreement.

We would encourage the government to proceed as rapidly as possible to ensure that the issues with respect to tax havens and money laundering with our trade partners in Panama are properly and adequately addressed.

• (1235)

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I heard the member say that he will be supporting this agreement. Obviously there has been great consideration given as to how important this agreement is to Canada. I would like my colleague to explain to the House why he feels it is good to support this agreement. I am really glad to hear that he is going to. Perhaps he could give the rest of us some insight as to why he feels this measure is worthy of being supported.

Mr. Sean Casey: Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Party is and always has been supportive of free trade and of anything that serves to break down barriers between countries, as long as concerns with respect to environmental matters, taxation and human rights are addressed.

It is important to break down barriers to encourage business between countries. It is a help to our exporters and importers to remove tariff barriers or other potential impediments to trade. It is all about providing greater opportunity to Canadian exporters and importers, as is the nature of any free trade agreement. The key is balance, and that is what I attempted to address in my remarks.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in the member's opening comments he mentioned there was time allocation on this bill. Once again we have a bill with some important repercussions, yet debate is going to be finished in a mere few hours on this particular section of the legislation.

Could the member comment specifically on the time allocation? Members opposite have said this bill has been back a number of times. However, clearly there are still some gaps in it, and the member identified some of that. I wonder what he feels about continuing to shut down the process so that parliamentarians do not have the opportunity to fully engage in debate, call appropriate witnesses and so on.

Mr. Sean Casey: Mr. Speaker, that is an excellent question. It almost seems as though it is a reflex in this Parliament to introduce legislation and then limit debate. It somehow has become automatic, and that is most unfortunate.

In the course of my remarks I indicated my concern over the lack of any solid agreement with respect to the exchange of tax information. That aspect could and should be addressed before this bill goes forward. Tactics such as time allocation prevent that from happening. It is unfortunate, but it seems to be ingrained in the government and in this Parliament.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jonathan Tremblay (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member from the Liberal Party talked about the problems that free trade with some countries might pose.

I would like to know if he agrees with us. The Conservatives are giving us the impression that they are putting the blinders on and closing their eyes as soon as we talk about free trade. That way, they cannot see the possibility of tax evasion and violations of human and workers' rights.

Does the hon. member agree with us that we have to make sure not to sign free trade agreements at any cost, and that we have to look at what is happening in foreign countries?

• (1240)

Mr. Sean Casey: Mr. Speaker, I do not fully agree with the hon. member.

It is very important to protect human rights and workers' rights, but it is also important to have a good trade environment. Both are important. We have to take both these interests into consideration.

[*English*]

This is all about balance. All too often my colleague's party, the NDP, errs on the side opposite commerce, and it would be very bad for the country if it were the will of Parliament to constantly err away from the side of economics. There does have to be balance, and I do appreciate that.

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill Gordon (Miramichi, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a great pleasure to rise in the House to talk about the Canada-Panama free trade agreement.

The House has spent considerable time debating the key elements of this trade agreement. We are aware that Panama is already a significant trade partner for Canada, with two-way trade totalling over \$235 million in 2011. Panama is an established market for Canadian exports and holds significant potential for Canadian businesses.

We have also heard about the tremendous opportunities that exist in Panama with respect to government procurement. In addition to the ongoing USD \$5.3 billion Panama Canal expansion project, the Government of Panama has numerous infrastructure projects either under consideration or already in progress to build or improve ports, roads, hospitals, social housing projects, bridges and airports. These projects are part of the Panamanian government's USD \$13.6 billion strategic investment plan for 2010-2014. A country like Canada, with so much expertise, can take advantage of these significant opportunities in Panama.

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Panama is also a strategic destination for Canadian investment, with the stock of Canadian investment in Panama reaching over \$121 million in 2010.

However, looking beyond this investment, government procurement and market access for goods, this agreement is a comprehensive free trade agreement with obligations that extend well beyond these subjects to include other areas of importance to Canadian businesses.

The free trade agreement provides comprehensive obligations in areas such as financial services, temporary entry of business persons, electronic commerce and telecommunications, and competition, monopolies and state enterprises.

Canadian banking is consistently recognized as among the best in the world. In fact, the World Economic Forum has ranked Canada's banking system as the soundest in the world for four years in a row. This is an area where Canada is truly excelling.

The Canadian financial services sector is a leader in providing high-quality and reliable financial services. Across the Americas, Canadian banks are helping foster economic growth through access to credit and other financial services. In Panama specifically, Canadian financial institutions such as Scotiabank have an active presence and offer a wide variety of banking services. This agreement will help those Canadian financial institutions take advantage of opportunities in Panama.

On financial services, this agreement provides market access parity with what Panama offered to the U.S. through the trade promotion agreement and contains a robust prudential carve-out. This agreement includes comprehensive obligations for the financial services sector, including banking, insurance and securities.

These market access commitments are complemented by key obligations that ensure non-discrimination, provide a right of establishment for financial institutions, and promote regulatory transparency in the financial sector. These are key elements that the Canadian financial services sector is seeking in order to ensure that it is able to compete in an increasingly competitive global market. This government is responding to this demand.

Another important area included in this trade agreement to ensure that businesses are able to fully maximize the opportunities in Panama is temporary entry for business persons. This is an important issue for Canadian businesses to ensure that their employees are able to work in Panama and is a natural complement to market access for goods, services and investment.

• (1245)

In recognition of a significant number of Canadian companies operating in the region, the agreement removes unnecessary barriers impairing the ability of companies to bring in the skilled workers they need. These would include impediments such as the requirement for labour certification, tests, quotas, proportionality requirements or any other prior approval procedure.

The agreement extends to an extensive list of professions, including various technicians and provisions for spousal employment.

The strength of this free trade agreement does not stop there. It also extends into the areas of electronic commerce and telecommunication. Electronic commerce is an important addition to previous free trade agreements in light of the importance of ensuring that no digital economy issues, such as the protection of personal information, consumer protection and paperless trade, are overlooked. These are issues that are increasingly important for businesses in the 21st century and Canada and Panama have recognized this fact.

In the free trade agreement with Canada, Panama has agreed to a permanent moratorium on customs duties for products delivered electronically. This includes items such as electronic software, music purchased online and digital books. This moratorium is important, not only for businesses but for consumers as well.

In addition to electronic commerce, telecommunications provisions were also included to support the competitive development of the telecommunications sector. Through this free trade agreement, Canadian telecommunication service providers will be able to better compete with their American counterparts in the Panamanian market.

Clearly there are many benefits to this free trade agreement with Panama that go beyond trade in goods and investment.

The final area that I will touch on is the obligation in the free trade agreement related to competition, monopolies and state enterprises. This agreement meets Canada's objective of ensuring that anti-competitive business practices and the actions of monopolies or state enterprises do not undermine the benefits of trade and investment.

Canada and Panama will co-operate on issues relating to competition policy through their respective authorities. The obligations ensure that Canadian companies doing business in Panama are treated fairly. There are many other areas of agreement that will offer real commercial benefits to Canadian companies.

Overall, this is a high quality and comprehensive trade agreement. It will allow Canadian businesses to compete and excel in the Panamanian market. This is a market where many key exporters are seeing enormous potential.

According to a recent report published by the Global Centre for Aviation, Panama has the fastest growing economy in all of Latin America and is expected to have the fastest growing economy in Latin America for the next five years. Panama's real gross domestic product growth for 2011 is estimated at 10.6%. That is a faster growth than many other rapidly emerging economies and clearly illustrates that the commercial potential in Panama is very significant.

It is important that Canadian firms establish an early presence in this emerging market and build solid relationships that will provide them with a competitive edge.

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Panama holds a unique and influential position in the global trading system, thanks to the Panama Canal. Panama represents an entry point to the broader region, thereby enabling access to neighbouring markets. This growth, driven by the expansion of the Panama Canal and other major infrastructure projects, represents tremendous opportunities for Canadian businesses. This country's sound macroeconomic policy and improved security have resulted in favourable economic conditions and stronger demand for imported products. This represents new opportunities for Canadian exporters.

This free trade agreement has the support of key exporters and investors across Canada and its passage through this House will ensure that Canadian businesses are able to take advantage of opportunities in this important market.

• (1250)

[Translation]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I commend the hon. member on her speech.

We know that a free trade agreement between Panama and Canada was signed on May 14, 2010. In that agreement, the Minister of Labour and the Minister of International Trade—the same two we have today—stressed that Canada and Panama would respect the fundamental labour rules and standards set out by the International Labour Organization.

Could the hon. member tell us if compliance with those standards will be required in the new agreement?

[English]

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill Gordon: Mr. Speaker, I want to assure the member opposite that our government will only be signing agreements that are in the best interests of Canadians. I am quite certain that she will find her question falls into that rank.

Global trade is vital to our economic prosperity. A country like Canada, with so much expertise, can now take advantage of these significant opportunities in Panama. This will help ensure Canada's growth, prosperity and strength.

I ask members to share in our vision and support this agreement.

[Translation]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague opposite for her speech.

I would like to ask about the lack of an agreement on exchanging tax information in this free trade accord. Usually, the answer we get is that Panama has agreed to sign a double taxation convention with Canada. But that type of convention only deals with legitimate income. However, we know that a lot of income in Panama is obtained illegally. Exchanging information through a tax information exchange agreement makes it possible to track all types of income, including illegal ones.

Why did Canada not want to put more pressure on Panama so that we would have an agreement of that kind, given that the United States signed such an agreement with Panama in 2010?

[English]

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill Gordon: Mr. Speaker, I guarantee and assure the member that our government will be looking for factors and

concerns like this and will only sign the agreement once it is sure the best interests of all Canadians have been taken care of.

This free trade agreement has the support of key exporters and investors across our country. Its passage through the House will ensure that Canadian businesses are able to take advantage of many opportunities in this important market. This will ensure Canada's growth, strength and prosperity. It is part of our global trade and part of our economic prosperity. Canadians elected us to do what is best for them.

• (1255)

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the member would be so kind as to expand on the importance of free trade agreements and the importance of growing Canada's economy, along with world economies, with free trade agreements. Our government has put a lot of new free trade agreements together which has helped to keep our economy in good stead.

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill Gordon: Mr. Speaker, it is well-known that Canada works to produce a trade industry across our country. This agreement will not only help one province but all the provinces will benefit from it.

It is important that Canadian firms establish an early presence in this emerging market and build a solid relationship that will provide them with a competitive edge.

Trade has always been a powerful engine for Canada's economy and so it is with this Panama trade agreement as well.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to Bill C-24, an act to implement the Canada-Panama free trade agreement. It will be of no surprise to those in this House that I will be speaking against this agreement because of my strong concerns about the impact of free trade agreements that lack adequate environmental, labour and human rights safeguards.

While this package does include side agreements on labour co-operation and environment, both of these are extremely weak. The Conservatives and the Liberals joined together to defeat amendments proposed by the member for Burnaby—New Westminster which would have strengthened those agreements by providing both dispute resolution mechanisms and enforcement mechanisms. Without those safeguards, I cannot support this free trade agreement.

In debate today, some members on the other side of the House have asked the New Democrats, as the official opposition, why, if we supported the free trade agreement with Jordan, we were not supporting the agreement with Panama. Part of that answer lies in the differences in the agreements that I just mentioned. The side agreements in the Jordan free trade agreement were far stronger, had enforcement mechanisms and had dispute resolution mechanisms included in them. There is a difference in the agreements themselves.

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The other part of that is the feeling I have that we ought to choose our partners very carefully when entering into closer economic associations. There are large differences between Jordan and Panama. For instance, Jordan is not a tax haven while Panama continues to refuse to implement a tax information exchange agreement with Canada. That lack of transparency means that Panama remains a major centre for money laundering, especially from the drug trade.

When I hear members on the other side talk about the provisions in this agreement for closer relations in financial institutions, this raises a big red flag for me about why we would want closer relations with a country that lacks that transparency and is a major transfer point and money laundering point for the drug trade in the Americas.

Again, on the question of why Jordan and not Panama, one only needs to look at the human rights and labour standards of these two countries. Here again, Jordan has made great progress and Panama has not. Jordan has made progress in raising labour standards and enforcing those standards, including several recent raises to the minimum wage and activities to try to enforce basic safety in the workplace conditions.

Panama has made no such progress. In fact, in Panama, the existence of sweat shops and other exploitive labour practices remain a real problem. Labour organizers working on these issues also come under very severe pressure, both from the government authorities and under threats from unidentified forces who we can only imagine are perhaps associated with those other illegal activities in Panama.

Not only do labour organizations face human rights threats in Panama, so do journalists attempting to cover labour and justice issues in Panama. Professional organizations of journalists have reported that over half the working journalists in Panama now face or have faced criminal defamation proceedings brought against them by the governments or businesses. These defamation suits carry penalties of up to one year in prison and very hefty fines.

This places an extreme chill on journalism and the freedom of expression in Panama, a problem that does not exist in Jordan. This has become so extreme that, in 2011, two Spanish nationals who had permanent resident status in Panama, Francisco Gómez Nadal and Maria Pilar Chato Carral were detained while covering a demonstration by the Ngäbe-Buglé indigenous people in Panama City. They were detained for 48 hours before being permanently expelled from Panama. This, again, placed a very severe chill on the activities of all journalists operating in Panama, because Mr. Francisco Gómez Nadal and Ms. Chato Carral were extremely prominent journalists, working both for the daily newspapers in Panama City and also filing stories for newspapers in Spain.

We on this side have been very consistent in calling for trade agreements that have labour standards, human rights standards and sustainability built into those agreements. When we talk about sustainability, we are talking about sustainability that is both economic and social, as well as environmental.

In Panama in the past few years, there have been very severe conflicts over development, in particular between mining companies and hydroelectric projects and local communities, and especially

indigenous peoples in Panama. Indeed, this was the subject of a CBC documentary this week which attracted the attention of international human rights organizations.

According to Amnesty International, one protestor died and more than 40 were wounded during clashes at a blockade of the Pan-American Highway by the Ngäbe Buglé indigenous people who I mentioned earlier. They are asserting their rights to be consulted and to give informed consent before any development project on their lands proceeds in the province of Chiriqui. Similar protests by local community organizations occurred earlier this year over the reopening of the Cerro Cama open-pit gold and copper mine by a Canadian mining company.

● (1300)

These conflicts over development also involve a lack of enforcement in environmental standards. At the Santa Rosa mine, which operated throughout the 1990s and was operated by a subsidiary of the Canadian mining company, Greenstone Resources, the mine finally closed in 1999, leaving three large tailing ponds, which are now very strongly suspected of having contaminated local water supplies. Local protests have broken out again very recently from the local community as this mine is now being reactivated without there ever being any attempt by the government to address these environmental concerns.

When members on the other side say that we are opposed to trade, they get it wrong. What we are opposed to is entering into these agreements which will provide advantages to multinational corporations, some of them Canadian, to impose working conditions that are dangerous, to develop projects that have severe environmental consequences and to undertake development in a country where freedom of expression comes under very severe threat.

Therefore, when we talk about trade on this side, we prefer to see multilateral agreements that have some basic principles inserted within them. However, if not, and obviously the government will not pursue the multilateral agreements, then we would like to see the same kinds of principles in these bilateral agreements, the principles I have just talked about: environmental sustainability, social sustainability and economic sustainability.

Of course, in a country like Panama with a large indigenous population and a large poor population, this means working with poor communities and working with indigenous communities for development that would help them build their communities and build their lives in a sustainable manner. We see nothing of the kind going on in Panama at this time.

We also want to see agreements that have very strong benefits to both parties. Therefore, we have called upon the government, before implementing free trade agreements, to have some kind of independent assessment of what the effects of the trade will be. We have not seen anything of this kind coming down the pipe from the government.

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When we talk about competition on the international stage, we on this side support free trade based on efficiency and innovation. If a company can be more efficient than another company, and Canadian companies are often very good at this, then it should have access to markets and it should succeed. If a company is more innovative than other companies, it comes up with new ideas that would help advance the quality of products or develop new products that would fill a niche in the market, then it ought to be able to succeed in that trade.

What we do not want to see is companies that succeed in international trade by offloading their environmental costs on to future generations. What we do not want to see is companies that succeed in international trade on the basis of paying the lowest wages in the most dangerous working conditions. Therefore, if we are to build closer economic relations with new trade partners, we need to ensure it is on the basis of shared values of democracy, human rights and sustainability.

When my colleagues on the other side asked why we supported the trade agreement with Jordan, we said that it was not because it was a perfect agreement, but that it is a good agreement. Jordan shares those same values with us and has shown demonstrable progress in the areas of democracy, human rights and labour standards. When it comes to the Panama agreement, we see exactly the opposite.

Therefore, I would question why we would want to enter into this agreement with a partner that has shown a disrespect for human rights, that has some of the lowest labour standards in Central America and where Canadian companies are involved in projects that often have quite severe environmental consequences.

I would ask the government that when it thinks about new partners, that it go back to those basic values. Yes, we want to see trade, but we want to see trade based on efficiency and innovation. We do not want to see trade on the basis of offloading environmental costs, paying low wages, dangerous working conditions and those which threaten the rights of free expression in order to proceed with those dangerous economic conditions. When we do that, I think we will find many good partners around the world to trade with and that trade will advance the interests of both nations.

Therefore, for the reasons I have outlined, I will be voting against the free trade agreement with Panama and I will be urging all members of the House to do so.

● (1305)

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I fundamentally disagree with the premise of my colleague's discussion.

In our view, we agree that there needs to be a set of values, standards and regulations that all abide by, and that is exactly what free trade agreements do. They allow two countries, two parties, to come together and have an agreement to move the yardstick further in terms of human rights, values and corporate environment in which companies should work.

I find it interesting that the NDP members take credit for supporting one agreement with Jordan, even though they say it is not perfect. Then in the same sentence, they say that they would agree with having multilateral agreements with countries.

I would like the member to name the countries that the NDP would support Canada having multilateral free trade agreements with so it can be on the record. I would like to know what countries they would like us to pursue.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member misses the point when we talk about multilateral. When we talk about multilateral agreements, the point is to involve as many nations as possible to remove artificial barriers to trade. Multilateral by its very nature means that we would attempt to work through organizations like the World Trade Organization to remove those legitimate trade barriers.

It is very interesting when the member says that he does not share the premise of our discussion. However, he points to Panama and says that we have some kind of provision in that agreement to encourage Panama to have higher labour and environmental standards and greater respect for human rights. Those amendments were put forward by the member for Burnaby—New Westminster and the members of the Liberal Party and Conservative Party voted against them. If we had those kinds of guarantees in an agreement, we might be able to support it, but we certainly cannot in this case.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is a consistency problem within the New Democratic Party. On the one hand, its members want desperately to try to show that they are in favour of some form of free trade, but we just do not know exactly what. They are consistent on the fact that they do not like Panama. I have detected that in the comments as expressed by numerous members.

There were NDP members on the Jordan file who said yes to Jordan, while other members had said no to Jordan. They never did request a formal vote so we really do not know where they stand on the Jordan file. I think there is a lot of controversy within their own caucus on that issue. However, it is valid to point out that on Panama we know clearly where the NDP stands.

Does the member believe that there is a united NDP caucus in dealing with freer trade with other countries? As the previous member asked, is he prepared to share with the House other examples, one or two other countries, that NDP members might have a consensus within their caucus to support freer trade?

● (1310)

Mr. Randall Garrison: Mr. Speaker, again, the Liberals as well as the Conservatives miss the point of multilateral agreements. Multilateral agreements tend to invite all parties in to try improve them.

However, if the member is asking me to name one country that I personally think we should look at expanding trade with it would be Brazil. It is a great example of a country that has made huge progress on democracy, labour standards and human rights standards.

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Another interesting question we could ask is this. Why is the government pursuing a free trade agreement with Panama? It was in talks with the government of El Salvador, but when it elected a progressive president, the government abruptly cut off those talks and went on to work other partners like Honduras and Panama, which have a much worse human rights record.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca for talking about sustainable development. We had a bill in the House on corporate social responsibility for Canadian companies working overseas and it was defeated.

Could the member comment on the need to have that kind of corporate social responsibility for Canadian companies that operate in countries like Panama?

Mr. Randall Garrison: Mr. Speaker, the member for Burnaby—New Westminster was doing very good work in trying to introduce a private member's bill to guarantee that Canadian companies would respect the same standards abroad that we would expect them to respect at home. Unfortunately, the examples I gave on Panama today largely involved Canadian companies operating in Panama in conflict with indigenous people and in some projects that had some very severe environmental consequences.

I look forward to a time when we in the House can impose the same standards on Canadian companies abroad that we expect them to meet at home.

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to have this opportunity to talk about the benefits for Canadian investors. My speech today will be about the investment aspects of the Canada-Panama free trade agreement.

Foreign investment is a crucial component of today's modern economy. Foreign investment not only brings with it jobs, but increases the transfer of know-how, efficiencies and economies of scale to a host of economic opportunities. These markers of success, in addition to the people ties fostered, help strengthen Canada's global competitiveness at home and pave the way for new opportunities for Canadian companies overseas. These opportunities help Canadian companies remain globally competitive by ensuring their integration into the world economy.

At the end of 2011, Canadian direct investment abroad reached an all-time high of \$684 billion. The value of the stock of foreign direct investment within Canada is also impressive. By the end of 2011, Canada had attracted more than \$607 billion in foreign direct investment.

I will pause for a moment to remind my colleagues and to emphasize that the actual numbers from the end of 2011 show there is more investment from Canadian companies abroad than direct investment we get from foreign companies. This is important. We often hear in the House, on the street and in our ridings, that Canada is hollowing out, that Canadian companies are being sold and we are losing our control. In actual fact, that is not the case. Canadian companies are more aggressive and progressive in investing in foreign lands than the money that comes into our country.

As the past few years have demonstrated, the Canadian economy has proven to be a safe harbour as the global economy faces severe

challenges. Canada is home to 27 of the *Financial Times* "Global 500" companies. More top global companies have headquarters in Canada than in Germany, India, Brazil, Russia or Italy.

Canada has also outpaced its G7 partners with its economic growth, the fastest it has been in the last 10 years, as a result of having lower corporate taxes, prudent fiscal management and financial regulation, a business climate that rewards innovation and entrepreneurship and an open economy that welcomes foreign direct investment.

Canada must remain diligent to ensure that our economic credentials remain strong at home and that Canadian businesses continue to have access to an increasing number of investment opportunities abroad. This is why it is important for us to leverage our investment relationships that we have around the world and with countries like Panama.

While data is unavailable for the end of 2011, the stock of Canadian direct investment in Panama was estimated by Statistics Canada to have reached \$121 million at the end of 2010. Canadian investment in Panama, primarily found in the financial services and the mining sector, also has strong potential for growth.

There are many Canadian investment success stories around the world and Panama is no different. Scotia Bank has been in Panama since 1973 and has expanded to become the country's fifth largest commercial bank. SNC-Lavalin moved its Central American regional office to Panama in 2006. Inmet Mining Corporation continues to develop its copper mine in Panama, which is now over 13,000 hectares.

Opportunities for Canadian investors in Panama are also poised to grow in the future. We have heard about the tremendous opportunities that exist in Panama with respect to large numbers of infrastructure projects.

In addition to the ongoing \$5.3 billion U.S. Panama Canal expansion project, the government of Panama has numerous projects either under construction or already in progress. These projects include the building or improvement of ports, roads, hospitals, social housing projects, bridges and airports, which are part of the U.S. \$13.6 billion Panamanian government strategic investment plan for 2010 to 2014.

• (1315)

Under this plan, a large number of infrastructure projects would create new opportunities for Canadian businesses. A country like Canada, with so much expertise to take advantage of these significant opportunities in Panama, must act now. The current and future opportunities for Canadian investors show how important it is to enhance our investment relationship with countries like Panama.

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This agreement would do just that by building upon a Canada-Panama Foreign Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement signed in 1998. By enhancing the investment provisions under this agreement, a free trade agreement with Panama would provide investors from both countries with the benefits that come with enhanced investment obligations. These provisions, which would promote the two-way flow of investments between Panama and Canada, would provide a range of obligations that would benefit investors from both countries.

They are designed to protect investment abroad, through legally binding rights and obligations. The investment obligations of this agreement incorporate several key principles. They include: treatment that is non-discriminatory and meets a minimum standard; protection against expropriation without compensation, meaning we cannot take land or property without compensation; and the free transfer of funds without penalty.

In short, Canadian investors would be treated in a non-discriminatory manner. This dynamic would help foster an investment relationship between our two countries and pave the way for an increased flow of investment for the years ahead.

Through this agreement, investors would also have access to transparent, impartial and binding dispute settlement systems.

While this agreement would ensure that investors and their investments are protected, it would not prevent either Canada or Panama from regulating in their public interest, with respect to health, to safety and to the environment.

The investment provisions also include an article on corporate social responsibility. This provision recognizes that Canada expects and encourages Canadian companies operating abroad to observe internationally recognized standards of responsible business conduct. This provision would also help level the playing field for Canadian investors when they invest abroad by encouraging CSR principles among all investors.

Overall, this agreement would send a positive signal to our partners around the world about the openness of Canada to foreign investment. This agreement would enhance investment opportunities abroad for all Canadians.

Foreign investment links Canadian companies to global value chains and to new economic opportunities. This enhances our competitiveness and increases the flow of goods and services between Canada and our trading partners.

To date, Canadian companies have shown a significant interest in investing in the Panamanian economy. However, as time passes, opportunities for Canadian investors are at risk. That is why it is critical that Canadian companies have the ability to strike while the iron is hot. I encourage members not to delay the approval of this agreement.

Our government has been very clear that trade and investment are vital to the economic growth and long-term prosperity of Canadians. That is why our government continues to move forward with an ambitious free trade agreement agenda that focuses on creating partnerships with key nations around the world. To take advantage of

commercial opportunities around the world, we must do everything we can to open doors for Canadian businesses.

That is why I ask all hon. members to show their support for the Canada-Panama free trade agreement.

● (1320)

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I find the member opposite to be a kind, caring and sensible man. However, this agreement and others have side agreements for the environment and human rights. One of the problems with side agreements is that they do not have any teeth. They are not enforceable.

A very simple way to get MPs in this House on board with trade deals is to move those two things, the environment and human rights agreements, into the body of the agreement so that there are some teeth, so that there is an opportunity for people to voice their concerns and to have them heard.

Does my normally very sensible friend across the way not think that is a good idea?

Mr. Mike Wallace: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the kinds words of the member opposite.

It is a bit of a red herring. It is in the agreement. We have side agreements on particular issues. Negotiation on free trade agreements is a two-way street. The member and his colleagues in the NDP believe that it is the Canada way or no way. We do not believe that. We believe this is an opportunity. When we sign these free trade agreements, there are issues that we need to deal with, whether they are with labour or the environment. We have discussions and put it in writing in, as he defines it, as a side agreement. It is progress. It is the way to move forward on creating jobs for Canadians.

The NDP way is to take the ball and go home. Nothing gets accomplished, no jobs for Canadians and no future for Canadian businesses abroad. That is not the way to go.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his very fine speech. But I cannot totally agree with what he said in his remarks.

Once more, I will ask the question I have already asked several of his colleagues today. But this time, I would appreciate a semblance of an answer.

We have signed a double taxation agreement with Panama. That can give us access to all legal and fiscal tools. I do not know why there has been no agreement to exchange tax information between Canada and Panama. That would have given us access to all types of income, whether earned by legal or illegal means.

Why was that not put in place? Canada has signed tax information exchange agreements with several countries and Panama also has signed them with several countries. In the light of what went on in Panama a few years ago, and of what is still going on, why do we not have this tax security measure in this bill?

*Government Orders**[English]*

Mr. Mike Wallace: Mr. Speaker, I know the member has heard the answer before. What we were dealing with on the free trade agreement had to do with tariffs and investment. There is an issue with the tax treatment of companies that are doing business in Panama. We have many tax exchange agreements, as the member said, with other countries. The United States has a tax agreement with Panama, which is relatively new. I can say that we are working on the tax issue. It was not ready in time to be included in this, but it is an issue we know we need to deal with as a government.

Denying Canadian companies an opportunity to do business in Panama and reducing the barriers to trade with Panama is not the right approach, in our view, in terms of moving the yardstick further along to accomplish those goals, including a tax agreement.

• (1325)

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I noted my colleague's comments about not taking Canadian standards to other countries. After the budget implementation bill that was just passed and the environmental standards in it, we have brought different environmental standards to this country, which are really not appropriate.

When the hon. member talks about the need to be magnanimous toward other countries in terms of their ability to move forward on the environment, and social and economic issues surrounding tax issues, he is really missing the boat. What is happening in this country with this budget implementation bill is driving down our standards, whereas we should be putting standards forward for other countries which are more appropriate.

Mr. Mike Wallace: Mr. Speaker, I am sorry that the member opposite misunderstood the statement. The statement was that through free trade agreements, we are promoting Canadian values and standards. If we told countries that they have to be like Canada or we would not speak to them, as the NDP wants us to do, we would talk to no one and Canadian companies would suffer, Canadian jobs would not be created and innovation would not happen.

We are looking for partners to do business with. Part of that process is that we promote our values in terms of the environment, the workplace and human rights. It is through those agreements that we are able to express what Canada stands for in the world. We are number one. I take exception to the member saying that Canada does not have a high level of standards. We are promoting those standards through free trade agreements.

[Translation]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to speak to Bill C-24, which has to do with a Canada-Panama free trade agreement.

It is very important that we take a stand and take the time to read this free trade agreement, because Panama is an extremely important international partner. Panama is the largest economic power in Central America, partly because of the Panama Canal, which sees a large number of goods pass through. Right now, it is being expanded, which will allow for greater flow and traffic.

Maritime traffic is rather important to Panama. Panama also specializes in financial services, commerce and tourism. So it is important for us to examine this agreement and decide what this agreement with Panama will contain. We need to do things the right way.

I have listened to my colleagues' comments today and will get back to them shortly. I think that the government is botching this job and is not taking the time to create a worthwhile agreement. The NDP is in favour of free trade agreements if they are responsible and sustainable. Right now, we have the momentum to show that Canada is a leader. Right now, Panama is an emerging country. Canada, as a proud economic partner and world leader, could show Panama the way in terms of proper environmental norms and a system of rights for workers and unions in Panama, and we could make this free trade agreement into an agreement that supports sustainable and viable long-term development.

This could be the time for Canada to move things forward internationally. Canada could be an excellent partner. Unfortunately, the Conservative government is completely ignoring this extremely interesting opportunity that is right in front of it.

The sad thing about this bill is that there has been a time allocation motion, which means that we will not be able to discuss it in greater detail. However, there are a number of interesting points I would like to make. When I read Bill C-24, I noticed a number of shortcomings. My NDP colleagues tried to make amendments to correct those defects, but unfortunately, all of the proposed amendments were rejected.

In my view, the most significant flaw is probably the fact that there is no tax information exchange agreement in this bill. I will say more about that later. There is also a glaring lack of vision with respect to sustainable development. The agreement lacks meaningful protection for the rights of Panamanian workers. We know what happens when jobs and workers are not protected. When that happens in Canada, factories close their doors and move jobs elsewhere. It is important to ensure that Panamanian workers are protected. Another problem is the fact that this is a bilateral agreement, not a multilateral one.

As for the tax information exchange agreement, it may sound very confusing to some, but actually, it is quite simple. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development gives a very good description of tax information exchange agreements on its website. Basically, any country can refer to that description in order to create its own tax information exchange agreement. All of the information is on the website. It was created in 2002, and since that time, many countries, including Canada and Panama, have used this model to clarify their tax information exchange agreements.

So what is a tax information exchange agreement? The following description is from the OECD document:

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The purpose of this agreement is to promote international co-operation in tax matters through exchange of information...The agreement grew out of the work undertaken by the OECD to address harmful tax practices...The agreement represents the standard of effective exchange of information for the purposes of the OECD's initiative on harmful tax practices.

As I just mentioned, many countries have followed this model to create their tax information exchange agreements. Canada has entered into several such agreements, for instance with the Cayman Islands, the Bahamas and Saint Lucia. In 2010, Panama signed a tax information exchange agreement with the United States, one of its biggest financial partners.

I just asked the hon. member for Burlington a question. I asked him why Bill C-24 does not contain this kind of tax information exchange agreement with Panama based on the same model as the one presented by the United States.

• (1330)

I was told that it was not ready in time. That is not a reason. In fact, it is proof that this bill was completely botched. We need to take the time to do things. This is important; it is a free trade agreement. I was honestly shocked when I heard this. If it was not ready in time, why not take the time to do things the way they should be done before presenting them to the House? Why did they not accept the amendments presented by the opposition to resolve the problems with this bill? I wonder.

It was not ready in time, and I find that very sad. This is clear evidence that we should go back, call a halt to this bill and secure an agreement. It is not as if things are pressing and we absolutely must have a free trade agreement with Panama by tomorrow. And it is not as if they are our most important partner. Panama is not Canada's largest trade partner. Bilateral trade in terms of goods between our two countries was worth only \$149 million in 2008. We are not even talking about 1%. We have the time to do things right. I do not see why we are not, and it saddens me a little to hear this.

I know that Panama was recently removed from the OECD grey list because it has implemented information exchange standards, but we do not even have these information exchanges with Panama. If that were the case, this bill would already be much better. We do not have a tax information exchange agreement, but the Conservatives, on the other side of the House, are trumpeting the double taxation convention that Panama has agreed to sign. They think that will do.

Is it really enough? I do not think so. Double taxation tax treaties—the definition is on the Canada Revenue Agency website—are designed to avoid double taxation for people who would otherwise pay tax on the same income in two countries. That applies to legitimate income only. A tax information exchange agreement helps track down all income, legitimate or otherwise. It is a much sounder and more interesting way to protect ourselves in terms of taxation standards.

Again, I am extremely disappointed not to find this exchange agreement in the bill, especially since we have already signed such agreements and so has Panama. So why not sign one together? It is a mystery. My colleague from Burnaby—New Westminster proposed some extremely interesting amendments, including some on sustainable development and responsible investment. That is what we want to see. That is the direction we should be taking. We are all

responsible. We all live on the same planet and everyone has the right to fairness.

We were also very disappointed that the benefits of sustainable development were not considered. I understand that it is a system of rules, but it has to be applied fairly and it is not included in this bill.

This bill touched on several issues all at once. I will not have time to talk about protection for workers or the environment, which has been clearly bungled in this bill, as it was in Bill C-38. I would like to talk about what we want to see in a Canada-Panama agreement.

We simply want a fair trade policy, one that gives a rightful place to social justice, and fair, sustainable, equitable trade. These are very simple things that should be the basis for a free trade agreement with another country. We should instead be negotiating multilateral agreements. However, if the decision is made to enter into a bilateral agreement such as this one, we have to do more and make a more responsible commitment with this kind of agreement.

We are reaffirming our vision of a fair trade policy that puts the pursuit of social justice, strong public-sector social programs and the elimination of poverty at the heart of an effective trade strategy.

• (1335)

Let us protect the environment, protect workers and, at the same time, ensure that the tax measures included in this type of bill are appropriate.

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, no doubt it is difficult to pretend to be in favour of or open to a policy that one completely opposes.

[English]

The reality is that this NDP member, just like her NDP colleague who spoke before her and other NDP members, plays this game of saying that she believes in multilateral trade agreements. The problem is that when the previous Liberal government was in office, it put forward for negotiation the multilateral agreement on investment, a multilateral approach that brought in all countries, and the NDP was opposed to that. NAFTA is a multilateral approach to trade that brings three countries together for the best interests of the continental economic regime. The NDP is opposed to that.

It is the NDP and its members who are in the streets waving placards and chanting whenever there are meetings of the WTO or NAFTA or the G20 or the G8 in Canada or around the world.

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Now the member and the NDP say in the House, “We are against Panama. We might be in favour of Jordan, but we are not quite so sure; maybe Brazil, but we are not quite so sure.” They cannot name any country in the world they actually want to trade with. Then they put out this red herring and say, “We are in favour of multilateral agreements when it comes to foreign investment and international trade and commerce”, except that every single time that has come forward, they have been against it as well and were in the streets chanting and waving placards like a completely non-serious political party would.

One has to wonder whether the NDP is in favour of bilateral trade agreements or of multilateral trade agreements. Could the hon. member please make up her mind?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his question.

I find it sad because I think that, unfortunately, he did not bother to listen carefully to what I took the time to explain in the 10 minutes that I had. We spoke about multilateral agreements, but it is not just that. This type of bill has plenty of shortcomings.

We are talking about environmental standards, labour standards and fiscal arrangements. I am surprised that the hon. member does not want to sign a tax information exchange agreement with Panama, since the members opposite are trying to make out that they are squeaky clean. There are many things that do not make any sense.

This goes much further than a bilateral or multilateral agreement. We are talking about the very essence of a bill. In this case, there has been a blatant lack of study. Earlier, his colleague, the hon. member for Burlington, said that they were caught off guard and that they did not have time to establish an agreement.

Therefore, I am not in favour of it.

● (1340)

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Party has been fairly clear in terms of expressing concerns regarding labour, environmental conditions and coming up with freer trade agreements, but that does not prevent us from being able to acknowledge the benefits, both to Canada and to other countries with which we would enter into these agreements, and we would always like to see agreements improved upon.

The issue I have with the NDP members is that they do not seem necessarily to be consistent with their thoughts when it comes to international trade. For example, they will not sign any sort of free trade agreement with any country we know with which they might have some concerns with regard to human rights issues, for example.

Let us use the country of China, where there is a great deal of concern regarding human rights issues. Would that mean that the NDP would take some sort of trade sanctions or anything of that nature in order to take a stand on that particular issue, or would they be open to an agreement between Canada and China?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member from the Liberal Party for his question.

What I find interesting in the preamble to his question is that the Liberal Party apparently also agrees that the bill has to be improved in terms of the environment, human rights and even sustainable development.

I would like to remind the hon. member that the member for Burnaby—New Westminster introduced amendments to improve this bill in terms of the environment, sustainable development and human rights. But both the Conservatives and the Liberals voted against those amendments. So he is in no position to lecture us about what should be improved because they did not support our proposals.

[*English*]

Hon. Rob Merrifield (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege and a pleasure for me to stand and speak to this important piece of legislation.

I just came from chairing the international trade committee. It is a pleasure for me to serve in that capacity. When it comes to trade, it is absolutely imperative that I explain to Canadians just how important trade is to Canada.

One out of every five jobs is created because of trade. Sixty-three per cent of our GDP is represented by trade, and we have accomplished that because of trade agreements.

The trade file started with NAFTA. NAFTA has been in existence for almost 17 years. What has happened in that time period? Jobs have gone up by 23%, meaning there are 40 million net new jobs in North America because of NAFTA. Trade has tripled, and has quadrupled with one of our partners.

Opposition members argue against free trade agreements. It really puzzles me that they let the Jordan free trade agreement go through on a voice vote; it was as if their union people were not watching. It is absolutely amazing to me that they could agree with the Jordan free trade agreement and then stand in the House and give some of the arguments that I have heard recently against the Panama free trade agreement. I will talk about that in a few minutes.

I want to give one quick example about NAFTA. We heard arguments that when NAFTA came in, the wine industry in Canada would be absolutely destroyed. It would cease to exist. All those arguments were presented on the floor of the House, and they were argued vigorously.

Can members guess what happened? Canada's wine exports amounted to \$1.8 billion. From all the various countries—Argentina, Australia, France, Italy, Spain—we imported \$800 million in wine, so our exports doubled our imports. What a great success story, and all because of international trade. That is something my hon. colleagues should keep in mind.

What have we been doing as a country? We have signed nine different free trade agreements: Colombia, Honduras, Jordan, Peru, the European Free Trade Association members, and Panama, the one we are dealing with today.

What are we pursuing? We are pursuing an economic free trade agreement with Europe. We just heard testimony less than an hour ago in committee from our chief negotiator, who indicated how well that is going. We expect to have the final draft by the end of the year.

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Why is that important? It is important because it is the most comprehensive free trade agreement between any two nations anywhere in the world. It will supposedly be at end of text by the end of the year. It is exciting to see how well that is going, and I compliment the negotiators on that free trade agreement.

What does that agreement mean to Canada? It means \$1,000 per family per year. That is a fair amount. That is \$12 billion coming into Canada every year because of the economic free trade agreement with Europe.

We are also working aggressively on another free trade agreement, in this case with Japan. The benefits to Canada would be \$9 billion. As well, there is India, Brazil, Thailand.

Just a few minutes ago we heard that we are in the TPP, which, as of yesterday, is a group of 10 countries on the Pacific rim that will work on a comprehensive free trade agreement in that group.

What about China? Last year we imported \$44.5 billion from China. It imported \$13.2 billion from us. To equalize the trade benefit from China and to balance the trade would be a \$30 billion benefit. It could be just an act of goodwill by China.

We are very excited about accelerating trade and about our opportunities with these growing countries that are in need of the products we produce and the resources, industries and intelligence we have here in Canada to offer them.

What are the elements of the Canada-Panama agreement? We trade cross-border services, telecommunications, investment, financial services, government procurement and so on.

It is important to sign this agreement and get on with it. The bill reached third reading in the last Parliament. It is important because the United States, Chile, Taiwan and Singapore already have an agreement with Panama.

What would bilateral trade with Panama mean? In 2011, trade was \$235 million. We imported about \$144 million in products such as metals, gold, fruit, machinery, fish and seafood products. We exported about \$111 million in products such as machinery, meat, aerospace products, vegetables and so. Signing this kind of agreement would provide a great opportunity for our corporations and our country.

• (1345)

It is very important to understand the opportunities that lay themselves before us under this agreement on the procurement side. In Panama it is projected there will be \$28.9 billion U.S. worth of infrastructure projects over the coming years. One of the largest is the Panama Canal, which is a \$5.3 billion expansion and a great opportunity for Canadian corporations with regard to not only that but also ports, roads, bridges and airports, with respect to procurement.

It is important to understand that the tariffs on our agricultural products are rather intense. They go from 13.4% right up to 260% for some of our agricultural products. Imagine what the elimination of those could do with respect to exporting frozen potatoes, pulses, pork, malt barley and other products such as beef, hogs and so on. When it comes to the non-agricultural goods, the tariffs are

anywhere from 6.2% right up to 81% on many of those, such as materials, equipment, industrial and electrical machinery, paper products, vehicles and so on. We can see that the potential for this is great.

The resistance I hear from the opposition members is rather interesting because they have talked about labour problems, human rights problems and environmental concerns. There is a corporate social responsibility that has been agreed to by Canadian corporations when we get into this piece of legislation. It very much encompasses environmental protection, human rights, labour relations, corporate governance, transparency, community relations, peace and security, and anti-corruption measures. Therefore, the opposition members are really blowing smoke when they say that the legislation does not include any of this. It is very important that it is there and that we sign this agreement so that Canadian companies would be able to capitalize on these kinds of opportunities.

The corporate social responsibility part of this agreement is very important. It is something that has not been talked about an awful lot here but is something that is very important. With respect to the side agreements on labour and the environment, I have heard opposition members ask why they are not encompassed within the body of the agreement. It is no different than with Jordan, for which they had no problem with standing in this House. Well, actually they did not stand; they just sat there on a voice vote and let it go unanimously at third reading. It is off to the Senate and will be passed very soon we hope. There is no difference here with respect to that, so I do not know how, in their own thinking, they can support one and not the other.

In testimony at committee we heard the most outrageous circumstances on human rights happening in some of the factories in Jordan. The members of the opposition who are on the committee heard the same testimony. There are two approaches that can be taken when we look at a free trade agreement. We can either say that unless that country comes up to Canadian standards we will disengage or just check out because there is no point, which will send a message that we would not do business with anyone who does not come up to our standards. The other approach is to engage that country as much as possible, improve its standard of living and give Canadian businesses as well as the corporations in those other countries opportunities that would help them along, so that we both win. That is the approach this government is using.

The most hypocritical position I have ever seen in this House on the trade file is the opposition members supporting Jordan but not supporting Panama, Colombia and others. It is really beyond anything I have seen. Clearly, it is something that has to be addressed when we challenge the opposition members to come on side and sign the agreement. If they say they are pro-trade then they should do it. The excuses I have heard are absolutely not excuses but rather blind ideology that hurts Canadian businesses and Canada as a country.

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Canada is a wonderful country. It is the greatest country in the world, according to the IMF, the OECD and *Forbes* magazine. We have created 760,000 net new jobs since the bottom of the recession. We have done that by lowering taxes and giving Canadian corporations the opportunity to actually develop and move their goods and services into international trade opportunities around the world. As a government, we will continue to do that. Why? That is what Canadians expect us to do.

The NDP would like to raise taxes to get out of this recession. We believe we should grow our country. That is the way to win, and we will continue to do that.

• (1350)

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Lapointe (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his comments. One concept came up twice in the hon. member's speech: that simply engaging with those people and those emerging countries will suddenly and magically improve workers' fundamental rights, environmental conditions and so on.

If the hon. member is so convinced that that has to happen, how is it that the agreement includes parallel agreements that bring up environmental concepts that are not in the body of the text? How is it that there is no vigorous mechanism to resolve environmental disputes? If he thinks that this really is part of the main thrust of trading with emerging countries, why is that not clearly indicated in the body of the agreement?

[*English*]

Hon. Rob Merrifield: Mr. Speaker, I addressed that question in my deliberations, but nonetheless I would like to repeat it.

It is absolutely no different from the agreement with Jordan that the opposition sat in this House and agreed with 100%. The most horrendous testimony we have heard in our committee came from the factories in Jordan, of the misuse of human rights, yet the side agreements on human rights and on the environment are the very same.

I am saying to my hon. colleague that it is ridiculous to say that the side agreements on human rights and environment say we are going to go soft on it. We are going to go as hard as we possibly can and make sure we do what we can, in this agreement and other agreements, to be able to respect human rights wherever we can. We understand very well that in Jordan and in Panama there may be problems.

I would say the opportunity to have more intense problems, when it comes to human rights, is in Jordan rather than in Panama.

• (1355)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Party has been fairly clear on the issue in regard to this particular bill. In principle, we support it. We do have concerns regarding the environment, as I alluded to earlier, and labour and so forth. At the end of the day, this is a bill we be supporting.

Having said that, I think Canadians need to be concerned about the growing trade deficit that the Conservative government has

created. The government tends to focus on this particular agreement and the Jordan agreement.

What does this particular member believe the Government of Canada is going to have to do to try to turn things around and bring back the days, with Liberal administrations, when we had a trading surplus? At the end of the day, that is going to create the hundreds and thousands of jobs here in Canada. We have to achieve that surplus.

When does the member believe we are going to be able to address that particular issue?

Hon. Rob Merrifield: Mr. Speaker, that is an interesting comment. Maybe the member is rather new here, but when the Liberals were in power for 13 long years, they signed zero agreements.

We signed nine and are heading to ten free trade agreements. It is very important that we not allow other countries to eat our lunch when it comes to trade. That is exactly what I said: when it comes to Panama, we have the United States, Singapore and other countries ahead of us with free trade agreements. The first one in usually has an opportunity ahead of the others. That is why we are pursuing, aggressively, free trade agreements with Japan and others. There is an advantage to making sure we do that.

It is very interesting, coming from the Liberal Party that agrees with free trade, because they did absolutely nothing. We have seen that as a trend by the Liberal Party for many years, so we are not really surprised.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to tell the hon. member that the NDP does not oppose free trade, but it does oppose time restrictions on debate. The NDP also opposes everything that is hidden in legislation and everything the Conservatives forget to mention. The NDP is in favour of a healthy economy and wants workers to be protected and to have their own rights. The NDP also wants to put an end to tax havens.

Can the hon. member confirm that there is nothing hidden in this bill?

[*English*]

Hon. Rob Merrifield: Mr. Speaker, the member is not opposed to trade; she is opposed to time allocation. This bill got to third reading with the last government. How much more debate does the member want on this thing?

Now we have started from scratch. This government has brought it up through committee and into the House, into third reading. That is a fairly extensive look at it. If the opposition has not made up its mind by now, it is never going to.

When it comes to tax havens, this is something that has been brought up before. In 2002 Panama committed to implementing the OECD's standards when it comes to exchange of tax information. In 2011, the OECD took another look at it and formally listed Panama as having substantial implementation and as having achieved international standards on exchange of information.

Statements by Members

I believe Panama has come a long way. This is the right thing to do, and I encourage all members to consider that and vote for this piece of legislation.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[Translation]

CORRECTIONAL SERVICE CANADA

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ): Mr. Speaker, inmates in Correctional Service of Canada penitentiaries regularly use their blood, vomit, feces, urine, semen or saliva as a weapon against correctional officers. The rate of hepatitis C among inmates is 20 to 50 times higher than in the general population, and the HIV infection rate is 5 to 40 times higher.

Every incident that occurs leaves correctional officers and their families in limbo, since inmates can refuse to have their blood analyzed to determine their state of health. These men and women who serve the public deserve our respect and our protection. They are not asking that every prisoner be required to give a blood sample, only those who, by their actions, have threatened the most fundamental right of correctional officers—the right to life.

What is the Minister of Public Safety waiting for to respond to this appeal and pass appropriate legislation?

* * *

[English]

QUEEN'S DIAMOND JUBILEE MEDAL

Mr. Barry Devolin (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, every member of Parliament has been given the privilege of selecting 30 recipients for the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal. For several months I wondered how I would select just 30 people from the 120,000 in my riding. Obviously there are hundreds of worthy candidates. Upon further reflection, I began to think about the Queen herself and about what she values and stands for. Words such as duty, honour and service quickly came to mind.

I think all Canadians are aware of the high regard the Queen has for our armed forces and how often she pays them respect. That is why I decided to select Diamond Jubilee recipients by honouring those who serve members of our armed forces. For example, there are unsung heroes in Royal Canadian Legions across the country who serve our veterans on a daily basis. In recent years, many Canadians have paid respect to our troops in Afghanistan. In my riding, one woman has sent scores of packages in the mail to soldiers she has not even met. There are also many cadet commanders across Canada who give their time to prepare the future leaders of our armed forces.

It is these people who will receive Diamond Jubilee Medals in my riding. I think my choices are most appropriate and I believe the Queen herself would agree with my decisions.

● (1400)

[Translation]

BLOOD DONATION

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last week was very important, because Canadians were encouraged to generously donate blood. I made my first donation when I was 18, but the cruel and discriminatory rules set by Canadian Blood Services and Héma-Québec against gay and bisexual men prohibited me from continuing to donate.

In 2012, because of biomedical technological advances to detect HIV in blood, there is no need for this discrimination. In fact, a team of researchers with the Canadian Medical Association Journal recommended that gay couples who have been in a stable, monogamous relationship for one year be able to donate blood.

These researchers suggested that, with such a measure, the risk of receiving HIV-infected blood would be only 1 in 11,000,000. Since we do not have a stable supply of blood from year to year, we are not in a position to refuse the generous donations from these gay couples, whose sexual practices are just as safe as those of heterosexual couples.

I am calling on the Minister of Health today to put an end to this discrimination against gay men. It is an insult to assume that our blood is not clean enough for you.

* * *

[English]

CHILDREN'S HEALTH

Mr. Joe Daniel (Don Valley East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I stand in the House this afternoon to highlight the need for a pan-Canadian network for child and youth nutrition.

Studies have shown that good nutrition for our children and youth has a direct impact on their educational success. These educational outcomes lead to their success in getting better jobs and to better long-term health. This has a direct impact on our economy in reducing health care costs and in creating a more educated workforce to meet the needs of Canada's future workers.

I call on all members of the House to support the Motion No. 319 on children's health, which will engage in a consultative process regarding the promotion and maintenance of healthy weights for children and youth.

* * *

BIRTHDAY CONGRATULATIONS

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to a remarkable lady living in Stephenville Crossing in the riding of Random—Burin—St. George's. On May 29, Mrs. Frances Peddle celebrated her 106th birthday.

Statements by Members

On a recent visit with Mrs. Peddle, who lives with her daughter, Margaret, I had the pleasure of chatting with her and enjoyed her stories and sense of humour. At the age of 15, Mrs. Peddle moved from her childhood home in Green's Harbour, Trinity Bay, to St. John's, where she worked until age 17, when she moved to Montreal. This meant moving to a foreign country, as Newfoundland was not then a part of Canada.

At the age of 23, Mrs. Peddle returned to Newfoundland, where she worked and raised her family of six children. After her husband passed away, Mrs. Peddle married again to a gentleman with six children. Today she has 57 grandchildren, 90 great-grandchildren, 30 great-great grandchildren and one great-great-great grandchild.

I ask all members to join me in recognizing Mrs. Frances Peddle and this tremendous milestone in her life.

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CANADA-WIDE SCIENCE FAIR

Mr. Rob Clarke (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to recognize two constituents of mine who have the remarkable achievement of attending the Canada-Wide Science Fair and competing.

Tristen Sasakamoose and Mario Ahenakew of the Ahtahkakoop School, with their project on ancient laws and legends pertaining to buoyancy, attended the Canada-Wide Science Fair this year in Charlottetown. On behalf of our Conservative government, I congratulate them both on being the first first nations team to attend the Canada-Wide Science Fair.

The Canada-Wide Science Fair is a national championship where finalists from different regional science fairs across the country meet and compete. It is the largest extracurricular youth activity related to science and technology in Canada.

It is an honour to rise today and recognize these two students who achieved such a remarkable feat. The Canada-Wide Science Fair accepts only the best students and projects and has a long history dating back to the 1960s.

I know the community of Ahtahkakoop and first nations across Canada are incredibly proud of what Tristen and Mario accomplished.

* * *

● (1405)

DEMOCRACY

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I often visit high school classes in my riding because I believe a healthy democracy needs all voices at the table, including youth. Students I have met recently at Victoria High are not apathetic. They are aware and engaged. In the civics class, every student is involved in a volunteer project. I promised I would bring some of their concerns to Ottawa.

The Vic High media and politics class wants to see a greater concern for truth and less spin by politicians. They deplore how some issues are depicted as black and white or good versus evil, but one overriding concern in several classes was that governments were not doing enough to protect our environment.

It is not apathy that stands in the way of youth engagement but an open and responsive government that respectfully listens to their concerns for a healthy environment is a goal that all youth would embrace.

* * *

FIESTA WEEK

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this week, in my home riding of Oshawa, we are celebrating the 38th annual Fiesta Week.

Fiesta Week is one of the most popular summer events in Oshawa. The annual week-long multicultural festival is a wonderful celebration of the cultural diversity of Durham region, especially in the city of Oshawa, for which I am truly proud to represent in the House of Commons.

Over the last 38 years, Fiesta Week has provided an opportunity for residents of Oshawa and Durham region to experience European, Asian and Caribbean cultures and cuisines, all without having to leave their community. There are numerous fun and exciting events throughout the week for people of all ages. This past Sunday I was proud to be part of the kickoff to Fiesta Week and attended the parade and concert.

Fiesta Week truly has something for everyone. Fiesta Week continues to be an inspiring celebration of the cultural diversity of Oshawa. I encourage everyone to participate in the festivities. A special thanks goes out to all the volunteers in the Oshawa Folk Arts Council. These individuals deserve our utmost respect and appreciation for all they do.

* * *

THE PRIME MINISTER

Mr. Mark Adler (York Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is a growing lack of respect for basic common decency by certain members of the House.

Last Thursday, two members gestured toward the Prime Minister in a questionable manner. I know I was not alone in my disgust in hearing of this action. Regrettably, it seems that this questionable action from the third party is not isolated to the House. Merely hours later, the member for Papineau tweeted that the Prime Minister does not believe in Tikkun Olam, a Jewish tenet that means healing the world.

On this side of the House, under the leadership of this Prime Minister, this government acts every day to uphold the Canadian values of freedom, human rights, democracy and the rule of law. Furthermore, considering the many awards and accolades that the Prime Minister has received from the Jewish community and other humanitarian organizations, I find the statement outrageous.

Given the strong humanitarian record of the Prime Minister, I urge all members to stand in recognition of the great works that have been accomplished in the spirit of Tikkun Olam by our government under the leadership of our principled Prime Minister.

*Statements by Members***DIESEL EXHAUST**

Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last week, the World Health Organization moved diesel exhaust to a new ranking, making it a carcinogen as powerful as asbestos, arsenic or mustard gas. This means that exposure to diesel exhaust can kill people just as surely as smoking cigarettes can.

Residents of the west end of Toronto have been saying to this to governments for years. With federal help, Ontario plans to run 464 diesel commuter trains each day within a few feet of homes, schools, day care centres and hospitals. It will be the busiest diesel corridor on the planet and, given the new evidence, 300,000 local residents will be subjected to carcinogenic exhaust.

The federal and Ontario governments need to get their act together and begin electrifying this corridor, starting with the air-rail link. Electric trains are clean, quiet, more economic to run and maintain, last longer and, best of all, do not cause cancer.

I urge the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities to take immediate action to protect the residents of Toronto.

* * *

[Translation]

CHRISTIANE BLANCHET

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to salute the contribution of an extraordinary volunteer in my riding.

I am pleased to announce that on June 12, Christiane Blanchet received the off-road vehicles volunteer recognition award of excellence from Quebec's transport minister, Norman MacMillan.

Now in its third year, this award honours people who have made a major contribution to their community through their involvement and activity.

As an intrepid, energetic and vital member of the Club motoneige des Plaines in Lotbinière, Ms. Blanchet has helped keep the club going for many years.

On behalf of all members of Lotbinière snowmobile clubs, I am very pleased to congratulate Christiane Blanchet on receiving this award of excellence.

* * *

● (1410)

PYRRHOTITE

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, many families in Mauricie have had their lives shattered by the pyrrhotite crisis—a crisis that could have been avoided.

At a press conference today, the NDP called on the federal government to take immediate action to help those families.

In 2011, the Government of Quebec announced \$15 million in assistance, hoping that the federal government would do the same. However, federal assistance has not been forthcoming.

We have three clear requests for the government. First of all, we ask that the federal government match the funding allocated by the

Quebec government. The NDP is also calling on the government to create a loans program for the victims. Lastly, we would like the government to change the standard regarding the quality of the aggregates used in concrete.

If this standard had been changed sooner, the pyrrhotite crisis would not be what it is today. The government now has an opportunity to help the affected families.

We must not leave these families to deal with this problem on their own.

* * *

[English]

FREE TRADE AGREEMENTS

Mr. Colin Mayes (Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government understands the importance of trade to Canada's economy. That is why we are currently undertaking the most ambitious trade expansion plan in our country's history.

Since forming government, we have signed nine free trade agreements and are working on more. With increasing growth through trade, it comes as no surprise that more than 60% of our economy and one in five Canadian jobs are generated by trade.

Sadly, the anti-trade NDP has opposed our pro-trade plan at every turn. It even sent two of its members on an anti-trade mission to Washington. The NDP's ill-informed, out-of-touch anti-trade position is out of step with global economic realities.

* * *

POLIO

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, while India has been successful at stopping polio, there are still 75 cases reported yearly in the world. The World Health Assembly is still declaring that high urgency is needed for polio eradication.

Canada has long been a leader in this historic effort for global eradication of polio and should support this call for urgent action. In continuing to fight against polio, Canada should close the funding gap for 2012 and 2013 and call on other donor countries to join this effort.

Organizations such as Rotary International, RESULTS Canada and The End of Polio campaign are increasing community and political engagement on polio across Canada this summer.

Former prime minister and polio survivor Paul Martin has also joined The End of Polio campaign.

I would encourage all members to get involved so Canada may continue to be a world leader in helping the world's most vulnerable.

* * *

FREE TRADE AGREEMENTS

Mr. Brad Butt (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as leaders from all political stripes from all around the world are coming together to expand free trade and create jobs, the NDP members continue to stubbornly hold out.

Oral Questions

We have worked with governments as diverse as Colombia, Panama, Iceland, Norway, Liechtenstein and Switzerland to expand free trade and create jobs.

A lesson for the NDP: when everyone around it says it is wrong, it is wrong. If the NDP ever wants to be taken seriously at home or abroad, it is time for it to leave its outdated, isolationist ideology in the Stone Age where it belongs and join with us in creating jobs, growth and prosperity for Canadians and millions of others around the world.

Until then, the NDP and its radical anti-trade agenda will continue to dwell on the fringes of the political spectrum.

* * *

CANADIAN COAST GUARD

Mr. Kennedy Stewart (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member for Nanaimo—Alberni keeps wanting to have things both ways. When he is in B.C., he is against major Coast Guard cuts in the budget. When he is in Ottawa, he votes for them.

Do not get me wrong. The member is right to be concerned about these cuts. These proposals would leave only two centres to monitor over 27,000 kilometres of coastline.

However, just like when every Conservative voted to impose the HST on British Columbians, Conservative members from B.C. are again acting like the Prime Minister's personal rubber stamp. The member for Nanaimo—Alberni could have voted with new Democrats to protect the Coast Guard last week, but he chose not to.

The Coast Guard cuts are risky for the west coast and this budget is bad for B.C. British Columbians know it, New Democrats know it and even some Conservatives know it. I only wish my Conservative colleagues had the courage to stand up for British Columbians and vote against these risky cuts to B.C.'s Coast Guard.

* * *

• (1415)

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Paul Calandra (Oak Ridges—Markham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, since 2006, our Conservative government has focused on creating jobs, growing our economy and ensuring the long-term prosperity of all Canadians. One of the most important steps we have taken is expanding our trade relations with countries around the world. Since 2006, we have signed agreements with nine countries: Panama, Colombia, Honduras, Liechtenstein, Switzerland, Norway, Iceland, Peru and Jordan.

Over two million Canadian jobs are dependent on Canada-U.S. trade alone, trade that some parties in the House actually oppose.

With one in five Canadian jobs and over 60% of Canada's GDP dependent on trade, our government's efforts are unlocking economic opportunities and ensuring a brighter future for all Canadians. One thing that is certain is that this side will always stand up for jobs and economic growth, and we will continue to focus like a laser on all those things that Canadians think are important, even if the opposition members oppose them all.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[*Translation*]

GOVERNMENT LEGISLATION

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians were right to hope that after yesterday's vote on the omnibus bill, the Conservatives would give it a rest.

Unfortunately, the Minister of Finance admits that he is plotting another omnibus bill for the fall. The Conservatives should learn their lesson.

Will the Conservatives confirm that they are gearing up to make the same mistake again? Will they at least think twice before they start showing contempt for our democratic institutions again?

[*English*]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government's number one priority is job creation, economic growth and long-term prosperity.

Every year, as long as I have been in this place and in the legislature of Ontario, the Minister of Finance presents a budget in the winter and the spring, then presents a budget bill in the spring and another budget bill in the fall. That will be no different this year.

Our focus and all of our energies are on getting Canadians back to work. We are very pleased with the 750,000 net new jobs the economy has created, but we are inspired to continue to do more so more people can have the dignity of a job and the pride of being independent.

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives' plan this spring was to ram their Trojan Horse budget bill through Parliament without anyone noticing what was actually in it. They hid their proposals, but even Conservative MPs can tell us Canadians are taking notice.

Bringing in another omnibus bill—another ominous bill—to change Canada in ways they never talked about during the election is simply wrong.

Why will the Conservatives not allow MPs to study their proposals properly? Canadians are calling for it, we are certainly calling for it and even Conservative MPs are calling for it. Why will they not show some respect for Parliament? What else will they try to hide this time?

Oral Questions

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government is very proud of its economic agenda. We are very proud of budget 2012 and the clear map it sets out for long-term economic prosperity. It contains measures on short-term economic growth to provide a real shot in the arm for the Canadian economy and provides measures in the medium and long term that will make our economy even more sustainable and create even more jobs and long-term prosperity.

We had a significant amount of debate on Bill C-38, probably more than any other bill since I have been a member of this place. That debate is now concluded. Now we will refocus and do even more to create jobs, more to create more opportunity, so that every Canadian who is looking for a job can have a job.

* * *

[Translation]

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the culture of secrecy is contaminating the entire government. It uses a budget bill to hide social and environmental changes that have nothing to do with implementing a budget. The Access to Information Act is repeatedly ignored. The Federal Accountability Act guarantees members of the House free and timely access to any financial or economic data in the government's possession, but the Conservatives are refusing to provide that information, despite the legal opinion received by the Parliamentary Budget Officer.

What do they have against transparency? What do they have against accountability?

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister and this government made accountability our number one priority. We introduced and passed the toughest anti-corruption bill in Canadian history before Parliament as a matter of our first priority.

The minister introduced the Federal Accountability Act. With great respect, I believe that from time to time and on occasion the Parliamentary Budget Office has overstepped its mandate.

Let me commit to this: this government will continue to report to Parliament through the estimates, the supplementary estimates, quarterly reports and the public accounts, all in the fiscal information Parliament needs to do its job.

* * *

● (1420)

ETHICS

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism has made disparaging comments about the deputy premier of Alberta, Mr. Thomas Lukaszuk, remarks so offensive the rules of the House prevent me from repeating them.

When the Leader of the Opposition and I met with Mr. Lukaszuk at the end of May, he was a complete gentleman.

Given that his reprehensible comments are now public, will the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism take this opportunity to apologize to Mr. Lukaszuk?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I and this government have a phenomenal, positive working relationship with the Government of Alberta. Just yesterday I spent 30 minutes meeting with the provincial finance minister. I have met in the last month with several ministers. We have a very strong relationship.

Will the member for Edmonton—Strathcona take the opportunity to apologize to Albertans for wanting to shut down the engine of economic growth and job creation in the province of Alberta that would kill hundreds of thousands of jobs for Albertans.

* * *

FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL RELATIONS

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the House knows that we are not—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Edmonton—Strathcona has the floor.

Ms. Linda Duncan: Mr. Speaker, as it is well known, neither I nor my party have opposed the development of the oil sands—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Edmonton—Strathcona has the floor.

Ms. Linda Duncan: Mr. Speaker, it is a question of respect. Conservatives have exhibited a hostile attitude toward the provinces on a host of issues: dismissing the concerns of premiers about employment insurance, ignoring the impact of the European trade deal on rising health costs, downloading the costs of the prisons agenda.

They are either attacking the provinces or ignoring them altogether. Why are the Conservatives showing such disdain for the provinces and territories?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. Provincial governments are receiving larger transfers from the federal government than ever in our history. With respect to immigration, Alberta has seen immigration levels more than double since this government took office.

Let me be clear. The leader of the NDP says that the resource industries that are fuelling economic growth and job creation in Alberta and western Canada are a disease that should be excised from the Canadian economy. He is dividing our federation unlike any leader of the opposition since Lucien Bouchard was in his position. He should be ashamed of himself.

*Oral Questions***ETHICS**

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the difficult reality is that the minister, in what has now become a public document, has said something extremely pejorative and extremely negative about the deputy premier of Alberta.

Every guideline that has been put out by the Prime Minister asks ministers to act with respect and dignity with respect to their office and with respect to others.

The simple question for the minister is this: why will the he not stand up and simply say, "I'm sorry"? Why is that so hard?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government has a tremendously close working relationship with that of the Government of Alberta. We have had a lot done for Albertans: infrastructure investments, tax cuts, phenomenal economic growth and an increase in immigration levels. Finally we have a federal government that has given freedom to wheat farmers in Alberta and that stands by our resource development.

It would be nice to have opposition parties that would finally understand that western Canadians deserve to be respected and supported in their economic aspirations.

• (1425)

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, referring to the deputy premier of Alberta in the most pejorative and negative of terms is not exactly showing respect to western Canadians. If the minister wants to show respect to western Canadians, all he has to do is say two simple words, "I'm sorry". That is all he has to say.

Why does the minister have such a difficult time coming to grips with the fact that when he replies all to an email, it then becomes a public document? Why will you not stand up and say that you are sorry?

The Speaker: I would remind the hon. member for Toronto Centre to address his comments through the Chair and not directly at his colleagues. I would ask all members for a little order. There is a lot of yelling and heckling both when the question is being put and when the answer is being put.

The hon. minister now has the floor.

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last year I was honoured to receive a mandate from 76% of the voters in Calgary Southeast to work hard for Albertans. I and every minister and every member of Parliament in this Conservative caucus are working very productively with our provincial governments from coast to coast, including the Government of Alberta.

We are standing up to the opposition of the Liberal Party that wants to force Alberta wheat farmers into the Wheat Board, that wants to bring back the gun registry and that wants to shut down our energy industry. We will stand up against those who oppose the legitimate aspirations of Albertans and westerners.

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one can only imagine what the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism would have called the deputy premier of Alberta if he had received 80% of the votes from Calgary Southeast. I can imagine how much further he would have gone.

However, there is a minor point of principle, which I will refer to the minister through you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask the minister if he would agree with Preston Manning, who once said, "When you're deep in a hole, the best thing you can do is stop digging". Why does he not stop digging and say "I'm sorry"?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, we have a very strong working relationship with the Government of Alberta. We are getting things done for Albertans.

We are moving forward with the strongest economy in the history of the province. We are respecting Prairie grain farmers. We are standing up for the resource sector. Albertans support that. We will continue to deliver for Albertans.

* * *

[*Translation*]

THE ECONOMY

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has been busy lecturing G20 countries under the Mexican sun, but he and his Minister of Finance refuse to come clean on the impact of their Trojan Horse. Seniors, the unemployed, fishers and all Canadians will feel the effects of this bill for years to come.

Do they realize that preaching responsibility abroad while acting irresponsibly at home is pure and simple hypocrisy?

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would say that voting against Canadians is hypocrisy.

The NDP voted against health measures such as increases in Canadian health transfers. The NDP voted against the environmental measures in our bill, which will better protect fish habitats and increase economic opportunities. They voted against jobs. That is hypocrisy.

We will move forward with our plan, create jobs and ensure our prosperity. Our Prime Minister is doing the same thing in Europe.

[*English*]

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there they go again, lecturing and blaming others but refusing to face their own failures.

While the Prime Minister spends his time at the G20 wagging his finger at others, the Conservatives are ramming through their budget cuts that will hurt Canadians.

Will the Conservatives stop making phony accusations against the official opposition, the Parliamentary Budget Officer and the EU, stop muzzling their own MPs and level with Canadians about cuts to services that will hurt Canadian families?

Oral Questions

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I stand very proud with my united caucus, the Conservative Government of Canada, which has put forward a budget that will help to create jobs, will sustain our prosperity and will focus like a laser on economic growth here in our country.

With regard to the NDP and the opposition, it is very disappointing for all Canadians to see that they are focused on tearing down this country, and are not focusing enough on raising our profile, which is what our Prime Minister is presently doing at the G20.

* * *

• (1430)

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a basic principle of negotiation that one does not communicate desperation to adversaries, and yet that is exactly what the Prime Minister has done in the trans-Pacific partnership.

In their panic, what exactly have the Conservatives given away? Did we agree to have no voice on past decisions and no real power in future negotiations? Did we agree to big pharma's demands that will raise health care costs or changes that sell out dairy, poultry and egg farmers?

Since I cannot ask Nigel Wright, maybe I will ask the minister. Canadians deserve to know, what is the price Canada paid for entry to the TPP?

Mr. Gerald Keddy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member continues to amaze me.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, order. We will just wait until the parliamentary secretary finishes the answer and then we can applaud. The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Gerald Keddy: Mr. Speaker, I have never had that ability to make a pig's ear out of a silk purse, but the hon. member obviously does.

The reality is that we did not give away anything to get to the table.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, clearly, fair international trade is important for our country's prosperity. The NDP has always recognized this fact.

However, we need agreements that will benefit Canadians, not agreements that will compromise their rights and interests. We cannot trust the Conservatives on this. From the buy American act to the softwood lumber agreement, the Conservatives have failed miserably every time they have had the opportunity to stand up for Canadians' rights and interests.

Will the Conservatives commit to bringing this new agreement before Parliament?

[*English*]

Mr. Gerald Keddy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, NDP members do not support trade. They did not support the free trade agreement with the United States. They did not support NAFTA. They did not support Chile. They did not support Peru. They did not support Puerto Rico. They have not supported Panama and have yet to support Jordan. They never supported the European free trade agreement and have not supported CETA with the European Union.

The NDP's position on trade is very clear. Our side's position on trade is extremely clear. We are pro-trade. We engage in trade in the best interests of all Canadians.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the chair of the Military Police Complaints Commission wrote the Minister of National Defence asking him to take a "common sense approach" to the investigation into the death of Corporal Stuart Langridge. He agreed with our understanding of the law of solicitor-client privilege and asked the minister to waive the privilege in the interests of justice. DND lawyers at the commission pointed out that only the minister can grant access to these documents.

Will the minister co-operate with the commission and allow a full and comprehensive inquiry to take place?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have indicated a number of times, we continue to support this arm's-length process. We have given additional funding.

Parliament has been unequivocal in expressing its intent that the Military Police Complaints Commission can and should accomplish its stated mandate without access to privileged communication between lawyers and their clients. This was restated in the second independent review of the military justice system recently tabled in the House by myself where Mr. Justice Patrick LeSage said, "The jurisprudence on solicitor-client privilege is clear and established. I see no reason to recommend change."

There is much precedent from the Supreme Court on this issue. The member is a lawyer. He knows full—

The Speaker: The hon. member for St. John's East.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I guess we can take that to mean that the minister does not want to co-operate and will not help this family get to the truth.

Oral Questions

These are very simple matters. The commission chair has asked the minister to release information on first, the legal reasoning why a suicide watch was not given to Corporal Langridge; second, who decided to deny next of kin status to Langridge's family and why; third, the rationale behind DND's flawed investigation.

Why is this too much to ask? Why will the minister not allow this civilian oversight to take place? Why will he not let justice be done?

• (1435)

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): We have supported the process, Mr. Speaker. We have given additional funding to see that the process is arm's-length and remains transparent and functional. The pettifogger opposite knows that full well.

Mr. Justice Binnie in the Supreme Court also spoke of this issue, as did Madam Justice Arbour in the case of Lavallee, where she said, "Indeed, solicitor-client privilege must remain as close to absolute as possible if it is to retain relevance."

There is much precedent on this issue. This issue is currently being heard by an arm's-length hearing. The member opposite wants to interfere with that and bring the matter before the courts.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of National Defence refuses to co-operate, but that is not surprising; it is becoming a habit for him.

The Conservative mismanagement of the F-35s is matched only by the many problems with this aircraft. The Conservatives should have set up an independent team to review the program. Unfortunately, they decided to reappoint those that the Auditor General found to be responsible for this mismanagement.

Why do the Conservatives insist on mismanaging the F-35s?

[*English*]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the secretariat is made up of four deputy ministers; a committee of assistant deputy ministers; senior officials from Finance, Privy Council, Treasury Board; the National Security Advisor for Canada, a respected academic, and also independent advice from a former auditor general.

They have put their terms of reference on a website. They are undertaking a work plan right now which they will also share transparently on a website. Let us let them do their job. We look forward to their conclusions.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives do not have even an iota of rigour or accountability.

The seven-point plan had not even been released before the Conservatives stopped following it.

The F-35 secretariat, which became the national fighter procurement secretariat, is not a committee of independent experts.

Data on the costs exist. Real independent experts are available. The Conservatives have no more excuses. What are they waiting for to publish the real costs associated with the F-35s?

[*English*]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member knows the information as to why the secretariat is going outside for expert advice to independently validate the cost estimates that the Department of National Defence will put forward. We agree with that. We think it should do this job thoroughly and comprehensively. It has latitude within its terms of reference to bring in experts to help it.

In addition, all of those members who I have listed on the secretariat are accountable to this process, so they must be involved.

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what are we talking about here? The Minister of National Defence has the costing figures. They come out of the joint strike fighter program office and make their way to DND through a very rigorous process. He has had them for years and he gets new updated ones annually.

Now we learn that the secretariat itself is being denied these costing figures. Welcome to the team, jackets forthcoming.

The only thing transparent about the F-35 secretariat is that it is another effort to subvert accountability. Why are the Conservatives refusing to hand over these costing figures and finally show some accountability?

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is true that the costing figures are available from the joint strike fighter program in the United States, but what we have said is that we want those figures, that would be cost estimates from the Department of National Defence, to be independently validated. The secretariat has asked for more time to do that. It wants to do this comprehensively. It is also looking at independently validating the cost assumptions that the Department of National Defence is using and meeting the recommendation of the Auditor General.

There is a lot of work to go through. We support it on this and we know that we have an excellent group of people around the table, including independent advice from a former—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Avalon.

ETHICS

Mr. Scott Andrews (Avalon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister is facing serious allegations that he broke Elections Canada laws. He says he has the documents that will explain everything and they are forthcoming, but he not produced them yet. His mouthpiece keeps saying they have provided all information and documents to Elections Canada.

My questions are simple. Do these documents include a \$21,000 cheque made out to a polling firm, the changed invoices, the affidavit from employees who swear they gave money after being offered a bonus from his cousin? Are those documents in or out?

• (1440)

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is an interesting question, given that the member will only make his allegations when he is in the House of Commons. He is still afraid to step out of the House of Commons and repeat them, as he promised to do with great braggadocio last Friday. Four days have gone by and he has not done it.

They have no leader and no policy. All they can do is try to tear people down.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are other questions that we could ask about the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister. As I see it, he is no longer worthy of that position and he should resign.

Now someone else has a problem with dignity and credibility. It is the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism. I find it completely unacceptable that he is not able to do the honourable thing and simply apologize. He called the deputy premier of Alberta a posterior orifice. That is unacceptable. I am asking him to do the honourable thing. He can stop telling me how big his winning margin was. I have been elected six times myself. That is not the issue. Why does he not just say he is sorry?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the advice from the candidate for the Montreal mayor's office, but I have to say that, as an Alberta member of Parliament and as a minister, I have very close relationships with our counterparts in Alberta. I spent 30 minutes with the province's finance minister yesterday. Because of those relationships, we are doing great things for the province. But Albertans remember only too well the Liberal Party's record vis-à-vis the province's concerns, and the hon. member's record too.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Deputy Premier from Alberta is coming to Ottawa and he wants to meet with the Minister of Immigration and other Alberta members of Parliament. The minister's response to the suggestion is, and I quote, "He is a complete and utter asshole".

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The member knows that he is not supposed to do indirectly what he is not allowed to do directly.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Oral Questions

The Speaker: Order, please.

I appreciate all the advice and assistance. The hon. member for Winnipeg North knows he is not allowed to do indirectly what he is not allowed to do directly, so I will urge him not to use that word as he is putting his question. He has a few seconds left to finalize it.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, like a man I recognize that I made a mistake. I am apologizing and I am asking for the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism to do likewise and apologize for saying inappropriate words to the Deputy Premier of Alberta.

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, now we see why they are the third party.

* * *

[*Translation*]

CANADA REVENUE AGENCY

Mr. Hoang Mai (Brossard—La Prairie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the scandals keep on coming at the Canada Revenue Agency. Former senior managers in the Montreal office went to meet with business owners to propose an exchange: for \$1 million, they would erase tax bills. Business owner Jacky Schryver is an honest man; he refused.

But who knows how many of these kinds of offers were accepted? How much money did this government lose? What are the Conservatives doing to try to recover this lost money?

[*English*]

Hon. Gail Shea (Minister of National Revenue, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we take this issue very seriously. We cannot tolerate this kind of misconduct within our tax system. The integrity of our tax system is important to all Canadians, and we will take any steps necessary to protect it.

An RCMP investigation into these matters is ongoing. These matters are before the courts, so we cannot comment any further.

Mr. Hoang Mai (Brossard—La Prairie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, at some point the Conservatives need to realize that there are serious ethical problems at the Canadian Revenue Agency. Hard-working Canadians play by the rules and pay their taxes, only to hear of corrupt officials running around trying to fill their pockets by helping corporations defraud the government. This is unacceptable. We need a government that will stand up and ensure our tax process runs fairly.

How long do we have to wait before the Conservatives accept responsibility and address these problems?

• (1445)

Hon. Gail Shea (Minister of National Revenue, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is why the RCMP is involved and why we have doubled the number of internal investigators we have: it is because any misconduct is unacceptable. We will not stand for any abuse of our tax system.

*Oral Questions***ETHICS**

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has established a reputation for being willing to win at any cost, but the costs to Canadians have been widespread unethical electoral abuse. We have the robofraud investigation. We have allegations of widespread voter intimidation in the now-invalidated Etobicoke Centre campaign, and of course we have the issue of fraud, forgery and now kickbacks in Peterborough.

Either the Prime Minister cares when one of his members steps over the line or he does not. Is this why he has refused to ask his parliamentary secretary to step down?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is quite the contrary. The hon. parliamentary secretary submitted his audited and verified filings to the elections agency almost four years ago. It accepted them and has not since raised any issue with them.

By contrast, the NDP members have confessed to having accepted what we now know to be illegal contributions from powerful union bosses. They have been forced to pay some of that money back. However, now they refuse to tell Canadians how much illegal money they accepted and how much they paid back. I invite the hon. member to rise and do so now.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, with the political white noise to help me, I forgot to add in the four convictions for electoral fraud having to pay the highest fines.

What did the Prime Minister do? He took those rule breakers and he promoted them to the Senate. Even Brian Mulroney knew when to bench the bad apples. It is probably not surprising that we see the Prime Minister turning a blind eye to serious allegations of fraud, forgery and kickbacks, which are now in the court documents.

Is the Prime Minister not aware of these court documents, or is this just the price of doing business for that government?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, the hon. member submitted his documents to Elections Canada almost four years ago. He had them audited. They were verified and approved, and he has not heard any contact from Elections Canada. Presumably if it has questions for him, it will ask.

By contrast, the NDP has been forced to plead guilty to breaking the law and accepting illegal union donations. The NDP had to give some of that money back. We do not know how much because the NDP will not tell us.

* * *

CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, despite the dirty tricks pulled by the opposition, our government passed the Marketing Freedom for Grain Farmers Act. This legislation provides western Canadian grain farmers the freedom to escape from under the thumb of the Canadian Wheat Board and sell their commodities to whomever they choose. Unfortunately, some individuals were

determined to keep farmers from marketing their own grain and launched a reckless and baseless legal attack.

Could the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food please inform this House of the outcome of these court proceedings?

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Prince Albert. Like me, he has a farm background and is happy to see that the Campbell declaration has been unanimously overturned.

The court stated that section 47.1 of the CWB Act “preserves to the greatest extent possible the ability of elected members of the House of Commons...to change that legislation as best they see fit”.

We delivered freedom for western Canadian farmers. What does the opposition do? It pledges to bring back the single desk. It is no wonder its polling numbers are tanking in the Prairies.

* * *

[Translation]

ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, according to documents obtained by Radio-Canada, the head of the RCMP detail responsible for protecting the Prime Minister appears to impose a climate of terror within his own team. There is talk of harassment, intimidation and discrimination.

The internal review clearly states that the Prime Minister's safety is compromised by this unhealthy climate. Allowing this sort of thing to happen right under their noses amounts to a complete failure for the Conservatives.

What does the Minister of Public Safety plan on doing to fix this situation?

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I cannot comment on a specific case. However, we expect all RCMP members to conduct themselves professionally and appropriately.

I might add that the Prime Minister is grateful to the men and women of the Prime Minister's protective detail for their outstanding and highly professional service.

● (1450)

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is clear the RCMP detail assigned to the Prime Minister is struggling with serious problems of harassment, intimidation and discrimination.

In a recently leaked internal report on the Prime Minister's 117-person security detail, the problems identified were so severe that the security of the Prime Minister could be at risk.

This is the latest in a series of harassment problems at the RCMP. What is the minister doing specifically to make sure these latest disturbing allegations are dealt with promptly?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have indicated, the Prime Minister is grateful to the men and women of the protective detail for their outstanding and highly professional service.

With respect to the specific question that the member has raised, I have been working very closely with the commissioner. I am very pleased to see the commissioner's very proactive approach to the issue of ensuring that all members maintain that high disciplinary and professional standard.

* * *

PRIVACY

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Minister of Public Safety said he saw no problem in eavesdropping on Canadian travellers. The minister claimed that “the privacy rights of law-abiding Canadians are respected at all times”, and he compared Canadian travellers worried about privacy to the Air India bombers.

A day after letting his rhetoric get away from him again, the minister is now flip-flopping. Now he is agreeing with the NDP that a privacy assessment is necessary.

Will the minister now acknowledge that he was mistaken about airport privacy rights and apologize for his insensitive Air India comparison?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the record speaks for itself when I mentioned the Air India inquiry and the very important recommendations.

What I can say is that I share the concerns of Canadians regarding the privacy impact of audio recordings, even when it occurs in a restricted area in an airport. Even though CBSA does respect privacy rights in all of its operations, I have made it clear to CBSA that no audio monitoring is to occur until a privacy impact assessment is submitted and recommendations from the privacy commissioner can be reviewed by the government.

[Translation]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I cannot believe how quickly they can make concessions sometimes.

The minister is flip-flopping for the simple reason that the initiative was flawed and implemented too hastily. There is a lesson in that for the Conservatives, who shun all forms of consultation. They did absolutely nothing to ensure that the proposed electronic eavesdropping program respected people's privacy. The minister has now acknowledged that, and about time too.

Will he now tell us how many conversations were recorded unbeknownst to travellers, and for how long those recordings will be kept?

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am unaware of any private conversations having been recorded by this measure. What I can say is that it is important for agencies

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tasked with protecting Canadians to have the right tools to catch smugglers and keep Canadians safe. It is equally important that these tools not infringe on individuals' privacy in a way that is unnecessary to ensure security.

Again I would stress that even if these audio recordings were to occur in a restricted area of an airport, I would still want an assessment by the Privacy Commissioner.

* * *

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, among the many casualties of Bill C-38 are small business owners and seasonal industries. In communities large and small across Canada, EI eligibility changes will force workers in tourism, fishery, forestry and farming to leave their industries or their region to find other work.

Where does that leave the tens of thousands of small businesses that count on their seasonal workers' experience and productivity? On top of the many other difficulties that small businesses face, some will not even make it.

Why did the government not even consult seasonal businesses? Why did it just hurt them?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what small businesses and seasonal businesses do not need is Chicken Little running around saying that the sky is falling when it is not.

Let me be very clear. Our job is to help people who have lost jobs, whether seasonal or full time, to find work, work that would make them better off and make their families better off.

By the way, in many cases, work is available. We have employers of seasonal businesses and in small towns who are asking for help in finding employees

● (1455)

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Cardigan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, people on P.E.I. are very concerned about Bill C-38. Fishermen on wharves are now saying that anyone who applies to buy a new fishing licence would automatically be disqualified from EI.

I would like the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development to confirm to this House and to all Canadians that new entrants to the fishery would not be disqualified from employment insurance.

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is Chicken Little, part two.

This is pure fiction. The roles for fishers are the same as they have been.

Oral Questions

What we are trying to do is let people who are on EI know what their traditional responsibilities have been and continue to be, which is to respect EI as a temporary income support while they are looking for another job. We will help them find that job because we want them and their families to be better off and we know that there is a demand for their skills.

* * *

[Translation]

MINING INDUSTRY

Ms. Paulina Ayala (Honoré-Mercier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday a CBC report revealed disturbing details about Canadian mining companies' practices in Panama. The Conservatives say they have a corporate social responsibility counsellor, but she is not doing anything. The process is completely voluntary, and companies can withdraw whenever they want.

Why do the Conservatives care so little about corporate social responsibility? Why are Canadian mining companies treating Panama's indigenous peoples so dismissively?

[English]

Mr. Gerald Keddy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I question where the member is getting her source of information, but the overwhelming majority of Canadian mining companies are world leaders in responsible mining practices. They employ hundreds of thousands of Canadian workers who support countless families. The corporate social responsibility counsellor's review process is a common sense approach that enjoys broad support within the mining community, and the CSR counsellor helps Canadian companies uphold their social and environmental responsibilities by operating abroad. The system works.

* * *

ETHICS

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism has now had seven opportunities in this place to do the right thing.

We know the Conservatives were very disappointed that their Wildrose cousins were unsuccessful in the last election, but it does not give them the right to insult the government that did win that election.

Let us give him one more opportunity to do the honourable thing, the right thing, and stand in his place and say, "I'm sorry".

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have such a close working relationship that, in fact, one of the ministers of the provincial government has been the president of my electoral district association. We have a very close working relationship.

What I can tell members is that Albertans do not respect the NDP or the Leader of the Opposition referring to the engine of growth in that province as a disease.

If an apology is deserved here, it is from the Leader of the Opposition to Albertans for attacking their livelihood.

* * *

HEALTH

Mr. Patrick Brown (Barrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, smoking is at an all-time low in Canada, thanks to our government's actions. Over the years, we have passed new laws to ban flavoured little cigars that targeted children. We have also shown leadership on health warning labels, and we are the first country in the world to have them on cigarette packages.

Continuing our government's efforts, the Minister of Health made a very important announcement this morning.

Would she please inform the House of Commons of its significance?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Health Canada introduced new warning labels on cigarette packages and, as health minister, I was proud to announce today that tough, new and bigger labels must be on all packages. Our government is proud of this work and is refocusing our anti-smoking efforts toward populations with higher smoking rates, while continuing to invest in initiatives that have seen great success over the years. We have also passed new laws to ban flavoured little cigars, which were clearly targeted toward our children. These initiatives will continue.

* * *

THE BUDGET

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on page 221 of the budget, the government stated, "The regional distribution of employment in the federal public service will be largely unaffected by the implementation of the departmental spending reductions". Federal jobs, it said, would be reduced by 4.8%. It is not true, not on Prince Edward Island. Federal job cuts will be more than double that amount. Hammering our seasonal economy through the EI changes apparently was not enough.

Why has my province been singled out in this manner? Is there nobody over there who cares about Prince Edward Island?

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, indeed, I can assure the hon. member that any job reductions were analyzed to make sure that there was regional fairness, fairness inside Ottawa and fairness outside of Ottawa, and that no particular region or province bore the brunt of those reductions to a greater extent than other provinces or regions.

Oral Questions

• (1500)

[Translation]

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canada is trying to create obstacles for anyone who wants to move forward at the Rio+20 summit on sustainable development. After opposing the elimination of fossil fuel subsidies, now the Conservatives are blocking efforts to protect marine biodiversity in extraterritorial waters. Just because the Conservatives have decided to destroy Canada's marine biodiversity with Bill C-38 does not mean they have to attack that of the rest of the world.

Why are the Conservatives determined to obstruct a project that could protect the oceans for future generations?

[English]

Hon. Keith Ashfield (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada is committed to the sustainable development of the oceans. We maintain a strong regulatory regime that governs responsible resource use and development that ensures high standards of environmental protection. We will continue to collect the scientific information necessary and provide advice to support informed decision making regarding the issues of greatest concern in Canada's oceans.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while the NDP constantly bashes the Canadian economy with its non-stop negativity, our Conservative government is growing Canada's economy and creating jobs. Canadians know our low-tax pro-growth plan is working. The IMF forecasts Canada's economic growth will be among the strongest in the industrialized world. *Forbes* ranks Canada as the best country in the world to do business, and since 2006, Canada has created nearly 1.3 million net new jobs.

Can the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance please inform the House what the NDP would do to Canada's economy?

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what a great question. The NDP's anti-trade, big-government, high-tax and anti-development agenda is an absolute recipe for economic disaster in Canada. The NDP does not understand the economy. That is why it votes against everything we do to protect it and would rather play silly procedural games. Canadians have had enough.

Indeed, here is what a *Toronto Sun* editorial had to say,

[The NDP leader] couldn't care less about having a budget in place that has been built to protect Canada from the upcoming ravages of an imploding Europe.

He cares, instead, about face time on television.

[Translation]

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Pierre Jacob (Brome—Missisquoi, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is sad to see the extent to which the Conservatives continue to attack the regions of Quebec.

Until recently, the people of my riding who come from other countries could go to the immigration office in Sherbrooke, but that office has fallen victim to the Conservatives' irresponsible cuts. The people of my riding will once again have to turn to the larger cities to get service.

My question is simple: why do the Conservatives keep cutting regional services?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, obviously, we have a responsibility to reduce spending in an effective manner in order to balance the budget.

We must avoid ending up like Europe and having huge deficits. That is why every department has had to find savings. We did the same thing at Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, by offering better online service, for example.

We do not need to run up huge administrative expenses with all sorts of offices, when we have more and more online services available to our clients.

* * *

[English]

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, there are winners and losers in a Canada with no energy policy. Eastern Canadians are the losers. Easterners are captive to expensive, insecure, imported oil. Easterners pay a lot for gasoline and home heating oil.

Canada does need a new pipeline to eastern Canada. It would bring a safer route to salt water, more jobs, energy security for Canada and European market access.

I ask our Minister of Natural Resources: Why not export western oil to eastern Canada instead of to China?

Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have said many times, Canada is immensely fortunate to have huge natural resources, including oil and gas.

We are talking about moving oil south. We are talking about possibly moving it west and north as well as east.

It is a market-driven economy. When the economics support it, we would be absolutely delighted to see pipelines moving east as well as west, north and south to bring jobs and economic growth to this country.

Privilege

●(1505)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Christian Paradis: Mr. Speaker, I ask for the unanimous consent of the House for the following motion: “That the House recognize the right of the duly elected National Assembly of Quebec to pass legislation such as Bill 78 within its jurisdiction, in accordance with Canada's and Quebec's Charters of Rights and Freedoms.”

[*English*]

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

Some hon. members: No.

The Speaker: There is no unanimous consent.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Mr. Gerald Keddy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in my answer in question period, I listed the free trade agreements. In my excitement, I mentioned Puerto Rico. Puerto Rico is under NAFTA, not under a free trade agreement. I just wanted to correct that.

We do have one with Costa Rica, however, and I forgot Israel.

The Speaker: The Chair has notice of a question of privilege being raised by the hon. Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada.

* * *

PRIVILEGE

ALLEGED USURPATION OF TITLE

Hon. Peter Penashue (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today on a question of privilege. I believe my ability to carry out my duties as a member of Parliament has been impeded.

Specifically, it has been brought to my attention that the individual who preceded me as the member for Labrador, Todd Russell is publicly maintaining that he is the current MP for Labrador. Currently on Mr. Russell's website, www.toddrussell.ca, there are numerous offending pages.

Although I provided printouts of the offending pages with my letter notifying you, Mr. Speaker, of this question of privilege, I would be prepared to table the links and a complete package of those pages, but Mr. Russell's website is not in both official languages.

I have contacted Mr. Russell on this matter and requested that he remove the inappropriate use of the website title. He has not removed these references.

This action impedes my ability to fulfill my parliamentary duties and responsibilities as the actual member of Parliament for Labrador.

As such, I believe it should be considered a *prima facie* breach of privilege.

O'Brien and Bosc, page 111, notes “the usurpation of the title of Member of Parliament” as being among the matters found to be *prima facie* cases of privilege.

On page 113 of *O'Brien and Bosc*, we learn about two previous cases when Mr. Speaker Bosley and Mr. Speaker Milliken found the usurpation of the title of MP to be a matter of privilege. I will read those passages into the record:

The misrepresentation of someone who is not a sitting Member as a Member of Parliament has been found to constitute a *prima facie* case of privilege on two occasions. On May 6, 1985, Speaker Bosley ruled that there was a *prima facie* question of privilege in a case where a newspaper advertisement identified another person as a Member of Parliament rather than the sitting Member. He stated:

It should go without saying that a Member of Parliament needs to perform his functions effectively and that anything tending to cause confusion as to a Member's identity creates the possibility of an impediment to the fulfilment of that Member's functions. Any action which impedes or tends to impede a Member in the discharge of his duties is a breach of privilege.

In 2004, a similar question of privilege was raised concerning a booklet published in connection with a fundraising event and which contained an advertisement identifying a former Member of Parliament as the sitting Member for the riding. The matter was found to be a *prima facie* breach of the privileges of the House and referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

Although the two previous cases related to print advertisements, a misleading Internet presence should be treated in the same manner.

Mr. Russell's misleading website, including contact information for his parliamentary office and three constituency offices, could cause confusion among the constituents of Labrador and, therefore, impede me in my ability to represent them.

I would ask for Mr. Russell to update his website immediately.

The leader of the Liberal Party needs to explain why he has allowed one of his party's former MPs to deliberately confuse my constituents, saying that he is their MP when the voters of Labrador have rejected him and his party.

I believe that the evidence shows this is a *prima facie* case of privilege. If the Chair so finds, I am prepared to move the appropriate motion.

●(1510)

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to my colleague's point of privilege. There have been many cases in the past where it has been found to be a breach of a member's privilege when someone suggests that he or she is the member of Parliament when he or she is not, regardless of whether it is a former member of Parliament, some other constituent or a Canadian.

I would remind the Conservative Party that it did the same thing in my riding when the member for Cariboo—Prince George assigned a go-to person and implied that the people in my particular riding should not go to their member of Parliament because they had chosen wrong in the last election. I am using his words, not mine.

We need to be consistent in our application of this rule from all sides and that when a member of Parliament is elected he or she must be allowed to do his or her work with no cloud presented as to who the representative is.

This practice has been done previously by the government, but it has stopped doing it, partly because of the public outcry. However, in this case, if what my friend from Labrador is saying is true, then we would seek those documents as well.

I think, Mr. Speaker, you will be urged to find a prima facie case of privilege because it prevents the member from doing his elected duties for the people there.

The Speaker: I thank both hon. members for their interventions. I will look into the matter and get back to the House in due course.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*Translation*]

CANADA-PANAMA ECONOMIC GROWTH AND PROSPERITY ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-24, An Act to implement the Free Trade Agreement between Canada and the Republic of Panama, the Agreement on the Environment between Canada and the Republic of Panama and the Agreement on Labour Cooperation between Canada and the Republic of Panama, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the motion that this question be now put.

Mr. François Lapointe (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in this House to discuss Bill C-24 to implement the free trade agreement between Canada and Panama.

First, I would like to point out that, once more, this motion is subject to time allocation. This is the 25th time this year that we have had to put up with a motion of that kind.

I am going to make a somewhat lengthy comment about the level of absurdity that this Parliament has reached by being constantly constrained by the party in power. This week—actually for two weeks—we have watched the heights of contempt for this Parliament being scaled with Bill C-38. The Conservatives refused to split up a budget bill of more than 400 pages that has impacts on all kinds of departments: Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, Natural Resources, Agriculture and Agri-Food, not to mention Human Resources and Skills Development because of the employment insurance issue that affects fisheries and tourism and that got a very poor reception from most Canadians. The provincial governments are angry. Another concern, and not the least of them, is the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act.

All of this is in a huge bill on which we were muzzled. The hon. members opposite are constantly throwing numbers at Canadians: 50 hours, 70 hours. Those numbers cannot really be weighed by someone who is not in the House. They do not accurately reflect the time that members would normally have required to share information and hear from witnesses in committee on such dense bills, had the work of Parliament been respected by the current government in this House.

Another aspect of Bill C-38 is completely mind-boggling. Just thinking that we were muzzled on it is astounding. There were decisions to eliminate organizations. Division 33 of part 4 repeals the

Government Orders

International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development Act and allows the government to take the necessary measures to do away with the centre. We are gagged on fundamental issues dealing with the elimination of organizations that have been very important to the development of Canadian policies.

On the Experimental Lakes Area, Mr. Del Giorgio, a professor of biology, said:

This is a disaster of proportions...that are hard to describe. It is not just the Canadian scientific community that is completely outraged; people from all over the world are sending petitions.

The government is shutting down the Experimental Lakes Area, not just slashing its budget.

For two weeks, we were simply gagged on that as well.

Here we are with Bill C-24 before us, a free trade agreement. This is not some minor information that can just slip through. This is a potential free trade agreement with a country in the Americas. That is important. Has this bill received unanimous support? If the bill had unanimous support, we could perhaps better understand why a gag order was imposed again, but no, we have before us a bill that does not have unanimous support.

Todd Tucker, from Public Citizen's Global Trade Watch, has conclusively demonstrated that Panama is one of the worst tax havens in the world and that the Panamanian government has deliberately allowed the country to become a tax haven.

Despite requests from the Canadian government, Panama refused to sign a tax information exchange agreement. This point is very important. At some point during the whole free trade agreement process with Panama, the Canadian government asked for a tax information exchange agreement. Why? First, Panama has some serious problems with illegal money and money laundering associated with illegal drugs.

There is something I do not get at all. There are members here who brag about being tough on crime. They are in the middle of negotiating with a small Latin American country that has a serious money laundering problem associated with drugs and, suddenly, it is no big deal.

● (1515)

The Conservatives want to be tough on crime with a 16-year-old kid who makes the mistake of growing a few pot plants in his basement, but they do not have the courage to apply their own tough on crime logic, in an international agreement, to a problem as serious as money laundering associated with drugs. That makes no sense at all.

My NDP colleague from Burnaby—New Westminster moved a motion to stop the implementation of a trade agreement between Canada and Panama until Panama agrees to sign a tax information exchange agreement. This motion was rejected by the Liberals and the Conservatives. But in light of this situation, it made sense to resolve this issue first. Other countries, including the United States, that came to agreements with Panama signed similar agreements.

Government Orders

I will repeat, because this is a very important point. Why did a so-called tough on crime government disregard the very idea of a tax information exchange agreement that could have covered all types of trade agreements? This could have perhaps covered the problems related to money laundering. How could this have been excluded from the negotiations and not remain central to the agreement? I do not understand it.

This is not a unanimous bill, and so it is not a bill that should be muzzled. Teresa Healy of the Canadian Labour Congress testified that although the minimum labour standards of the International Labour Organization are cited, the agreement is still weaker than it should be. Moreover, as Ms. Healy pointed out, the current Panamanian government has become increasingly tough on unions and workers in recent years.

Some things having to do with workers' rights and fundamental human rights have not yet been resolved.

Muzzling debate about Bill C-24 amounts to muzzling debate on tax evasion and workers' rights. This is not trivial; it is really not trivial.

Panama is not Norway. You need to show a good dose of bad faith to throw the name Panama in the middle of existing agreements with northern European countries. That is what I heard two or three times from colleagues on the opposite side of the House. You cannot put Panama on the same list as Norway and Switzerland without showing bad faith.

A fair trade policy can be realistic. For instance, from the beginning of our discussions with emerging countries, we should demand standards regarding human rights and tax ethics that are in line with Canadian standards. It would be simple. We would not have any surprises or any appendices to add at the end, but rather just the fundamental principle whereby all trade agreements must protect and promote human rights. We should be talking about this from the beginning, imposing it, and prohibiting the import, export or sale in Canada of any products considered to have been manufactured in deplorable conditions that do not meet international standards. This notion should be imposed at every stage of the negotiation process. Ensuring that all trade agreements respect sustainable development is a notion that this government cannot seem to grasp or assimilate.

The agreement includes side agreements on labour co-operation and the environment. These side agreements are not in the main body of the text. Someone probably suddenly realized that a bare minimum should be done in order for this to be acceptable. Why is it not simply in the main body of the text?

More than one-third of Panamanians live in dire poverty. Free trade agreements should guarantee that better living conditions and working conditions will result from the agreements, rather than the potential exploitation of the poverty there. Although the agreement appears to protect the environment on the surface, it does not include any really strong measures or any mechanisms to resolve disputes.

According to the U.S. Department of Justice, which someone mentioned earlier, Panama is a major financial conduit for drug trafficking and money laundering activities. Under those conditions, there is no way anyone can guarantee a better way of life for the people of Panama.

Trade between Canada and Panama is currently worth \$150 million. Why the urgency, especially since we already do \$150 million worth of trade with this trading partner? How can the Conservatives justify ramming another free trade agreement down our throats as quickly as possible, using another closure motion, when the agreement does not even ensure that Panamanian tax laws will not encourage tax evasion?

• (1520)

I congratulate the government on one thing: in this agreement, Canada has kept over-quota tariffs on supply managed goods such as dairy, poultry and egg products. That is very good.

What is deplorable about this bill is the failure to address human rights and tax evasion. I have been talking about this from the beginning. Every time we fail to address such fundamental issues in our international agreements, we somewhat deride the work of our most courageous predecessors in Canada. They struggled to move the country forward, while constantly working to improve our fundamental rights. We must never lose sight of that.

[English]

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to stand in the House today and talk about the Canada-Panama labour co-operation part of the agreement in Bill C-24, which is a very positive initiative. It started many years ago, but even in January of this year our Minister of Labour visited Panama to talk about labour co-operation and discuss labour related issues. She met with government officials and people in business. She took the trip to support the free trade agreement but specifically to discuss labour related provisions. As we all know, our Minister of Labour is very much a supporter of having good labour relations and ensuring those conditions are in place so people can continue to work.

Our government is proud of its journey of bringing into place a number of free trade agreements. We are a free trade country. We have products that we need to export to other countries and we do that by partnering with other countries. However, we also need to ensure that we coordinate our labour issues with those countries. If we do that and work with our partners on a trade agreement, then obviously it becomes a potential benefit for Canadians.

As free trade agreements are signed and brought forward, they will bring forward many preferential investment opportunities. Many of those, through trade, will reach out into many aspects of the commodities that we have in Canada. However, we also want to ensure we protect the environment and those investments in it, along with labour. As we know, economic advancements cannot be made at the cost of labour rights.

It will be interesting when the free trade agreement comes into force because Panama's trade tariffs sit at over 90% for Canadian exports going to that country. We hope that many of those tariffs will be eliminated. That is good news for all Canadian companies that export into that market.

For service providers to gain access, we need to help expand Panama's communications, technology and financial services markets. There is also a chapter that ensures there are rules that will govern Canadian investments to give greater protection and predictability to Canadian investors who are looking to invest into Panama, which will encourage companies to invest and help strengthen Panama's economy.

The free trade agreement also gives Canadian exporters of goods and services greater market access. That access goes into Panama's government procurement opportunities, one of the few that are available to it. One example that we know of is the Panama Canal expansion process that is happening or about to happen. It is one of the U.S. \$5.3 billion worth of investment projects that will widen and make export and trade more accessible. It gives Canadian companies a procurement opportunity for products, whether it is Canadian goods and services, that they will be able to bid on.

When we talk about trade and economic growth, the goal is rationale, which we talk about within our economic action plan. We believe it is a part of free trade. It is more than just a philosophy. It is a key element of our economic policy and our relationships with other countries.

• (1525)

Quite honestly, this recession was the worst since the Great Depression of the 1930s and many countries around the world are still struggling through it wishing they had the same economic stability and governance that Canada does. It has intensified our negotiations with other countries so that we will be able to partner with them to help them and ourselves become stronger in our economy and labour rights. We are doing that particularly in the discussion today around Panama.

How do those opportunities for Canadian exporters actually happen?

Panama is a strategic hub logistically. It is a platform on which Canada can build on. It will allow commercial activity to grow through Central America, the Caribbean and the Andean region of South America. It brings in a great global perspective for trade. However, free trade is also about having a level playing field where Canadian businesses can compete in the Panamanian market.

In these challenging economic times, it is important than ever to build solid trade relationships with countries around the world to secure our future prosperity. Canada is committed to pursuing initiatives that will help Canadians compete in global markets, and Panama is one of those markets.

I will now talk about the importance of labour rights. As Canadians, we naturally want to see our country prosper and continue to prosper, but not at any price. We are eager to advance our trade agenda but we must also ensure that labour rights and obligations are respected. Prosperity cannot come at the expense of labour rights. This is a concession that we are simply not willing to make. We will not accept this free trade agreement nor any other accord without the proper concessions in place. As I said, we will ensure a level playing field and that means that everybody must play by the same rules.

Government Orders

There is also a labour co-operation agreement, which is why the free trade agreement with Panama is paralleled with a labour co-operation agreement. This agreement includes the enforcement of labour rights and a transparent complaints and dispute resolution mechanism.

Under the terms of the labour co-operation agreement, Canada and Panama have committed to ensuring that their laws respect and embody the International Labour Organization's 1998 Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work. The declaration covers the right to freedom of association, the right to collective bargaining, the abolition of child labour, the elimination of forced or compulsory labour and the elimination of discrimination in the workplace.

It sounds a lot like the same labour standards that we uphold in this great country of Canada. However, it also demonstrates the government's belief that prosperity cannot come at the expense of workers' rights.

In the Canada-Panama labour co-operation agreement, both countries have committed to protect workers' health and safety on the job, as well as to provide compensation in cases of work -related injuries or illnesses. Both countries have also committed to establishing and maintaining minimum employment standards.

The fact that the Government of Canada is helping Panama address these issues speaks well of Canada. We are recognized as a country that is compassionate. We do what we say we will do and we trade with honest intent.

Businesses that treat their workers decently are more likely to attract skilled and productive employees, just like businesses that treat their customers well are likely to have better sales.

We have a reputation for honesty, integrity and reliability. We keep our promises and we play by the rules. We want to help build a Canada-Panama relationship to that same extent.

, I would encourage the members opposite to support Bill C-24, not only for Canada but also to help build a strong partnership with our colleagues in Panama. We want to strengthen Canada's economy, a foundation for future trade and opportunities to promote and ensure fair, productive and safe workplaces that will benefit both countries.

• (1530)

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank the member for pointing out at least some effort to address labour and environmental issues in this proposed trade agreement with Panama.

What is so regrettable is that supposedly this agreement is premised on what was learned from our negotiations and implementation of the NAFTA. I want to share with members a provision in NAFTA that says, "it is inappropriate to encourage investment by relaxing domestic health, safety and environmental measures".

What kind of measures are we suggesting to Panama about how seriously we treat our trade agreements formed with other nations? We already violated that agreement in this House yesterday by downgrading Canadian environmental laws for an economic advantage.

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Therefore, can the member give assurances to this House that this time around, in this agreement, we will provide the language and we will live up to our obligations and commitments in the trade agreement to protect the environment?

Mr. Bev Shipley: Madam Speaker, we all need to understand how important the environment is, not only to Canada but also to the people in Panama. When we have businesses going there, they must not only follow the labour agreements that both countries have signed but they must also help to raise the bar to ensure, in the environmental aspects of what they are doing, whether it is in mining or in agriculture initiatives, that they become better environmentalists and hopefully reach the high standards that we have in Canada. I do not believe those agreements will be violated, not when they have been signed and agreed to by both Panama and Canada.

• (1535)

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren (Chatham-Kent—Essex, CPC): Madam Speaker, I listened with interest to my colleague's speech on this proposed agreement with Panama and I was encouraged to hear him talk about the importance of labour laws and the importance of respecting those laws in other countries.

There has been a considerable amount of criticism that for the labour unions in other countries these laws are not respected. Could the member just elaborate and tell this House the importance of that to this government and why we will continue to move in that direction?

Mr. Bev Shipley: Madam Speaker, part of why the whole Canada–Panama labour co-operation agreement has been signed between both countries is that we recognized that, while there will likely continue to be some issues around corruption and around the labour issues, the intent of any agreement is to help build a country's economic strength, its rule of law and its respect for workers so we do not have child labour and workers have the right of association to form unions. We agree with that. It has been found that when we come alongside those countries and give them open opportunity in those areas where they are weak, they then become better stewards of those areas.

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Madam Speaker, if it is the case that there are some data that trade agreements do have the effect of raising labour and environmental standards, why did the member's government refuse to put in those kinds of evaluation efforts in agreements like the recent Jordan agreement? Could the member share with this House the data he has seen that show that trade agreements do have that positive effect? I think all members would agree that is a good objective but I am not so sure that the data are clear to support him.

Mr. Bev Shipley: Madam Speaker, my colleague and I sit on the international trade committee, and I have great respect for him.

Even in Canada, if we have people in dire straits in poverty, if we give them the opportunity for a job, to raise their social status or to provide better for their family, then those relationships become stronger. I do not think that relationship with families is any different than when we deal with other countries on trade agreements.

Mr. Russ Hiebert (South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to highlight the benefits of the free trade agreement with Panama.

With one in five Canadian jobs generated through international trade, our government's pro-trade plan is essential to bringing continued prosperity to Canadians. At the same time, when Canadian businesses are faced with tough global economic challenges, the benefits that the Canada-Panama free trade agreement will provide are tremendously important for our economy.

Our government is consistently demonstrating that its top priorities are jobs, growth and long-term prosperity. That is why we embarked upon the most ambitious trade plan in Canadian history.

To this end, since 2006, Canada has concluded new free trade agreements with nine countries: Colombia, Jordan, Peru, the European Free Trade Association member states of Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Switzerland, most recently with Honduras and Panama. We are negotiating with many more, including the European Union.

Our government understands, as do Canadians, that expanding our trade and investment ties around the world will help create new jobs and opportunities for hard-working Canadians from every region of our country.

Today I would like to focus on how Panama fits within our Americas strategy as part of discussions on the Canada-Panama free trade agreement.

Panama is already a significant trading partner for Canada, with two-way trade totalling over \$235 million in 2011. In addition, it is an established market for our country's exporters and presents significant opportunities for Canadian businesses. Canada's exporters, investors and service providers are calling for these kinds of opportunities. Entrepreneurs want access to global markets and Canada's businesses can compete and win against the very best in the world.

Let me now turn to how this agreement fits within our government's Americas strategy, which was announced as a government priority in 2007 and was renewed in March, 2012.

The renewal seeks to maximize Canada's engagement by aligning priorities and leveraging Canadian strengths in areas where Canada can have the highest impact. The three goals of the renewed strategy are: first, increase Canadian and hemispheric economic opportunity; second, address security issues and advance freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law through capacity building; and third, build a stable foundation for Canada's engagement and increased influence in the hemisphere.

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As a member of the international trade committee, it is clear to me that stronger economic ties are becoming increasingly important with the uncertainty in the global economy. Expanding Canada's trade and investment in the Americas will help protect existing jobs and create new jobs and increased prosperity for Canadians. Canada's efforts to increase economic opportunities centre on deepening commercial ties by advancing our trade agreements.

The Americas is the most successful region for recent Canadian bilateral trade initiatives, with 7 of Canada's 10 concluded free trade agreements being with countries in the Americas. To maximize the benefits flowing from these agreements, the Americas strategy recognizes the need to make Canadian companies aware of the advantages and opportunities that they create. Increased engagement through trade and commercial economic ties is one of the best ways to support positive change and growth in the Americas. Advancing freer trade in the Americas opens new doors of opportunity for Canadian companies, increasing economic benefits for Canadians, including increased jobs and prosperity.

Canada's strategic push to liberalize trade with the Americas is working. We are removing barriers and facilitating two-way commerce. The Americas offer great potential. Total trade growth between countries in the Americas and Canada has increased by 39.5%, from 2005 to 2010. In order to continue to increase economic opportunity, the renewed Americas strategy will focus on intensifying trade promotion and relationship building efforts to ensure that the Canadian private sector is taking full advantage of the trade and economic agreements that are and continue to be put in place.

As part of increasing economic opportunity with Panama, Canada is committed to a strong economic partnership that will contribute to enhanced prosperity in both our countries.

• (1540)

Tools, such as this free trade agreement and its parallel labour and environment agreements, will promote commercial exchange, while building a winning advantage for our companies, especially in natural resource management.

I want to take a moment to pay special tribute to His Excellency Francisco Carlo Escobar Pedreschi, the former Panamanian ambassador to Canada, for all of his efforts and his strong support of this renewed and expanded free trade agreement.

To enable and protect Canadian trade and commercial investments, the security situation in Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean must be taken into consideration and has rightly been made a core focus in the renewed Americas strategy.

In recognizing its security challenges, Panama has significantly increased spending on public security and has committed to the reform of security institutions. Panama continues to foster strong security co-operation with the United States and has demonstrated a willingness to co-operate with Central American neighbours under the Central American integration system regional security strategy.

Canada is pleased with the significant efforts that Panama is making to meet the challenges posed by organized crime and its efforts to exercise leadership in confronting the public security threats facing Central America.

In a region where relationships are fundamental to success, long-term and multi-faceted engagement is a vital part of Canada's Americas strategy. Competition for market share is on the rise and Canada must demonstrate that it is a serious and committed partner.

The engagement of the Prime Minister, our ministers and seniors officials has been central to this effort. While sustaining high level engagement will be essential, Canada will benefit from building relationships more broadly across the private sector, government, academia, civil society and people to people.

All countries in the region have a vested interest in prosperity, security and stability. That is why it is so important for us to build and sustain relationships with our like-minded hemisphere neighbours.

Through our strong bilateral relationships and the increasing people-to-people networks generated through educational exchanges, increased tourism and business links, our ties with Panama are growing stronger every day and we are seeing an increase in the opportunities for Canadian companies.

With 60% of our GDP dependent on trade, it is clear that jobs and communities across Canada depend on trade with other countries. Through increased access to export markets for Canadian businesses, we are supporting economic growth in Canada and creating new opportunities, jobs, growth and long-term prosperity for Canadians.

The Canada-Panama free trade agreement and the parallel labour co-operation and environment agreements are key components to advancing the goals of the Americas strategy. I ask all members for their support.

• (1545)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to ask my Conservative colleague why the members of his party voted against the amendment moved by my NDP colleague from Burnaby—New Westminster, who was trying to include the concept of sustainable development in the free trade agreement with Panama.

The NDP believes that economic development can go hand in hand with environmental protection and workers' right to live in safety and have well-paid jobs. That is partly what sustainable development is about.

Why did my Conservative colleagues vote against this very reasonable amendment moved by my NDP colleague?

[*English*]

Mr. Russ Hiebert: Madam Speaker, the member opposite raises a question related to the environment. I want to ensure he is aware of the provisions within the environment sub-agreement that relate to his concern.

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The agreement on the environment commits both countries to pursue high levels of environmental protection to improve and enforce their environmental laws effectively and to maintain appropriate environmental assessment procedures. It also has provisions encouraging the use of voluntary best practices for corporate social responsibility and a commitment to promote public awareness.

One last point about the environment is that it reaffirms the country's international commitment under the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity to promote the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity and to respect, preserve and maintain traditional knowledge, innovation and practice of indigenous and local communities.

It is my opinion that this side agreement goes a long way to promoting and protecting the environment.

The member also raises the concern about labour. As a member of a party which is always very concerned about labour, I want to highlight the provisions within the agreement that state that the labour co-operation agreement contains strong and enforceable provisions to protect and promote internationally recognized labour. We are talking about things like occupational health and safety, including compensation for injuries, employment standards, minimum wage—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I see other members rising for questions and I would like to give others some opportunities for questions.

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want thank my colleague for his work on international trade issues in the committee.

My question is relatively simple. The member is from British Columbia and his activity on the international trade file has been extensive. I would like to know, from the member's perspective, what trade and international trade and free trade agreements mean to British Columbia and his community?

• (1550)

Mr. Russ Hiebert: Madam Speaker, it has been a pleasure to serve with the member in the past.

There are two ways to look at this. We can look at the national benefits and then I will get to the regional benefits for British Columbia.

Nationally, let us not move past the point that this creates opportunities for Canadians across the country. By eliminating tariffs on non-agricultural imports, there is a huge opportunity for Canadian companies to get involved in the markets. Service providers will have expanded opportunities in the areas of information and communication technology, energy and financial services. There are rules for governing foreign investment. Canadian businesses can invest in Panama as well.

Let us keep in mind that Panama is about to expand the canal with, I believe, a \$5 billion investment. I want to ensure that Canada has an opportunity to participate in that.

The member's specific question was how this would benefit the west, in beautiful British Columbia. Looking at the specifics, the

tariffs that are eliminated address issues around paper and paper board, so there is the forestry industry, processed food products, milling products, machinery, pulses from other Prairie provinces and precious stones and metals of which we have a lot in British Columbia.

We can see that the spectrum with which this will impact our province is pretty large.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleagues from all parties who have already spoken in the course of this debate for letting us know their views.

We are debating another free trade agreement signed by this government in Central America, this time with Panama. So Panama is joining Colombia, Peru and Honduras, which have all negotiated or signed agreements with this Conservative government.

This agreement is just one more step in the Canada-United States strategy of prioritizing sequential bilateralism in the form of a NAFTA-style trade agreement. In my opinion, bilateralism is a very bad strategy. As was the case for the other agreements I have mentioned, this agreement presents problems, and that means we have a number of reasons for opposing the bill that has been introduced in this House.

This agreement presents a significant problem in terms of workers' rights in Panama, and in fact there are no provisions in this trade agreement to ensure that Panamanian workers will not be denied their rights as they have been in the past. Two of the amendments proposed in committee by my colleague from Burnaby—New Westminster would have protected unionized workers in Panama by guaranteeing them the right to bargain collectively and by forcing the Minister of International Trade, the principal representative of Canada on the joint Canada-Panama commission, to consult regularly with representatives of Canadian workers and Canadian unions.

Those amendments, like all the others, were rejected by the Conservatives and the Liberals. Unfortunately, the result is a free trade zone where workers' rights are cheapened, something that is already a serious problem in Panama.

[*English*]

The fact that these reasonable amendments were rejected by both the Conservatives and the Liberals reminded me of one of the last times we saw the two parties come together on an FTA in this region. I am referring to the Canada-Colombia Free Trade Agreement. It was during the last Parliament that many of my colleagues discussed and debated that agreement, eventually seeing its passage as the Liberals supported the Conservatives. However, that support came with a condition at the suggestion of the hon. member for Kings—Hants. Under that condition, each country would have to provide annual reports to their parliaments assessing the impact of the free trade agreement on human rights.

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To the Liberals, this was the answer to the grievous human rights concerns that exist in Colombia. To the Liberals, this was the silver bullet, or as put another way by the member for Kings—Hants in a press release dated March 25, 2010, was the “new gold standard” for human rights reporting in free trade agreements.

With that deal in place, the Liberals signed onto the FTA and it went into force. Therefore, maybe it is appropriate timing that just last month the very first report under that agreement was published. Given what the Liberals had agreed to, we should have expected to receive a fulsome report on the human rights situation on the ground in Colombia, but what did we get instead? We got nothing, zero, nada on human rights in Colombia.

What was the excuse for this failure to report? The international trade minister told us, “the government did not have enough information to conduct a full assessment by the time it was required to submit the report to Parliament”. Seriously, that was the answer. He may as well have said that his dog ate his homework. If this is what the new gold standard is supposed to look like, then so far it looks like the Liberals were sold a big piece of fool's gold.

Under this FTA, the government is supposed to produce these reports every 12 months. How is it that it could not produce at least a preliminary report after nine months? Maybe it did not because it knew it would not be the most flattering and would create some political problems for it.

Regardless of the excuses for not reporting, the entire reporting process that was agreed to has major flaws.

First, these reports do not meet the United Nations' standard, which states that nations should complete human rights assessments before signing an FTA rather than after.

• (1555)

Also, this report is coming directly from the government itself, not an independent third party. We are counting on the Government of Colombia to tell us if it is violating the human rights of its own citizens. Throughout history that kind of self-reporting arrangement has never been viewed as the most credible approach, yet we are depending on it here.

But the *coup de grâce* really comes from the final problem with this approach, which is that under this FTA there are no negative consequences for any negative results that come from that report. So regardless of how bad the reports may be, there is not a single consequence for the Government of Colombia. How does the Conservative government expect the Government of Colombia to be motivated to improve the human rights situation in its country if it faces no consequences for not doing so?

After the Colombia FTA came into force, we saw the violence and the repression of human rights continue. Groups like MiningWatch Canada have brought forward reports from Colombia of incidents involving Canadian mining companies in Colombia, particularly regarding indigenous rights violations.

On September 2 Father José Reinel Restrepo was murdered in Marmato, Colombia. Father Restrepo just happened to be a very vocal opponent of a mining project proposed by a company based in Canada called Gran Colombia Gold Corp. Under this project his

home community of Marmato would be obliterated in order to make way for an open-pit mine.

There are other NGOs that have also brought forward stories and reports of human rights violations. Despite all these reports brought forward by reputable NGOs, I remind the House that the Conservative government said it “did not have enough information to conduct a full assessment by the time it was required...”. These reports seem to state otherwise.

I represent a riding where many of these same mining firms work and work well. They work with local communities and aboriginal nations to provide opportunities for the people who call our region home. I have personally negotiated many agreements with many of these companies on behalf of the Grand Council of the Cree in the past 20 years.

I have to ask myself why it is that some of these companies seem to not take this same approach when working in other countries. Maybe it is because under this FTA these companies simply do not have the obligation to do so. The Conservative government, by signing FTAs that do not truly protect human rights in these partner countries, is sending the signal that as long as they act like good corporate citizens at home, we will forget about what they do abroad. This “what happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas” approach to corporate social responsibility is not only doing harm to communities in these other countries; it is putting a stain on the reputation of our country and the reputations of those Canadian companies that take their corporate social responsibility seriously.

• (1600)

[*Translation*]

The NDP believes that the federal government should stop following the NAFTA model exclusively, at the expense of other approaches. It should explore different ways of promoting trade. Our trade policy, here in Canada, should be based on the principles of fair, sustainable and equitable trade, trade that builds partnerships with other countries that support the principles of social justice and human rights, while not ignoring the need to expand our trade objectives. It is possible to have a better model, but the political will has to be there, and that is what is sorely lacking on the part of this Conservative government.

The NDP firmly believes that there is another model for trade relations, a better model, one that can be applied to Panama and any other country. That model includes the fundamental principle that all trade agreements must protect and promote human rights. There is a lot of work to be done to improve this free trade agreement with Panama. I hope the government is going to take our suggestions to heart and exchange its free trade model for our fair trade model, which is viable and realistic.

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my NDP colleague for his remarks. I am glad to know that he, too, cares about the economic agreements that Canada enters into with other countries. He mentioned that it was very important to him that these agreements be sustainable and equitable.

It worries me that Canada may end up exploiting workers who live in Panama under this agreement.

Government Orders

Is my colleague also concerned about the potential exploitation of workers under this free trade agreement?

Mr. Romeo Saganash: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Chicoutimi—Le Fjord for his excellent question. We also ask excellent questions on this side of the House.

It is such an important question. In all the agreements that we will have to negotiate in the future, the measures in place in these agreements must be comparable to what we have in Canada, whether in terms of the environment, human rights or labour standards. This is important, and we insist on that.

Only yesterday, I read the United Nations Human Rights Committee report. On the other side of the House, they seem to be saying that there is no problem with human rights in Panama and that there are therefore no concerns to voice in this regard. Yet, in its latest report on Panama, in paragraph 20, the Human Rights Committee, which monitors the implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, had the following to say about child labour:

[English]

The committee notes with concern that, despite the fact that the Constitution prohibits persons under the age of 14 years from working, including as domestic workers, and despite legislative measures to prohibit the worst forms of child labour, the rate of child labour in the country continues to be high.

[Translation]

That is why we are concerned about this type of free trade agreement.

Ms. Laurin Liu (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague. He raised several important and interesting issues for Canadians, including protecting the environment and the rights of workers.

I also want to mention that despite the Canadian government's requests, Panama has consistently refused to sign a tax information exchange agreement. This is very troubling because we know that there is currently a very high volume of money laundering activities in Panama, including laundering of money from drug trafficking. We know, therefore, that there is no transparency when it comes to taxation in Panama. Moreover, that is why the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development called Panama a tax haven.

Does my colleague have any comments to make on this issue? Should Canada proceed with a little more care when it negotiates free trade agreements? Is the process too fast?

• (1605)

Mr. Romeo Saganash: Madam Speaker, our credibility is at stake when we negotiate free trade agreements with countries like Panama.

The Department of Justice expressed extreme concern with regard to the money laundering situation, which is very well known in that country. Why are we going ahead with this type of free trade agreement without taking care to determine whether what is going on is really going on? What measures are being proposed in our agreements to remedy these situations?

That applies to the issues raised by my NDP colleague, but also to the environmental issues, human rights issues and right of

association issues in that country, which is a matter of constant concern. We need to be able to act rigorously each time we negotiate a free trade agreement.

[English]

Mr. Devinder Shory (Calgary Northeast, CPC): Madam Speaker, I rise in the House today to speak in support of Bill C-24, the Canada–Panama free trade agreement. This is a trade agreement that would help Canadians from all regions of the country, including the hard-working people of Calgary Northeast.

The Canada-Panama free trade agreement would level the playing field for Canadian businesses in Panama. As we all know, healthy Canadian businesses produce jobs, growth and long-term prosperity. Seeing as how Panama has negotiated a few free trade agreements in recent years, Canadian companies are currently at a disadvantage in Panama because many of their competitors have better market access under one of Panama's recent free trade agreements.

In March 2011, six Central American countries, including Panama, initialled an association agreement with the European Union. The agreement includes a section on trade, which will reduce tariffs on European goods such as machinery and transport equipment, goods that are also key Canadian exports to Panama.

In addition, since 2003, Panama has signed and implemented free trade agreements with Chile, Peru, Singapore and Taiwan. However, it is not just these trade agreements against which we are competing.

The United States is our friend but it is also a competitor. The U.S. signed a comprehensive free trade agreement with Panama in 2007. It has been ratified by both Panama and the U.S. and it is expected to come into force before the end of 2012. Once that agreement is brought into force, over 87% of U.S. exports of consumer and industrial goods and nearly 56% of American agriculture exports to Panama will become duty-free immediately. Canadian producers of pork, potatoes and other goods will be hard pressed to succeed in the Panamanian market if their American competitors enjoy such duty-free access while we do not.

I am sure my hon. colleagues will agree that we must take steps to maintain Canada's competitiveness in Panama. The Canada-Panama free trade agreement would do just that. By removing the majority of tariff barriers faced by Canadian goods exported to Panama, this agreement would help Canadians succeed in one of Latin America's most dynamic and rapidly growing economies.

The Canada-Panama free trade agreement would also help Canadian companies bid competitively on major government procurement contracts, including projects related to the \$5.3 billion U.S. expansion of the Panama Canal. If we in the House believe that Canadian exporters and investors are among the best in the world, we must help them prosper by ensuring that they are not disadvantaged in the Panamanian market. The opportunities are there and it is our job to help Canadians take advantage of them.

Now I will turn to the second set of benefits that the Canada-Panama free trade agreement would provide. As members know, Canada is a country of many regions. Tariff concessions under the Canada-Panama free trade agreement would make Canadian goods from every region more competitive in Panama's market, bringing economic benefits to every province.

Permit me to briefly remind the House of a few specific benefits that this agreement would have for exporters across Canada.

When I migrated to Canada, Quebec was my first home. That is where I met my wife Neetu. Our first son Jatin was born in Montreal on January 15, 1991. It is a beautiful part of Canada and a province that would benefit from this trade agreement. Quebec pork producers would enjoy immediate duty-free access to the Panamanian market. Panama's tariffs on pork currently range up to 70%.

Quebec producers of industrial and construction machinery would benefit from the immediate elimination of Panama's current tariffs, which are as high as 15%. Quebec firms in the pharmaceutical and aerospace sectors would also enjoy duty-free access to Panama. Panamanian tariffs in these sectors currently range up to 11% for pharmaceuticals, and up to 15% in the aerospace sector.

• (1610)

Therefore, I urge all Quebec members to stand up for Quebec producers and to vote in favour of this agreement.

In Ontario, the free trade agreement would benefit exporters through the elimination of Panama's tariffs on industrial and construction machinery. Ontario exporters of electrical and electronic equipment which currently face tariffs of up to 15% would also enjoy immediate duty-free access to the Panamanian market. Other sectors of export interest for Ontario include pharmaceuticals, chemicals and furniture. In all of these sectors, Panama will immediately eliminate its current tariffs when the free trade agreement comes into force. I know that the Leader of the Opposition likes to blame all manufacturing slowdowns on other provinces, but supporting this agreement is one real way, an easy, honest way, that the NDP can stand up for Ontario manufacturers and exporters.

In B.C., where I also lived before settling in Alberta, exporters would benefit from the immediate elimination of tariffs on goods such as paper and paperboard, processed food products and wine. Exporters in my home province of Alberta would enjoy duty-free access for industrial and construction machinery, and power-generating machinery.

In grain-growing provinces like Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Alberta, farmers of oilseeds, pulses and cereals would benefit from the immediate elimination of Panama's tariffs, some as high as 40%, on their products.

Let us jump back east. In Atlantic Canada, exporters would benefit from the immediate reduction of Panama's tariffs on paper and paperboard. Current tariffs on these products range as high as 15%.

Panama would also eliminate its tariffs on fish and seafood, which range up to 15%, and frozen french fries, which range up to 20%. As we know, french fry superstar McCain Foods is fast becoming a

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global player, and recently I had the pleasure of touring one of its facilities in Gujarat, India with our hard-working Minister of International Trade. Let us not stand in its path to success with Panama.

Other sectors of interest for Atlantic Canadian exporters that would receive duty-free access under the Canada-Panama free trade agreement include plastic, electrical and electronic equipment, and information and communication technology.

These represent just a few of the ways that Canadians would benefit from this free trade agreement, but before workers and businesses across Canada can take advantage of these new opportunities, we must do our part and pass Bill C-24. We live in challenging economic times, and we cannot allow Canada's competitiveness to diminish. By pursuing an aggressive bilateral trade agenda, this government is helping Canadians to compete and win in markets beyond our borders.

International trade plays a critical role in the success of our nation; 60% of our GDP and 1 in 5 jobs depend on trade. Free trade agreements, including this agreement with Panama, are necessary to help Canada maintain its current economic strength and prosperity. That is why I hope that my hon. colleagues here in the House will join me in supporting the passage of Bill C-24. It is good for constituents, it helps produce jobs and growth, and it is good for Canada.

• (1615)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Madam Speaker, I find that quite unbelievable. The Conservative member opposite is saying that the agreement between Panama and Canada will be good for the Quebec economy and that we need to trust the Conservative government. What I would like to ask that hon. member is whether he is trying to make me laugh.

The Conservative government negotiated a free trade agreement on softwood lumber with the United States, and regions like mine—Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean—have still not recovered from that forestry crisis. The wonderful forestry resources of Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean are being exported for peanuts, which is killing the regional economy when it comes to secondary and tertiary processing.

Government MPs were the ones who voted in favour of the softwood lumber free trade agreement with the United States. Now, the government wants us to trust it on the agreement with Panama. The government thinks that Quebec will come out the big winner, as will the Maritimes, Alberta, British Columbia and all Canadian provinces. Are you trying to make me laugh? Does the Conservative government think Canadians just fell off the turnip truck?

The Deputy Speaker: I would like to thank the hon. member for correcting himself and addressing his comments to the Chair.

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The hon. member for Calgary Northeast.

[English]

Mr. Devinder Shory: Madam Speaker, I am not kidding. I am serious that this agreement would benefit all provinces. Quebec would benefit from the elimination of Panama's tariffs on key exports such as pork, industrial and construction machinery, pharmaceuticals and aerospace products. Investment and services provisions would benefit the engineering, construction and transportation sectors in Quebec.

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brant, CPC): Madam Speaker, of course we constantly hear the opposition opposing any kind of free trade agreement, going back to NAFTA. We in our ridings listened to the businesspeople and the workers who are employed at those businesses to find out what the real issues are on the ground. Those issues are about expanding their businesses, creating more work, getting better bonuses as a result of hard work and perseverance in terms of their ability to make contributions to Canada. Of course, free trade and expanding our markets do all that. It is totally what the opposition members are against.

In your comments today, your being from Alberta, I know you have seen many of the—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. Could I ask this hon. member as well to direct his comments toward the Chair? And could you conclude?

Mr. Phil McColeman: Madam Speaker, I will conclude. I would like him to comment on the many benefits that he has seen in his province and his riding.

Mr. Devinder Shory: Madam Speaker, as my colleague knows and would agree, we on this side of the House know that opening new markets and creating new business opportunities lead to jobs, growth and long-term prosperity for all Canadians. A trade agreement with Panama would provide greater economic opportunity for Canadians and for Canadian businesses. He is absolutely right that this free trade agreement specifically would better enable Canadian companies to participate in large projects such as the \$5.3 billion U.S. expansion of the Panama Canal which is expected to contribute to Panama's future growth.

A free trade agreement would also help level the playing field for Canadian businesses against competitors that already have or are seeking preferential access to Panama's market, for example, the United States, the European Union, Chile, Singapore, et cetera.

•(1620)

The Deputy Speaker: Before resuming debate, it is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: The hon. member for Random—Burin—St. George's, Search and Rescue; the hon. member for Edmonton—Strathcona, Government Spending; the hon. member for Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, Search and Rescue.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord.

[Translation]

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Madam Speaker, today, I have the honour of debating the Canada-Panama free trade agreement. Obviously, I have a lot to say about this, and I

have some serious criticisms of the government and the Republic of Panama, which we all know is a tax haven.

First, I would like to give some background for those watching at home who would like to understand what is happening a little better and who want to know why Canada wants to conclude a free trade agreement with Panama and how it all works.

On August 11, 2009, the Conservative government concluded negotiations for a comprehensive free trade agreement with the Republic of Panama. The agreement includes side agreements on labour co-operation and the environment. Bills were introduced, but they died on the order paper as a result of the election. Recently, these bills were re-introduced by the Conservative government.

I would like to say that the members of the Conservative government have been playing politics by saying that the NDP is opposed to trade agreements with other countries. That is completely untrue. The NDP is in favour of economic agreements with other countries. However, these agreements must respect the environment and workers' rights. In short, these agreements must be win-win and not support the exploitation of one country by another, as is the case in this free trade agreement between Canada and Panama.

The hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster proposed a number of amendments in committee. These amendments were reasonable and would have improved this bill. I will refer to some of them. However, the people at home need to know that the Conservatives voted against these amendments. They were not incorporated into the last iteration of the bill on the Canada-Panama free trade agreement.

So, the hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster proposed some changes in order to include the concept of sustainable development, which is very important in trade. I do not need to explain what sustainable development means since Quebeckers have been familiar with this concept for many years now. It is important to have good economic development while respecting the environment and workers' rights.

It is also important to ensure that Canada's trade agreements with other countries include the concept of responsible investment, but the Conservatives voted against that. Apparently, they want more irresponsible investment, which does not surprise me given their ridiculous expenses these days. My NDP colleague also called for mandatory fiscal transparency, which I will say more about later.

Right now, Panama is hiding behind a smokescreen. We have no idea what is going on in terms of finances, and there is no accountability. One of the reasons Panama is known as a tax haven is that anyone doing business with Panama can do things on the quiet and launder money. Money from Latin American drug cartels flows through Panama and comes out clean. Apparently, the Conservative government has no problem with that. It thinks Canada should dismantle its tariff and economic barriers and do more business with that country.

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My NDP colleague also proposed adding protection for workers' rights, including the right to collective bargaining, a concept that Canadians are very familiar with. The right to collective bargaining is important to NDP MPs. Whenever there is a dispute between the employer and the union—the workers—there has to be a middle ground. The employer, which has greater financial resources and more political influence, should not bulldoze, threaten or blackmail workers. The workers' rights situation in Latin America and South America can be disturbing. Personally, as an MP, I am very aware of that. The Conservatives decided to vote against our proposal, and I find that utterly deplorable.

● (1625)

I mentioned that Panama is a tax haven, but we also know that it has a poor record when it comes to workers' rights. So I am very worried about this bill.

How can the Government of Canada, in good conscience, decide to sign such a free trade agreement?

A free trade agreement or simply a trade agreement between two countries is the highest form of trust that we can show. We are saying that we will not place barriers between the two countries, that we will work together and will allow free trade in goods, so that the economies of the two countries can develop and move forward.

So I feel a bit uneasy as a Canadian. How can Canada sign a free trade agreement with Panama, when that country is a tax haven that violates workers' rights and compromises their safety?

I have some serious concerns. What is the Conservative government's motivation for signing a free trade agreement with Panama?

Here is an interesting statistic. Do members know that bilateral trade between our two countries reached only \$149 million in 2008, or less than 1% of our trade?

Out of all of our trading partners, why choose Panama, when our bilateral trade with that country represents less than 1% of our trade? Was it simply because the Conservative government likes the fact that it is a tax haven?

I cannot help but wonder about these serious issues, especially when Canadians, Quebeckers and the people of my region are being asked to tighten their belts and being told not to work under the table, to declare all of their earnings—a notion that I support. Why would we do business with a country that has different standards?

For various reasons, it does not seem to bother people that illegal financial transactions take place there. In Canada, people have to be responsible and declare all of their earnings, but in a country like Panama, people do not have to do so.

If we do business with Panama, Canadian capital will go south to Panama and more of it will leave our country. This means less money for our domestic economy. Knowing that we are running a deficit for yet another consecutive year, we could say we there is not enough money in Canada, and services to the public have to be cut as a result.

Some political decisions are stupid—for example, laying off 100 employees responsible for processing employment insurance claims

at the Service Canada office just before Christmas. The effects of that decision were felt in my region, and especially in my riding of Chicoutimi—Le Fjord. People had to wait several months before receiving their first employment insurance cheque. That is worrisome.

Why do business with a country that is a tax haven if that will lead to the flight of capital from Canada? In our country, we do not place enough importance on managing our finances well.

I do not wish to question the lawfulness of the agreement that the members opposite wish to enter into with Panama, but I do have many questions about it.

I would like to go back to working conditions in Panama and other countries we do business with. In the past, the NDP opposed free trade agreements. As I mentioned, it is important to the NDP to maintain good economic relations with other countries. We are 100% convinced that tariff barriers between our two countries can be eliminated in order to grow both our economies. However, there must be a relationship of equals, even though the Conservative government has been trying to violate workers' rights since coming to power in 2006.

This tendency is also evident in the changes to employment insurance that would force workers to accept wages that are 70% of their previous wages. This will put downward pressure on wages.

The NDP is committed to Canada as a country where workers are paid well and treated well.

● (1630)

That is why we like doing business with countries that do the same thing. That is my opinion on the matter.

[*English*]

Mr. Devinder Shory (Calgary Northeast, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is incredible to listen to the member and his colleagues in the opposition. They always try to show that they are a pro-trade party. I wonder how many free trade agreements NDP members have supported to date.

I would like my colleague to comment on this. We all know that Panama and Canada are both members of the International Labour Organization and have both committed to ensuring that their laws respect the International Labour Organization's 1998 Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, which covers the elimination of child labour, forced labour and discrimination, the respect of freedom of association and the right to bargain collectively. I would like him to comment on this provision of the agreement on which both countries agree.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Dany Morin: Madam Speaker, I am going to deal with the Conservative member's first question. He said that the NDP should have supported free trade agreements in the past. I have brought this up with the hon. member previously and I am going to bring it up again. Following the logic of the hon. member opposite, the NDP should have supported the most recent softwood lumber agreement that has ruined the forestry industry in my region.

Routine Proceedings

The NDP has analyzed the bill before us. The hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster introduced 11 amendments that could have protected the rights of workers and the environment and other rights not covered by this bill. In fact, my Conservative colleague mentioned a number of rights.

But it is important to have those understandings written into the bill. Otherwise, in a country like Panama, where there is a lack of transparency in tax matters and in other respects, there is the danger of things going off the rails and of some things not being considered. My simple reply is that things must be put in writing. The amendments should have been accepted; they would have improved the bill.

Ms. Laurin Liu (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, NDP): Madam Speaker, I think the NDP is quite clear. We are in favour of trade with other countries, but it must be fair trade. Workers' rights must be respected. That is why my colleague from Burnaby—New Westminster proposed two amendments to protect the rights of workers in Panama.

The first amendment would have given them the right to bargain collectively, while the second would have forced the Minister of International Trade, who is Canada's principal representative on the Canada-Panama joint commission, to consult regularly with representatives of Canadian workers and Canadian unions.

I think that is the least we can do to respect workers' rights. Does my hon. colleague have any comments on that subject?

• (1635)

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Madam Speaker, my New Democrat colleague specifically mentioned the amendments that my New Democrat colleague from Burnaby—New Westminster wanted to make to the bill, which were intended to protect workers. The Conservatives voted against them. That does not surprise me from our lovely Conservative government.

We are talking about the same Conservative government that intervened in the labour disputes at Air Canada, Canada Post and Canadian Pacific. Time is passing so quickly and there has been so much interference in labour disputes by this Conservative government. In all the labour disputes the Conservative government has intervened in, in the last year, and in all of the interference it has engaged in, we see an extremely clear line. The government sides with management, and as a result does not respond to the demands of the unions that were engaged in disputes with the employers, whether about wages, pensions or job security. I find it very disturbing, but I do not find it surprising to see this government doing business with a country like Panama that—

The Deputy Speaker: The Minister of State and Chief Government Whip is rising on a point of order.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of State and Chief Government Whip, CPC): Madam Speaker, there have been consultations among the parties and I am seeking unanimous consent for these travel motions. I move:

That, in relation to its study, Standing on Guard for Thee: Ensuring that Canada's Immigration System is Secure, six members of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration be authorized to travel to Laval, Quebec, Toronto, Ontario, and Vancouver, British Columbia, during the period of June to October 2012, and that the necessary staff accompany the Committee.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of State and Chief Government Whip, CPC): I move:

That, in relation to its study on A Comprehensive and High-Level Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) with Japan, six members of the Standing Committee on International Trade be authorized to travel to Tokyo, Osaka and Nagoya, Japan, during the period of August to November 2012, and that the necessary staff accompany the Committee.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of State and Chief Government Whip, CPC): I move:

That, in relation to its study on the Annual Conference of Canadian Council of Public Accountants Committees (CCPAC) and the Canadian Council of Legislative Auditors (CCOLA) Annual Conference, four members of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts be authorized to travel to Iqaluit, Nunavut, in August 2012, and that the necessary staff accompany the Committee.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION, PRIVACY AND ETHICS

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of State and Chief Government Whip, CPC): I move:

That, in relation to its study on Privacy and social media, six members of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics be authorized to travel to Washington, D.C., United States of America, in the Fall of 2012, and that the necessary staff accompany the Committee.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. chief government whip have the unanimous consent of the House to propose the motions?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: Having heard the terms of the motions, is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motions?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Government Orders

(Motions agreed to)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS*[English]***CANADA-PANAMA ECONOMIC GROWTH AND PROSPERITY ACT**

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-24, An Act to implement the Free Trade Agreement between Canada and the Republic of Panama, the Agreement on the Environment between Canada and the Republic of Panama and the Agreement on Labour Cooperation between Canada and the Republic of Panama, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the motion that this question be now put.

Mr. Brian Jean (Fort McMurray—Athabasca, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am thankful for the opportunity to rise today to speak in relation to the Canada-Panama free trade agreement.

I would also like to mention that I did rise out of my chair slowly, as may have been seen on camera, because I ran 10 kilometres on Sunday to support a great charity in Barrie for the member of Parliament for Barrie, who did a great job and sold out. I would like to express my thanks to him and the town of Barrie.

I do want to talk about free trade and the belief I have in free trade around the world and the ability for Canada to open up its markets, because it is very important of course to the people I represent, to the businesses, the financial sectors, the farmers and agriculture producers.

I find it surprising that the NDP still takes the position of anti-free trade. We have seen bluntly what protectionism does to countries. In particular, we have seen iron curtains put up and brought down. They simply do not work. To be protectionist simply, in my mind, creates an atmosphere that brings about the surety that the NDP is not fit to govern because one cannot live in a house that is closed today. Certainly, if we close the borders of our country, we will all suffer the consequences for many years.

Therefore, I do want to put my support in this place firmly in the position behind free trade agreements. Even listening to the arguments, we hear they are quite hollow. Free trade will help the workers of Panama under the conditions that we provide them jobs and we provide a better quality of life as a result of their ability to trade with us.

This agreement actually would bring about additional market access for our agricultural and agrifood producers and exporters. That is very important to my constituents in northern Alberta, because I have many cattle producers, and there are many people who are in the agricultural and agrifood business in all parts of this country. Bluntly, Canada has a competitive advantage in the agribusiness. We can use that competitive advantage to ensure we continue to have the great quality of life that we do have in Canada.

As Canada's agricultural and agrifood sector becomes more modern, innovative and competitive, the sector is becoming a more significant part of Canada's economy. In fact, many people do not

realize this but in 2010, the agriculture and agrifood industry directly accounted for one in eight jobs in Canada. This actually translated to employment for more than 2 million people. That is a lot of people who are employed through this sector.

In the same year, it accounted for about 8% of the GDP of the country. I would like to make mention that 8% of GDP is about the same as what my constituency in northern Alberta, through production of the oil sands, brings into this country, another 8%. Therefore, it is equivalent to about the same as the agricultural and agrifood business in the country as to the gross domestic product it produces for the country. Obviously, both are very important for Canada and for the continued great quality of life we enjoy.

Increasingly, over the last 15 years the agricultural and agrifood sector has become internationally focused. In 2011, exports valued at more than \$41 billion were accounted for in this sector from Canada. This actually ranks Canada as the fifth largest exporter of agriculture and agrifood products in the world, which is a very important place to be. I am hoping with these new free trade agreements we can actually see that rise to first, if not to fourth or third, in the near future.

It is no surprise then, as a result of the great amount of the financial sector and the amount of jobs that are produced by the agricultural and agrifood sector, that our Conservative government continues to work tirelessly on ways to improve access to international markets. I know that my friend, the Minister of International Trade, is doing a great job there and I appreciate his doing that. I barely see him in the House anymore because he is always out somewhere in the world and is extremely busy and working hard for Canadians abroad. I especially appreciate the opportunity he has taken out of his own life to support Canada and Canada's trade market in the agricultural food and agrifood business.

We are achieving this great significant milestone through our commitment to pursue bilateral and regional trade agreements. These trade agreements are essential for continued prosperity for Canadians. I think most people know that.

During question period, the parliamentary secretary actually confirmed how many trade deals we have initiated as a Conservative government. I think it is probably more by three times than was done in the previous 13 years by the previous Liberal government, so we have seen a real focus on that by our government. I think it goes a long way to say how well we are doing as a country.

● (1640)

Certainly, we know the OECD has identified us as being a very strong economy, with the best banking sector and the best financial sector in the world. That is no surprise when we see agreements like the Canada-Panama free trade agreement.

The Conservative government has taken a very firm position on this because we know that to succeed in a global economy, we have to have a strong export market.

Government Orders

We want to ensure that our Canadian agriculture and agrifood producers and exporters remain competitive with other preferential suppliers to Panama, because we are not competing against ourselves; we are competing against other countries. We need to make sure that we have a competitive advantage. We do have a competitive advantage. We have large tracts of land. We have a very good, experienced workforce in the agriculture-agrifood sector. We have the ability to innovate and create, and we have the best agricultural sector in the world, bar none.

We certainly can use these competitive advantages to become that number one exporter. For example, one of the things that has happened in Canada's exports is, believe it or not, frozen french fries. Now, frozen french fries may not seem like a lot to many people. I know some of our members have particular fetishes toward frozen french fries, as we can hear in the background. However, when we get well down into it, this industry would immediately benefit from this because there would be an elimination of the 20% tariffs on this product.

In 2011, Canada exported almost \$12 million worth of frozen french fries to Panama. This is a \$1 million increase over 2010 exports, at a time when things are supposed to be tough in the world. Now, that is a lot of potatoes. That is a lot of potato farmers who we support through these trade deals and through these free trade agreements. I think that is often forgotten by the NDP, that it is actually the farmers we are helping support, the farmers of P.E.I. or wherever they are growing potatoes across this great country, and the ability for those people who package those frozen french fries to be able to keep their jobs, as well, on the assembly line; so it is the manufacturers and the farmers.

Our pulse exporters would also benefit from an immediate tariff elimination with the implementation of this free trade agreement, because tariffs of up to 15% would be eliminated on its implementation. Fifteen per cent of nothing. I do not mean that 15% is nothing. I mean that 15% does nothing for anybody. Those tariffs, those barriers to trade, are not helping Canadian workers and are not helping Panamanian workers. They are simply doing nothing. That is why it would be so good to see.

In 2011, Canada exported more than \$5 million worth of lentils to Panama. Now, that is a lot of lentils, as well. This is almost double the amount of our trade on this product in 2006.

There is a growing market for dried peas in Panama, from Canada. In 2011, Canada exported more than \$1 million worth of dried peas. People forget about that, that it is the farmers, that it is the packers, that it is the manufacturing process, all the way from the farmer to the plate, that takes place in Canada. We want to see more manufacturing, more assembling of product, but we also want to see the farmers being able to grow their product and sell it overseas because that is what they are doing. That is what they have a competitive advantage on.

Canadian malt exporters would also benefit from the immediate elimination of Panamanian tariffs of up to 10%. Again, that is 10% for nothing, just a barrier to trade that does not accomplish anything, that does not give anybody a real job. That is what we are doing in this government: making sure that people have real jobs, that farmers

have real jobs and that they have some ability to sell their products overseas.

In 2011, Canada exported more than \$8 million worth of malt products to Panama. That is a significant amount of malt. This is a significant increase, as well, from the \$3 million worth of malt exports in 2010.

So, we can see that the elimination of these tariffs in this free trade agreement would greatly enhance our ability to export products, agricultural products and agrifood products, to Panamanian society.

In fact, there would be some real benefits to different parts of the country, and I want to talk about that a bit.

In Quebec, for instance, key exports such as pork, industrial and construction machinery, pharmaceuticals and aerospace products would receive a real benefit. In fact, that is where this particular province and the farmers from this province would receive a real benefit. They would also receive a benefit for investment services for the engineering, construction and transportation sectors. That is just in Quebec,

I know I do not have a lot of time left, but Ontario and the western provinces would also receive real benefits.

• (1645)

The real benefits are that we eliminate barriers and trade deals that do not help our producers or our country. We enhance free trade, and it works.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP): Madam Speaker, we know the member across does not believe in the Canadian capacity to refine and upgrade our own resources here at home, so his sellout arguments do not really surprise me.

He referred to providing jobs. Let me say that Panama City has just recently opened the regional hub for Caterpillar, and members will remember that Caterpillar recently fled Canada. Deloitte's Canadian manufacturing consultants say that "we are not going to get the jobs back without the involvement of policy-makers", and Boston Consulting says that "the cost of operating in Canadian dollars is very high".

While we would support a trade agreement that would show a net benefit for Canadians, we cannot support this one, and we do not understand why the member for Fort McMurray—Athabasca continually sells out Canadian jobs and Canadian workers.

• (1650)

Mr. Brian Jean: Madam Speaker, that was so funny I forgot to laugh.

I represent more union members and workers per capita than anybody else in this place. I promise and assure the member that I am not going to stand against workers.

I can say that this member and his caucus are standing against machinery manufacturing jobs. In fact, we heard from the president of the Canadian association that it is selling more machines, and in the case of this one particular gentleman who builds forklifts, 40% of his forklifts are going to the oil sands.

Government Orders

We know that the NDP wants to shut down the oil sands. We know that the NDP leader wrote a preface to a book that said within 30 years he was going to make sure that the oil sands were shut down. What about those jobs? Is the member standing up for those jobs? I would say no.

We have clearly heard that Quebec, with this particular free trade agreement, would receive real benefits for pork and industrial and construction machinery. We know that they will be able to export industrial machinery from Quebec to Panama. Why would the member want to close down those export markets for Quebec manufacturers? I do not understand that.

Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from northern Alberta for his hard work on this trade file.

I have had the pleasure of being on the trade committee for about six and a half years. About four years ago, I travelled to Colombia and Panama with the trade committee and saw first-hand the importance of this agreement.

I would like to applaud my colleague for standing up for Albertans and Canadians and for creating jobs. The fact is that we are engaging and helping Canadians from coast to coast in training. I know that my colleague has athletic prowess and I congratulate him for completing the 10K, but he is also working hard in the sense that he could enlighten the House on the importance of engaging folks in Panama, rather than isolating them from the hope and opportunity of jobs that would be created through free trade versus looking for a utopian model that unfortunately is not out there in the NDP world.

Mr. Brian Jean: Madam Speaker, I appreciate the member's hard work on the trade file.

I believe that open doors and open dialogue create open minds and open hearts. I think that we can see from the world's example what takes place when minds are closed, borders are closed and hearts are closed: people suffer. That is why we need to open our doors and reach out to these developing economies. We need to make sure that they understand that we will be standing up for our workers and that we will be helping out their workers as well.

It is about free trade. It is about free market access and making sure that we have an open mind, an open heart and an open door.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the member's comments about reaching out to other jurisdictions and giving them a helping hand. I wonder if he would support my view that we should be bringing forward the best possible agreements.

The government talks about sidebar agreements on the environment and labour. I happen to have worked under the side agreement under NAFTA, and it was a very fulsome agreement. I wonder if the member has a view on whether or not it is advisable for the government to be downgrading these agreements.

If we are going to have a useful dialogue, surely we should have the independent secretariat and an independent commission between Panama and Canada, as we had with the U.S. and Mexico.

Mr. Brian Jean: Madam Speaker, I appreciate the member asking about beef.

In fact, the BSE-related beef tariffs in Panama have actually been lifted. I can tell members that believe it not, the tariffs were 25% to 30% on Canadian beef and on all of Canada's high-quality beef cuts. Panama will also eliminate its 15% tariff on fresh or chilled offal with the implementation of the free trade agreement.

I will say, in relation to what the member did say, that I do not think there is any possibility of reaching perfection in anything. To suggest that we should hold out until we reach perfection, which I think is the NDP position, admirable as it is, is not reality.

We deal with real life here on this planet. We deal with real life in the Conservative caucus. We are going to continue to stand up for workers, the Canadian economy and families.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle (Rivière-du-Nord, NDP): Madam Speaker, here is a country with a history.

When we talk about these things, we often have the feeling we are discussing them with people who have little or no history. Panama has a very long history. Denial of human rights in Panama also has a very long history.

The first time in my life that I heard of Panama, it was for an unfortunate reason: our Prime Minister at the time was registering the ships owned by his company, Canada Steamship Lines, in Panama so as not to pay taxes in Canada. That is the kind of prime minister we had.

I do not remember exactly where I was working at the time, but I found it truly despicable that a prime minister would actually register his ships in Panama in order to avoid taxes. I wondered what was happening in that country and why we did not have a reciprocal agreement for income tax. Then I delved into the question a little, and discovered it was a tax haven. Companies that did not want to pay their taxes or did not want governments to be looking into their business went there to register, and that enabled them to engage in multiple transactions all over the world, without being too bothered by financial regulations and laws.

The second time that we heard about Panama in recent years was because of Noriega. Initially, he was a CIA agent and he eventually became the country's leader by relying on narco-dollars, the drug trade, and the sale of arms to the FARC and other guerrilla movements throughout the world. He remained in Panama for a little over 10 years before he was ultimately toppled by the U.S. Army—during the presidency of George Bush—which set up puppet governments—more or less—until the arrival of Mr. Martinelli.

Why have I mentioned Mr. Martinelli? When a contract is signed, people assume that it is signed with another country, when in fact, it is an agreement between two individuals. When I sign a contract, I want to know who I am signing it with. So, I did a bit of research on Mr. Martinelli. At the precise moment that the Conservatives introduced the first bill on a free-trade agreement with Panama in this House, in Panama, Mr. Martinelli introduced and adopted without debate his Bill 30, framework legislation to promote foreign investment in Panama.

Government Orders

I am going to speak a little about the various sections of Bill 30 to demonstrate what sort of person Mr. Martinelli is, and to show that there is a similarity between the Conservatives and Mr. Martinelli, and that the Conservatives like the measures that he passed.

Bill 30 has been caricatured as the lobster act, or the prawn act. There are nine sections in this act that are quite problematic. Among them, there is the suspension of workers who support strikes within an affected institution or trade. That is one of the measures in Bill 30, introduced at the same time that the Conservatives wanted Canada to enter into a free trade agreement with Panama.

Bill 30 also provided that once a strike was initiated, the regional labour directorate would immediately give the order to law-enforcement authorities to guarantee and protect people and property. This signified, therefore, the abolition of the right to strike in Panama. I know that these are measures that the Conservatives favour hugely. Then, there was the immediate suspension of the contracts of workers who called a strike. There was also a ban on union dues deducted at source. That is another provision that seems tailor-made for the Conservative government.

When Mr. Martinelli introduced this bill, he flatly lied to Panamanians, saying that the International Labour Organization had proposed these measures. In fact, Panama has never respected the agreement it signed in 1998 with the International Labour Organization.

I listened to one of our colleagues across the way rattle off the list of rights that would be respected under this agreement.

● (1655)

Panama signed the accord, but it has never complied with the content. Let us put that out of our minds.

There were other sections on the environment in Law 30. State projects that the executive considers to be in the public interest are exempt from the major impact studies. As I read that, I cannot stop laughing, because it is the exact same thing as was served up to us this week. They are exempt from the impact studies.

Now let us talk about the open-pit mining in areas that are designated human ecological reserves. Law 30 was introduced at the same time as we wanted to negotiate free trade with Panama. There will be no more impact studies on environmental projects in Panama. That is something else that must please our Conservative friends a great deal.

As for human rights violations, the ultimate outrage in the law—which has really set the cat among the pigeons in Panama, as I will discuss later—is that immunity is being provided to the members of Panama's national police force. I will read section 27 of the law:

When a member of the national police force is the subject of a report or a complaint or when he is accused of or charged with committing an alleged offence while on duty or in the performance of his duties, for excessive and unjustified use of force, preventive arrest shall be neither ordered nor prescribed...

Basically, any police officer using excessive or unjustified force will not be arrested or suspended until the courts rule.

This is another measure endorsing the fact that the government is denying workers the right to strike and suspending the collection of union dues. If anyone protests these measures, the government sends

in the police, and the police can do whatever they want. What a wonderful world.

Mr. Martinelli revealed the main purpose of his legislation in a conversation with the President of South Korea. Speaking about the new law, Mr. Martinelli said:

...[this legislation] will enable multinationals to become established in the country and to feel at home. With the facilities...in any of the country's tax-free zones, business people from around the world can come here to find the social and economic stability they want for their business.

In other words, he has workers under his thumb and the police in his back pocket and he wants foreigners to invest. His law went through at exactly the same time as this free trade agreement was introduced.

Of course, the law did not go through smoothly. There were strikes. A major strike movement began building. Thousands of workers across the country went on strike. Unfortunately, people died. The police were given the power to do whatever they wanted without worrying about the courts or human rights. People died; people were threatened and arrested. Terror still reigns.

Mr. Martinelli backed down from some parts of his law. Nevertheless, the basis of it, the purpose, was to enable foreign capital to get its hands on Panama.

One of the important aspects involving Canada is the presence of Canadian companies in Panama. In fact, at this time, there are significant disputes involving three Canadian mining companies and ancestral lands in part of Panama. Three big mining companies—Inmet Mining Corporation, Corriente Resources Inc. and Petaquilla Mining—are working on projects in Panama. The indigenous people who live on the lands where those companies are carrying out their projects are opposed to the projects and are trying to renegotiate the bases of the projects.

In April of this year, three men were killed in the Ngöbe-Buglé reserve. There were men killed, there were a dozen men injured and there were a hundred others arrested when the police were sent to put an end to the occupations of the lands where the Canadian mines are located.

● (1700)

If anyone would like to have more information about what is going on in Panama, about the position of our companies that are currently in Panama, about how rights are being flouted, in particular the rights of the indigenous people, ask me questions; I have a lot of information in my document.

● (1705)

[English]

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Madam Speaker, since I have been here in Parliament, it has been obvious that the NDP is not in favour of expanding our markets to other parts of the world.

We need to remind Canadians that Canada currently does export a lot of goods to Panama, such as machinery, precious stones, wheat, aerospace products, minerals, fuel and oil.

Government Orders

However, the part that is most troubling for me is that within this trade agreement, Canadian farmers will have increased access to the beef and pork markets in Panama. I am from a riding that has a large number of farmers, and a lot of agricultural products are produced and processed. I am just wondering if my NDP colleague and his party are not interested in supporting our farmers in Canada. What is their reason for being against increasing the opportunity for trade in our agricultural products?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle: Madam Speaker, in spite of what my colleague thinks, Canada's real interest has nothing to do with the marginal market for Canadian beef in Panama; it has to do with the gigantic market for the Canadian mining companies that are there.

For example, Corriente Resources Inc., a Canadian mining company, holds information sessions with the Ngöbe-Buglé people who live in that region. It has the people sign documents in order to receive training sessions and other benefits. In fact, what the people did not know was that they were signing papers saying they agreed to the open-pit mining project on their lands.

[*English*]

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I personally have spent a lot of time in Panama. Panama has been moving forward very fast since Noriega has been gone. It is a great opportunity for Canada to be doing trade, especially when the Panama Canal is there. We could be bringing stuff in, transshipment. That country looks for our products and there are a lot of products we could buy from it, especially exotic fruits and vegetables.

We do have concerns about what is happening in Panama. *The National* had a story on last night about what Panama is doing with the mining sites. However, if we are doing a proper job on the mining sites and in our resource extracting industries, would my hon. colleague not agree that we should have a good trade deal with Panama if we are doing things in the right way?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle: Madam Speaker, the member for Burnaby—New Westminster introduced a series of amendments that would in fact have made it possible, if a free trade agreement were signed, to protect a country that has these problems from having foreign investors, including Canadian investors, exert too much control over the country's mining resources.

Unfortunately, all of the amendments were voted down. Because of that, the bill is really unacceptable. It will not mean that the people of Panama come out ahead and it will not restore the Canadian economy to its former glory. On the contrary, it will damage us at the international level, at the...

The Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou for a very brief final question.

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to congratulate my colleague. I am pleased that he raised the issue of indigenous rights in Panama.

We know that Panama has signed more than 27 international human rights documents, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Recently, the UN Human Rights

Committee underscored the absence of a process for consulting with indigenous people in Panama.

I wonder whether the hon. member has anything to add to that. Indeed, it is a matter of concern now that the United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples has come into force internationally.

● (1710)

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle: Madam Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for his question.

There is cause for concern over the fate of indigenous peoples there and over their claims, which are being trampled.

Inmet Mining Corporation is in the process of developing a project in an area of biodiversity without any consultation or oversight. It is left free to do what it wants on that land. The only opposition comes from the people who have ancestral rights to the land.

[*English*]

Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise in the House today to talk about the Canada-Panama free trade agreement. I will spend a few minutes talking about how this agreement fits into our government's broader economic plan.

The one thing we always need to keep in context is that free trade agreements, while they are important, fit into a much larger plan of what our government is trying to accomplish. We have been working on a number of free trade deals, which I will touch on in a bit, but I also want to comment on the fact that we continue to lower corporate taxes to one of the lowest levels in any of the G7 or G8 countries. That is important as we look at trying to attract other investments and corporations for jobs.

There are other things we are doing. We are continuing to work on deals with the U.S. to try to get goods and services flowing quicker at the borders. A historic deal was announced just this week. The Prime Minister was able to make a deal in Windsor, which is hugely important in trying to get our goods and services across to the U.S., our largest trading partner. We continue to invest in research and development. We realize that new jobs will come as we are able to commercialize technology. That is why we continue to spend money on research and development and ensure we are getting the best bang for the buck.

We have been trying to reduce red tape. The Red Tape Reduction Commission talked to business owners and business people across the country to try to figure out how to reduce irritants so that Canada could become a friendly place to do business. It already does a great job. I think one of the differences between us and some of the other parties in the House is that we realize that we need to continue to find ways to sell our goods and services around the world. Sixty per cent of our GDP depends strictly on trade. With a population between 30 million and 35 million people, there is no way that we can consume all of our goods. Therefore, we need to continue to expand those markets. That is why I appreciate the opportunity to talk a bit more about this Panama free trade deal.

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We understand the importance of benefits of trade. As I mentioned before, we are an export-driven economy and we need open borders. With one in five Canadian jobs dependent on international trade, bilateral and regional trade agreements are essential to bringing continued prosperity to Canadians. That is why deepening Canada's trading relationships is rapidly growing, and markets around the world, such as Panama, are important parts of this government's pro-trade plan for jobs, growth and long-term prosperity.

With a GDP of over \$30 billion and a GDP per capita of over \$10,000, Panama is among the fastest-growing and best-managed countries in Latin America. In fact, the *Latin Business Chronicle* has predicted that Panama will be the fastest-growing economy in Latin America in the five-year period from 2010 to 2014, matching Brazil's rate of growth of 10%.

Like most countries in the region, however, Panama is feeling the impact of the global financial crisis, which threatens to undermine the social gains made in the past few years. That said, the expansion project of the Panama Canal, combined with the conclusion of a free trade agreement with the United States, is expected to boost and extend economic expansion for some time.

As a former member of the Standing Committee on International Trade, I had the pleasure of visiting Panama in 2008 with my committee colleagues. I want to mention, since Lee Richardson, who was the chair of the committee at the time, is no longer in the House, that it was a pleasure travelling with Lee to Panama and he did a great job leading the delegation. He is certainly a colleague that we will miss in the House. I want to wish him all the best as he starts his work in Alberta.

While in Panama, we had a chance to visit the Panama Canal. One really cannot appreciate the sheer scale of this 97-year-old architectural marvel until one gets to witness it in person. The Panama Canal is an 82 kilometre ship canal that connects the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific via the Caribbean Sea. It is one of the largest and most difficult engineering projects ever undertaken. The Panama Canal is a shortcut that allows for shorter, faster and safer access to the North American west coast, allowing those places, including Canada, to become more integrated with the world economy.

The Panama Canal has an annual traffic of over 14,000 trips, carrying about 300 million tonnes of goods annually, raising close to \$2 billion in revenue for the Panamanian government. The Panama Canal expansion project, which is currently under way, will double the capacity of the Panama Canal, allowing more and larger ships to transit.

• (1715)

New components include the construction of the two lock complexes, the excavation of new access channels to the new locks and the widening and deepening of the navigation channels. The project is expected to be completed in 2014. Interestingly, this expansion was approved in 2007 by Panama's cabinet and national assembly with a national referendum in which 77% of Panamanians voted to support this project.

The Panama Canal Authority estimated the cost to construct the third set of locks at approximately \$5.25 billion. This estimate

includes design, administrative, construction and testing. As with most projects of this scale, there are opponents who contend that the project is based on uncertain projections about maritime trade and the world economy and that the project will cost more than the \$5.25 billion price tag.

Again, according to the Panama Canal Authority, the third set of locks is financially profitable and will produce a 12% internal rate of return, which will help to continue to finance the project and will be a cash flow for the country as it moves forward.

Recent challenges in concluding the World Trade Organization Doha round regional and bilateral trade agreements have taken on increased significance. Our government recognizes that there are a growing number of countries where Canadian companies are at a competitive disadvantage because their competitors have preferential market access under some form of preferential trade agreement.

Canada cannot afford to sit on the sidelines while other countries vigorously pursue trade deals to secure better market access for their products and services. That is why our government is in the midst of the most ambitious pursuit of new and expanded trade and investments agreements in Canadian history. The Canada–Panama free trade agreement is yet another step this government is taking to help Canadians compete and succeed in a global economy. It supports the global commerce strategy which will ensure that Canada maintains its current economic strength and prosperity in an increasingly complex and competitive global economy.

With 60% of our GDP dependent on trade, it is clear that jobs in communities across Canada depend on the business we do with other countries. This government's pro-trade plan is an essential contributor to Canada's prosperity, productivity and growth.

By improving access to foreign markets for Canadian businesses, we are supporting domestic economic growth and creating new opportunities for Canadian workers. Canada's exporters, investors and service providers are calling for these opportunities. Business owners and entrepreneurs want access to global markets. This government is committed to expanding the various opportunities created by free trade agreements. Our track record speaks for itself.

Since 2006, Canada has concluded new free trade deals with nine countries: Colombia, Jordan and Peru; the European Trade Association member states of Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland; and, most recently, with Honduras and, of course, Panama. We are negotiating many more, including with the European Union.

A deal with the European Union would represent the most significant Canadian trade initiative since the North American Free Trade Agreement and could potentially boost our bilateral trade with this important partner by 20%. It could also provide \$12 billion annually to boost the Canadian economy, which is equivalent to a \$1,000 increase to the average Canadian family income or almost 80,000 new jobs.

Government Orders

Canadian companies recognize the many benefits to workers and businesses that a Canada–E.U. trade deal would bring.

We are also intensifying our focus on Asia. During the Prime Minister's visit to China in February 2012, leaders announced that Canada and China would proceed to exploratory discussions on deepening trade and economic relations on the completion of the bilateral economic study. Also, just this past March, the Prime Minister announced and launched the negotiations toward a free trade agreement with Japan and the start of exploratory discussions with Thailand. This week, the possible participation in the trans-Pacific partnership negotiations was also announced.

This free trade agreement would also better enable Canadian companies to participate in large projects.

For all those reasons, the proposed Canada–Panama agreement is a good deal. The agreement will support more Canadian jobs by enhancing our ability to export more goods and services to this market. This is why the implementation of a free trade agreement is a priority for this government.

I ask all hon. members to support Bill C-24, the legislation to implement the Canada–Panama free trade agreement and the parallel labour co-operation and environment agreements.

• (1720)

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the presentation made by my friend, who also chairs the foreign affairs committee. I always appreciate his interventions.

Over and above the concerns that we have on this side regarding labour rights, environmental issues and indigenous issues and rights in Panama, Panama has refused to sign the tax information exchange agreement. This is always very troubling for us because of the money laundering that happens in Panama. That has been confirmed by the U.S. justice department and others.

What does my hon. friend have to say about that?

Mr. Dean Allison: Madam Speaker, my hon. colleague is a new member on the foreign affairs committee, and we appreciate his contributions.

As we continue to look at deals, one thing we need to consider is trying to find other markets for our goods and services. Therefore, we will continue to work on foreign investment protection agreements, tax treaties, all those things as we move forward. We believe we need to find more areas for our country to serve and sell our goods. This is what we will continue to do.

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as I mentioned before in the House, I have had a lot of experience in Panama. I really think it is great that we are doing business with it. There is so much opportunity. However, there is still a concern, and we saw it last night on TV, about the environmental degradation that can happen. It is such an important area, and not only for trade; Panama is a flight path for many of our birds, and the rain forest is protected.

My question is for the chair of the foreign affairs committee. When we did the Colombian deal, there was a collateral agreement with environmental clauses in it. Are there any environmental

clauses or collateral agreements that could protect the Panamanian lands from degradation from mining operations?

Mr. Dean Allison: Madam Speaker, as we have with all agreements, we have side agreements for labour co-operation and agreements for the environment. As we move forward with these agreements, we will continually look at these things and ensure they are included in our agreements.

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Madam Speaker, the member is from an area that has a tremendous amount of trade already, particularly through the Hamilton airport and its cargo activity. What would this trade deal potentially do for his riding and the Hamilton airport as a cargo hub?

• (1725)

Mr. Dean Allison: Madam Speaker, one of the areas where we have opportunity is through our Hamilton airport, which is one of the busiest hubs in Canada right now for cargo and transport. These are all the things on which we need to continue to work. I cannot underline how important the deal this week was with Detroit for a new bridge. Any avenues where we can increase the flow of goods back and forth, whether through our airports or across our bridges, are all critical to help our businesses grow.

Mr. Gordon Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is a real pleasure to rise today to support Bill C-24, the act to implement the Canada–Panama free trade agreement and in support of our government's pro-job, pro-trade agenda.

As an export-driven economy, Canada needs open borders. With one in five Canadian jobs generated by international trade, our government's ambitious pro-trade plan is essential to bring continued prosperity to Canadians. That is why deepening and strengthening Canada's trading relationships in dynamic markets, such as Panama, is an important part of our government's plan for jobs, growth and long-term prosperity.

Canada and Panama have a history of strong bilateral relations. Canada established diplomatic relations with Panama in 1961 in recognition of the growing political and economic ties and to promote political trade and investment relations between Canada and Panama. Canada then opened its embassy in Panama in 1995.

Export Development Canada's regional office opened in the Canadian embassy in Panama in September 2010 and now covers all of Central America and the Caribbean. This decision endorses Panama's potential to become the Singapore of the Americas. It also echoes other respects in which our embassy has adopted a regional mandate. In 2011 EDC supported more than 100 Canadian companies in Panama.

Private Members' Business

Apart from our physical presence, Canada and Panama also speak to each other in multilateral fora, such as the World Trade Organization. Panama acceded to the WTO in 1997. As a WTO member, Panama grants most favoured nation treatment to all of its trading partners and has bilateral investment treaties with 16 countries.

One of these investment protection agreements was with Canada and it came into force in 1998 as a means to deepen our commercial relationship by extending to Canadian investors legally binding rights, including provisions to protect them from expropriation without fair, adequate and prompt compensation and the freedom to transfer capital internationally.

Canada and Panama also have concluded an air transport agreement in order to facilitate greater travel between our two countries. Copa Airlines, Panama's national carrier and a prominent regional airline, has now launched four weekly direct scheduled flights to Toronto. This improved service will facilitate travel and people-to-people ties for nearly 100,000 Canadian visitors a year and an estimated 5,000 Canadian residents in Panama.

This year we are also negotiating a tax information exchange agreement with Panama. To combat international tax evasion, Panama committed in 2002 to implement the OECD standard for the exchange of tax information. Panama has now substantially implemented the OECD standard through the conclusion of more than 12 double taxation agreements or tax information exchange agreements that include the OECD standard. Like a double taxation agreement, a tax information exchange agreement will also have important benefit for investors.

The result of these initiatives for Canadians in recent years is bilateral trade between Canada and Panama has been steadily growing. From just under \$50 million in total trade in 2002, we were up to a total of \$235 million per year by 2011. We are now in 15th position as a supplier of goods to Panama. Much of this is very diversified and includes pork, vegetables and vegetable preparations, vegetable oils, industrial machinery, electrical and electronic—

• (1730)

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I regret to interrupt the hon. member. He will have about six minutes remaining when this bill returns to the order of the day.

It being 5:30 p.m., the House will proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*Translation*]

WORLD AUTISM AWARENESS DAY ACT

The House resumed from February 28 consideration of the motion that Bill S-206, An Act respecting World Autism Awareness Day, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Ms. Éline Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is a great privilege to rise today in the House to speak to Bill S-206, An Act respecting World Autism Awareness Day.

This cause is particularly close to my heart and I know this debate directly relates to thousands of Canadian families.

Bill S-206 calls on the government to designate April 2 as World Autism Awareness Day across Canada.

On December 18, 2007, the United Nations General Assembly declared that April 2 of every year would be dedicated to efforts to increase our understanding of autism spectrum disorders. Autism Society Canada and other civil society groups already recognize this important day. It is time for the federal government to do the same.

Autism is the most common childhood disease and is four times more common in boys than girls. It is estimated that more than one in every 110 children is born with some form of autism and that there are currently nearly 35 million autistic people around the globe. In Canada alone, there are approximately 200,000 autistic people, including 48,000 children.

Over the past 20 years, there has been a drastic increase in the number of diagnoses of autism disorders, without any clear explanation for this increase.

Despite the ever-growing number of diagnoses, autism is a disability that remains unfamiliar to a large number of Canadians. The many forms of autism are part of a group of conditions referred to as autism spectrum disorders.

Each case of autism is unique. The intensity of symptoms is different for every autistic person, and the symptoms may also vary over time.

Generally speaking, autism disorders are characterized by deficiencies in verbal and nonverbal communication, and there may be learning disabilities. Without early intervention, nearly 40% of autistic individuals will never learn to speak.

Autism disorders are also characterized by problems with social interaction, and by repetitive and stereotypical behaviours.

It is not yet known what causes autism spectrum disorders, nor how they can be treated. However, it is known that early diagnosis and specialized intervention can greatly improve the quality of life and the social abilities of an autistic individual and his or her family.

The passage of Bill S-206 will help shed light on autism and the other pervasive developmental disorders, and this is a step in the right direction.

However, we must go far beyond merely raising awareness among Canadians. The government must take action.

At the present time, Canadian families who are affected by autism spectrum disorders have difficulty obtaining the help they need and they may not have equal access to health care services and social services, depending on the area of the country in which they live.

This situation is unacceptable. As parliamentarians, we have the duty and the power to provide assistance to these families who really need it.

I am very familiar with the day-to-day situation facing families affected by autism spectrum disorders. My 23-year-old brother, Philippe, was diagnosed with a pervasive development disorder not otherwise specified, a PDD-NOS, when he was 17 years old.

Philippe is a cheerful and generous person, who likes to help others and for whom family is very important. However, things were not always easy for him at school and he always had difficulty with social integration.

For many years, my parents did everything they could to help him, without knowing the cause of his problems. There were very few services available to help them in the schools and they had to do almost everything on their own.

They consulted a large number of specialists, without ever really getting a proper answer. There were countless visits to doctors, pediatricians, neurologists, psychologists, speech therapists and occupational therapists over the years, but the questions remained. Of course, most of these tests were not covered by private medical insurance or by Quebec's Régie de l'assurance maladie. My parents had to cover all the costs themselves. It took 12 years to get a formal diagnosis for my brother.

Thanks to a psychologist who knew about pervasive developmental disorders and who had just been hired at Philippe's secondary school, Philippe was finally diagnosed. It was sheer chance.

After the diagnosis, my brother was able to enrol in a specialized class with more personalized support, but the program was available in only one of the town's four secondary schools. As a result, he had to change schools and build a new social network, which is quite difficult for people living with pervasive development disorder.

My parents have looked for programs targeting people living with autism spectrum disorders, but these programs are virtually nonexistent.

• (1735)

My brother was lucky enough to have access to socialization courses offered at a hospital in the region, as well as to regular follow-ups with a psychiatrist, but nothing more. The only program in the region catering to teenagers was full. He was never able to enrol.

As far as job placement is concerned, there are absolutely no programs to help people living with autism spectrum disorders.

Since my brother does not have an intellectual disability, most of the programs were not available to him. He had to apply for social assistance in order to get access to a program that enabled him to do an internship in the workplace. Without his perseverance and that of my parents, Philippe would not have had this opportunity to develop, to validate himself and to acquire new skills.

It is high time that Canada had a national strategy on autism spectrum disorders, and took practical steps to help people with autism and their families.

Currently, it is the provincial governments, health promotion organizations and families that provide the necessary care to people with autism.

Private Members' Business

However, the federal government also has a responsibility to people with autism and their families. This government must provide sufficient resources to the provinces and territories so that they can provide treatment and services to people with autism spectrum disorders, including specialized education and professional training.

It does not make sense that in our society, people who are able to hold jobs and fit in must rely on provincial social assistance to be able to access job opportunities. I think that is counter-productive. The provinces are not investing resources in the right places. Families need direct access to these resources. There are job opportunities and integration opportunities for people with autism spectrum disorders. We must offer those to them.

We must also ensure that testing and treatments are covered by public health insurance plans. This is not the case right now. The various specialists required to diagnose pervasive developmental disorders are not included in the list of specialists paid by the current plan. Parents must sometimes pay vast amounts of money to get answers to their questions and come up with a plan to help their children.

As I mentioned earlier, in the case of my brother it took 12 years to get a diagnosis—12 years of tests, appointments and uncertainty. That is a heavy investment and a great deal of anxiety for the families and the people with autism spectrum disorder, who understand that some things about themselves do not work the same as they do in other people. They are looking for answers and may not have access to them, perhaps because of the cost or where they live.

We therefore have a responsibility as parliamentarians to consider this issue and offer families opportunities that are not currently available to them.

Programs must be put in place to allow people with autism to develop their skills and reach their full potential. With attention and programs and assistance adapted to their needs, people with autism are able to accomplish many things and can develop social networks that they might not be able to access without additional help that cannot always be provided by charitable organizations in the community. These resources are not always available. I know that these resources are lacking in the Outaouais region and other areas of Canada. Families are speaking out about this need. We must quickly address this need and find solutions.

There is still much work to be done in order to help Canadian families affected by autism spectrum disorders. I hope that the government will finally hear the pleas of families such as mine, who are desperately waiting for their government to take concrete action.

Canadians sent us here and they have confidence in us. In each of our ridings, there are families that face these situations every day, and they deserve our support and our help. We are in a position to do that.

The world autism awareness day bill is a step in the right direction. I am very proud to support the bill, as are my colleagues and several other members who have indicated that they will also support it.

Private Members' Business

However, much remains to be done. We cannot stop there. Autism spectrum disorders affect the lives of thousands of Canadian families. It is our responsibility to help them now.

Today, I spoke about my own family. But others are in the same situation and have the same problems as me, my family and my parents, and they expect us to act quickly on their behalf. Today, I hope that this will be just the first in a series of steps that will finally meet their expectations.

● (1740)

[English]

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first I would like to salute Shawn Murphy, the former member of Parliament for Charlottetown who retired just before the last election. I should add that the current representative for that riding is an excellent member who has obviously taken much inspiration from Mr. Murphy in terms of the sincerity of his efforts and the intensity of his work ethic.

Shawn Murphy tabled bills and motions several times in this House calling on the federal government to create a national autism strategy. The bill we are debating today, courtesy of Senator Munson, is calling on the government to officially enact in Canada April 2 as world autism awareness day. It is but one item in a suite of federal actions needed to address the growing and still poorly understood autism spectrum disorder, which affects a growing number of children and their families every year in this country.

In turn, we can only have a concerted national action on autism if first we create a critical level of awareness among the general Canadian population. This awareness will lead to overwhelming public consensus on the need for such action, followed logically by political pressure at the grassroots that, at the end of the day, should produce concrete government measures on autism.

To many of us, autism appears to have come out of nowhere. Personally, I do not recall talk of autism when I was growing up. I do not know if this is because autism had not been properly diagnosed or whether it is because new factors are at work that have increased the incidence of autism.

As we know, approximately 1 in 110 Canadian children are diagnosed with autism. The number of new cases is increasing by 10% to 17% per year. Another fact of which I was not aware is that boys are four times as susceptible as girls to be diagnosed with autism. Just this past Sunday, I spent the afternoon with a friend whose son is autistic. Today I meet numerous parents and families who are nurturing an autistic child with extraordinary love, dedication, intelligence, creativity and patience. What all these parents have in common is a fierce and indefatigable determination to create a powerful community of interest around those directly or indirectly affected by autism and to push for a proper public policy response to autism at the local, provincial and national levels. I will take this opportunity to salute these parents.

One of the reasons I have chosen to speak today in the debate on the bill is that the region I represent on the island of Montreal, what is commonly referred to as the West Island, is home to a higher percentage of people with intellectual disabilities and autism than any other region in Quebec. If this is so, it is testimony to the

extraordinary civic-mindedness and volunteer spirit of my community, I can proudly say. This spirit has been the historic hallmark of the West Island and lives on today, perhaps on an even wider scale as primary and secondary schools, for example, make community service part of their curriculum.

One of the most eloquent examples of how citizens of the West Island coalesce to meet social and health needs is through the West Island Association for the Intellectually Handicapped, which operates under the vision and energetic leadership of Natalie Chapman. WIAIH, which in 2008 celebrated its 50th anniversary as a community organization, provides support to people with intellectual disabilities or autism. Its mission is to maintain and develop innovative services and to sensitize the community to available services and the need for greater government support for people impacted by intellectual disabilities and autism.

If the West Island of Montreal includes such a large number of families with children with intellectual disabilities or autism, it is because of the scope and quality of WIAIH services. In other words, families move to the West Island expressly to access those services. As a side benefit, our community attracts extraordinary citizens to live and work in the community and surrounding region. These are dynamic people who help us grow in so many different ways.

● (1745)

Incidentally, WIAIH has served as an incubator for the development of other local organizations in the same sector, namely, West Island Citizen Advocacy, Placement Potentiel, AVATIL, the West Montreal Readaptation Centre, the West Island Residences for the Intellectually Handicapped and the John F. Kennedy School.

While we are fortunate in the West Island to house a critical mass of organizations like WIAIH, our success in constructing an enviable social and health infrastructure underscores the fact that other regions lack a comparable level of support. In other words, while WIAIH is a beacon of hope and assistance for those suffering from autism and their families, at the same time the organization's success illuminates the fact that in other regions a greater level of need persists and goes unmet.

One should not, for a moment, think that WIAIH has all the resources it needs at its disposal. Whenever I have the opportunity to meet and speak with Natalie Chapman, she reminds me of the overwhelming pressure on our community. She reminds me of the weight under which families are labouring and how diagnosis is not being conducted early enough in those crucial years for children with autism. She reminds me that post-diagnosis intervention still does not occur early enough, and that families desperately need respite.

Private Members' Business

What is needed today at the federal level, and urgently so, is best captured by the Autism Society of Canada. It says, "We need increased funding for provinces and territories to provide critical no-cost treatment, education, professional training and required supports for Canadians with autism. What is also needed is a mandate for the Public Health Agency of Canada to make autism a national priority by initiating surveillance and reporting, and setting national standards for treatment and service delivery. Also needed is an allocation of significant funds targeted for autism research to Canadian funding organizations, such as the Canadian Institutes of Health Research. Finally, we need improved financial and other supports to individuals with intellectual disabilities and autism, and their families, through the federal tax and labour systems."

In conclusion, issues of common concern to Canadians from coast to coast to coast need to be addressed through national coordination and with standards of service delivery that are consistent for all citizens, wherever they may live in this great country.

Autism is such a matter of common interest and national priority. Declaring April 2 of each year world autism awareness day would be a small but meaningful step in the direction of eventually, hopefully, creating an effective national approach to learning all we can about autism and providing the services children with autism and their families need, and this as early as possible.

Mr. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I am not going to get into a whole bunch of statistics and definitions. Instead I am going to talk about my own experience as the father of a now 16-year-old boy with autism, my son Jaden. Before I do that, though, I would like to extend some recognition.

First of all, I would like to thank Senator Munson for moving this important legislation forward in the first place. I would like to thank my good friend and colleague from Kitchener—Conestoga for sponsoring the bill in the House.

I would particularly like to thank the Minister of Health, who declared that as of April 2, 2009, each April 2 will be known as World Autism Awareness Day in Canada. That is an important step. That is what the bill addresses in legislation today.

I would also like to thank colleagues from all parties, who have been very supportive of my family. They have met Jaden and wanted to know more about the situation, know more about autism, so that they can be more informed as they go out into their own constituencies.

First and foremost, I want to thank my son Jaden, who is a tremendous example for me and obviously one of the most important people in my life.

I also want to thank my wife Debi and my daughter Jenae, who hold the fort down at home.

My daughter is now 13 years old. When she was four or five, she did a little interview with the autism newsletter. One of the things that she said is "I'm Jaden's little sister, but I'm like his big sister". She went on to say that she had to protect him and keep him safe from things like permanent markers and hot stoves. At 13 years old, Jenae is still keeping Jaden safe.

My proudest moments as I think about my daughter are the moments when she does not know that we are watching. We hear her playing games with Jaden, interacting with him, keeping him out of harm's way or helping him because he is upset with something and trying to talk him through it. She is an amazing little big sister to him.

Why is autism awareness so important? It is important because early diagnosis is critical for people with autism. There is a short window of time when kids are young. We have more and more information about autism. There has been more and more research that shows that early treatment is absolutely essential for people with autism. In order to get that early treatment, we need doctors to be aware of the signs of autism, we need parents to be aware of them and we need the broader public to be aware of them.

Looking back in our own circumstance, when Jaden was 18 months old and knowing what we know now, we could have recognized the signs of autism had we been more aware, but even at the time, the doctors suggested that some boys just talk late, so they sent us for speech training and workshops and things like that.

It was six months later, after we had lost six months of that window, that we read a book about autism and recognized what we were dealing with. It was autism. A cousin mentioned it to us as well. It was six months later that we finally received a diagnosis. Thankfully, that delay does not happen as often today as it did over a decade ago, because people are more aware.

Another reason that awareness is so important is that families need support. I remember one particular circumstance when I was having a discussion about respite with someone who knew my son had autism but did not know what we dealt with on a daily basis. He asked me, "Why should the government provide a babysitter for your son?" It was one of those things that made me realize that people do not understand it the way we live it. They do not see the 24/7 stress that families are under, the constant need to be on high alert for fear of the child's safety or for the other kids.

Jaden is like a three- or four-year-old in a 16-year-old's body now. The difference from when he was three and four, though, is that he is much quicker and much stronger than he was. When he sees a dog across the street, he still has no concept of traffic, but he can get to that dog very quickly. If we are not paying constant attention to him when we are out, he will just run across the street if he sees a dog.

In fact, when we were on Parliament Hill a couple of years ago for Canada Day and a man was walking a German shepherd dog across the lawn, we had our eyes off Jaden for a second, and he bolted to this German shepherd. Before we had time to even think about it, he had grabbed the German shepherd by the neck and was sticking his face into the German shepherd's face.

Private Members' Business

● (1750)

It turned out that the man who was walking the German shepherd was a security guard and the German shepherd was a trained dog. The man happened to know Jaden and made sure he got in between so that the dog would not react to him, but we can imagine if it was some other dog; Jaden would have no awareness of that.

The same things apply in relation to water, traffic and those types of things. We have to be constantly vigilant that Jaden does not get himself into trouble because he sees those things like a three- or four-year-old would see them, not like a regular 16-year-old would see them.

We also need to be aware of the things they do see but maybe do not understand. A common story is that a child at six or seven years old looks like any other child, but when the child throws himself down in a grocery store or acts up in a restaurant, people wonder why the parents are not disciplining the child or doing something about it. There was a story of a family that got kicked out of a restaurant in Edmonton because of a situation like that. As families, we need people to understand that.

There are some funny stories that go along with that, and every family has their own. In my case, I remember one particular time when Jaden was about eight years old and we were walking through a parking lot. He walked up behind a lady who was walking on her own and grabbed her hand. Jaden was a very cute eight-year-old, and she thought it was very cute. Then he proceeded to take her fingernail and pick his teeth with it, at which point she was not thinking he was quite as cute any more and went running off with a little scream. There are moments like that.

There was the time that I was at an Oilers game. I worked for the Oilers before I was elected and decided to take Jaden to an Oilers game. He was probably in that same timeframe of six or seven years old at the time. We were sitting in the seats watching the game and everything was good. All of a sudden, out of the blue, he decided to reach over the shoulder of the five-year-old girl in front of him and grab the ice cream off of the top of her cone, stick it in his mouth and eat it straight out of his hand. It took a few seconds for me to explain to the father what was going on, and, as usual, he was good with it once he understood.

These are the things that happen, and we need people to understand.

When Jaden was 13 years old, just three years ago, he went through a time when he was experiencing an absolutely debilitating anxiety, a time that was very difficult for us as parents. There were times when he would go through two hours of absolute stress and anxiety. His body would get rigid, he was scared and he could not explain what was going on because he could not talk. We would just have to hold him and hope the anxiety subsided. It was a very difficult time for the family. Those are the things that people do not see, and sometimes family members need a break from those things. Families need people to understand what they are going through.

I notice, as always happens when I talk about my son, that time is slipping away quickly, so I am going to move on to a couple of other things that I want to talk about. I want to talk about people with

autism contributing and give one more example from our family's life.

As people with autism get older, they can contribute in vocational things. In Jaden's case, he can work in the library. There are many who can contribute as artists or researchers or computer programmers.

Something that has happened recently in Jaden's life that has been really meaningful to us is that he is now in a regular grade 10 classroom, and his classmates chose to include him in a musical theatre production of *Oliver* that they were doing. These kids practised for dozens and dozens of hours as they got ready for this performance. One would think that they would be laser-focused on having the smoothest performance they could possibly have. The choreography was fantastic and took a lot of work to coordinate. However, instead, they invited Jaden to be a part of this process.

There was a scene of Jaden dancing a little off the beat from the rest of the kids, from time to time meandering a bit to the side of the stage and wandering off. One of his friends grabbed his elbow and brought him back to the rest of the group so that he could continue to participate. They worked hours helping him to understand what the steps were and to include him in what they were doing.

I cannot say how much it meant to my family and Jaden that they included him, but also how much it meant to those kids in the end, who really benefited from learning that important life lesson at that stage in their lives, a life lesson that will move them to include people in employment in the future and to look for opportunities for people like Jaden to contribute throughout their lives.

I will conclude by recognizing all of the people who have autism themselves, as well as their family members and friends who live with this disorder each and every day of the year. I want to let them know how much I admire them for their perseverance and for what they contribute to make the lives of those around them better. God bless them.

● (1755)

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to speak in support of Bill S-206, An Act respecting World Autism Awareness Day.

On December 18, 2007, the United Nations General Assembly, through resolution 62139, designated April 2 from 2008 on as World Autism Awareness Day. My colleague for Vancouver Kingsway has already put forward Bill C-351, which also calls upon the Government of Canada to recognize April 2 each year as World Autism Awareness Day. In a sense, this bill is playing catch-up. Nevertheless, obviously the value of such a designation is in raising awareness about the condition, the challenges faced by those living with an autism spectrum disorder and the importance of improving research, diagnosis and treatment options for this disorder.

Autism is the most common neurological disorder in children and impacts many Canadian families, with as many as one in every 110 children having some form of autism spectrum disorder. It has been estimated that there are approximately 35 million people living with autism around the world.

Private Members' Business

In Canada, although there is a lack of detailed epidemiological data, there are currently around 48,000 children and 144,000 adults with some form of autism. It is known that the rate of autism has been increasing without explanation with each passing year; in fact, it is estimated that the rate of autism has increased about 600% in the last 20 years. When one looks at this data, what becomes obvious is that autism is a widespread and growing issue about which we know very little.

What we also know is that living with it is an enormous challenge. Friends of mine, Michelle and Brett, have a beautiful daughter, Tennyson, just Tenny to friends and family. Tenny is the younger sister to Ethan and Stephanie.

Michelle, Brett, Steph and Ethan's love and devotion for Tenny is infinite, unconditional, inspiring and so very patient. The image that stays with me is one that has repeated itself many times over the years. It is of Brett and Tenny passing by my house slowly, Tenny with her headphones on, absorbed and happy in her music, and Brett happy alongside, enjoying the day in the company of his beautiful blue-eyed companion Tenny.

However, I asked Michelle and Brett to share with me, so that I could share with members, what it is like to raise Tenny. This is what they would like members to know:

"Our daughter Tennyson is 11 years old and she is one of our biggest joys. However, having an autistic child presents many challenges and stresses for our family."

"Tennyson requires constant assistance with eating, bathing, dressing, toileting, et cetera. As if this is not enough, every stage of her life requires an almost full-time effort to navigate the system for what she needs. During her preschool years we spent countless hours and dollars on IBI therapy, as the Ontario government wait-listed Tennyson for three years."

"Today our biggest challenge is finding appropriate schooling for her now and in the future. Today Tennyson attends a remarkable TDSB school, Beverley. Finding our way to Beverley was fraught with bureaucracy—as if we have time. We need more schools like Beverley with OT, speech and language, communication tools, and excellent staff under one roof."

"Our imminent fear is finding a comparable high school. Oh, and what about the future? Proper care, affordable care, safety, et cetera. Families like ours have little time, money and mental energy. We need help."

I should note for the House that those last three words, "we need help", came to me in upper case font with more than one exclamation mark attending them.

This is the unvarnished truth of the matter. The love of a family can overcome a lot. Knowing Michelle, Brett, Steph and Ethan as I do, Tenny will never want for that in all its manifestations. However, it is our love that is also required, not just for autistic kids and adults but for the moms and dads and brothers and sisters who need our support.

While it is important to bring awareness of the impact of autism on the lives of so many Canadians, we collectively, through our government, are still failing to show measurable and meaningful

support for those living with autism spectrum disorder. Instead, the government chooses symbolism over real action.

• (1800)

There is much that we can and should do. Through the testimony of witnesses at both Senate committees and the Standing Committee on Health of the House, we as parliamentarians have been told directly what needs to be done, or at least where we need to start.

We can start first with my colleague from Sudbury's private member's bill, Bill C-219, An Act respecting the establishment of a National Strategy for Autism Spectrum Disorders. This very simple but important bill would, among other things, establish national standards for the treatment and delivery of autism-related services and create a system to monitor autism prevalence.

My colleague from Sudbury has a second private member's bill, Bill C-218, that would also qualitatively change the lives of kids and adults with ADS as well as their families. Bill C-218, An Act to amend the Canada Health Act (Autism Spectrum Disorders), would mandate the inclusion of ABA and IBI treatments under the Canada Health Act.

These bills would go a long way to redress what Kathleen Provost, an executive director with the Autism Society of Canada, called in her testimony before the Subcommittee on Neurological Disease of the Standing Committee on Health, "a two-tiered health system for Canadians living with an ASD".

According to Ms. Provost:

There is a health system that is inconsistent because of where you are, what province you live in. There's also a health system that's not equally accessible....We seem to have a public health system versus a private health system.

Ms. Provost cited in evidence the difference in cost of diagnosis between provinces. She also talked about the extraordinary cost of treatment, a cost so high that it was financially ruinous to the majority of Canadian families.

The multidisciplinary approach necessary for the treatment of autism is not covered currently under the Canada Health Act. However, it can cost families well in excess of \$50,000 per year. Those kinds of costs inhibit, first, early diagnosis and, second, effective treatment once diagnosed. That means so many kids and so many parents are forced financially to live and struggle with a condition and in circumstances that can be ameliorated and treated.

There are other solutions as well that are readily available to us to relieve the stress, both emotional and financial, for families. These have to do with income tax treatment and amendments to labour and employment standards.

Private Members' Business

At the end of the day, what is at issue and what is absent here is federal leadership on the issue of autism.

The last word on the federal role I give to Kathleen Provost, because she captured this issue so well in her testimony to the health subcommittee. She said:

We think the federal government is in a unique position as a national facilitator engaging provinces and territories. The federal government can stage and maintain a national agenda for autism...The challenge before us is to find effective ways to leverage the strength of our federal-provincial system to advance the autism agenda in Canada so we can provide universal access to treatment and services.

I will support Bill S-206, An Act respecting World Autism Awareness Day. However, it needs to be remembered that those who need our support are already aware all too intimately, and too often painfully, of the challenges of autism spectrum disorder.

In the words of Tenny's mom, Michelle, "They need help". Therefore, I urge the government to get on with what the Canadian government is supposed to do, which is supporting Canadians who need support.

•(1805)

[Translation]

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Chambly—Borduas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in this House in support of Bill S-206.

On a personal note, I too would like to commend the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry for sharing his personal experience. I think stories like those are rather exceptional, especially for someone like me who has never had this personal experience. I want to commend the hon. member and wish him well.

It is exactly this type of situation that makes a seemingly symbolic gesture so important because, like many mental or brain-related illnesses, there are many unknowns. Increasing public awareness gives us the opportunity to do more research and more work to help the friends and family of individuals with autism. Their family members become their caregivers for their entire lives. It is not like other situations where people become ill at a certain age and their family needs to care for them at that stage. In this case, we are talking about children whose families want to watch them grow like any other child in this world and in our community.

I would like to take a more personal approach to this topic by looking at the work of Emergo, which is located in my riding. This organization is very well known in Quebec and provides respite services. One of their summer respite camps is located in my riding of Chambly—Borduas, in Otterburn Park.

A very long time ago, when I was in elementary school, I had the opportunity to visit this camp because Emergo shares this land with the public. The elementary school I went to had rented part of the camp for us to celebrate the end of the school year. It was in Les Bosquets. That was my first experience meeting kids with autism. It really opened my eyes, because I saw people and the organization working with them. Even at a young age—I do not want to delude myself by saying that I understood the complexity of the issue—I thought it was something special to see. That really helped me much later when I became the member of Parliament for the region. I was able to return to Les Bosquets and visit this organization, this time to work with them and help them with their work.

The respite service they offer gives parents and family members of children with autism the opportunity to take some time off in the summer because caring for an autistic child is a major challenge. As I said at the beginning of my speech, we can never truly understand what parents and families in this situation are going through. We can never understand and speak on their behalf because this is such a unique challenge. Emergo is one of the organizations that has the courage and conviction to help these people, and the work it does is very important.

When I had a chance to meet with representatives of the organization, they had a lot to say about their efforts to raise awareness. During the most recent election campaign in Quebec, people were very interested in the interviews with the political party leaders on *Tout le monde en parle*. During one episode featuring an interview with a party leader, there was another guest, Roxanne Héroux, a former LCN reporter, who has two autistic children. She had a lot to say about the importance of community, family, parents and others working together, raising awareness among themselves and supporting people who are coping with these problems.

She talked not only about autism, but about all kinds of problems and crises that families may go through with their children. It was extremely touching as testimony to this experience and a powerful interview. When I talked about the interview with people from Emergo, they said it was very interesting that I was touched by this interview, because this demonstrated to me just how much more awareness is needed among the general public so that we can provide those affected with the help they need. There is nothing glamorous about Emergo's work. Unfortunately, it gets very little recognition in the community. This is not because of bad faith, or because the community does not want to recognize that work.

•(1810)

It is primarily because people are simply not aware of everything that goes on or the various services that are available. The very fact that people are unaware undermines Emergo's work, because it makes it difficult for that organization to secure funding.

I must say very sincerely that I would not dare play politics with this. In my opinion, the funding problem is not necessarily the problem of any one level of government or any one political party. I think this is a collective problem that we must all face together.

People do not understand, and it is the responsibility of parliamentarians, the members who represent various communities, to educate them. That is the purpose of this bill. Members from all political parties realize that this is merely a first step, but it is an important step, because it opens such an important dialogue.

April 2 is already recognized as World Autism Awareness Day elsewhere around the world. I think it is very important that we follow suit and do the same here in Canada. Some degree of coherence and consistency is needed in the message in order to continue this work.

Private Members' Business

I would like to talk about another very personal example, one not necessarily related to autism. However, it relates to caregivers, who face similar challenges. I spoke a little about this when I talked about a Liberal colleague's bill to establish a national epilepsy day, which was also intended to promote awareness.

I do not want to make too many comparisons because, as I said earlier, I plead ignorance. I do not know very much about the two disorders. I have heard from caregivers and families who courageously deal with these challenges. I am going to share these stories because, although they unfortunately show how little I know about these challenges, they are the reason why I support the bill.

I will not name the man in question, to protect his privacy. I met this man just before Christmas, during the holidays, when I was grocery shopping in my riding. It is sad that it was at that time of year. This man is a family friend. He told me that his wife had suffered from a malignant brain tumour at the end of her life and that he had become her caregiver. He had to take care of her at the end of her life. It was very difficult because brain cancer can affect "normal" life in different ways. The word "normal" is in quotes because it not the right word in this case.

What society considers to be normal behaviour is not the norm. In my opinion, a parallel can be drawn with the situation we are discussing today. Once again, I am being very careful. I am not saying that these are not normal behaviours, but those are "society's rules".

The man in my example said that it was a very trying experience. What I want to bring to the debate today is that the man told me he did not blame any political party or ideology. The issue is that there is a certain lack of understanding behind our way of proceeding.

Such occasions allow people to rally behind a non-partisan issue and make an initial symbolic gesture in order to improve our understanding in the hope of providing better assistance. That is what our society does best.

That is why I am very pleased to support this bill. This is not an issue that I fully understand, but I commend the work of Emergo, an organization that does so much for my riding and with which I want to continue working. I am committed to continue supporting it and to continue supporting, in a broader sense, my colleagues who will introduce similar bills. This is a very important issue.

I also want to take this opportunity to commend my colleague opposite, who lives with this situation, and all Canadians going through this experience, this challenge, in the shadows. I commend their courage and I want to thank Senator Munson and the hon. member who introduced this bill in the House.

• (1815)

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, before beginning my speech, I would like to thank my NDP colleague from Chambly—Borduas for sharing with us this very touching story, this very heartbreaking story, about people living in this kind of situation. As a member of the Standing Committee on Health, I would like to tell them that the New Democratic team is working hard on the committee to ensure that the government provides greater assistance to informal caregivers through a tax credit or a tax benefit that will help low-income families and lower

middle class families. We have to help families that are taking care of their loved ones, the members of their family.

Clearly, the government can do something. The government must demonstrate leadership in this area. I do not see any leadership by the Conservatives today. However, I am optimistic that they will increase the assistance available to families who are taking care of their loved ones.

To begin my speech officially, I would like to mention the fact that Bill S-206 will officially designate April 2 as world autism awareness day. This awareness day will increase awareness among Canadians of the challenges faced by autistic individuals and the importance of improving their opportunities and the treatments for autism.

Organizations such as the Autism Society Canada and the United Nations already mark this very special day.

For those who may perhaps be less familiar with autism, I will provide a summary of it. Autism is the most common neurological disorder among children. Many people do not know this, but it truly is the most frequently occurring neurological disorder affecting children. It affects millions of Canadian families, because one child in 110 is affected by some type of autism. There are many different types of autism that I will not describe in detail. I do not think this would be relevant to the type of discussion we want to have today concerning world autism awareness day.

Autism disturbs the brain's operation. Consequently, it is characterized by abnormal social interaction and communication, as well as by restricted and repetitive behaviours.

Autism is also referred to as autism spectrum disorder. I just want to clarify that these terms are used interchangeably. This disorder affects all aspects of childhood development and the symptoms usually appear during the first three years of life. It can manifest itself a little later than that, but usually it is within the first three years. It is the parents, who spend most of their time with their children, who notice that their child may be a little different than the others developmentally speaking. Just because a child is different does not necessarily mean that he or she has autism spectrum disorder, but it is a good indicator for parents. They must pay special attention to the situation and to the development of their child because he or she could be autistic.

As I mentioned, the symptoms usually appear in the first three years. The seriousness of the disorder, the number and type of symptoms, the age at which the disorder manifests itself, the level of functionality and the challenges posed by social interaction vary greatly from one person to the next. Science has not yet determined an exact cause of autism. It is still a grey area. Research is placing a particular emphasis on genetic, biological and environmental factors, but that is still a lot of ground to cover.

Private Members' Business

It is also important for all levels of government to support research to determine the real causes of autism spectrum disorder. It would be great news for families and their children if we were eventually able to prevent the disease in one way or another as a result of medical advances. If we cannot prevent the disease, we must at least help these families to live with the disorder. I think that would be very much appreciated by our society.

There are approximately 35 million autistic people worldwide. In Canada, although epidemiological details are rare, approximately 48,000 children and 144,000 adults live with one form or another of the disease.

● (1820)

It is quite possible that people in your neighbourhood, or in your surrounding area, are living with an autism spectrum disorder and so are their family members. This demonstrates to what extent it is prevalent in our society and why we must act.

These figures do not take into account the millions of parents, family members, health care providers, employers, teachers, researchers, and other people who have to manage this kind of situation and help these people.

The NDP is in favour of having a day dedicated to recognizing autism and its impact on Canadian families. However, the NDP is calling for concrete measures to be taken. NDP members have introduced bills in an effort to move forward. I am referring to my colleagues from Sudbury and Vancouver Kingsway.

The NDP will support World Autism Awareness Day, but I hope that the government will move forward in the future, and will do more to support families and people living with autism spectrum disorder.

● (1825)

[*English*]

The Speaker: I will now go to the member for Kitchener—Conestoga for his five-minute right of reply.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege to rise once again to encourage the House to support autism awareness, to support a world autism awareness day and to support Bill S-206, legislation raised by my colleague, Senator Munson, in the other place.

There are many reasons to raise awareness of this condition. In my opening comments I noted the benefits of early diagnosis, of proper surveillance and that autism spectrum disorders, or ASD, is the third most commonly reported chronic condition among children under the age of 4.

I also reminded the House of actions our Conservative government has already taken in this area. I praised the efforts of early diagnosis and early intervention and I asked that we not forget teens and adults with autism as we focus our attention on children.

In that speech, I also said though:

Individuals with autism and their families want what everyone wants, to fulfill their aspirations and flourish with the support of their family, friends and society as a whole. All too often, however, they and their families face the stigma and lack of understanding of the challenges they face and the support they need in order to reach their full potential.

To me, that is the most important benefit of establishing and recognizing world autism awareness day, breaking the stigma.

In my research, I found a blog entry by Julie Cole, an entrepreneur and a mother of a child with autism, who shared how even everyday well-meaning comments can be hurtful. She prefaced by saying “If you’re curious about what common and harmless things you are saying that make my ears bleed, here goes:”.

One such comment came from expectant mothers, “All I want is a healthy baby”. I will share Ms. Cole’s response. She said:

...It makes sense to me - health is the most important gift we can ask for. But, bring out my psycho sidekick self and you want to know what it hears? It hears that the very last thing you want is a child like mine. I know that’s not really what’s being said, but it’s what the little friend in my head is hearing!

Another very innocent comment that caused her pain was obviously meant as a compliment, “He’s lucky to have you.” Once again, Ms. Cole’s response is heartfelt and honest. She said:

The thing is, I’m lucky to have him. When I hear how fortunate he is to have me, it makes me feel like you see him as a burden. Please remember, I feel like I picked a four-leaf clover on the morning of his birth.

A four-leaf clover: I view each of my children and each of my nine grandchildren the same way, and I am sure all parents do.

The question is why Canadians would assume that other parents could view their child differently. That assumption is not based on Canadians’ understanding of autism. That assumption is based on ignorance.

The recognition of world autism awareness day will increase our understanding, reduce our ignorance and lead to better outcomes for our society in general.

As Ms. Cole, the member for Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont and other parents of children with ASD would all attest, the diagnosis brings many challenges. My colleague has spoken about these eloquently in the House several times and again tonight.

I truly appreciate the greater understanding I have gained of ASD since being elected to represent the good people of Kitchener—Conestoga. I am especially grateful to the member for Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont for sharing his experience with me through debates in the House and especially for introducing me to his son Jaden.

I am grateful to people like Julie Cole, parents who are willing to speak from their heart publicly about their experiences to help break down the stigma surrounding autism spectrum disorders.

I humbly ask the House to stand with Canadians like these to promote awareness of autism and to formally designate April 2 of each year as world autism awareness day.

As I said yesterday in comments on another topic altogether, often the most important role members of the House can play is as leaders of conversation. Bill S-206 provides the House with the opportunity to lead a national conversation on a subject that desperately requires more dialogue.

I ask all hon. members to vote in favour of Bill S-206.

• (1830)

The Speaker: The time provided for debate has expired. Accordingly, the question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Private Members' Business

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Speaker: In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 93, the recorded division on the motion stands deferred until Wednesday, June 20, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

[For continuation of proceedings see part B]

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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, June 19, 2012
(Part B)

—

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, June 19, 2012

[Continuation of proceedings from part A]

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1830)

[English]

CANADA-PANAMA ECONOMIC GROWTH AND PROSPERITY ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-24, An Act to implement the Free Trade Agreement between Canada and the Republic of Panama, the Agreement on the Environment between Canada and the Republic of Panama and the Agreement on Labour Cooperation between Canada and the Republic of Panama, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the motion that the question be now put.

The Speaker: The hon. member for Leeds—Grenville has six minutes left to conclude his remarks.

Mr. Gordon Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I was saying before I was interrupted for private members' business, what has been the result of these initiatives for Canadians? In recent years, bilateral trade between Canada and Panama has been steadily growing. From just under \$50 million in total trade in 2002, we are up to a total of \$235 million per year by 2011.

We are now in 15th position as a supplier of goods to Panama, and much of this is very diversified and includes pork, vegetables and vegetable preparations, vegetable oils, industrial machinery, electrical and electronic machinery, motor vehicles including ambulances, ships and tugboats for the Panama Canal, paper products, pharmaceutical products, iron and steel products, coins and precious stones and metals.

Meanwhile, we are now Panama's second most important market for exports, which include gold, fish and seafood, fruits and nuts, mainly bananas and pineapple, and coffee.

Canadian companies have also demonstrated a recent interest in Panama as an investment destination. The stock of Canadian direct investment abroad in Panama was estimated at \$121 million by Statistics Canada at the end of 2010, and Scotiabank established itself in Panama in 1973 and has expanded to become the fifth largest commercial bank in Panama.

However, it is in the mining sector where Canada is now poised to play its most visible role as a commercial partner for Panama. According to public sources, the book value of assets owned by

Canadian mining companies in Panama in 2010, which is the last year for which data is available, was \$658.7 million.

The government of Panama has ably steered the economy through the global downturn with a stimulus package of large, strategic projects that aim to maintain employment levels, address gaps in social development infrastructure and transform Panama into a world class logistics hub.

Going forward, the completion of the Panama Canal expansion must surely rank as one of the most dynamic undertakings in the Americas. We have already seen some Canadian participation in this venture, a contract to analyze the lifespan of the concrete, for example.

The government's ambitious infrastructure development plan includes the metro public transportation project and the building and improvement of the national network of roads, airports, hospitals and ports.

Education, energy and the environment also feature prominently in this program, much of which will be materially assisted by the Inter-American Development Bank and the World Bank.

Panama's strong commercial banking, insurance and service sectors, along with its achievement of an investment grade rating, lend credence to projections that the country will continue to be a lead performer in the region. According to the World Bank, Panama ranks highest in Central America in terms of the ease of doing business.

Canada wants to be part of this exciting program that would contribute to the welfare of all Panamanians. We need this free trade agreement now, not only to help maintain this pace of growth but to protect our existing base, since Panama has already been out there, being aggressive and going after bilateral programs and trade agreements, which already benefit many of our competitors, such as Taiwan, Singapore and Mexico, and shortly will also benefit the United States and the European Union as well.

I strongly endorse our government's pro-trade, pro-jobs agenda that we are pursuing as we pursue many different trade agreements throughout the world. Canada is a trading country.

Jobs in my riding of Leeds—Grenville are heavily dependent on trade with the United States and with other countries around the world. We are located on all of the major corridors, whether it be the main rail route through Canada or the main road infrastructure through Highway 401, and we are also located right on the St. Lawrence Seaway with the Port of Prescott. All of these things help jobs in my riding of Leeds—Grenville.

Government Orders

•(1835)

This is yet another opportunity for our country to conclude a trade agreement with another country that would help create jobs here in Canada, as well as open up another market for many of our producers here in Canada.

I encourage all members to support this important trade bill. I look forward to it being passed in the very near future.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague across the way for his speech.

In the last few minutes, he mentioned the extent to which trade is important, especially for the people in our ridings. I think that it is beneficial for most people in all regions of Canada to be able to trade with other countries. For example, several business owners in my riding of Alfred-Pellan are small-scale importers—exporters and rely heavily on trade. I agree with him on this point.

However, I agree less on others, especially when it comes to the fact that no tax information exchange agreement has been signed with Panama. It is a little strange. All that has been signed with Panama, in terms of taxation, is a convention on double taxation. Only legitimate revenue is traceable, and not illegitimate revenue, which would be traceable under a tax information exchange agreement based on OECD data.

Why has this not been included in the free trade agreement, especially given that Panama enters into this kind of agreement with other countries, just like Canada does?

Canada has this kind of agreement with the Cayman Islands and the Bahamas, and Panama has one with the United States. So why do we not have something that is so key to our economy?

[*English*]

Mr. Gordon Brown: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for her question, but my question is this: if members are representing ridings that are heavily dependent on trade for their jobs, why are these members on the opposite side not standing in support of these free trade agreements?

We know they have opposed every single trade agreement. There was some division on whether they supported the Canada-Jordan free trade agreement.

In any event, directly to the question the member asked about the financial issues, the bill would in fact have a section and a chapter of comprehensive rules governing investment, and the rules would provide great protections and predictability for Canadian investors in their investments in Panama.

I think the bill does address the issues that the hon. member is concerned about, and I would hope she would in fact support this bill because she even said it is important for jobs in her riding.

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his excellent presentation.

I want my colleague to try to square this for me. The NDP is a party that claims to be for workers, yet it does so much that kills jobs, quite frankly. As an example, it is against the expansion of the

oil sands. It is against almost every major natural resources project developed in this country. It is against the pipeline to the west coast, which would add \$30 a barrel, probably, to the price of oil. It is also against free trade, yet these things all create a lot of jobs. In fact, the free trade agreements, I think, together created about 30% of all the jobs in Canada. However, it wants to kill those jobs.

I would like the member to comment upon the importance of free trade agreements and jobs.

Mr. Gordon Brown: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member who has stated very clearly his understanding of how important it is for resource development here in Canada and the jobs it creates. It not only creates jobs in the province of Alberta. This has been an argument, that it only creates jobs in Alberta. It creates jobs across Canada. It creates manufacturing jobs in machinery and other sectors in Ontario, for example, which is the province I am from, and there are so many jobs that are dependent upon manufacturing.

I do not understand how the members on the other side can stand there and actually oppose these free trade agreements that would create jobs. They say they want to improve the quality of life in their ridings for their constituents. Here is an opportunity for them to stand up to help create those jobs, create the free trade agreements that would create those jobs and make life better for everyone here in Canada.

•(1840)

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as members know, the Liberal Party is very supportive of free and fair trade, frankly, so we do support this agreement in principle. However, I have a question. I wonder to what extent the member opposite has investigated the effectiveness of any collateral agreements, with respect to the environment.

I know that the member for Kings—Hants, several years ago, was able to have one of those collateral agreements respecting labour and the environment attached to the Colombia free trade agreement. I also understand that we are having difficulty overseeing the effectiveness of that agreement and undertaking the proper investigations to make sure it is being complied with.

I ask the member what degree of satisfaction he has with the content of any of these collateral agreements and their actual enforceability.

Mr. Gordon Brown: Mr. Speaker, I am encouraged that the Liberal Party is supporting these free trade efforts. In fact, over the last number of years it has supported them. It is the NDP that has opposed every single trade agreement that has come before this House.

In terms of the parallel agreements, there is one on the environment and one on labour co-operation. If we do these types of agreements and we continue to work with these countries, we are in a much better position to help ensure that these sorts of things are enforced, rather than walking away and not being engaged with these countries.

The benefits to Canada for these types of agreements are large. They create jobs throughout Canada. They help in our ridings and improve the employment situation. I am encouraged that the Liberal Party is in fact—

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The Speaker: Order. Resuming debate, the hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Claude Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I admit that I rise today in this House with a certain amount of anxiety to state my views concerning Bill C-24, an act to implement the Canada-Panama free trade agreement.

Obviously, this legislation is very important for the people of Canada and Panama. If it is enacted, there will be many lasting consequences, and they will not necessarily be positive. Before telling my colleagues what I really think, however, I believe it would be a good idea to give an overview of what is really in this bill.

First, the negotiations between Canada and Panama addressed a number of major changes to trade relations between the two countries. Several points drew my attention. First, it provides that Canada would eliminate all customs duties on non-agricultural products, and the vast majority of duties on agricultural products.

The best estimates available indicate that this means that 99% of customs duties on Panamanian imports would disappear with the stroke of a pen. Over a 15-year period, once the agreement is ratified, other duties would also be gradually eliminated.

The various products that would still be subject to customs duty include dairy products, poultry and eggs, and certain products containing sugar. In return, about 90% of Canadian exports to Panama would be exempt from customs duty. Obviously, that 90% includes numerous agricultural products.

At the end of a 5- to 10-year period, it will be possible to export most agricultural products, in fact virtually all of those products, free of customs duty. Knowing that at present, Panama's customs duties come to nearly 70% on certain agricultural products, we can understand how significant the consequences of ratifying this agreement will be for both countries.

Apart from agricultural products, there will be a series of equally important changes if the agreement is ratified in this House. Those that cause the most concern obviously include the expansion of free trade in the service sector, such as information technologies, for example, and also increased access to government contracts in both countries. The agreement also addresses other points. For example, it mentions an agreement on the environment, an agreement on labour and provisions dealing with investments.

As we can see, this agreement is very wide-ranging and will have consequences for many different spheres of society. Earlier I mentioned agriculture, the services sector, government procurement, the environment, investment and labour law. It will have major consequences.

For this reason, I believe we should think long and hard about the agreement before deciding whether or not to support it. This is what I and my party have done. We have been watching the negotiations leading to Bill C-24, which we are currently studying. We were also in attendance at the meeting of stakeholders and experts.

Our analysis of these many discussions has had a chilling effect on our support. Above all, we heard a great deal of very convincing evidence that Panama is a tax haven. According to Todd Tucker,

research director at Public Citizen's Global Trade Watch, Panama is home to an estimated 400,000 corporations, including many offshore corporations and multinational subsidiaries. In comparison, as just one example, this is four times the number of corporations registered in Canada. It is a number that speaks volumes.

According to the OECD, the government of Panama does not have the legal resources to efficiently verify the essential information concerning these corporations, including the information with regard to their capital structure. When we are talking about tax havens, needless to say, it is obvious that caution needs to be exercised.

This is also the reason why my colleague, the member for Burnaby—New Westminster, put forward a number of amendments that would help to resolve part of this issue. Unfortunately, the Conservative government, with the support of the Liberals, refused to listen, as it was probably too blinded by its ideology and by its disregard for compromise.

● (1845)

Another aspect that I have serious problems with is the rights of workers. In fact, the agreement we are examining today gives no specific protection to the right of association or the right to strike. A number of stakeholders raised this issue during the consultations. There is cause for concern, especially since the fines prescribed in the event of infractions are virtually non-existent.

We must be very aware of Panama's specific context in order to see how the rights of workers will be impaired by this agreement. Recently, demonstrations and strikes were held in Panama when the government made a full frontal attack on the rights of workers. Some of the government's repressive measures included the authorization to bring in strikebreakers, an end to environmental studies for certain projects and a prohibition on collecting mandatory union dues.

During the demonstrations in Panama, the police used excessive force to suppress protests. Six demonstrators were killed during confrontations with the police and 300 union leaders were detained. This is particularly worrisome if we consider that, with the government we have right now, workers are losing more and more of their rights. I therefore do not see how it will be useful to support a free trade agreement that does not respect workers' rights. Unfortunately, the state of workers' rights in Panama is far from rosy.

We have every reason to be concerned given that the free trade agreement set out in Bill C-24 will likely make the situation worse rather than better.

Once again, the hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster proposed sound and intelligent amendments to fill this gaping hole in the agreement. These amendments could have protected unionized workers by guaranteeing them the right to bargain collectively. These amendments also would have required Canada's Minister of International Trade to speak with union representatives on a regular basis, which is a healthy thing in a balanced democracy.

It is nothing, for a democratic country like Canada, to make demands when signing a free trade agreement. That seems obvious. But the government simply brushed off my colleague's suggestions, which were realistic and showed a lot of compromise.

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For all of the reasons I just listed, my party and I are opposed to Bill C-24. The NDP has always opposed trade models like this one. We saw it with NAFTA. These agreements put the interests of multinational corporations ahead of the interests of workers and the environment, which is unacceptable. They also promote inequalities and erode the quality of life of people and honest workers. It is not surprising that this government is pushing so hard for this agreement. It is rather ironic, though.

The agreement we are studying today is another step in the strategy adopted by Canada and the United States, which focuses on serial bilateralism through the use of trade agreements that are unfair to honest people, as I already mentioned. For a long time, the NDP has been preparing and suggesting a multilateral approach based on a fair, sustainable model that respects the environment and workers.

I urge my House of Commons colleagues to carefully consider the consequences of passing Bill C-24. I do not think we should pass it. This agreement will not help honest workers. The government has been utterly uncompromising and has rejected all of my colleague's fitting amendments.

I will never vote in favour of such an unfair agreement.

• (1850)

[*English*]

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for her speech. My concern, though, was the tone of her speech, the disrespect for Panamanians, the pejorative language she used and the misinformation in calling Panama a tax haven.

The reality is that Panama was listed on the grey list, but the democratically elected Government of Panama and the Panamanian people have worked hard and Panama is no longer on that list. It is now on what is called the white list. It has been working hard to open its markets to create jobs.

Why does the NDP feel that it is in better shape to decide what is good for Panamanians?

This agreement was negotiated between the democratically elected governments of Canada and of Panama, but the NDP members seem to feel, and have the arrogance to say, that this is not a good deal and they are fighting against it. They have not stood up for any of the free trade agreements that have benefited this country. What puts the member in a position to decide what is good for Panamanians?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Claude Morin: Mr. Speaker, I have to laugh when my colleagues challenge the facts that the NDP brings forward.

When we deliver a speech on an issue, we do our research and we present the facts. My information is not wrong. Maybe my colleague should do some fact-checking. Maybe he is a little behind on his research.

As I said before, I cannot support a bill that does not respect workers' quality of life and tramples their rights. That is all I can say in answer to the question.

[*English*]

The Speaker: It being 6:55 p.m., pursuant to an order made Thursday, June 7, it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the second reading stage of the bill now before the House.

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion that the question be now put?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Speaker: In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Speaker: This division stands deferred until tomorrow immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

* * *

• (1855)

[*Translation*]

PROTECTING CANADA'S SENIORS ACT

The House resumed from April 27 consideration of the motion that Bill C-36, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (elder abuse), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Ms. Marie-Claude Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise a second time here today to speak to another bill.

I am speaking today on behalf of all Canadian seniors. Like others before them, they have built our country. They have contributed to society and created an open, warm, modern, caring society that does not leave anyone behind.

My grandparents raised their children, worked hard their whole lives and shared their knowledge and wisdom with their community. Now they are both over 85 years old, and like millions of other Canadian seniors, they still contribute to society through their experience, volunteer work and social and political involvement. They are productive members of society, and the last thing I would ever want is for them to be mistreated or neglected. I shudder at the very thought of my grandparents going through something like that.

Unfortunately, seniors can suffer from more serious physical disabilities, be more emotionally vulnerable and be financially dependent on others more often than younger adults. As a result, through no fault of their own, many Canadian seniors can become the victims of abuse.

Mr. Speaker, pardon me, but I forgot to mention that I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Beauport—Limoilou.

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According to Statistics Canada and a number of organizations that advocate on behalf of seniors, one in ten seniors has suffered some form of abuse in Canada, which is significant. I am talking about 10% of seniors in Canada. And that number is just the tip of the iceberg since only one in five cases of abuse is reported by the victims.

Worse yet, according to a study by the Institut universitaire de gériatrie de Montréal, 800 seniors in Quebec died as a result of neglect between 2005 and 2007. I am talking about 800 people. That is a lot of people, but, in my opinion, one person is too many.

That is why the NDP supports Bill C-36, which partially—I repeat, partially—answers the requests we made during the 2011 election campaign.

I want to work with all parties in order to make our country a safe place for our seniors. Unfortunately, the bill before us here does not do enough to properly protect the men and women who built our country. Protecting them also means providing them with income security, affordable housing, access to universal pharmacare, home care and health care, all of which are sadly missing from Bill C-36.

One of the other things that is missing from this bill is gender-based analysis that would take into consideration the fact that older women do not experience violence and neglect the same way older men do.

As chair of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, I tabled the committee's report on the abuse of older women in late May 2012. According to the report, the number of older women is and will continue to be greater than the number of older men. Even if the rate of victimization is the same, the number of abused women will always be greater than the number of abused men. In addition to the fact that their numbers are greater, women live longer and are more likely to have some disability that makes them more vulnerable to injury or abuse.

In fact, two-thirds of calls received by agencies dealing with elder abuse in Canada are from women. There are a number of reasons why women are victimized more often.

First, more than half of the 250,000 seniors living in poverty are women. Elderly women tend to have more limited financial resources. In 2008, the average income of elderly women was \$24,100 a year compared to \$38,100 for men. The ensuing financial dependence may contribute to financial exploitation and abuse, and also to the reluctance of women to report the abuse. In short, it is a vicious circle.

• (1900)

The absence of a national housing strategy that would enable elderly women to have access to safe, adequate, accessible and affordable housing, often forces these women to remain the objects of violence and prevents them from reporting cases of abuse. Once again, women are caught in between a rock and a hard place.

Elderly women are also victims of the lack of coordination between various levels of government. The current bill is a glaring example of this, unfortunately. Rather than offering a partnership with provincial social services in order to develop programs that

encourage elderly women to understand and report situations of victimization, the federal government is doing the bare minimum.

Let us be honest, Bill C-36 makes only a minor change to the Criminal Code. It provides no support and no tools for the organizations, professionals and other stakeholders that assist seniors.

I am currently a member of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women. However, the non-partisan Parliamentary Committee on Palliative and Compassionate Care also made several arguments and recommendations in its report. Indeed, the report entitled, "Not to Be Forgotten: Care of Vulnerable Canadians," dedicates a section to the abuse of seniors.

We obviously support this bill, but it must not pass completely untouched. My colleagues and I are in a position where we are forced to implore the government to not only listen to us and people in need, but also to listen to its own committees.

We concur with the sentiments expressed in the committee's report on palliative care: all sectors of society must band together and make a huge, concerted effort. The federal government must not act alone.

Something must also be done with regard to housing for seniors, and in particular, for elderly women. Elderly women must enjoy autonomy in order to overcome systematic sexual discrimination. The lack of housing strips elderly women of their status and autonomy.

The New Democrats recommend that the federal government work with the provinces and territories to establish a national housing strategy in order to provide all Canadians with safe, adequate, accessible and affordable housing that meets the needs of elderly women, among others, and prevents cases of abuse, violence and mistreatment.

In closing, the government has well and truly taken the first step by incorporating one of the 15 recommendations in the report by the Standing Committee on the Status of Women on the abuse of elderly women, but it is far from sufficient.

To put an end to elder abuse—our elders being full members of our society, I would point out, and deserving of our respect—we have to define that abuse, coordinate the efforts of all levels of government and provide adequate housing for all seniors, particularly women. To do that, we need a national housing strategy, as I said earlier.

The NDP is offering concrete solutions that have also been recommended by two parliamentary committees. Unfortunately, this government has chosen not to put those solutions into practice. Our former leader reminded us not just to oppose, but to propose.

We are proposing solutions to the government. We want to work with it. It is up to it to listen to them and work with us.

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Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to thank my colleague for her excellent speech. I know that as chair of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women she sees a lot of things, and the case of women in particular is very important to her. What she told us in her speech is interesting. It moved me deeply that she has addressed so many subjects, all of which are equally important to women of all ages.

My colleague mentioned at the end that we are not just a party that opposes, we are also a party that proposes. I know that when it comes to the cause of women, including the question of affordable housing for seniors, she has a lot of ideas. I know her time was a little short. I would like to ask her to continue a little and tell us about the changes she would make to improve this bill.

• (1905)

Ms. Marie-Claude Morin: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for giving me the opportunity to expand on my idea a little.

Certainly, working here in Parliament, we have the chance to spend time with a lot of people and develop new ideas every day. At the moment, I am doing a lot of work on the status of women, and my speech may have been a little coloured by that. Obviously, I am also doing a lot of work on housing.

In fact, when I see that a segment of the population is affected by violence or abuse, the solution I propose is to adopt a comprehensive strategy. For example, an individual needs health care, adequate housing and three meals a day. A comprehensive strategy that meets all of an individual's basic needs is how we will ultimately manage to deal with the violence experienced by people in our society who are somewhat more vulnerable.

Earlier, I mentioned housing. Obviously, all Canadians are entitled to safe, accessible, adequate and affordable housing, but in this case, particularly, this could avoid a lot of problems.

[*English*]

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, frankly, I quite agree with my friend's observations. I would like her to expand on this concept.

Section 718 of the Criminal Code already provides in sentencing provisions the ability of a court, a judge, to consider aggravating or mitigating factors. Really all this does is set out age, at which a court can already look. It tells me that this is yet another piece of Conservative legislation that is just designed to be cosmetic in nature and make people feel like the Conservatives have actually done something when so much more needs to be done.

Does my friend agree with that proposition?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Claude Morin: Mr. Speaker, we decided to support this bill because, obviously, we are not against motherhood and apple pie; however, this bill is clearly insufficient.

Of course, there is talk of tougher sentences and things like that but, when it comes right down to it, we really have to avoid this type of problem. We have to focus on prevention. Seniors who are being mistreated have to be given the tools they need to prevent this mistreatment. Taking action after the fact and making it easier for a

person to file a complaint is not going to solve the problem of elder abuse. We must take preventive action by providing the tools. These people should not have to accept such situations.

We need to take this much further. It would be really worthwhile to consider this issue and to work on it. It would be really useful to have something more extensive.

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise to speak about Bill C-36. The NDP is quite pleased with this bill because it responds to some of our party's concerns and objectives. In that regard, I would like to thank the Conservative members for introducing this bill because it is a starting point for potentially improving the situation of our seniors and preventing abuse.

As the MP for Beauport—Limoilou, a riding in Quebec City, this bill holds a special importance for me. I would like to remind the hon. members that Quebec City is among the cities in Canada with the highest average age. There is thus already a significant proportion of seniors living in Quebec City. It is therefore going to be a challenge in the future to provide these people with the conditions they need to lead full, meaningful, satisfying and safe lives or, in short, lives that will allow them to play a real role in today's society.

However, it is truly essential to realize that the amendment to the Criminal Code proposed by the government is only one aspect of an action plan for seniors that should be much broader in scope. From that point of view, the problem remains untouched. Let me explain.

Even if we pass this bill and the amendment is made to the Criminal Code, without adequate means, without the various people who intervene when seniors are abused, without a broader framework and without co-operation between the federal, provincial and municipal governments and other stakeholders, this change will only solve a small part of the problem.

We all agree that a bill like this one is just an instrument. It is a tool. If we do not have trained personnel, if we do not have the people who can make full use of this tool, we are not going to meet the stated objectives.

This is why, for years, the New Democratic Party has been proposing a much broader plan than merely amending the Criminal Code. Incidentally, I must congratulate the hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot on her speech, because she mentioned a whole series of measures that should be adopted in conjunction with the amendment to the Criminal Code, and also because she highlighted a specific group, a group which, sadly, is known for being the target of elder abuse, namely women.

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First, it is very important to understand, for example, that our police forces are powerless, because they do not have the necessary training or personnel. Moreover, they do not have sufficient resources to help them and provide support, such as doctors, medical staff, psychologists, and even financial planners to track down and expose financial abuse, which is very common.

● (1910)

Without this support, police officers, who are the first responders when elder abuse is reported, will be powerless despite the change to the act. That is not just true for police officers, but for the whole legal system.

Lawyers specialize in various areas. They choose a field, an area of expertise. We will also need lawyers who are specialized in that type of crime and that type of case. Similarly, judges will also need some support to put everything involved in a case of elder abuse into perspective.

We do not realize how complex these cases can be for our police officers and our legal system. A very large part of the abuse that can be reported or identified is caused by people close to them, often by a senior's own children.

Starting from that point, there may be a whole string of consequences such that the crime goes unpunished. If our police officers, lawyers, judges and social workers have no training to decode this information, to support elderly victims, and to encourage them not only to report incidents of abuse, but to make progress in finding a solution—indeed, systematically punishing offences does not always solve problems of abuse—other very significant problems can be created of which elderly victims may be aware, and which may cause them not to report cases of abuse.

Many seniors, due to uncertainty about the future, a lack of confidence in themselves, or simply due to a lack of financial and material means, will accept the unacceptable in order to avoid suffering from insecurity. They prefer to suffer from other problems rather than suffer from such insecurity about their condition and future.

We can therefore give Bill C-36 the green light, but with a caveat: as a member of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, and having worked with my 11 colleagues, I am well placed to know that some of them unfortunately apply magical thinking and believe that amending the Criminal Code will solve everything, and that consequently, nothing else needs to be done.

I am sorry, but I will never support that kind of logic. We need to consider this aspect, this proposed amendment that may be adopted, at least I hope, that is if more work is done. And from there, we will be able to create a real strategy, a coordinated approach at the federal, provincial, and municipal level, including other stakeholders from the para-public and private sectors.

There is another parallel track to the proposed amendment that needs to be considered, examined and eventually implemented, if ever that track has potential and seems worthwhile. I am talking about restorative justice, where the victim can get assistance and support from the person who has wronged them, and even be set on a path of reconciliation that may facilitate things and may eventually help to solve problems.

I remind members that many seniors unfortunately are victims of their own loved ones.

● (1915)

The restorative justice approach must be very closely examined, both by the federal government and the 308 members of the House and by other levels of government and various stakeholders. Indeed, it will be very easy for many victims to fall between the cracks when what they really need is our help and support.

Ms. Mylène Freeman (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Beauport—Limoilou for his excellent speech. He mentioned the fact that, when we talk about elder abuse, we are not talking about anything that is black and white.

I had an opportunity to hear from expert witnesses during the study on the abuse of senior women that was conducted by the Standing Committee on the Status of Women. The witnesses who work in the justice system revealed serious problems with how cases are processed. I would like to ask my colleague to tell us more about this.

We heard in committee that ageism, a poor understanding of the nature of the elder abuse and the lack of services for seniors, among other things, really came to a head when the seniors were in the legal system. When they were in court, they had great difficulty in moving their file forward.

This is really evidence of a much larger problem. Seniors have difficulty obtaining justice; it is not enough just to change the legislation.

● (1920)

Mr. Raymond Côté: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her question and also commend the work that was carried out on this issue by the Standing Committee on the Status of Women.

Basically, it must be understood that, in the Criminal Code, there are sections that already make it possible to take legal action, to initiate a legal procedure. One of the problems that was raised is that, despite these provisions, despite this basic tool that exists for our police forces and for the various stakeholders, really very few cases, unfortunately, arrive at their logical conclusion, with a conviction or at least compensation for the victim.

My colleague quite correctly points out that we need additional measures and, above all, a support or a strategy that is entirely devoted to our police forces and to the various stakeholders that are called upon to act. Essentially, this type of case must be identified, and this appears to be a fundamental problem.

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Beauport—Limoilou for his excellent speech.

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As members know, we are going to support this bill, even though in our view it really does not go far enough, as my colleague said. Since my colleague has a few moments more to speak, I would appreciate it if he would tell us about the changes he would like to make to this bill. What changes would he make in order to improve the quality of life of seniors? In his view, what changes would it be extremely important to make for this bill to be worthwhile?

Mr. Raymond Côté: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Alfred-Pellan for her question. It is an excellent one.

This bill is a good starting point, an opportunity for us to work with the government. How many times has the government asked for our suggestions and our help, then spat in our faces? This time, I am hoping for a sincere, collaborative approach on the part of the government so that we can improve this bill and do much more with it. Still, I am a little worried about shortcomings on the government side.

The truth is that what we really need is coordination and collaboration among stakeholders, including provincial governments. Any discussion of health and social services has to involve provincial governments.

If the government thinks that this one bill solves the problem, it will be a failure, and while that failure can be corrected later on, how many thousands of victims will get no help if we do not do more now?

[*English*]

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak today on Bill C-36, an act to amend the Criminal Code (elder abuse). While this is a very small step forward in dealing with the silent scourge that must be brought into the light, it does not nearly address the true scope and range of elder abuse in Canada.

The World Health Organization adopts a definition from the United Kingdom for elder abuse, which is, "a single or repeated act, or lack of appropriate action, occurring within any relationship where there is an expectation of trust, which causes harm or distress to an older person". This abuse comes in many forms: physical, psychological or emotional, financial or material, neglect or even sexual abuse.

The Parliamentary Committee on Palliative and Compassionate Care found an expanded definition, which includes institutional abuse, such as a loss of freedom and control, inadequate care, insufficient diet, misuse of physical and chemical restraints in long-term care facilities; medical abuse, such as senior Canadians having their wishes ignored or seniors being subject to support cutbacks; or systemic victimization, be it marginalization by the government and bureaucracy or by the medical system.

Over the course of the last two years, I had the distinct privilege to serve on the all-party Parliamentary Committee on Palliative and Compassionate Care, where we examined in depth the hidden crime of elder abuse in Canada. Ours was an ad hoc committee, founded out of a non-partisan and mutual concern for end-of-life issues and oriented toward improving care for elderly, dying and otherwise vulnerable Canadians.

My experiences as a young man and then later as a lawyer shaped my inherent belief in the need to stop these silent injustices. As a

young law student, one of my summer jobs was through a provincial government summer employment program through which I worked with the Guelph Police Service. I was put to work inside the station and frequently had opportunity to go out on calls.

I will never forget attending a call with an officer of the police service involving a domestic dispute. It was enlightening. For the longest time, we further subjugated the victims of these terrible crimes, and I could not understand why, when a spouse or child was abused, it was the victim who was forced to leave with the police. It took years, but we finally changed professional opinion of the right protocol and eventually public opinion so that the offender was removed from the home and not the victim.

I have come to realize that elder abuse is a similarly silent but pervasive problem. In my former life as a lawyer, I was often called upon to assist with wills. I often had to spend considerable time determining whether older clients were being pressured to give me will instructions to satisfy the desires of their children. Too often older parents were asked to guarantee loans that could never be paid and for which they would become responsible, causing considerable emotional and financial damage. Too often children attempted to convince aging parents to transfer title of their home into their names to avoid probate fees upon death. I saw cases of children taking advantage of their parents by forcing them out of their homes after title was transferred.

Too frequently I witnessed children of aging parents coming into my office because another sibling with the power of attorney for the parents had misused the power and absconded with money from the parents' account. I could go on and on. However, I urge my colleagues to read the committee's report, "Not to be Forgotten", wherein members will find numerous accounts of reported physical and emotional abuse of seniors and compelling, offensive and, frankly, sometimes gruesome examples of mistreatment at the hands of family or caregivers.

Now, as a member of Parliament, it breaks my heart to get a call from an elderly mother or father expressing horror over their yelling and screaming children, being forced into compliance, feeling trapped because if they report this abuse, they feel that not only will they lose a caregiver but they will lose their children. The parental bond is so strong, even in older age, that we are right now on the issue of elder abuse where we were 30 years ago with spousal abuse: a fear of reporting and lack of committed resources and programs to adequately research, detect and deal with its frequency.

Government Orders

We have the facts on our side to make this better. We know that elder abuse does not discriminate by gender, ethnicity, income or education. Regardless of one's cultural upbringing, previous career or social standing, any senior can become a victim, and it is shame or guilt that often silences them should they even have the capacity to report the abuse. Between 4% and 10% of Canadian seniors will experience a form of abuse in their lifetime, yet nearly half go unreported. When we consider how rapidly our population is aging, we have a problem on our hands that demands attention.

• (1925)

Elder abuse is often committed by a person known to the victim. It might be a son, daughter, grandchild, or another family member. It might be a friend or a professional caregiver, such as a paid care provider or staff. Family violence against elderly Canadians has increased by 14% since 2004. Abusers can also include neighbours, landlords or other authority figures.

Tragically, it is their love that makes them the greatest victims. Abused elder Canadians often do not reveal their mistreatment because of fear, love for the abuser, a lack of understanding, a physical or mental impairment, or simply a lack of awareness that this treatment is not okay and that there are resources they might draw upon.

The bill is really just a paragraph that would change a single section of the Criminal Code of Canada. Section 718 of the Criminal Code addresses the purposes and principles of sentencing; this bill would add a subsection to paragraph 718.2(a), which already states:

A court that imposes a sentence shall also take into consideration the following principles:

- (a) a sentence should be increased or reduced to account for any relevant aggravating or mitigating circumstances relating to the offence or the offender, and, without limiting the generality of the foregoing,

This bill would add one other element:

- (iii.1) evidence that the offence had a significant impact on the victim, considering their age and other personal circumstances, including their health and financial situation,

While it is admirable that we are including this as a factor in sentencing, the words in the current law, “without limiting the generality of the foregoing”, already allow a judge to consider age as a factor. This really is a cosmetic change, and cold comfort to the victim of abuse. Simply adding age as a factor does not deal with the root of the problem, and it runs the risk of not dealing with the result either. We need a more comprehensive approach to this problem.

Our committee found that we need to develop a broad-based public awareness campaign to raise the level of consciousness and understanding of these abuses and highlight the importance of reporting and ending it. It is important to ensure that we do this with proper consultation, as seniors focus groups recently found some ads that were broadcast too creepy and alienating. Our communication strategy must be inclusive to have its maximum effect.

We found that prevention programs are essential. By creating programs that integrate or further involve seniors in society, we can minimize risk, negate some of the harm and increase respect for seniors. A comprehensive strategy involves the development of adequate intervention and advocacy from and on behalf of senior

Canadians. Abuses of any kind have pervasive psychological, physical and emotional effects that must be addressed immediately.

Finally, none of these measures will be sufficient without adequate and appropriate judicial remedies, and the bill addresses this final issue in some part. However, we are faced with a very serious crisis and we must act now to address it lest it get out of hand.

If there is truly one issue presently facing senior Canadians that is unsustainable, it is that we are not doing enough to end abuse at the hands of loved ones or authority figures and that we are still retreating into the mindset that so long as we threaten the perpetrator with an increased sentence, we solve the problem. This really is a myth.

Our mothers, fathers, elderly relatives and neighbours built this country for us. We stand on their shoulders and we would not be here without them. It is unpalatable that we let this go unaddressed.

I ask now that, while acknowledging this is a very small start, we do not stop until we adequately address the root of and solutions for elder abuse.

• (1930)

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his speech on elder abuse. As he pointed out, the parliamentary committee did in fact take a number of months—in fact, almost two years—to study this issue, along with the issues of suicide prevention and improved palliative care in our country.

However, I have a slight sense of disappointment. While our committee did make a large number of recommendations in each of these areas, I think all of us as committee members were very much aware that no government of any stripe would be able to implement all of those recommendations in one fell swoop. There would have to be small incremental steps taken on all of these.

I would ask my hon. colleague to remember that limitation in terms of the committee that we served on and to acknowledge the fact that this is a good step in the right direction and that we hope to make additional progress in the future.

Can I have the assurance of my hon. colleague that he and his party will support this legislation?

• (1935)

Mr. Frank Valeriote: Madam Speaker, I appreciate the member's efforts in working together with us on the committee. He is quite right: we do support the legislation.

Government Orders

That should not negate the fact that there is so much more that needs to be done with respect to elder abuse, including a recommendation that we made for the creation of a national elder abuse prevention strategy. That recommendation would include supporting existing groups across Canada that are trying to deal with elder abuse as well as supporting awareness strategies and campaigns that would teach those on the front line, such as police officers, nurses and doctors, how to detect elder abuse when they might not otherwise notice it and how to intervene in an effective but conscientious and sensitive way and let elders know that it does not have to continue.

I want to assure my friend that while this is a small step, I intend—as I hope our committee intends, and I hope I have the member's support—to move forward in making much more meaningful strides towards the end of elder abuse.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Giguère (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to speak on this issue.

The problem with the bill is with the penalty that it advocates. The Criminal Code does not deal with abandonment. Nothing can be done for someone who is not invited to the Christmas party or who does not receive a telephone call on Mother's Day. Abandonment is probably the deepest wound that these people will ever receive. We talk about abandonment, about non-communication and isolation. Poverty is another kind of isolation. Social abandonment is a form of isolation and is very severe punishment for these people.

I would appreciate it if my distinguished colleague would explain how this bill, which aims at punishing people more severely, will protect the elderly against something that is heartbreaking but is not illegal, *per se*.

[*English*]

Mr. Frank Valeriote: Madam Speaker, my friend is quite right: isolation is often one of the root causes of abuse. This bill, of course, does not deal with that, nor can it effectively, in and of itself as criminal legislation, deal with that.

That is why I continually say that the dichotomy is not being tough or soft on crime, it is being smart or dumb on crime. Frankly, if we are going to be smart on crime, we will develop a national strategy that deals with abuse prevention. That would include programs to draw seniors out of their isolation and encourage them to become involved and engaged in society when their own families may not be engaging them. That is just one of the many things that a national strategy would include.

Again, I would ask all members of this House to read the report we created, "Not to be Forgotten", and see exactly how we, as members of this House, all can promote all levels of government, federal and provincial, toward a solution.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have one quick question. I am not a lawyer, but there was a point the member raised that raises some questions with me.

He mentioned that this bill may in some ways be superfluous, since age is already taken into account when crimes are committed against elderly Canadians. Maybe I misunderstood. I would appreciate it if the member could clarify that for me.

Mr. Frank Valeriote: Madam Speaker, sentencing within section 718 does not specifically mention age, but it mentions that the court can take into consideration aggravating or mitigating factors.

It goes on to say "without limiting the generality of the foregoing" and then mentions some sentencing factors. The fact that it says "without limiting the generality of the foregoing" generally means that a court can take into consideration anything it believes to be a mitigating or aggravating factor. In fact, the court can already take age into consideration.

What I would have loved to have seen included in this bill was some form of counselling, for instance, as an encouragement, so that if someone is found guilty of abuse, they are not just given a sentence of a fine or time, but one that requires some form of counselling and restorative justice. We do not want to pull families apart; we want to help families come together. That kind of sentencing would have helped.

● (1940)

Ms. Mylène Freeman (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, NDP): Madam Speaker, my colleague from Guelph's intervention was excellent. The status of women committee studied elder abuse. I had a chance to pick up the report done by the palliative and compassionate care ad hoc committee. It looked extensively at the issue and provided excellent recommendations. Even in the few weeks that we looked at the issue, we could see this was a very complex problem.

Given the complexity, could my colleague talk a little more about the autonomy we should be helping our seniors gain in order to prevent abuse, how can we do that and what kinds of ideas and programs have come out of his looking at this topic?

Mr. Frank Valeriote: Madam Speaker, my friend is quite right. Not unlike my previous answer, a national elder abuse prevention strategy would encourage community to become involved in helping seniors who might otherwise be isolated and getting them more involved in the community.

There are many seniors groups out there that can be used right now. We have the infrastructure scattered across Canada. It just has not all come together. A function of the federal government could be to try and bring people together in a more intentional way, to reach out to seniors so they can become involved in more seniors programs to break the isolation and the preponderance of abuse that is often associated with isolation through any kind of activities that these groups normally encourage and engage in.

The Deputy Speaker: Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

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

Some hon. members: Nay.

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

And five or more members having risen:

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Madam Speaker, I ask that the vote be deferred until 5:30 p.m. on Wednesday.

The Deputy Speaker: The division stands deferred until Wednesday, June 20, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

* * *

●(1945)

FINANCIAL LITERACY LEADER ACT

The House resumed from March 2 consideration of the motion that Bill C-28, An Act to amend the Financial Consumer Agency of Canada Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the motion that this question be now put.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Madam Speaker, I rise today in opposition to the motion to create a financial literacy leader. I really struggled with it. What does this mean? As I read into it more and more, I came to the realization that it was not a new leader we needed in financial literacy. We need to address the dire condition in which our citizens live. We need to address unemployment. We need to address the fact that the cost of living is going way up. We need to address, and the government has failed to address, the rising costs of credit cards. It has failed to address the fact that the average Canadian right now has a debt load of 150% of their income. That is just unacceptable.

One thing I learned a long time ago is just creating a leader—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I regret to interrupt the hon. member, but I would like to ask for some order in the House. The member for Newton—North Delta has the floor and there will be time for questions and comments. I ask members to wait until they are recognized.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Madam Speaker, Canadians are struggling with an onslaught of attacks from the government across the way, an attack through the Trojan Horse budget bill, an attack on environmental assessment, an attack on pensions, just to mention a few things. This is at a time when the gap between the rich and poor is growing in Canada. Some people in my riding are working two or three jobs to make ends meet. Others are worried about being able to pay their bills from week to week.

Creating a financial literacy leader absolutely will not address the issues. This is what I find a bit hypocritical. This is at a time when government is cutting jobs that serve citizens across Canada, and we see heavy cutting in some areas. For example, people have to wait on the phone for longer and longer and have to go to the web to get essential services like EI. They cannot get a hold of a human being to ask questions. Yet the government wants to create a new leader, another layer of bureaucracy, without a clear mandate, without a clear accountability structure, without knowing what that person will do. It is time for the government to stop doing things like that.

There is a time for accountability and citizens look to us for that. However, the government has demonstrated over and over again that it is not about accountability. The Conservatives have shut down debate in the House over and over again, so the citizens of Canada do not get to find out what they are really up to. I do not know what their rush is. It is as if the Conservatives want to skate through and pass as much legislation as they can in as short a time as they can and interfere with parliamentary democracy. If anything, what would give the Canadian public confidence, and maybe more literacy about finance, is if the Minister of Finance would walk into the House and table reports and then let us debate them and take our time. At least the members could carry out the responsibility with which we have been entrusted.

We are not just about opposing. We have some solutions and really good solutions. We look forward to this bill going to the committee. When it does, we will try to mitigate the damage it will do. We will try to address key issues. We will add the fact that there should be a requirement for bilingualism. We are a bilingual nation and yet once again the government manages to produce legislation where the second official language is not given the due respect it deserves. We will add provisions to define what is meant by “financial literacy”. Right now, it is smoke and mirrors. It is “let’s do something but not tell anybody what we are doing”, so much like many of the other things we have seen happen in the House.

We will also move amendments that will recognize that financial literacy means different things, depending on one's income, gender and age. We will also ensure that whoever or whatever system is put in place is more accountable.

Let us face it, the legislation will not create more jobs. It will not address the needs of citizens in Atlantic Canada, or in western Canada, or central or northern Canada who only want to have a decent-paying job to support themselves. Nor will the legislation address what the government needs to address but has failed, and that is a better plan for retirement security by expanding the guaranteed Canada and Quebec pension plans. That is where we should be putting our energy. We should also be looking at affordable housing. We should be looking at the things that everyday citizens are struggling with.

●(1950)

Instead, once again, what is the Conservative solution to the everyday struggle of Canadians? It is that we should have a literacy leader. I wish just creating a leader would solve all our problems, but I can assure everyone it is not.

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Let me read what Rob Carrick, personal finance columnist in the *Globe and Mail*, had to say. He stated, “it’s disappointing to see banks, advice firms, investment dealers and mutual fund companies treated solely like part of the solution to the lack of financial literacy in Canada, and not part of the problem as well”.

Who were the key people the minister listened to, the ones who designed this legislation? It was the financiers, the bankers. The government certainly did not set up an advisory committee of citizens who would be impacted, those who experienced the high costs of credit cards and who suffered during the stock market meltdown. Once again, the very people who created some of the problems are the advisers.

The article went on to say that it did not matter how literate one was, the financial markets were increasingly irrational.

Barrie McKenna, who is a business columnist for *The Globe and Mail*, said:

The average credit-card agreement is as intuitive as quantum physics...

Canadians are constantly bombarded with pitches to take on more debt, whether it’s right for them or not. They’re often blindly steered toward high-fee products and complex financial instruments. The accompanying disclosure statements are written by, and for, lawyers...

There is a sounder and arguably less-costly path, but it doesn’t suit the financial services industry or many business groups. Ottawa could mandate plain-English disclosure.

What would that cost? Nada. The amount of time that is going to be spent debating this bill could be spent debating capping the credit card rates, simple disclosure laws and also trying to address the real concerns of Canadians.

He goes on to say:

Working with the provinces, it could enhance regulation of industry sales incentives and defined-contribution pensions.

And Ottawa could beef up the CPP, mandating that Canadians sock away more money for retirement, while benefiting from the CPP Investment Board’s low administrative costs.

I am not going to pretend to be an accountant or a lawyer, but I look at a very simple fact like this. In the last quarter, the CPP outperformed the markets by a margin of 10 to 1. What an example we could set for Canadians if we were to say that we as parliamentarians, who manage the taxes they pay, have seen the wisdom of this and that is what we will do for them. However, instead, what do we do? We are now going to have a new financial leader and we are going to tell people that instead of retiring at 65, they are going to have to keep working until age 67, that they can do it. We are going to be the cheering section edging them on along that path.

I would urge all members in the House to take a look at what is really impacting Canadians today and not create another level of bureaucracy that is going to add nothing to what Canadians need.

• (1955)

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Madam Speaker, I listened with bemusement to my colleague’s comments, but I want to pick on one little point. She said that the CPP had outperformed the market by 10% last year. Does she understand that the CPP is actually invested in the market and there are very educated people who manage CPP investments in the market? That is what we are

talking about, some financial literacy so other people can make informed decisions as well.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Madam Speaker, I wish I could say that I was amused by my colleague’s delivery but I will say that he has made his point. When we have a collective, a publicly funded, publicly managed, public pension fund, and it is managed by—

Mr. Bob Zimmer: It sounds like you need financial literacy.

The Deputy Speaker: I regret to interrupt. I am requesting members to have more orderly conduct. There is a member who has the floor, and I would ask members to respect that.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: That it is the best way for us to ensure that Canadians have a secure retirement. That is what it is all about. It is not about creating another position of bureaucracy. It is not about telling people to save more money when they are finding it difficult to make ends meet. We need to look at this in a very productive way so that we serve the needs of the public.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would first of all like to thank my colleague for her very interesting speech.

I am pleased that she has given us so many examples of concrete action that we could take now to help people who are financially vulnerable, such as seniors who are not able to set aside the money they will need for a secure retirement that will allow them to live in dignity for a long time. I would like to add another example of something concrete that we could do to help people who need financial support.

The guaranteed income supplement is a sum that is given to seniors who are living the closest to the poverty line. To some extent, they can receive it but, at this point in time, if they do not ask for it, it is just too bad for them, we use the money for something else and they do not receive it.

We could allow seniors to have access to this money right now. I would like to point out that these are seniors who are living the closest to the poverty level. We could take concrete action and allow them to receive this money that will allow them to live with dignity. Instead of talking about concrete actions that we could take today to help people, the government is focusing the debate on something else.

I am fully in agreement with my colleague on this issue.

[*English*]

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Madam Speaker, absolutely there are a number of concrete steps that we should be taking. This party has often advocated and will continue to advocate so that our seniors do not live in poverty and are not having to choose between medication and food on the table.

Government Orders

We have talked about ways to address the needs of the public, such as addressing the fees for university students and the cost of post-secondary education. We should also be looking at addressing health care in a very realistic way so that people have access to health care in a timely manner.

We could be doing so many things but once again the government, after last week's travesty with Bill C-38 and then it passing through the House this week, is in the process of shutting down debate. The government was not interested in the over 800 amendments that were put forward that would have made the bill better for Canadians. It did not accept one amendment.

I am just hoping, now that the government has passed that bill, that when this goes to committee stage it will pay heed to the amendments put forward by the opposition.

● (2000)

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Newton—North Delta for perhaps setting the tone of the debate as we enter the conversation about Bill C-28 and this notion of a new financial literacy leader.

It surprises me that we are having this debate. In this era of belt-tightening, the best thing that the Conservatives can come up with to address the issue of financial literacy is to create a high-level, expensive, bureaucratic position with no real plan and no guarantee that it will have any of the desired effects in elevating the financial literacy of the general population. It seems like a big PR campaign and, frankly, a phenomenal waste of money.

What is even more worrisome is that there this element of blame the victim that runs throughout this whole notion, which is that if we are seeing greater financial inequality, somehow it is the consumers who are to blame for getting themselves into this mess.

We should note that the notion of a financial literacy leader has its origins in a national task force on financial literacy that was criticized as soon as it got out of the gate because the chair was, of course, a banker. The majority of the members on the task force were either bankers, or in the financial sector, or associated with it. The recommendations they came up with had more to do with making Canadians into good customers for the banks rather than elevating the standard of living conditions or even the financial literacy of the general public. The recommendations were suspect from the very outset given the origins, the motivations and, I would say, the conflict of interest from the principals chosen to be on this task force.

Even the recommendations that came out of the task force were ignored when it came to putting them into a bill. The task force recommended that this new financial literacy leader be guided by input from an advisory council made up of industry, unions, educators, volunteer organizations, et cetera. However, there is no mention of that whatsoever in Bill C-28. It seemed reasonable to have an advisory committee to at least steer, give some direction and some sense of purpose to this new expensive bureaucracy, but that notion was ignored.

The other thing the task force recommended was that the financial literacy leader should be accessible to the general public through reports tabled by the Minister of Finance in Parliament. That did not find its way into the bill either.

Therefore, the financial literacy leader would be operating in isolation doing we do not know what, having the effect of, we do not know what. Who will audit the efficacy of the financial literacy leader?

Those are some of the things that bother me. This is an urgent issue but the problem lies more with the lack of protection for consumers than it does the consumers' personal education.

I want to talk for a minute about what the government could be doing.

There used to be a time within living memory, and I am not that old but I remember, when there was a minister of consumer and corporate affairs. It was a whole department with a fairly high-profile minister. This was not just a small portfolio in cabinet. There were heavyweights like André Ouellet. Big names in Canadian politics were the ministers of consumer and corporate affairs. Their stated mandate was to protect the best interests of the consumer, not the financial sector, not the predatory lenders and not the gougers and users who charge 10 and 15 points above prime for credit card lending rates.

If the government really wanted to do something for the consumers' best interest against predatory lending, why would it not cap the credit rates to 6 points above prime and never mind 18 points above prime? Why does it not enforce the Financial Administration Act and the Bank Act to make banks live up to their charter and provide reasonable access to Canadians to basic financial services, and if they will not live up to their charter, why do we not pull their charters?

The banks have an exclusive monopoly on some very lucrative financial transactions, like cashing cheques and credit cards, in exchange for providing basic services to Canadians, even when it is not the most profitable thing in the world. However, what do they do? They close down bank branches in every neighbourhood in this country.

● (2005)

In my riding alone, 15 bank branches have closed down. That is a vote of non-confidence in my neighbourhood and it is an abrogation of their obligation under their charter. We have charter banks for a reason. We should pull their charters if they are not going to live up to their financial obligations. Every time a bank pulls out of my neighbourhood, do members know what pops up? Another Money Mart or another Payday lender, and it is not charging interest at 60%, that is in the Criminal Code. If a lender charges more than 60% per annum, it is a criminal offence called usury. The interest rate at these Payday lenders is not 1,000% or 2,000%. It is as high as 10,000% per annum. People cannot make that kind of money selling cocaine but yet it is happening on the street corners of every major city in this country because the banks have reneged on their obligation to provide basic financial services. They are charging 3% to cash a government cheque. It is against the law and the government will not enforce it.

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Members can walk to the Sparks Street Mall right now and some moneylender in a Money Mart will charge them 3% to cash a government cheque. It is illegal but the government does nothing to enforce it. Instead, it will put in place this expensive bureaucrat, God knows who. I presume some failed Conservative candidate is in line to be the new financial literacy leader.

This is the most appalling thing. I believe this is all part of the whole notion of driving down Canadians' expectations. The government believes in a low-wage, low-cost economy and a low-wage, low cost economy is a recipe for poverty, mark my words.

Forty-seven percent of the children in my riding live below the poverty line, and members heard me correctly. The child poverty rate in Norway, Denmark and Sweden is less than 3% because they do not have this notion of a low-wage, low-cost economy. They do not see it virtuous to drive down workers' wages. They do not see it as virtuous to smash unions.

I saw a bumper sticker the last time I was in Washington, DC. that read, "At least the war on the middle-class is going well". That government has embarked on a comprehensive detailed attack on labour and the left, just like the neo-Conservatives in Canada have followed suit, eliminating things like the Fair Wages Act, enabling the Merit shop contractors and the non-union sector to flourish and prosper.

This is the way to drive down the middle-class. This is the way to drive down wages and drive down expectations. Then the government will blame people for not saving their money and, instead of having a real pension plan, they can have one of these pooled pension plans that the employer does not have to pay into, only the worker.

It is all part of picture. The Conservatives' vision of Canada is to recreate Canada in the image of the United States, and it is not a model we want to follow. I have been to the United States recently where in North Carolina a decent job pays \$9 to \$10 an hour. Is that the economy and the vision of the Conservatives where the rich get richer and the poor get poorer, and then some guy is getting gouged by these financial institutions?

My colleague from Newton—North Delta had a good point. No amount of financial literacy will help somebody understand how to sell short on a derivative of a hedge fund or understand some of these arcane financial instruments that these financial engineers put in place to deliberately obfuscate and make it impossible to make an informed choice or decision. I challenge any stockbroker on Bay Street to explain some of these derivative hedge fund monstrosities that were actually a great cause of the demise in the most recent downturn.

If we had kids going to engineering school and actually learning how to build things instead of going to financial engineering school to learn how to construct these incomprehensible financial instruments, we would be a lot better off. We would have a generation of young people who could do things instead of a generation of young people who are trained to cheat people and help the financial sector cheat Canadians.

We want to see consumer protection in its purest form. As I said, we do not have to look very far back in Canadian history to when we

had a minister of consumer and corporate affairs who was a champion for Canadians, not a shill for the financial sector. That is what we are seeing here.

We cannot support this bill. We disagree profoundly with the Conservative vision of any kind of enhancing or enabling of people to cope with the financial services sector.

● (2010)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to take a few seconds to congratulate my colleague on his excellent speech, which was articulate, inspirational and witty, like the member himself.

We put our money into a bank. It charges us administrative fees for taking money out of the automatic bank machine. If we are unfortunate enough to go to another bank, which makes billions of dollars each year, it will charge us \$1.50, \$1.75 or \$2 to withdraw our own money.

What does the Conservative bill do to stop people from being robbed by the banks?

[*English*]

Mr. Pat Martin: Madam Speaker, exactly; my colleague is getting the point that the Conservatives seem to be missing, that if they want to do something to protect consumers, they should do something to protect consumers. They should not embark on this public relations campaign that we are going to put in place this expensive bureaucrat with no mandate, no accountability, no reporting structure and no advisory committee to give him or her a sense of direction. We are just going to put this person in place and the Conservatives would say that they have done something to help Canadians protect themselves from being gouged. But they should look to the root of the problem. They must stop their friends on Bay Street from gouging Canadians. It is not that difficult if they would stand up on their hind legs. The great only appear great because we are on our knees.

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his eloquence this evening in the House. It is deeply appreciated, at least on our side. I want to get to something that the member said about the propensity of the government to blame victims. We have, for example, record household debt in this country and a lot of it due to the lack of affordable housing. The government's response is just to hector Canadians into saving more while at the same time bashing them over the head that they should spend more.

With respect to the pensions crisis, the Conservatives' response is not to increase the Canada pension plan. Their response is to present some pooled pension Ponzi scheme, and here we are tonight, where instead of dealing with income inequality and with the fact that wages do not keep pace with the cost of living in Canada, the Conservatives present us with some piece of paper that is not going to help Canadians deal with the very real financial issues.

Government Orders

I would like the member to delve deeper into the government's propensity to blame victims, not just in Canada but globally.

Mr. Pat Martin: Madam Speaker, it is true that Canadians need better government policy, not lectures by the government on how they should be saving more money. This report and the bill that stems from it heap blame on individuals and completely ignore the predatory behaviour of financial institutions.

My colleague made an interesting point. I am not sure that the inequality bothers the Conservatives. I am not even sure that equality is a stated policy objective of the government anymore, whereas it used to be a prime motivation in terms of social policy. Equality was the goal. Inequality seems to be accepted as perhaps just the way God wanted it. I do not know.

• (2015)

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Madam Speaker, the member talked about this bill as being a way of exhorting Canadians to save. There is a particular group that the Conservatives insist ought to save so they can pay for two more years that they are not going to get old age pension, age 65 and 66.

Who is going to be able to save for that? And who is going to be most affected by that? Are they going to be able to save, regardless of whatever exhortation the government lays down?

Mr. Pat Martin: Madam Speaker, it is almost a cruel joke that the flip side of this same social policy initiative is the financial literacy leader. On the one hand, the Conservatives are telling Canadians they can no longer retire at age 65 and they are going to have to save more to work longer. However, the only idea they have to assist people with that impossible task is a highly paid bureaucrat who undoubtedly would be some washed-up Tory flack, a failed candidate from the last federal election with no mandate and no particular ability to actually help Canadians cope with the new reality that is being foisted on us.

The Deputy Speaker: Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

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

Some hon. members: Nay.

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

And five or more members having risen:

The Speaker: The vote stands deferred until 5:30 p.m. tomorrow before private member's business.

[*Translation*]

STRENGTHENING MILITARY JUSTICE IN THE DEFENCE OF CANADA ACT

The House resumed from April 5 consideration of the motion that Bill C-15, An Act to amend the National Defence Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Bill C-15, An Act to amend the National Defence Act. This bill would amend the structure of the Canadian Forces military justice system.

I would like to explain that members of the military are subject to two justice systems: the civilian system and the military system. Although most of the time they are subject to the military system, on some occasions and for some offences, they are subject to the civilian system. However, I will not address these issues in my speech on this bill.

Because of the nature of the soldier's job and the role members of our military play, the Canadian Forces, of course, sometimes need rules that are specific to that job. However, even though the military justice system has specific rules, we must not forget that it is part of the Canadian justice system as a whole. The two systems must therefore be compatible, and we must ensure that our soldiers are obviously treated fairly and equitably.

We must therefore ensure that even though the military justice system differs from the civilian system, it is consistent with our overall system of justice, which reflects what Canadians want. This means that the rule of law must always be respected. The military justice system exists not only for members of the military who have committed offences that have to be dealt with, but also as a command element to ensure that the rule of law is respected in all circumstances.

In addition, the Canadian Forces rely a great deal on discipline, which is certainly one of the pillars of a soldier's job. The military justice system therefore reflects the need for discipline, and that is why we need it. Military justice is not perfect, however, and it needs to be updated when problems are identified. We must also not forget that members of the military are citizens, and that while their role in the military calls for a distinct justice system, that system should be as close as possible to the civilian justice system.

Obviously, military justice must reflect the protections guaranteed by the Charter of Rights and Freedoms as closely as possible. Although we recognize the need to have distinct provisions within the military system, that need must not outweigh the fundamental principles of justice.

Proceedings in the military justice system have to be efficient, so that discipline problems or issues can be resolved speedily when the situation calls for it, so the member can return to work as quickly as possible, for example. Speed does not, however, mean overstepping the fundamental principles of justice and the law.

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I think we owe it to the members of our military, who put themselves in harm's way for our country, for Canada, and for their fellow Canadians, to provide them with a justice system that is fair and just. We cannot expect the discipline and dedication that we need from our military without a military justice system that is completely fair to them.

Bill C-15 is in fact a step in the right direction for reforming the military justice system and making it a system that, for one thing, is more in line with the civilian system. This bill has its limitations, however, and it does not solve certain important problems, such as reforming summary conviction trial proceedings, reforming the grievance system and strengthening the Military Police Complaints Commission.

During the last Parliament, reasonable and fair amendments to the equivalent bill, Bill C-41, were negotiated in committee, including by my colleague, the hon. member for St. John's East. Unfortunately, those amendments have disappeared from this new version of the bill. They were approved by the committee, by parliamentarians. What is more, some had been proposed by the judge advocate general as compromises to correct the system in an acceptable manner. Now, because of the government, we have to redo the work that was done during the previous Parliament.

One purpose of those amendments was to remove certain offences from the list of those that result in a criminal record. That is mainly what I will be talking about.

● (2020)

Military justice includes a number of proceedings. Everyone has seen clips of trials by court martial on television. Those shows are fictional, but they give a good idea of what a trial by court martial is like. However, there are other types of trials, namely summary trials where the military's chain of command is authorized to judge soldiers under its responsibility directly. These trials are held without lawyers, without a jury, without a system of evidence, and without solid witnesses as in a formal court.

This proceeding is useful in a number of cases. It is used for minor offences regarding discipline in the army and does not require any intervention by a court.

Nonetheless, with a summary trial, soldiers can end up with a criminal record that they will continue to have once they return to civilian life.

I will elaborate on these minor offences, which include absence without leave and drunkenness.

Here is a simple example. One of your colleagues on the base is celebrating his birthday, and, like all his colleagues, you offer him a drink to celebrate. You are young. This also happens in civilian life. It is not unusual to be offered a birthday drink. Unfortunately, the next day, your colleague, who might have accepted a few too many drinks, is absent because he is sick. Or maybe he was caught drunk by one of his superiors when he returned to the dormitory.

On a military base, this is a breach of discipline. It is natural to expect exemplary discipline from our men and women in uniform, in light of the job they do.

I was a member of the Canadian Forces. I understand very well that discipline is part and parcel of our everyday lives. We adapt and it is fine. However, from time to time, for example, on a birthday when we party too much, there can be breaches.

In civilian life, this person would likely call his boss in the morning to say that he could not go to work. He would take a taxi home that night and go to sleep in his own bed.

Such conduct on a military base is dealt with by summary trial. I am not suggesting that a guy who calls in sick because he partied too hard the night before is behaving responsibly. People can be reprimanded, suspended or even fired if this kind of thing happens too often in the civilian world. That makes sense because the behaviour is not acceptable. Still, I am sure we can all agree that a guy who misses work because he drank too much on his birthday probably does not deserve to have a criminal record. But that is what happens to soldiers.

This soldier, who might have been 19 or 20, did not really understand what was going on. He did not understand the military justice system. He got his summary trial. Fifteen years later, as a civilian retired from the armed forces, he had a criminal record. His case was treated the same way as other much more serious offences that do deserve that kind of treatment.

A soldier should not end up with a criminal record for an offence that is nothing more than lack of discipline and certainly not a criminal matter.

He will end up with a criminal record without ever getting a real trial as set out in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. His basic rights will not be respected. This kind of trial happens very quickly.

Bill C-15 does not take into account this kind of problem that, in practice, can have consequences.

I think that such cases are not rare. I do not have the latest numbers, but I reviewed the numbers in the annual reports of the judge advocate general to the Department of National Defence on the administration of military justice in the armed forces and the statistical reports on summary trials.

In 2009-10, 20,054 trials took place. Nearly 95% of them—the vast majority—were summary trials. During that same period, 98% of summary trials resulted in a guilty verdict. Charges of absence without leave accounted for 28% of the summary trials and drunkenness for 7%.

● (2025)

These are things that, in civilian life, do not deserve a criminal record. Although it warrants a slap on the wrist, it does not warrant a criminal record.

In the previous version of this bill, which was the subject of a compromise reached in committee during the last Parliament, the section on exemptions for a criminal record listed 27 sections of the National Defence Act. The current version contains only five exemptions.

In short, for Bill C-41:

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(1) A person who is convicted of any of the following offences, or who has been convicted of any of them before the coming into force of this section, has not been convicted of a criminal offence:

(a) an offence described in section 85, 86, 87, 89, 90, 91, 95, 96, 97, 99, 101, 101.1, 102, 103, 108, 109, 112, 116, 117, 118, 118.1, 120, 121, 122, 123, 126 or 129 for which the offender is sentenced to

- (i) a severe reprimand,
- (ii) a reprimand,
- (iii) a fine not exceeding basic pay for one month, or
- (iv) a minor punishment;

In Bill C-15, however, we see that many of these sections are suddenly missing. It reads:

(a) an offence described in section 85, 86, 90, 97 or 129 for which the offender is sentenced to a minor punishment or a fine of \$500 or less, or both;

It quickly becomes clear that a lot of things have unfortunately disappeared from the bill that should have remained.

Members will recall that there was consensus on Bill C-41 and that both the opposition parties and the government had reached an agreement.

I want to remind members that the offences and excluded penalties for inclusion in a criminal record would be far more broad under C-41, and the fine included did not exceed one month of basic pay and minor penalties.

Currently, the exemptions include only fines of less than \$500 and minor sentences. In most cases, it exceeds a minor penalty or a \$500 fine. The restrictions are too limited and will mean that too many military members will end up with a criminal record.

For example, in one of the cases mentioned in the 2010 JAG report, one case of absence without leave was penalized by five days behind bars and a \$1,500 fine. In others the sentence was 30 days in prison. These cases would not qualify as exemptions to inclusion in a criminal record, and yet they constitute cases of absence without leave.

Other cases concerning drunkenness—still from the same report—were punished with a severe reprimand and a \$5,000 fine. Once again, this does not fall into the category of permitted exemptions. These exemptions are no longer as broad. The previous version, negotiated in committee by my colleague from St. John's East, must be consulted.

I should clarify that I am not questioning the appropriateness of the commanders' penalties. I have had the experience of discipline in the Army. I understand that discipline is important. However, there is a big difference between a disciplinary case on a military base and having a criminal record, which normally signifies a criminal offence. In this particular case, ending up with a criminal record for something that is more akin to foolish behaviour, is not a path that I want us to go down.

According to a Department of National Defence publication, the guide for the accused and officers designated to help them, "Summary trials are designed to provide prompt and fair justice in dealing with service offences that are relatively minor in nature but which have an important impact on the maintenance of military discipline and efficiency..."

This is not referring to criminal offences or major offences. It refers to minor offences that have an impact on military discipline.

Military discipline is something quite unlike what is found in civilian life. It is a mistake to put breaches of military discipline and civilian criminal offences on the same footing.

• (2030)

If a civilian did something equivalent to the vast majority of cases of breaches of military discipline, he would not be subject to any legal ramifications. It is not fair to impose consequences on the military that will have repercussions in their civilian lives, when most of the facts involve solely military issues.

Furthermore, the summary trial can cause notes to be made in a criminal record, even though the process has no judge who is adequately or professionally trained, nor a sound process for evidence and witnesses, nor defence counsel. It is not right that a summary trial for a minor offence should lead to a criminal record.

It should also be mentioned that a procedure that guarantees none of a person's fundamental rights, as is clearly the case with summary trials, should not have consequences that are as serious as a criminal record for the person who committed the offence. The procedure followed in a summary trial is simplified for the obvious reason that, in a conflict situation, military justice must be swift and efficient. Discipline must be administered smoothly so that things get back to normal very quickly.

In the case of minor offences, a breach of rules or a breach of discipline, a soldier's chain of command—his superior—has the authority to judge. This is a swift and efficient procedure. However, the superior knows the accused and is therefore not entirely neutral. He may feel favourably toward him, or he may have an unfavourable bias against him. Even though he has some training, it does not change the fact that the superior knows the accused. There is no system for verifying the evidence and hearing witnesses. In the case of minor offences, the commander also knows the witnesses very well, and is therefore able to give more or less credibility to the witnesses according to his judgment and the esteem that he has for the people involved. There is no counsel to ensure that the rights of the accused are respected.

However, these courts, these summary trials may lead to fines as high as several thousand dollars, and especially to up to 30 days imprisonment or even a demotion. I think that one month's imprisonment, without an impartial court or an adequately trained judge, is important enough that we should pay some attention to what the bill will do.

These procedures, which are found in a civil trial, are there for another purpose: to ensure that an individual's fundamental rights are respected. I can already hear members opposite claim that the NDP wants to protect criminals. I was a member of the military and I know that there is nothing criminal with most breaches of military discipline or rules. As a soldier, one has to abide by military discipline. However, as a civilian, one should not be exposed to consequences such as those that currently exist.

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I also want to point out that an individual should be presumed innocent until proven guilty. We have to respect the impartiality and the independence of the judiciary. We should not be guided by impressions and biases and we should not rush to judgment. We must let the facts speak. An impartial and independent justice system is essential to people's confidence.

In the military, knowing that one cannot be judged impartially is not conducive to putting our trust in the military system. We accept that system and we trust that our superiors will be fair and just. Most of the time, they are to the extent that it is possible. However, we must set strict and strong limits to these summary trials and to the impact they will have later on in civilian life. Bill C-15 obviously does not do that, or does not do it any longer, because the sections added by Bill C-41 are not included in it.

I would like to conclude by reminding hon. members that having a criminal record makes things very difficult in civilian life. Once they go back to civilian life, soldiers will have to appear before the Parole Board of Canada, request a pardon, wait for five years after the summary trial and incur costs to erase their criminal record.

I think that is unacceptable, and I sincerely believe that the current bill should include amendments and other measures to avoid the situation described in my speech.

• (2035)

[*English*]

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for her speech tonight. She can speak with a measure of authority that many of us cannot because she has been in the Canadian Forces. She is also a young person who can understand the issues that relate to minor variances from discipline in the forces.

We ask a lot of our soldiers, our young men and women in uniform. Many of them come from regular working families right across Canada, from big cities, small towns or rural municipalities. They are in this situation and we expect a lot from them.

As we have heard many times in this House, veterans of our military are faced with very tough times. I wonder if my colleague could comment further on the detrimental effects of the use of summary trials when young people end up with these criminal records, and how they have to deal with that later on in life and the difficulties they could have.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore: Madam Speaker, I am going to provide an answer to the hon. member for Davenport by giving the example of a recruits' course.

We often have recruits who may be 16 or 17. They have just begun their adult life. A recruits' course is intensive. It is very demanding. It tests soldiers, who are often very tired and even exhausted. They can make unintentional mistakes that will lead to a summary trial. For example, it can be the accidental discharge of a firearm. Nobody does it intentionally, but it can happen. The individual will have a summary trial and may even end up with a criminal record.

I once knew a colleague who was really tired. He was not paying attention and, unfortunately, he raised the flag upside down. He really did not do that on purpose, but he ended up with a summary trial. What he did was a mistake and it is something unacceptable in the military. That was simply caused by fatigue. That offence may also lead to a criminal record.

A 16- or 17-year-old does not understand the justice system. They do not think about what will happen when they leave the armed forces in 20 years. They leave 15, 20 or 30 years later and finally realize that they have a criminal record because they did not really understand what was happening.

• (2040)

[*English*]

Mr. Tyrone Benskin (Jeanne-Le Ber, NDP): Madam Speaker, the military is often like a world of its own. With summary trials, military officers are thinking of one thing, discipline, and how to make sure the incident does not happen in the ranks again. That is fine for the military. However, those young recruits leave after putting in their tour, and some of them leave with a criminal record. I would think that would have a very strong psychological effect on young people who have given of their time to their country.

Would the member care to comment on the downside and the ill effects, and the recurring effect, that would have on these young people leaving the military with a criminal record?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore: Madam Speaker, after serving in the armed forces for a certain period of time, a member may decide to leave and return to civilian life, so they apply for a job. Most people know that you have to declare whether or not you have a criminal record. Most employers ask for that information. So, the soldier has to say yes.

Naturally, the prospective employer will ask what happened. That is, if they look at the application, because simply checking yes may mean that the CV will not even be kept. The employer will have the person explain why they have a criminal record. It can be embarrassing to tell a future employer about a silly mistake that was made. Furthermore, the employer may have a slightly unrealistic view of the veteran, the former soldier trying to return to civilian life.

It can be very detrimental. Everyone knows that, for any job, even to work at McDonald's, you are now asked if you have a criminal record.

[*English*]

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Madam Speaker, I too spent some time in the military, on both sides of the justice system, and I did not leave with a criminal record. I disciplined a number of people under my command in my time in the service, for things the member suggests would carry a criminal record. None of them are carrying criminal records. The member is overstating that case tremendously.

Another colleague on the other side mentioned that it is all about discipline. It is not. It is about efficiency. Discipline is part of efficiency, with the emphasis on efficiency not discipline.

Government Orders

If I heard my colleague correctly, and I may have heard her wrong, she thinks the summary trial system somehow takes away the constitutional rights of the accused person. In fact, we have Supreme Court decisions that point out it does not. Charter rights and freedoms are preserved under that system. A member gets to choose whether he or she undergoes summary trial or court martial.

I may have heard my colleague wrong. I am not sure.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore: Madam Speaker, I would like to make it clear that I do not believe that a summary trial violates the fundamental rights of a soldier. However, I believe there is a problem because being tried for a minor offence as a civilian would not result in a criminal record. However, this summary trial for a minor offence does result in a criminal record for the soldier, who may not be very aware of the potential consequences. We must try to improve Bill C-15 to prevent such situations from occurring.

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for her rather informative speech. I am not as aware as she is of the reality of the people serving in the Canadian Forces. She brought up some very interesting points.

Can the hon. member tell us, if she knows, how receptive members have been, to date, to the potential amendments to this bill? Could she provide us with an example of another relevant case that would help us to better understand the scope of the amendments, such as the ones she proposed?

• (2045)

Ms. Christine Moore: Madam Speaker, to date, I have not had the opportunity to discuss with my colleagues on the government side what amendments they would be prepared to accept. However, I would like to believe that, since a consensus was reached on the amendments that were submitted during the previous examination of Bill C-41 and everyone seemed to agree on them, the government members will be prepared to go back to the same point where we were before with this bill. We are therefore prepared to deal with the same situation as with Bill C-41.

With regard to examples, there is just one thing that I would like to clarify for people who do not know what a summary trial is. The way it works is very impressive. When a person is young, they are lined up with four people who accompany them to the commander's office for the summary trial. The soldiers have to march at a rate of 120 steps a minute. The accused has to remove his beret but those accompanying him do not.

Even the way we enter the commander's office is rather impressive. This can be pretty interesting for a young soldier. When we were lucky or unlucky enough to accompany some colleagues before it was our turn, at least we knew what to expect. However, when we did not know what it was like, it was very impressive and we were already a bit unsettled when we entered the commander's office.

[*English*]

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am happy to rise today to speak about Bill C-15, the strengthening military justice in the defence of Canada act. As per its

title, Bill C-15 is intended to amend the National Defence Act on matters related to military justice.

There is a substantial context to the bill. It has a fairly long history and iterations of the bill have come before this House, many iterations in fact.

The bill is a legislative response to the 2003 report of the former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, the Right Honourable Antonio Lamer, and subsequent to that, the May 2009 report of the Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs.

Chief Justice Lamer's report was a very comprehensive and independent review of the National Defence Act, which arrived at 88 recommendations pertaining to the military justice system, suggesting there are a lot of issues that need to be corrected.

However, to date only 28 of these recommendations have been implemented in the form of legislation, regulations or even change in practice. Clearly, much work remains to be done.

Other efforts to respond to the chief justice's report preceded the bill before us tonight. Bills C-7 and C-45 died on the order paper, in 2007 and 2008 respectively.

Bill C-60 made a dent in Chief Justice Lamer's recommendations, in 2008. Bill C-41 was introduced in 2010. It went through committee stage with agreement for some positive amendments, but it too eventually died on the order paper.

This bill, Bill C-15, seeks to accomplish a great deal in response to Justice Lamer's report and the Senate committee report.

Among other things, the bill would provide for greater flexibility in the sentencing process; and additional sentencing options, including absolute discharges, intermittent sentences and restitution. It would modify the composition of a court martial panel according to the rank of the accused person, modify the limitation period applicable to summary trials and allow an accused person to waive the limitation period. It clarifies the responsibilities of the Canadian Forces provost marshal, and, finally, it makes amendments to the delegation of the Chief of the Defence Staff's powers as the final authority in the grievance process.

The bill is a step in the right direction, in that it would move the military justice system more in line with the civilian justice system. This much is true. However, it falls too short on some of the key objectives, those being reforming the summary trial system, reforming the grievance system, and strengthening the military complaints commission.

Curiously, the bill even falls short of Bill C-41 as amended by the committee. In our view, it is not worthy of the support of this House as currently drafted.

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This view is informed most fundamentally by the principle that the men and women of our Canadian Forces are entitled to the same rights that we send them to fight for around the world. What a terrible and bitter irony it would be if we, as Canadians, were to stand aside and allow the men and women of our Canadian Forces to become effectively second-class citizens in our midst, particularly when we have intervened around the world in deadly conflicts to uphold basic human rights and systems of rule or law that ensure such rights are protected.

These rights to which we are so committed, for which we are prepared to put at risk the lives of young Canadians, in fact do not permit the kind of treatment to which we subject the men and women of our Canadian Forces under our current military justice system.

This requires a bit of an explanation about military systems of justice, in that military justice is a bit different from the justice system that prevails in the rest of civil society because of the primacy attached to the issue of discipline and efficiency in the military.

● (2050)

Retired Colonel Michel Drapeau is an expert in military justice and law and is the author of the only really significant military legal text in Canada. He had this to say about the implications to military justice of the centrality of discipline to the functioning of the military:

Few professions are as dependent on discipline as is the military. Discipline is fundamental to military efficiency, cohesion and esprit-de-corps, permitting commanders to control the use of violence so that the right amount and type of force can be applied in exactly the right circumstances, the right time and in the right place. At the personal level, discipline ensures also that in times of great danger and risk, the soldier can and will carry out orders even if his natural instinct for self-preservation and fear tells him otherwise. Likewise, group and individual discipline ensures adherence to laws, standards, customs and values of civilian society, even during combat operations.

Another statement reads, "Therefore, discipline is integral not only to the maintaining of an efficient armed forces but also to ensuring that the rule of law predominates within the military, particularly when engaged in great peril and danger in combat."

In 1980 and 1992, the Supreme Court of Canada examined the constitutionality of certain aspects of the military justice system. On both occasions it affirmed that a separate system of justice was needed to meet the unique requirements of military discipline. This is especially so because certain actions, like being absent without leave, which are offences in the military, are not obviously civil offences.

However, there is a tension here in the military justice system that must be resolved through legislation. There must be, on the one hand, speedy response to breaches of discipline. On the other hand, there must be adherence to law and as far as possible, that means adherence to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and principles of natural justice. That is, principles that suggest that any system of justice should be heard and decided by a neutral impartial body and that, in the most general terms, the hearing be fair. That is, provide notice, the opportunity to examine evidence, to speak, to answer and so on. At this point this tension remains unresolved.

The B.C. Civil Liberties Association commented on the interests influencing the system. It said that military officers who give out sentences in summary trials are concerned with showing unit

discipline and deterring future violations, not the effect they impose on an accused in the civilian world with a criminal record, for example.

We believe this tension is resolvable. We do not believe that the need for an efficient military justice system is inconsistent with, and therefore needs to take the place of, fundamental principles of justice for the members of our Canadian Forces. We believe that the bill is potentially salvageable with the necessary amendments at committee.

At the core of the issue before us is the matter of summary trials. In the context of the Canadian armed forces, summary trials are disciplinary actions which are generally less serious than courts martial. They are designed to deal with minor service offences with limited possible punishments. Offences can range from insubordination and drunkenness to being absent without leave. Actions like this, while destructive to the flow of military life, are less serious in the civilian world.

Retired Colonel Michel Drapeau testified before the national defence committee that summary trials continue to be the dominant disciplinary method used to try offences by the Canadian military. In 2008-09, there were a total of 1,865 cases determined by summary trial, and only 67 heard by court martial.

A 2008 CBC study found that military charges against Canadian Forces members had risen dramatically in the years since Afghanistan. Post-Afghanistan, disciplinary charges had increased by as much as 62% in certain areas.

● (2055)

Just 10 years previous, there were only 1,300 summary charges laid, compared to 2,100 in the midst of the Afghan conflict in 2006-07.

Most Canadians are likely unaware that the summary trial procedure exposes soldiers to penalties, including imprisonment and even more seriously the potential that following convictions they will have a criminal record that will continue through to their civilian lives.

While subsequent Judge Advocate General annual reports have indicated that the frequency of convictions has declined since the high point of the Afghanistan conflict, what is being left behind and what continues are convictions under this very inadequate form of justice. Canadian Forces personnel were still punished, and depending on the sentences, will have criminal records for the rest of their lives.

It is not news that having a criminal record can make life after the military very challenging. Ordinary things like getting a job, travelling, or renting an apartment become very difficult. Most Canadians would be shocked to learn that our soldiers, who bravely served our country, can get a criminal record from a system of justice that lacks the due process usually required in civilian criminal courts.

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The objective of summary trials is to promote and maintain unit discipline. Therefore, the focus is on dealing with alleged offences expeditiously and returning the member to service as soon as possible. Fairness and justice, which are guaranteed in civil criminal trial, take a back seat to discipline and deterrence. In summary trials the accused do not have access to counsel. There are no appeals or transcripts of the trial and the judge is the accused person's commanding officer.

Through proposed and accepted amendments to Bill C-41, an iteration of this bill in the previous Parliament, we had gone much further down the road of reconciling this tension in the military justice system of expediency and the inclusion of fundamental legal principles. For example, a key New Democrat amendment to Bill C-41 was the provision ensuring military personnel convicted of offences during a summary trial would not be subject to a criminal record. We believed then, and we still believe, that those who bravely serve our country should not be deprived of the rights and protections that other Canadians enjoy.

It should be noted that Bill C-15 makes an exemption for a limited number of offences, if they carry a minor punishment which is defined under the act or a fine less than \$500, to no longer result in a criminal record. This is a positive aspect of Bill C-15, but it does not in our view go far enough.

A New Democrat amendment to Bill C-41 also expanded the list of offences that could be considered less serious and would therefore merit less severe punishments and no carry-over of records to an individual's civilian life. That too had been accepted through committee with Bill C-41. This is one of the amendments that we would like to see included in Bill C-15.

Another area in which Bill C-15 falls short is with respect to grievance committees. In his 2003 report, Chief Justice Lamer described for us the grievance process in the military. Having spent about 20 years involved with grievance proceedings in the workplace context, I was surprised to learn about a grievance process in the military. However, Chief Justice Lamer stated in his report:

Grievances involve matters such as benefits, personnel evaluation reports, postings, release from the Canadian Forces, [et cetera] all matters affecting the rights, privileges and other interests of CF members... Unlike in other organizations, grievors do not have unions or employee associations through which to pursue their grievances... It is essential to the morale of the CF members that their grievances be addressed in a fair, transparent, and prompt manner.

That is not happening presently in the Canadian Forces.

● (2100)

The grievance committee, under this system, is a group which is intended to be an independent civilian oversight body to be composed entirely of non-Forces members. In fact, it is composed entirely of retired Canadian Forces officers, and some just recently retired. Like the summary trials system, there is obviously an apprehension of bias in this system. As it is the purpose of this body to have an outsider perspective on matters such as benefits and personnel evaluations, it should be obvious that former Canadian Forces soldiers are not capable of bringing, or are not seen to bring, an objective and independent viewpoint to their task. This seems like a very obvious breach of the rule against bias.

The New Democrats have proposed that at least 60% of the grievance committee members must never have been an officer or a non-commissioned member of the Canadian Forces. This amendment, too, was accepted as part of Bill C-41 and should also be a part of Bill C-15.

Finally, Bill C-15 would fail to strengthen the Military Police Complaints Commission. While Bill C-15 would amend the National Defence Act to establish a timeline within which the Canadian Forces provost marshal would be required to resolve conduct complaints as well as protect complainants from being penalized for filing good faith complaints, nothing has been done to effectively empower the commission to act as an oversight body. We believe it is necessary that the Military Police Complaints Commission be empowered by a legislative provision that would allow it rightfully to investigate and report to Parliament.

In conclusion, I will bring it back to Colonel Drapeau for the final word on this matter. He said, in part:

...I find it very odd that those who put their lives at risk to protect the rights of Canadians are themselves deprived of some of those charter rights when facing a summary trial. If Britain, Australia, New Zealand, and Ireland have seen fit to change the summary trial system, it begs the question: why is Canada lagging behind?

I will leave the government side to ponder that question.

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to my colleague's speech with interest, and I do believe they are trying to make the system better. I do not dispute that. However, I will point out a couple of things that may have been glossed over or misrepresented a bit.

When the member talks about the number of charges during a period of very active conflict, versus a period of peacetime, it is natural that the number of charges would increase in that period. Chief Justice Lamer, whom he puts great stock in and I agree, said:

The purpose of a separate system of military tribunals is to allow the Armed Forces to deal with matters that pertain directly to the discipline, efficiency and morale. The safety and well-being of Canadians depends considerably on the willingness and readiness of a force of men and women to defend against threats to the nation's security.

And, I would add, threats to themselves, while they are in a conflict.

The member brought up the fact that only 28 of 88 recommendations by Lamer had been enacted. That is true. However, what is also true is that 72 were accepted by government, 11 partially accepted and only 3 rejected. The reason that the others have not been carried is because we have been trying since 2006 to get this legislation through and, as happens with minority Parliaments, governments fall and we are back to square one.

I believe this to be the case. I hope it is the opposition's intention to simply pass this and get it on to committee where the issues that my colleague brought up, and other issues that people may want to discuss, can be dealt with quickly and efficiently, and let us get on with it.

Government Orders

• (2105)

Mr. Matthew Kellway: Mr. Speaker, I am gratified that my colleague listened with interest and not amusement, as he commented previously with one of my colleagues.

With respect to the numbers, I raise the issue of the numbers to show how much of the military justice system is processed through summary trials as opposed to courts martial. Over 95% of the issues are dealt with by way of summary trial. Therefore, the issue of the summary trial looms large in this discussion. Obviously, many amendments need to be made to that process.

With respect to the fact that these charges are being laid in the context of battle, literally in the heat of battle, I think that it is understandable and agreeable that there be limited exception to the kind of justice system that is imposed in the context of battle. However, the real challenge here is that so much of the military justice system lays these charges and processes discipline through the summary trial process outside of battle where there is no excuse in fact for the kind of exceptionalism that prevails in the summary trial system.

On trying to get the legislation through, what puzzles me is that we have already been down this path a number of times. We went to committee and at committee we agreed to a number of amendments. As a matter of good faith, if the government were really interested in moving this legislation, why would it take out what we had already agreed to in the committee process in the last Parliament?

Mr. Jean-François Larose (Repentigny, NDP): Mr. Speaker, being an ex-member myself, I have seen trials that colleagues and friends have gone through and the impact they can have to ruin careers and leave people looking at the military in a certain way but not necessarily understanding the system. I have seen summary trials put onto military personnel in such a way that they were used as a training tool. I think there is a serious problem with this.

The question that goes through my mind when I see the attitude of the government is where its desire is to actually get something more constructive into play.

Mr. Matthew Kellway: Mr. Speaker, frankly, I cannot explain the absence of desire to move this through.

The Lamer report goes back to 2003. A subsequent statutory review was completed by Justice LeSage recently. I cited the substantial historical context leading up to Bill C-15. If the government were truly interested in moving this through in an expeditious fashion, one would have thought it would have picked up Bill C-41 in its post-committee state, with agreement from all parties on some amendments, and put that back in front of the House so that we could move forward on something that we had all agreed to already.

• (2110)

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Mr. Speaker, I just want to point out one quick thing that I pointed out to the previous speaker. Yes, the majority of cases are settled by summary trial because in the majority of cases that is the option chosen by the soldier, sailor, airman or airwoman.

Mr. Matthew Kellway: Mr. Speaker, that is very interesting. If these things are done by choice, which may be the case, I would question whether it is an informed choice.

One of the challenges with the military justice system is that soldiers who are going through discipline do not even have a right to representation. I think they are provided access to another officer to assist them but that officer is not legally trained and would seem to be in no better position to provide advice on what are obviously complex legal matters with very lasting effects on the men and women of the armed forces going through this process.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member mentioned Justice LeSage's report. In it he says that he went around the country and was shocked to find that many of the Canadian Forces members and lawyers he talked to were not even aware that service offences could attract criminal offences. He noted that, even for minor service offences, there was the requirement of a three-year wait before someone can apply for a pardon because it is under the Criminal Records Act. The government says that pardons can no longer be granted, that it can only be a suspension of record.

Does the member find it surprising that in this day and age, with the expectations about disciplinary matters, that is still the case, as Justice LeSage pointed out?

Mr. Matthew Kellway: Mr. Speaker, I am surprised. I was surprised, when I wrapped my head around this issue and this bill, to discover that criminal convictions can come out of summary trial proceedings. That is a very serious consequence for the careers of people within the Canadian Forces and, obviously, after a career in the Canadian Forces as well.

In the context of the absence of representation and absence of informed choice, those have very serious consequences in our country where we adhere to the principles of natural justice, one of which suggests that when people go into legal proceedings there is a legitimate expectation of what will transpire and what the potential outcome will be. Frankly, I do not think in this century in Canada there can be a legitimate expectation that people go into summary trials with so very few protections, no guarantee of a fair hearing and come out with such a serious consequence.

To answer my colleague, yes, I in fact do find it extremely surprising that this state of justice actually exists in our military system today.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Tarik Brahma (Saint-Jean, NDP): Mr. Speaker, first I would like to say that I am very honoured to participate in the debate today on Bill C-15, which would strengthen the military justice system, for a number of reasons.

I had the honour of being elected as the member of Parliament for the riding of Saint-Jean in Quebec. I realize that I have never had the opportunity to talk about this riding, which has many ties to national defence.

Government Orders

[English]

First, I will say that it is because of the military installation at the base, for example, with which all Canadian soldiers are familiar due to an important part of their basic training that takes place and also the Royal Military College in Saint-Jean, from which most of our senior military personnel graduated. Second, Saint-Jean is also an important centre for the defence industry, including Rheinmetall, Cadex and Mil-Quip, which contribute significantly to the regional economy.

Finally, for historical reasons, this year we will commemorate the bicentennial of the War of 1812, part of which took place in Lacolle, in the riding. In November 1812, a very small group of 200 Canadian regulars were able to hold off more than 1,200 American soldiers and were eventually able to chase them back into the United States. We are fortunate that the wooden blockhouse, which is called the Lacolle Mill, which protected the Canadian soldiers is still standing and is one of the most significant and interesting historical buildings in Canada. If members or people listening are in the region this summer, this building is absolutely a must see.

● (2115)

[Translation]

On a more personal note, I worked in the military exactly 20 years ago, from 1992 to 1993. I did mandatory military service in the French army. As a signaller in the signals company of the 4^e Régiment d'hélicoptères de commandement et de manoeuvre of the French army's Force d'action rapide, I was directly confronted with the reality of military discipline and with the consequences that arise if anyone disobeys the kind of rules we are debating today regarding Bill C-15.

I can say that I feel privileged, compared to the majority of members who have had a chance to examine this bill, either to debate it in the House or to study it more carefully in committee. I and my colleague from Abitibi—Témiscamingue, who is also a member of the Standing Committee on National Defence, have worked in the military.

Let us get back to Bill C-15. This bill is substantive in terms of both quantity and quality. It has 90 pages and addresses complex legal notions.

This is actually the fourth time this bill has been introduced. The third time it was introduced, as Bill C-41, it was referred to the Standing Committee on National Defence, which studied the bill during eight sessions lasting over two hours each, the last of which took place not long ago on March 23, 2011.

It is important to point out that, in addition to the 16-plus hours of formal meetings during which witnesses were called and questioned by members of the Standing Committee on National Defence, hundreds of hours of work were devoted to finding reasonable solutions to real problems. Now that is all being thrown in the trash.

During the 40th Parliament, Bill C-41 included specific clauses about the independence of military judges. This is now the 41st Parliament, and given the urgency of the matter, the government decided to remove those provisions to create a new bill, Bill C-16,

which the members of the Standing Committee on National Defence studied last fall and the NDP supported at all stages.

Clearly, Bill C-15 is not an omnibus bill, like the ones introduced in 2011 and 2012, but it nevertheless amends several parts of the National Defence Act. First of all, it amends part III of the act, which serves as the Code of Service Discipline. There is also part IV, which has to do with complaints concerning the military police, and finally, there is an addition regarding the position of the Canadian Forces provost marshal.

I would like to begin by addressing one very important aspect of this bill, that is, the question of discipline. In an excellent speech delivered on March 29, 2012, the hon. member for St. John's East did a fine job addressing the issue of discipline, reminding us how important it is to any military organization, because soldiers' lives depend on it. He quoted retired Colonel Michel Drapeau, and I quote:

Discipline is fundamental to military efficiency...permitting commanders to control the use of violence so that the right amount and type of force can be applied in exactly the right circumstances, the right time and the right place. At the personal level, discipline ensures that...the soldier can and will carry out orders even if his natural instinct for self-preservation and fear tells him otherwise.

As a non-commissioned soldier myself once, I was trained to understand that military justice is inexorably different from civilian justice because it must fulfill two additional requirements: discipline and swiftness.

I can say that people who wear a uniform are subjected to pressure that does not exist in the civilian world, if only because of the existence of a chain of command that must be obeyed—obviously, as long as those commands are lawful. During my military training, in fact, I remember learning about the particular problem posed by illegal commands. Even so, experience shows that when an individual is subjected to this particular pressure, he can be motivated to commit acts that he would never commit in civilian life.

Next, I would like to speak a little about the procedural aspect of the question we are addressing today. Our role as parliamentarians is to study bills in detail, however complex they may be. Our responsibility as elected representatives, however, is also to summarize our work and explain to Canadians how their government is conducting itself in a specific case. When we provide Canadians with those explanations, they do not understand why their government, the same government that sets itself up artificially as a good manager of the money that Canadians have earned with the sweat of their brow, could be trashing the hours of work that have been put into improving this same bill on three occasions. Instead of starting from the last version of this bill, the government is using its position of power and starting over from zero. That is what Canadians do not understand.

The saddest thing is that the last version of Bill C-41 was the product of discussion, dialogue and consensus. Unfortunately, we get the feeling that this government does not understand the word “consensus”, and that is what is sad.

I would like to start by talking about points that the NDP believes are a step in the right direction. I will then address the points where we disagree, or rather where we think improvements should be made.

Government Orders

In general, we support all the measures that are designed to create greater uniformity between the military and civilian justice systems.

A typical example is the question of the jurisdiction of the court. Sometimes, offences, or crimes, are committed in a military precinct. In that case, the military court will have jurisdiction, although the crime is in no way connected with the operational side of the job performed by a member of the military. Instead, the case should go before a civilian court, so the accused has the benefit of all the civilian protections guaranteed by the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

• (2120)

What are the points on which we think the government can do a better job in its reforms? There are three main points. There are the summary trial system, the Canadian Forces Grievance Board and the MPCC, which is the Military Police Complaints Commission.

Let us first talk about the summary trial aspect. This is a very important one, because, as we have heard in various speeches, 90% of military offences are dealt with by summary trial. The concern raised by my colleague from St. John's East in his work in committee is that, contrary to what happens in the civilian justice system, the proceedings in summary trials do not protect the rights of the accused adequately. He also introduced amendments to address this point.

As he pointed out, one of the general principles of natural justice lies in procedural fairness, and one of the things this means is the right to be tried by an impartial person. It will be agreed that in a summary trial, when a person is tried by their superiors, that is not the case.

Another interesting case and one which we should take as an example is the case of countries whose legal system comes from the common law, but that have had to change their legislation to achieve that well-known procedural fairness. The reason for it is that the European Court of Justice has ruled that military summary trials violated the European Convention on Human Rights. This is the case in the United Kingdom, a country that had to amend its legislation.

As was mentioned earlier, if Commonwealth countries, such as Ireland, Australia and New Zealand, have been able to make these legislative amendments, why should Canada still not be able to do so?

To end on this point, I would say that we cannot discuss summary trials without looking into the issue of criminal records. I will take a few minutes to speak about this particular issue.

One of our main concerns is that military personnel should not be treated less fairly than civilians are and that the treatment a soldier receives should not have unfair repercussions in his civilian life. Why? Because after a certain period, our military return to civilian life once again.

What we are concerned about is the direct link that currently exists between a summary trial in the military environment and the risk of a criminal record under the Criminal Records Act in the civilian world. It was mentioned earlier that a criminal record is becoming even more important in everyday life, not only in crossing a border, the case that first comes to mind, but also in looking for

work. It is a good thing in itself, on condition that the process that led to the criminal record has been as rigorous and as fair in the military context as the equivalent in the civilian context.

One of the solutions to this issue could have been to provide that anyone found guilty in a military context during a summary trial may not have a criminal record in the civilian environment. Unfortunately, the solution was not accepted.

Let us take the example of being under the influence of a drug and behaving in a manner that is likely to discredit Her Majesty's service. This is a punishable offence in the military, while in civilian life, it is not even an offence.

We could look at the example of someone claiming to have an illness that they do not actually have. This can be punishable by life imprisonment in exceptional operational circumstances, for example, if it put the lives of other soldiers at risk. However, in the civilian world, this is not even punishable as a criminal offence.

These are practical examples that would result in a criminal record for a criminal act committed in the military world, but that would not have a consequence in the civilian world.

• (2125)

The second item that should be improved in this bill is the Canadian Forces Grievance Board.

At present, this board consists exclusively of retired members of the Canadian Forces. We would like to have more civilians on this board.

Initially, we even supported having only civilians on the board. My colleague from St. John's East introduced an amendment in that regard. During discussions in the previous Parliament, members of the committee had found a compromise solution whereby at least 60% of the members of the Canadian Forces Grievance Board would be civilians. That amendment was adopted by the committee. We wonder why the Conservatives deleted this particular provision from Bill C-15.

Another issue that was debated in detail during the meetings of the Standing Committee on National Defence was the Chief of the Defence Staff's authority to make financial decisions.

This has been a problem for many years and Justice Lamer asked that it be rectified in 2003. That was almost 10 years ago. This issue has been raised on a regular basis not only by the Canadian Forces ombudsman, but also by the chair of the Canadian Forces Grievance Board.

For the sake of clarity, I will try to explain what is meant by that. What we find unfair is that National Defence's Chief of Defence Staff does not have the authority to render a decision. He only has the authority to issue a notice that the applicant must use to try to get paid by National Defence. That is what we want to correct because we find it to be unfair.

Government Orders

Next, we would like the Military Police Complaints Commission, the MPCC, to become a real oversight body. I noticed that we have not talked very much about the MPCC during the various debates because we were focused on the summary trials, which are the most important aspect. However, I would like to provide a bit of historical background. The MPCC was established by the Parliament of Canada in the wake of the Somalia inquiry because MPs felt the need to strengthen civilian control over how the army operates.

We think that this reform is not ambitious enough and does not go far enough.

I would like to come back to the question that the hon. member for Edmonton Centre asked the hon. member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue as to why summary trials are not constitutional at this time.

I will simply read a ruling by the Supreme Court of Canada, which confirmed in *Wigglesworth*:

If an individual is to be subject to penal consequences such as imprisonment... then he or she should be entitled to the highest procedural protection known to our law.

That was the ruling made by the Supreme Court. I do not know whether the hon. member for Edmonton Centre will have the opportunity to say more about this, but that is indeed why we are in this position regarding summary trials.

In closing, I would like to say that, for all the reasons I have mentioned, the NDP will not be supporting Bill C-15 at second reading, not because we are opposed to most of the provisions in the bill, but because we cannot condone the government's strategy of deliberately ignoring the recommendations that had been made by parliamentarians during the previous sessions.

We are asking the government to amend its bill, in order to take into account the hundreds of hours of work done in the Standing Committee on National Defence during previous parliaments.

• (2130)

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, having served in the Canadian Forces for a number of years, I understand and appreciate the differences between civilian life and military life. Many members of the forces see that. There is a great dependency on discipline within the military and a need to follow orders. People in the military have an obligation unlike people outside the military.

People outside the military if they do not feel like working, they can leave, but they might not have a job at the end of the day. They can call in sick without any real consequences. If they do not like what the boss is saying, they can quit or in some instances talk back.

People in the military do not have these options. There needs to be a consequence in order to have an effective force. The discipline factor and the need to follow orders is absolutely critical for the Canadian Forces sheer existence.

There is a need for changes to the legislation. It needs to be modified to the degree where it would probably be more effective.

In principle, why would the NDP prevent the legislation from passing? There is a need to make some changes to it and

amendments would most likely be welcome, but why would that party oppose the bill in principle and its passage?

• (2135)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Tarik Brahmi: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for his interesting question. He mentioned the example of malingering, and the fact that there must be consequences.

As I said at the beginning of my speech, discipline is one of the pillars of the entire military organization because the lives of the other soldiers depend on discipline and its enforcement. We do not deny that. No one is denying the importance of discipline nor the fact that, as he said, anyone found guilty of malingering or faking must suffer the consequences.

We are not saying that there should be no consequences to lying. What we are saying is that when a soldier is charged for faking an illness, for example, the military justice process that applies must not be less fair than the same process that would operate in the civilian world, under the Criminal Records Act.

It is not a question of removing the guilt associated with the act or playing down the seriousness of it, since as I said earlier, the act of malingering can result in the loss of other soldiers' lives, because one soldier did not honour his commitment to stand guard, for instance. The best example is standing guard. If a soldier falls asleep or pretends to be sick in order to leave his guard post, his fellow soldiers could be killed as a result. We are not denying that. What we are saying is that it is a question of processes.

Once the act is committed, regardless of the consequences, and the soldier has been arrested, the process must be as fair as the corresponding process in the civilian world.

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his excellent speech. He is a very eloquent speaker. This is very interesting, especially coming from someone who represents a riding that has many military institutions and who knows military institutions, having served in the military himself in Europe. It was very interesting for a neophyte like myself to learn a little more about how things work internally.

My question will be very simple. I found my colleague's comments very interesting and I would like to know a little more about the whole issue. Knowing that amendments could be proposed, how does he think this bill could be improved?

Mr. Tarik Brahmi: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Alfred-Pellan for her question.

Government Orders

As I mentioned, this is the fourth time this bill has come before the House. We have therefore had plenty of time to discuss it. There have been negotiations and discussions. However, I should note that during the previous Parliament, the Conservatives who were members of the Standing Committee on National Defence did not have a majority, so they were forced to agree to a certain number of compromises. Now they are in a position of power and they have a majority on the Standing Committee on National Defence, so it seems to me—I am speculating here—that they want to use their position of power to thumb their noses at all of the negotiations that took place in committee during previous Parliaments.

To answer the question about what can be done, I would say that we should pick up where we left off with Bill C-41 during the 40th Parliament and not remove the amendments that were negotiated and agreed to by members of the Liberal Party, the Bloc Québécois and the Conservative Party.

• (2140)

[English]

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we hear so much rhetoric and blather from the other side about law and order and lock them down, punish them and pick them up by their bootstraps and all the other baloney. It is nice to hear from a member who actually knows what he is talking about, who has served in the military, who understands that an institution is not just some hollow vessel but it is filled with people, in many senses, young people who are in a context, and it is a bit of a rarefied context. We are asking them to do things and to give of themselves in a way that is really extraordinary. When they occasionally run afoul with the law, they are not given the kind of due process that anyone would expect. I think many Canadians would be surprised that in this context, and for certain infractions, those in the military are not given due process.

Would my hon. colleague comment on the general context in which the government is tabling the bill, stripping out some of the more reasonable amendments that had already been negotiated and leaving just the ones that follow its lock them down law and order baloney?

Mr. Tarik Brahmī: Mr. Speaker, I really feel the government, the Conservative Party, is using the position it holds right now to take a completely different approach from what it had taken under the previous legislation just because it has that majority. The Conservatives are claiming that they have a strong majority, but this is not true. Forty per cent of the votes is not a strong majority. Therefore, if we take the perspective of the voters, this is not a strong majority. It is not a majority at all. It is just here in this place that the members of the Conservative Party are using and abusing this position.

I am very sad. The Conservatives could have taken the previous amendments that had been negotiated under the previous legislation. Now they are scrapping all that and starting anew. Frankly, Canadian taxpayers do not understand why we have to pay so many people and spend so many hours doing things and redoing them.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to speak tonight to this important bill, Bill C-15, more commonly referred to as the military justice act. It is a bill that should have been dealt with Parliament long ago, but was

delayed numerous times by the vagaries of the Canadian electoral system.

Unfortunately, as the bill stands now, I will not be speaking in favour at second reading. Despite still agreeing that the bill does represent a step in the right direction, this version omits key recommendations from the mandatory review process and it also omits recommendations that had already been accepted by all parties in the previous Parliament during debate on its predecessor, Bill C-41.

Certainly both sides of the House recognize the importance of the major reforms to our military justice system that took place in 1998. One of those important progressive provisions was the requirement that there be a mandatory five-year review of the impact of those changes in our military justice system.

The first review was completed by the very distinguished former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Canada, Mr. Justice Lamer, in September 2003. His conclusion was that our military justice system was generally working well, but it was not without room for improvement. Therefore, he then submitted 88 recommendations for improvements to that justice system.

Since that time, by most counts, only about 28 of those recommendations have been dealt with, either in legislation or in administrative changes. That still leaves 60 recommendations outstanding.

Mr. Justice Lamer made recommendations in three main areas. The first of those was action to increase the protection for the independence of military judges. The second area was for actions to improve the current grievance process. The third area was actions to address efficiencies in the overall military justice framework.

Tonight I want to talk largely about how well Bill C-15 does in terms of implementing those outstanding recommendations made by Mr. Justice Lamer. When we look at Bill C-15, what we find is a very mixed record.

The recommendations in the first area of independence of military justice were dealt with last fall with all party support. They were separated out into Bill C-16, due to the deadline Parliament had been given by a decision of the Military Court Martial Appeal Court in the case of *Regina v. Leblanc*, and that deadline was met with royal assent last November.

I mention this specifically because it demonstrates that with goodwill on both sides of the House, we can get reforms that are needed through the House of Commons in a timely fashion. What I see missing in this draft of the bill is that goodwill to respect opinions on all sides of the House.

The second area that Mr. Justice Lamer made recommendations in was the area of improvements to the current grievance system. Lamer judged the current process unsatisfactory, largely due to its failure to deal with grievances in a timely manner and then the resulting backlog of grievances that came about as a result of that untimely dealing with problems.

Government Orders

His conclusion was that the basic principles of the grievance system were sound, but that its operation was not sound. At the time of his report, there were over 800 grievances outstanding and he pointed out the fact that grievances were often stuck at the office of the Chief of Defence Staff for more than two years.

Lamer suggested a 12 month limit be placed on grievances, that they would have to be dealt with within that time period. However, he also suggested some ways that deadline could be met, but it required several things to happen.

If the Chief of Defence Staff were able to delegate responsibility for some grievances to subordinate officers, that would speed up the process. That provision is in Bill C-15 and has been in all the previous bills.

The other two things are not actually legislative action and unfortunately they have not taken place.

The second of his recommendation on grievances was that adequate resources needed to be made available so that grievances could proceed in a timely fashion. The main reason for the delay was not enough people and not enough resources to deal with those grievances.

His third recommendation was providing additional training to those members of the Canadian Forces who were actually dealing with grievances, so they became more skilled in getting resolution of the grievances at a low level and were able to therefore move on to deal with more serious grievances.

As I said, only the first of these is in the bill. The other two would be very difficult to manage now, in view of the large cuts to the DND budget this year. They require more resources for the grievance system and they require more resources for training. I have my doubts about whether those would be available, given the large cuts in this year's budget.

The other reform not included in this bill to do with grievances was one which was adopted as an NDP amendment to Bill C-41, the previous version of this bill. That was an amendment to add critical balance to the representation on grievance committees. Therefore, I am at a loss as to why the government would not have included this amendment, which was already accepted in the previous Parliament, and which would go a long way to helping restore credibility to the grievance committee system by having a good representation of different kinds of members of the Canadian Forces on those committees.

● (2145)

In his third area of recommendations we probably have the most important recommendations for redressing the balance within the military justice framework as a whole. In talking about these, Justice Lamer set out four principles to guide that system. I want to take a moment to talk about those principles because I think it is important to keep them in mind as we are talking about this bill.

The first of those, and I shall quote Mr. Lamer, was to recognize that "maintaining discipline by the chain of command is essential to a competent and reliable military organization".

What he is pointing out there is that discipline depends on a well-functioning grievance and justice system. Therefore, it is not a challenge to that system to have a good grievance system; it is a support to that discipline system. It is not a challenge to have a good justice system; it is a support to discipline within the military.

The second principle he raised is that it was necessary to recognize the particular context of the military justice system. I will quote him at length here because what he said was that we:

...need to have a system that will properly operate under those special conditions that our men and women are placed in, often abroad, under conditions from peacekeeping to peace-making, in what is often a hostile environment, and indeed sometimes outright war.

Mr. Justice Lamer did not say there should not be a system for summary convictions or expedited justice. He recognized that sometimes these things are necessary. However, he also recognized that we can do these things within the framework of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and within a system that is just and fair to all the members of the Canadian Forces.

The third point or principle underlying these reforms to the framework that he mentioned was that those "who risk their lives for our country deserve a military justice system that protects their rights in accordance with our Charter" of Rights and Freedoms.

What he is saying there is that, like all other Canadian systems, but in particular because members of the Canadian Forces risk their lives in the service of their country, they deserve the protection of the rights that are in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms because that is what we are asking them to defend as members of the Canadian Forces.

His fourth principle said that it was necessary to recognize that any doubts about the military justice system and any lack of confidence in the military justice system would have negative impacts not just on discipline but also on morale within the Canadian Forces. Therefore, it becomes very important to deal with concerns about injustice in a timely fashion in order that the esprit de corps and the sense of common purpose can be maintained in the Canadian Forces.

By laying out those four principles, what he was saying is that the context that the military justice operates in makes it particularly important that we operate a model system.

Bill C-15 does make progress in two areas. I am prepared to acknowledge that.

One is in placing limits on the power of arrest without warrant under the existing sections 155 and 156 of the National Defence Act. Two court cases had already brought these wide powers of arrest without warrant into question, and Bill C-15 addresses this problem by incorporating Mr. Justice Lamer's recommendations.

The second area in which it makes progress is in providing for more flexible sentencing. Again, as recommended by Lamer, this would bring military justice in line with civilian justice in Canada by adding new sentencing options, including absolute discharges, intermittent sentences and restitution orders.

Government Orders

Those are two areas of progress I am prepared to acknowledge. Unfortunately, some of the most significant recommendations from Mr. Justice Lamer's report are missing from Bill C-15. That is why I am unable to support the bill at second reading.

One in particular I would like to highlight from Mr. Lamer's report deals with section 129 of the National Defence Act. That section establishes a general prohibition against conduct to the prejudice of good order and discipline. That is something no one could disagree with, given the context the military operates in. Unfortunately, as Mr. Justice Lamer noted, there is a lack of clarity in that section as to what the requisite elements of an offence are under this section or, in common language, what it is one has to do to violate this section is not clear. We might ask why Justice Lamer would focus on such a technical matter involving a single section of the defence act.

• (2150)

What he pointed out was that in the last year before his report, 44% of all charges in the military justice system were under this single section, where exactly what one has to do to be in contravention is unclear, and that this section also generated a large proportion of the appeals in the military justice system. This is what I would call a very major problem in terms of acceptance of the justice system, in terms of discipline and in terms of morale, and resulting from this lack of clarity it is not dealt with in Bill C-15, and it is a major omission.

It is so major, in fact, that it raises the general question of why most of the other 60 recommendations have not been included in Bill C-15. What was the standard by which the government sorted through and decided some of these deserve to stay and some of them have to go?

The second major omission that many of my colleagues have spoken about is the failure to reform the summary trial system. Again, the summary trial system, according to Mr. Lamer, in normal times accounts for about 96% of all cases in the military justice system. The major concern we have noted here is the possibility of summary trial convictions leading to criminal records, something that has a great impact on the future prospects of those convicted, both their prospects within the military and their prospects should they choose to leave the Canadian Forces. Again, in its last incarnation as Bill C-41, NDP amendments were adopted to expand the number of offences considered minor from 5 to 27, and this would reduce significantly the number of convictions that could result in a criminal record.

A further failure of Bill C-15 is its failure to address the need to strengthen the role of the Military Police Complaints Commission so that it can act as an effective oversight body with full investigative powers and the unfettered right to report to Parliament.

There is one other concern that Lamer had, which is perhaps not surprising, but is not addressed in this bill. He did acknowledge that all the solutions are not legislative in nature. This concern was the general under-resourcing of the military justice system. Lamer pointed in particular to the under-resourcing of the defence counsel services, where the number of defence lawyers in the Canadian military was equal to the number of judges and that number was four. So not having enough people to provide defence counsel

contributed to these lengthy delays in the actual justice system in getting cases through the court.

A further particular concern with resourcing came about at CFB Esquimalt in my riding. That is the cuts that have been made to alternative dispute resolution programs. These cuts that have been made in this budget would result in the phasing out of the alternative dispute resolution program at CFB Esquimalt by March 2014.

Now why am I talking about this as part of Bill C-15? I would say we have had a proven success rate in reducing the number of grievances and the number of behaviours that result in discipline by having an effective alternative dispute resolution program operating on the base. We can look at the number of cases that were dealt with in alternative dispute resolution and we can look at the number of grievances and see that the number of grievances has gone down. We can look at the number of cases dealt with in alternative dispute resolution and see that the number of discipline cases has gone down. Why on earth would the government want to cut the funding to alternative dispute resolution at the base? What the Conservatives say is that there is no explicit mandate for alternative dispute resolution services anywhere in the National Defence Act.

However, as I said, it flies in the face of the proven results of the alternative dispute resolution program in having a significant impact on reducing recourse to formal grievance procedures and in reducing the incidence of behaviours that would result in formal discipline proceedings. It is a great shame to see this program being phased out at the base.

I conclude my remarks about this bill by saying, once again, that I believe Bill C-16 last fall demonstrated the ability of all parties to cooperate to get important reforms adopted quickly in the House of Commons. Once again, I am perplexed as to why this bill ignores previously agreed upon amendments and ignores key recommendations from Mr. Justice Lamer. For that reason, I cannot support this bill at second reading.

Let me restate the importance of improvements to our military justice system. As I said, it is extremely important to one of those fundamental principles, and that is maintaining discipline in a chain of command.

• (2155)

It is extremely important to maintaining morale within the Canadian Forces, but it is also a right of those who serve. Therefore, we owe nothing less to the members of the Canadian Forces than to give them the same rights and the same protections, albeit in a special context, that are given to all other Canadians.

Members of the Canadian Forces are held to a high standard of discipline. They are asked to risk their lives, and therefore our judicial system should reflect those sacrifices they make on behalf of all of us. Those who risk their lives for our country should not be denied their charter rights when facing things like summary trials.

Other countries have recognized this issue and have changed their summary trial process. I heard my colleagues previously listing countries like Australia, Britain and Ireland. It is time for Canada to catch up in this area.

Government Orders

Ensuring that our military justice system ranks as a model system and a system of which all Canadians, both members of the Canadian Forces and the public at large, can justifiably be proud of should be the goal of Bill C-15. Once again, I have to question the government's motives in putting forward a bill that rejects those previously agreed upon compromises that help us accomplish that goal.

My final remarks go back to the important innovation we had in 1998, a five-year review. We had that review from Mr. Justice Lamer. We had a more recent review completed. We know what needs to be done here in the military justice system, and it is left now to us to find a way to come together in Parliament to get that done. We on this side of the House have said we will not support the bill at second reading. We would urge the government to take another run at this, one that recognizes the things that had already been agreed upon.

I want to go back to talk a bit more about the grievance system. It would be an easy thing for the Chief of the Defence Staff to adopt a 12-month limit for dealing with grievances, if we had that provision that allowed him to delegate some of that responsibility to his subordinates. It would not be so easy for him to do so in the context of cutbacks to the DND budget for this year. Therefore, those adequate resources for dealing with grievances will not be available, I am certain, and adequate resources for training those who deal with grievance procedures will not be available, likely, because of these large budget cutbacks.

I wonder where the consistency is in the government's commitment to the military and the commitment to improving the military justice system, when it is proceeding with such large cutbacks on an annual basis. I just cannot square that circle. Once again, if they are concerned about efficiency, I would go back to programs like the alternative dispute resolution program at CFB Esquimalt in my riding and ask why that program, instead of being cut, is not being piloted at all the bases across the country as a way of trying to get the problem solved at the lowest level without resorting to the formal processes that take so long and consume so many resources and without leaving Canadian Forces members so unhappy that they often engage in behaviours that provoke discipline and then invoke the military justice system.

We have some good alternatives here. We have some good ideas. We know where we need to go in reforming the military justice system. Again, I just cannot understand the lack of goodwill of the government in introducing Bill C-15 in this form when we have had so much experience in previous Parliaments and we know what it takes to get all of us on to the same page and improving the military justice system for the benefit of all the members who serve in the Canadian Forces.

• (2200)

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, near the end of my colleague's speech, which seemed as if it went on for much more than five minutes, more than he should have had, he said something about squaring a circle. I have been in the House now for about six and a half years and I have watched his party time and time again. Virtually every time we have had any measures put forward to improve the safety of our men and women in uniform, to provide the resources that our men and women in

uniform need to do their job well and to return home to us safely, almost every single time, this colleague and his party continue to vote against those initiatives.

My question is very simple. Maybe just for once could the NDP put aside its ideological opposition to supporting our men and women in uniform and get the bill to committee where it can be studied in depth?

Mr. Randall Garrison: Mr. Speaker, there is a colleague of his on the other side who likes to start his responses by saying, "Utter nonsense". I would like to quote that hon. member.

I gave the example of the bill last fall dealing with the independence of military judges. In that instance we worked together on all sides of the House and passed it through the House in record time in order to meet the deadline that was set in the court martial appeal court decision of *R. v. Leblanc*. We were able to do that.

With good will, as we have already demonstrated, we can cooperate on certain aspects of military justice to get things through the House of Commons.

Mr. Tyrone Benskin (Jeanne-Le Ber, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to button the impression that my colleague from across the way seemed to want to give, the impression that we do not support our military.

We do support our military; we would just like to do it the right way. That is it. The right way, we feel, is to have dialogue and discussion with the members across the way so that we could put forward some of the concerns we have, and hopefully have those concerns listened to. The committee process has proven very limiting in that respect.

Could my hon. colleague just expand on some of the issues that we have with this bill? Obviously it is not with the whole bill, but there are enough concerns that we cannot give it our full support. Would my colleague care to elaborate on that?

• (2205)

Mr. Randall Garrison: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure I thank my colleague for that question, because I have already expanded about as much as I can.

I would like to go back to what he said at the very beginning. It has been my tendency not to take the bait from the other side when they say we do not support the military. Can they actually demonstrate that?

One of the things I would bring to the Conservatives' attention is that if we look at the ridings across the country that have large military populations and check which parties won in the last election in those ridings, we can see that most of the major military ridings across the country are represented by New Democrats.

The members on the other side can claim that we do not support the military, but I think the members of the Canadian Forces and their families know that we have been there when it counts. They know we can be counted on for the issues that are important to them and their families. They voted accordingly.

Government Orders

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is very troubling, because Conservatives say one thing and do the opposite.

I have been sitting in the House for over a year now, and Conservatives would have us believe that they actually support our veterans and our military. However, when it comes to the budget for veterans and military personnel and their medical needs, Conservatives do the opposite. They cut those budgets.

Over the year, and my colleague could enlighten me on this, I have seen many bills introduced in this House, and I have seen many amendments offered by a number of opposition parties, including the NDP. Not one amendment to any of those bills has been accepted.

I would like to ask my colleague this question: am I on the right track when I say that Conservatives do one thing and say another thing?

Mr. Randall Garrison: Mr. Speaker, it is obviously late in the evening and late in the debate. I always like the first part of the question better than the last part, because I am not sure I can remember the last part of questions as they come to me. Perhaps it is important to make notes.

I always said, in my previous life as a city councillor, that when the government shifted from Liberal to Conservative, one of the things that I thought would change was the way the police and the military were treated by the Canadian government. One of the great disappointments, for me, when the Conservatives became the government was to find that they have the same bureaucratic bean-counting approach to members of the Canadian Forces that was used by the Liberals.

At the beginning, yes, there was a little increase in some salaries and some improvements in conditions, but what we have seen most recently in the budget is a very large cut to DND, which means that a lot of civilian contractors in my riding will probably actually lose their jobs.

The other thing we have seen is this attack on veterans' benefits. When people who are veterans' advocates raise complaints about that, we see a consistent pattern of violation of privacy rights and use of military and military medical records against them as advocates for members of the Canadian Forces.

As I said, I really did expect that the military and the police would be treated better by the Conservatives than they had been by the Liberals. It is sad to see that the same kind of treatment has continued.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I know the member was particularly interested in the grievance process. Members opposite are not speaking, so it is hard to ask them to justify why certain things are missing from the bill. For example, in the last Parliament, Bill C-41 was amended to provide that the Chief of the Defence Staff would be given the final authority to grant relief, including financial compensation if somebody was not properly paid, for instance, or given the right benefit. That is not in Bill C-15. That was taken out of this version of it.

There was also a recommendation that the name of the grievance board be changed to the military grievance external review committee to emphasize that it was supposed to be outside of the

military, an external review, and that it be populated by people without a military background. That has been taken out. Mr. Justice LeSage, who studied this issue, recommended that the change be put back again and also that there be a time limit of one year for dealing with grievances. In the last Parliament, the government rejected that idea, but Mr. Justice LeSage, in reviewing the act, says that it should be put in.

I do not know if the member can answer this. I am wondering why members opposite in the government have failed to recognize the importance of having a grievance procedure that is fair, effective and speedy.

● (2210)

Mr. Randall Garrison: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question, because it is the same thing I was musing about in my speech. It is hard to understand why some things are in the bill and some things are not, and what standard was used to make decisions about what should have been retained or not, in particular those things on which compromise had been reached in the previous Parliament. If the government is looking for support from the opposition parties for this bill to move forward quickly, why would it not include the things that had been in the previous bill?

When it comes to the grievance system, which I emphasized a lot in my speech, it is really important to both discipline and to morale within the military to have this well-functioning grievance system operating. I am at a loss to explain why the government would omit that from this bill, and it is one of the reasons that I am not supporting it at second reading.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to have the last word, especially since a comment was made that I was really itching to talk about.

My colleague made an excellent speech that was eloquent and easy to understand. We are both members of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security, and we have spent a lot of time studying the grievance system in our prisons. When he spoke about the grievance system in military justice, I could not help but make the link to the problem with the grievance or complaint system in prisons.

I find it rather strange that there is a double standard in both cases. Resources are being taken away from these two systems, but they are needed for the grievance systems in both of these places. That is just a comment that I wanted to share with my colleague.

[*English*]

Mr. Randall Garrison: Mr. Speaker, that is a very interesting question, because I think my colleague is onto something.

The government came up with a bill to label some prisoners as vexatious and problematic and to not accept complaints on the same basis. Maybe there is something about the idea that somehow complaints are a problem and are not about fixing problems. Perhaps there is that common attitude that would explain why a government that would support a private member's bill in the corrections area, a bill that would limit the right to complain, might also leave these things out of the bill.

Government Orders

As one of my colleagues said, it is probably an attitude of shooting the messenger who raises the problems rather than dealing with the problems themselves. I thank the hon. member for drawing that very interesting parallel.

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there were a number of other bills that I have had to speak on in this Parliament. I am pleased to rise this evening to speak on this one, but I will speak strongly in opposition to the bill going through as presented.

It is quite clear that Bill C-15 includes some significant reforms that we can support and in fact encourage all members to support. However, on the question from the member for Winnipeg North about why we would not support the bill in principle, I want to be very clear that I am never going to vote for a bill that would treat our military people unfairly.

The second reason for opposing the bill at this stage is the lack of trust that we have in the government to make the necessary amendments to the bill at committee. The Conservatives have clearly shown bad faith regarding Bill C-15. They have shown bad faith regarding our military personnel.

We have heard from everybody who has spoken this evening on the bill in its previous incarnations about recognizing the necessity of having a criminal justice system within the military context that would have to take into account the military discipline system at the same time. There is no dispute about that. Everybody accepts that on all sides of this House. However, if we are going to respect our military personnel and all that they contribute to this country today and all that they have contributed to this country historically, that system has to be one that is administered with firmness but very clearly with fairness.

There are aspects of Bill C-15, the part regarding criminal records in particular, that are grossly unfair to our military personnel. We would be treating them as very distant second-hand citizens with regard to the rights that all the rest of us enjoy and that this bill is prepared to take away from them. Again, our party is not prepared to support the bill as it stands because of that particular section as well.

The other point I want to make, and it has come up in the last few speeches, is that we have gone through incarnations of the bill twice before: once as Bill C-7 in 2007 and once as Bill C-41 in 2008.

Bill C-41 did get to committee in a minority government situation and had a number of amendments applied to it. We have to set that in the context of the report from Mr. Justice Lamer in 2003, the work that was done on Bill C-7 initially and then all of the work that was done and the evidence taken for Bill C-41 in committee.

Amendments were presented. They were accepted. There was a lot of negotiation, and that is not just me speaking on the information that I have of how the defence committee functioned at that time; Mr. Justice LeSage, who did his report in 2011, made similar comments about the amount of work that was done dealing with, in some cases, fairly complex issues.

There were not a lot of amendments—probably 10 or 15, or something in that range, and some of them fairly innocuous—but if we go back and look at all of the amendments that were made, we see that every single one of them has been stripped out in Bill C-15.

One of the changes we made was on the title of the grievance board, which is what it is still called. The committee wanted to be clear about the culture of how we should be dealing with grievances. A recommendation was made, adopted at committee stage and sent back here to the House at report stage.

● (2215)

We changed the title to military grievances external review committee because that more clearly reflected the context in which grievances were being dealt with, the personnel who were dealing with the grievances and the culture in which grievances should be addressed.

The bill came back as Bill C-15 and the title had gone back to grievance board, for no reason whatsoever except the Conservatives are absolutely determined to do it their way and no other way. In spite of the fact that all those negotiations went on in committee when it was Bill C-41, changes were made. With regard to that particular title, Mr. Justice LeSage agreed when he did his report.

Let me spend a couple of more minutes on Mr. Justice LeSage's report. He was appointed by the government to review the military justice system. In his report he said he did not specifically look at Bill C-15 because he was not asked to do that. It was not within his mandate. He did look at Bill C-41. He looked at the history and at Mr. Justice Lamer's recommendations, and he came up with a number of his own recommendations.

That report was presented to the government in December 2011. The bill itself came before the House shortly before that. It had very little debate, one to two hours, and one speech by my colleague. The bill has sat there since that time.

The report also sat in the hands of the government. I am going to suggest that it sat in the hands of the government because there were so many recommendations in that report that copied the amendments we did on Bill C-41.

The government finally tabled the report in the House earlier this month, on June 8. It did that because it did not want somebody with the reputation and stature of Mr. Justice LeSage agreeing with all of the amendments done by the collective parties in the last Parliament on Bill C-41. The government kept it hidden and finally, under pressure from the official opposition, brought it to the House.

I now want to take members to the major concern we have with the bill, and that is with regard to the criminal records. Mr. Justice LeSage, on pages 28 and 29 of his report, goes into some detail, and I want to read part of it:

The Criminal Records Act provides that a person is ineligible to apply for a pardon for ten years for a service offence under the National Defence Act for which the offender received a fine of more than \$2,000...

What we will have is that our military personnel who have been fined \$2,001 will have to wait 10 years before being able to clear their record. If they were in detention for six months, they will have to wait 10 years. That is not the standard we have set for other people in our society who have committed criminal offences that are much more severe than these. They would not have to wait 10 years.

Government Orders

Similarly, for the very minor ones, with a fine of less than \$500, military personnel will have to wait three years before their record is cleared. If they were in the general civilian population, that would not even be a consideration. It would not be a criminal record. It would be quasi-criminal, and they would not have a record under the Criminal Records Act.

Justice LeSage goes on to say that we have to change this. He makes specific recommendations, and he does make reference to Bill C-41. He says that this was looked at, that it was very complex, but specific recommendations and amendments were passed at committee.

Section 75 of the bill provides for section 249.27 of the National Defence Act. The government put in a new section that says a criminal record would not apply. It then said it would not apply to five sections of the National Defence Act. It would not apply for a fine of less than \$500, but it would apply for anything over \$500.

Bill C-41 came back to the House as amended at report stage, in March 2011, just before the government fell and we had an election.

● (2220)

The Conservatives did have time. If they had called that bill, with everybody who was in support of it at that point, we actually would have had it passed. There was time in late March and early April, before the election was called, for that bill to get through the House. If they were serious about it, we would have had the bill in place. It would be the law of the land at this point.

However, that is not what they did.

Much like this bill, which has sat on the order paper since late last fall, we are only finally getting back to it this week.

The amendment that was passed at that time at committee included a number of sections. I will not do the mathematics right now, but it was roughly 15 to 18 sections. If military personnel committed an offence under these sections they would not have a criminal record. They are small items. It is things like being intoxicated on duty. Again, it is minor stuff, which in civilian life people would not have a criminal record for, at all.

With a lot of work, the committee went through these 15 to 18 sections and said these should not invoke a criminal record.

As I said a few minutes ago, what we see in Bill C-15 is that all of those sections, except five of them, are stripped out. We have all sorts of offences now—and Mr. Justice LeSage again confirms this in his report—that would not be offences in civilian life, that would not invoke a criminal record, that will now have an impact on our military personnel. It is not fair. It is going to produce really negative consequences.

It was interesting to hear a couple of the members saying, “Well, no, you are wrong about this. There really is not a criminal record.” Mr. Justice LeSage, in his report, said he was not surprised the member said that. When he spoke with Canadian Forces members across the country, he was surprised that many people, including lawyers, were unaware of the very real potential to acquire the equivalent of a criminal record if convicted of a minor service offence. Even the lawyers who might be advising military personnel

as to whether they should, in a summary trial situation, admit their offence and plead guilty to it, did not know they would acquire a criminal record.

I wonder if my colleague knows that he may in fact have a criminal record under the provision.

That was the level of the lack of knowledge the committee saw under Bill C-41, and that Mr. Justice LeSage identified as he went across the country and took evidence. He made it very clear of the absolute need for all those sections of the National Defence Act to be exempted from attracting a criminal record.

However, the Conservatives stripped it out and reduced it down to five offences that would not acquire a criminal record. Another 10 to 13 offences are going to acquire a criminal record.

We are going to have military personnel, after they leave the service, trying to get employment.

One of the points Mr. Justice LeSage makes in his report is getting across the border. I know, coming from my riding in Windsor, how difficult the Americans are being, how very rigid they are on enforcing denials to Canadians who have any kind of a criminal record. They are going to get caught. They are not going to be able to go into the United States. In effect that would have a major impact on their ability to earn.

There are a lot of people who live on the Canadian side of the border but work on the American side. They will not be able to pursue that employment if they have these kinds of criminal records from their military service.

We need the government to give its head a shake and look back at what they did in Bill C-41. It made sense.

Mr. Justice LeSage is a very well-recognized person. He has strong stature. He understands the military justice system. He is one of the experts in the country. He did not make these recommendations lightly. Neither did the committee make those amendments lightly when it was doing its work on Bill C-41. The committee studied it and said, “This is a much better solution than what the government proposed at that time. This is the way we should go.”

● (2225)

That is where we should go back to now.

I have no particular faith in the government. I see some of the other silly amendments that the Conservatives stripped out, and I mean silly in the sense of their willingness to take out what were fairly minor changes. They were important changes. I do not want to downplay those. But when they have stripped every single one of them out, including the title of the grievance board, we know we cannot trust the government to deal fairly with our military personnel. The Conservatives have to get that message. We will continue to oppose the bill as long as we possibly can, until we get those amendments.

I want to move on to a couple of other areas. One of the recommendations from Mr. Justice LeSage was about disclosure, both with regard to summary trials and court martials.

Government Orders

I want to make a comment. It is very clear that 96% of all military discipline cases are dealt with by summary trial, so the Conservatives are saying it is obvious they are satisfied with the system.

If one can imagine, an individual either has minimal counsel from somebody who is not a lawyer, or none at all. Their commanding officers, who will ultimately be their judge in a summary trial, say they could either have a court martial, which would probably take six months to two years, or a summary trial. It is obvious why individuals end up electing to go the summary trial route 96% of the time.

With regard to the point of disclosure, both with regard to summary trials and with court martial proceedings, we made the recommendation very clearly that we had to have full disclosure. This is not dealt with at all. It was not dealt with in Bill C-7. It was not dealt with in Bill C-41, and it is not dealt with in Bill C-15. In spite of the fact that the government has known of that recommendation for six months, it has not done anything to amend Bill C-15 to include the requirement that full disclosure be given.

The point that Mr. Justice LeSage made when he made that recommendation, and I suppose the advocacy he was putting forward with regard to it, was that especially in a court martial the evidence is not given to the person in advance. When they get the evidence shortly before the trial, or in some cases at the trial, it will end up in a delay, an adjournment. On the other hand, if it is given early, the evidence they have against the individual is quite clear. Oftentimes it ends up in a guilty plea and a quick resolution of the matter.

In terms of the good faith of the government in this regard, it has known about that since December 2011. It has had six months to propose the amendment from the opposition parties to that section of the National Defence Act. It has done nothing about it whatsoever.

I could go on. There are any number of other fairly small amendments. We heard them from other members of my party this evening.

Let me deal with one that would allow the acceptance of the grievance. Rather than have it go over to the Justice department, which is the way it works now, it would stop at the Chief of Defence Staff. This would be financial compensation. An individual might say, "I was on this duty. I am entitled to danger pay. I am in a high-risk situation. I am entitled to an extra \$200 for this month of employment". The person dealing with the grievance says, "Yes, you are".

Right now after that decision is made, it then goes over to the Justice department. Its lawyers look at it for as long as six months to another year before it is dealt with. It is grossly ineffective. It is inefficient. Again, it is unfair to the military personnel who are entitled to that \$200 or \$400.

The recommendation is that it stay at the military level, that the Chief of Defence Staff makes the final decision and allows for the compensation. The Conservatives stripped that amendment out too.

We will continue to oppose the bill as long as we possibly can. We are calling on the government to agree to put back those amendments that were in Bill C-41. At that point we can get this over with and get

that firmness but fairness that we would apply to our military personnel in good faith.

• (2230)

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as a lawyer of long standing and great experience, the member's comments on these matters mean a lot.

I just want to add that Mr. Justice LeSage of the Ontario Superior Court, who did this report, said that the amendments that were in Bill C-41 took away the criminal record for certain offences but that, "I am of the view that the language contained in Bill C-41 is too narrow and should be expanded".

He went on to say:

Suffice it to say I have very real concerns about obtaining a criminal record from a summary trial conviction. The issue of criminal records flowing from convictions at summary trial must be reviewed. The very damage that flows from a criminal record and the potential effect on a person's life is far too severe a consequence for most offences tried by summary trial.

He made the same arguments that we are making, which are that although it is constitutional it does not provide the safeguards of a civilian criminal trial and that the unintended consequence of acquiring a criminal record at summary trial should only occur in exceptional circumstances.

Is the member suggesting that the amendments that we had in Bill C-41 when it came back was the starting point for a further review and that we would expect members opposite to take it from there and in fact improve on the amendments that were made the last time instead of shipping them away?

• (2235)

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, I must admit that I was a bit uncertain but that is certainly the most logical interpretation to make of the comments of Mr. Justice LeSage, that even those 15 to 18 sections that Bill C-41 had amended and had been added by the committee at that time were still too narrow. There were still too many low level inconsequential charges and convictions under the summary trials and that in fact that list should be expanded even greater. That is the most logical interpretation.

I have to say that there is a possibility that he may have been referring to Bill C-41 before it was amended, the original government version which had much fewer sections. However, he clearly had looked at Bill C-41 by the time it had come back to the House for its final report at that stage, so I think he was saying that even the 15 to 18 sections were too narrow.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Tarik Brahma (Saint-Jean, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Windsor—Tecumseh and take advantage of the fact that he is an eminent legal expert to share with him a statement made by a witness in the Standing Committee on National Defence during the last Parliament. I want to share what Jean-Marie Dugas, a retired lieutenant-colonel with the Canadian Forces, had to say:

[*English*]

There's also the problem that you don't have that many lawyers on the city streets who are able to take care of our soldiers. Military law is military law, and there are regulations nobody has ever read or heard of before.

Government Orders

I would like to hear the member's comments on the availability of lawyers who are able to deal with military matters.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, the answer is clear. There are not enough lawyers. In my city, there are between 300 and 500 lawyers, and not one of them knows how to defend someone charged under this law. The same is true across Canada. Michel Drapeau is one of the experts in Canada. He wrote about this bill and he said the same thing. There may be a hundred or so lawyers in Canada who can defend our military personnel with some degree of expertise.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate the hon. member on his presentation. He applied his vast knowledge and made a real impact on this debate.

I would like him to say a few words about what Colonel Michel Drapeau said in February 2011, before a committee:

I strongly believe that the summary trial issue must be addressed by this committee. There is currently nothing more important for Parliament to focus on than fixing a system that affects the legal rights of a significant number of Canadian citizens every year. Why? Because unless and until you, the legislators, address this issue, it is almost impossible for the court to address any challenge, since no appeal of a summary trial verdict or sentence is permitted. As well, it is almost impossible for any other form of legal challenge to take place, since there are no trial transcripts and no right to counsel at summary trial.

This seems to pose fundamental problems of natural justice. Why would we have double standards? I understand that the soldiers are in a unique situation, but are there no improvements that could be made to avoid this type of situation? Should we not be improving the bill before us because it does not satisfy these concerns?

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his question. It is very clear that the government's response is not enough for military staff.

There are no transcripts and no defence lawyers. The judge gives the orders. Decisions cannot be appealed. I want to be clear: this does not pose a problem for most investigations. The charges are not too serious and the punishments are even less so.

However, when the defendant acquires a criminal record for very simple charges, it is clear that this law is not a satisfactory response for military staff. These amendments are essential.

• (2240)

[*English*]

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I, too, would like to avail myself and this House again of my hon. colleague's deep knowledge of the law. We have heard, through some of the questions from the government side, that somehow due process and discipline are mutually exclusive terms. I wonder if the member could shed some light on why this is a false route for the government to go down, not just in this instance but in many others.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, the argument that the Supreme Court has said that the summary trial process is an acceptable one is accurate. Then to extrapolate from it that there should not be any due process, that they should not have the right to avoid criminal records in any number of other areas, is pervasive with the government. Unfortunately, it is all too pervasive in some of the upper echelons in the military, which is not the case in any number of other militaries.

We have heard several times this evening that Australia, which is probably the closest to us, has gone a great distance to guarantee just about all of the same civil rights and civil liberties within the military justice system as it has in the rest of its criminal justice system. We are nowhere near close to doing that.

When we see this kind of bill and see that particular section that would impose these criminal records on our military personnel for no good reason whatsoever, other than it is their way or no other way and the opposition is not allowed to have any input. If it has any input, the Conservatives will strip it out, and it is too bad if our military personnel suffer. That is the result of this.

Again, we can point to other military establishments, such as Ireland and Australia again, where they have done this. It has not had any negative impact on discipline within their military. In fact, since they shifted to treating their military personnel with firmness but fairness, it has actually reduced the number of charges.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to speak today against the second reading stage of Bill C-15. Before my colleagues across the way start saying that I do not like the military and all of those things, I will stress that it is because I so strongly support the men and women in our military who sacrifice so much to serve our country and put themselves on the line that I find it very difficult to support this legislation. Surely, our men and women who serve us at home and overseas in unimaginable circumstances deserve due process, and that is what this is all about. It is about transparency, accountability, t doing the right thing and natural justice.

When I look at Bill C-15, I do acknowledge that the government has taken a baby step in the right direction. However, it is only a baby step and does not go far enough.

As I look at the legislation, I experience déjà vu. Not too many days ago I stood in the House and talked about another bill, Bill C-11, the Balanced Refugee Reform Act, which was legislation that the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism praised as being a miracle. It was legislation that all political parties worked on and together they included elements that would address human smuggling, put processes in place that would speed up processing times and short-term detention for people who did not have identification verification, all of those things. I want to acknowledge my colleague from Trinity—Spadina who did such an amazing job on that file. The government side and the other opposition party also praised that legislation.

Government Orders

Then, lo and behold, out of the blue we then had legislation that went backward and undid so much of the work that was done. Bill C-11 was the Balanced Refugee Reform Act and we ended up with Bill C-31 in its place, which undid all the work that was accomplished in Bill C-11. That is exactly the *déjà vu* I am experiencing now.

Once again we had legislation that was in Parliament, Bill C-11, which had been acclaimed but was still not fully implemented, and then it was undone. On the other hand, Bill C-15 undoes the amendments that were accepted in Bill C-41. Once again, we need to look at what the drive is behind this. The drive behind it seems to be the majority my colleagues are experiencing across the way. I was really hoping that after a year of being a majority government it would have gotten over that and gone on to do the work of Parliament in a way that respects the role of the opposition and, of course, the contributions the opposition has to make when it comes to legislation.

• (2245)

As I was saying, I was experiencing *déjà vu*. Here we are with this iteration of Bill C-15, and none of the compromises, amendments that were made in Bill C-41 are in it. Why? It is so tiring to hear about how the Conservatives are all about the military and how the opposition does not care about the military.

When I look at this legislation, I wonder how much my colleagues sitting across the aisle really care about the men and women who serve in our military and put their lives at risk and why the Conservatives have chosen to ignore key recommendations from a critical report written by Antonio Lamer, which was issued in 2003. There were 88 recommendations in that report. Out of those 88 recommendations, only 28 have been dealt with to date.

I am not fully blaming my colleagues across the aisle. The other opposition party also had an opportunity to implement the recommendations that were made in the Lamer report and it chose to sit on them. I do not know why, maybe it was dealing with a lot of other issues. Surely, no other issue can be as important as ensuring that the men and women who serve in our military get justice and get treated fairly.

We have all of these things going on. One good thing that I suppose we could say, as could my colleagues across the aisle, is that Bill C-41 was never acclaimed.

My colleague who spoke just before me is such an eloquent speaker. I just hope that one day in the future I can emulate even 10% of what he is able to express so clearly and so succinctly.

As my colleague said, the government had the opportunity, because the bill was at the report stage, to deal with it before Parliament was shut down for the last election. However, it chose not to.

Here we are a few days before Parliament closes and, again, through bullying tactics, we will sit until midnight every night this week. Why was the legislation not introduced earlier so we could have dealt with it? It could have gone through all the stages.

Here we are at 10:50 p.m. on the Tuesday night, before Parliament recesses on Friday, debating the treatment of our men and women

who serve in the military to give them the kind of fairness that we expect as civilians. Where are the priorities of the government? Certainly not with the men and women in the military. The government seems to have other priorities.

When I looked at all of this, and I will go through this in detail, I was struck by a quote from the Minister of National Defence in February 2011, when he appeared before the Standing Committee on National Defence, the same defence minister who occupies the seat today. This is what he said when he endorsed the summary trial system:

—the summary trial system strikes the necessary balance between meeting the unique disciplinary needs of the Canadian Forces and the needs to respect the rights of individual members of our military...Canadians similarly need to know that their country's military system will treat those who serve fairly and in a way that corresponds to Canadian norms and values.

Does the minister still believe in those words? If he does believe them, why is the minister not accepting the fact that the summary trial system is tainted with undue harshness? Sentences are resulting in criminal records for minor offences. Why is the minister ignoring the need for greater reform than the baby step that is being proposed in this legislation?

• (2250)

When we look at all of this, we really begin to question the motives and what drives the government.

In the previous iteration last year, the NDP put forward some amendments. Quite a few were accepted. Other important amendments that were passed at committee stage at the end of the last parliamentary session are not in Bill C-15, although a couple are. The ones that are not there include the following.

First, the authority of the Chief of Defence Staff in the grievance process, responding directly to Justice Lamer's recommendation, is not included in the bill. Second, changes to the composition of the grievance committee to include a 60% civilian membership is once again not included in the bill. Third, a provision ensuring that a person who is convicted for an offence during a summary trial is not unfairly subjected to a criminal record. Once again, that is not included.

What would address some of our concerns with this legislation? We absolutely need further amendments and we need to ensure that the summary trial system is fixed. Summary trials are held without the ability of the accused to consult counsel. There are no appeals or transcripts of the trial. The bit that I find very hard, maybe because of the background I have had, where I have always believed that if people are accused of something, they have the right to representation. Then they have the right to go before a person who is fairly neutral. In this case, people end up having to go in front of one of their commanding officers. If they go before one of their commanding officers, I am not sure how independent that is and what kind of pressure that puts individuals who are there to advocate for themselves without legal counsel. This absolutely puts undue pressure on our armed forces when they can be convicted for very minor service offences.

Government Orders

I am sure that some members previously had employers somewhere, other than the Canadian people. Perhaps they had some kind of an accusation against them, or maybe they came to work late or whatever and before they knew it, there was a grievance. They then had to defend themselves, in other words, put their case forward. First, they could not get representation. Second, they had to go before their employers. Imagine the kind of depressing effect that has on people when they have to go in front of someone who has that much power and authority over them? That actually has a chilling effect on even the accused's desire for justice because they are afraid of the kind of impact that could have on their career and so on.

The kind of minor offences we are talking about, and I think I could often be accused of these, are: insubordination, and I think I was born with that one; normal quarrel and disturbances, almost everyone in the House would have to be charged at some time or other; absence without leave, imagine all those young people at school ending up with criminal records because they were away without leave; drunkenness and disobeying an officer's command.

● (2255)

This is a very serious business. I really do not want to make light of it because it actually affects our military. However, at the same time, when I am reading some of these trivial things, I am thinking that we are going to give our men and women who serve our country, without holding anything back, a criminal record for these. If they end up with a criminal record, once they are out of the army, crossing that border could become almost impossible.

I deal with cases of people who were stopped, had charges of drinking and driving even 10 years ago and were still finding it difficult to cross the border.

Is that the way we want to treat our men and women when they go looking for certain jobs? As members know, there are jobs where people deal with the public and there is a requirement for criminal record checks. If we did any of these things, as long as we were not too far out there, we would not end up with a criminal record. Military members are already held up to such high standards, so why are we, in the idea of criminality, stooping so low as to give them a criminal record? We really need to pay attention to this.

It is not easy living with a criminal record, but I will not get into that. The members know that anyway. If they have not experienced it themselves, I am sure they have had constituents who have come and talked to them about it.

Regarding reform of the grievance system, I absolutely understand grievances and I also understand accountability and transparency. Whenever we have professionals, whether the RCMP, teachers or any other profession that we hold to account, one of the key things is that civil society has engagement. Once again, this bill fails to address that. It is really critical when grievances are under review, there be a representation from civil society on the panel. This would give it that authenticity that we often talk about, and the accountability.

At this stage, I will read a quote from the Lamer report. It is quite amazing. I did not know this gentleman, but he is very learned obviously, because he gets to the heart of the matter. He writes:

Grievances involve matters such as benefits, personnel evaluation reports, postings, release from the Canadian Forces...all matters affecting the rights, privileges and other interests of CF members...unlike in other organizations, grievors do not have unions or employee associations through which to pursue their grievances...

I want to stress this. He says:

It is essential to the morale of CF members that their grievances be addressed in a fair, transparent and prompt manner.

That becomes really critical when we take a look at reforming the grievance system.

I will read a quote from Colonel Michel Drapeau, a retired colonel from the Canadian Forces and military law expert. In February 2011, before the committee, he said:

—I find it...odd that those who put their lives at risk to protect the rights of Canadians are themselves deprived of some of those charter rights when facing a summary trial. If Britain, Australia, New Zealand, and Ireland have seen fit to change the summary trial system, it begs the question: why is Canada lagging behind?

I plead with my colleagues across the way to see the light of day and please address and give fairness to our military men and women who serve us so unselfishly.

● (2300)

Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member is sincere in wanting to see this move forward, then we need to move it to committee where it can have the kind of discussion and work that needs to be done. We can have witnesses called and the bill can be studied.

This report goes back to 2003. The bill was brought to the House a number of times: we had it as Bill C-7 in 2006, as Bill C-45 in 2008 and as Bill C-41 in 2010. Going back to the recommendations of 2003, this has been too long in coming.

If the member is serious about wanting to get it studied and done, then why not let this pass to committee so that we can look at it and make the necessary changes?

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Mr. Speaker, I would laugh if I did not want to cry at this stage.

The bill has been through committee. It was amended. I read out some of the elements that were addressed. That work was done by all sides of the House. Yet the government, because it is not serious despite the rhetoric, has presented the House with a bill that is stripped of the amendments that were made.

Absolutely, we are serious. We moved those amendments and they passed. It is a shame that the government is playing games with such an important piece of legislation.

● (2305)

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this is more of a comment. We have been debating this now for over two hours. We have had a number of speakers, even some from the other side. Not a single member on the opposite side who wants this to go to committee has indicated that one single amendment would be presented or accepted in committee.

Government Orders

What we know so far is that the amendments that were accepted and the consensus that was developed in committee the last time were stripped out of the bill. Now we have the bill as it was when it was first presented to Parliament several years ago. It came back to the House and the government did not even call it. The Conservatives were so anxious to get it passed, they did not even call it. That is what we are left with here. We are left with a government stonewalling this by saying that we should bring the bill to committee so that we can study it. Well, the Conservatives have a majority on the committee. We know that, they know that. Is this a game?

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Mr. Speaker, over the last five or six weeks I have spent more hours in committee than I care to count dealing with different pieces of legislation and with amendment after amendment that were defeated. I sat in this House looking at the Trojan Horse budget bill where over 800 amendments were accepted, but not one passed in this House. It is very difficult to think that when this bill gets to committee the amendments we bring to committee will pass.

However, I am an optimist. I am still hoping that my colleagues across the way will see the rising sun and light of day and do the right thing.

Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for all the fine work she does back in her riding.

Certain individuals may very well be facing summary conviction without the benefit of professional legal counsel. Does the hon. member have any thoughts on that?

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Mr. Speaker, the presence of my colleague in the House always brings some calmness. His thoughtful input is always appreciated.

One of the basic concepts that we have in the western world is the right to representation. When we see that someone may end up with a criminal record, that right to representation becomes critical.

Members of our military do not have access to lawyers to represent them in summary trials. They also have to appear before their commanding officer. That has a chilling effect when one is advocating for oneself. I would say that it does a great deal of injustice to our men and women who serve us tirelessly.

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for her speech tonight and many of her other speeches. They are some of the more memorable moments in this place.

We hear noise from the other side about bringing this legislation to committee. Yet, as my hon. colleague pointed out, not one amendment put forward by our side has been deemed worthy of the government's meat grinder when it comes to legislation. Committee has looked at this legislation in the past and some sound amendments were passed.

My colleague says she lives in hope that the government will see the light of day. Does she not think that light of day is probably in 2015?

● (2310)

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Mr. Speaker, I have always been called an optimist. No matter how bleak things look I always have an absolute belief in the human spirit. I hope we will begin to see some light long before 2015. The Canadian public needs to see some hope, it needs to see some light. The Canadian public needs to see a government that does not use its majority like a hammer to shut down Parliament constantly and not address legislation in a fair and balanced way.

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, from a process point of view, I just want to know if the member could illustrate other times during second reading where a government, whether it was us or a previous government, stood in its place and accepted amendments prior to an item going to committee?

The process that works here is that at second reading we have a debate. The bill would then go to committee where amendments can be put forward. The bill would come back to the House at report stage to be debated. This is what we did ad nauseam last week. The bill then goes to third reading. That is the process.

Could the member give me any examples when the government of the day accepted amendments to a bill at second reading prior to it going to committee?

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Mr. Speaker, my experience in the House is not lengthy. I have only been here just over a year. However, my experienced colleague sitting to the left of me tells me there absolutely have been times in the past when the government has indicated it will accept—

Mr. Mike Wallace: When? Name them.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Mr. Speaker, the member should at least give me a chance to answer the question, please.

There have been times when a government in power has said at second reading stage that it would accept amendments.

There seems to be a refusal to accept reality. The reality is that this legislation has been through second reading, has been through committee stage. Amendments were accepted and now it is back here, stripped bare of all the amendments that were accepted.

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me to rise this evening and speak to this bill, but I have to say that I am really getting tired. It has nothing to do with the hour of the evening, but rather listening to the lobotomized government on the other side talking to us about process.

Let us talk about process. In its previous iteration in 2007, this bill died on the order paper. Why was that? The government prorogued this place. That is why it died on the order paper. If the government wants to continue talking about process, then let us talk about process. In 2008 it died again. Why did it die again? The government closed the shutters on this place. It broke its own fixed election laws in 2008 and that is why it died then.

Government Orders

What about 2011 and Bill C-41? That died too because the government fell, in part due to contempt of Parliament. At such a late hour of the evening, clearly I have woken up the sleeping hyenas. It is too bad that the Conservatives cannot actually defend their government in a fulsome way. What do they do? They throw out these pithy remarks about process.

However, we ask a lot of our soldiers, our men and women in uniform. I would like to ask the members on the other side if they think that the kind of remarks and the questions that they are bringing forward tonight are suitable within the context of the conversation we are having. What we are talking about tonight is how we support our men and women in uniform and how we project the image of Canada to the world through our men and women in uniform. If we cannot guarantee for them the kinds of rights in terms of due process that we expect for everyday, ordinary Canadians, then we are doing them a disservice.

Too often, we hear the government using our men and women in uniform as cover for the egregious decisions and laws that it is foisting upon the Canadian public in the guise of a majority in the last election. Thirty-eight percent is not a majority. It has a parliamentary majority here, but we will leave that aside. I may need it a little later in my 20 minutes.

We have a situation here where the government has let down our men and women in uniform far too often. For example, in my hometown in Toronto we have homeless veterans. How can we ask the men and women in the Canadian Forces to do the most extraordinary things on behalf of the rest of us when the government refuses to properly look after our veterans when they are finished their service?

We have a tax on veterans' benefits. There is an inability for many men and women veterans to get the kind of treatment they need for post-traumatic stress disorder. We have a government that tables legislation that strips out of the legislation some of the wise counsel, the wisdom and the compromises that were hashed out in previous Parliaments.

I would like to echo my colleague from Saint-Jean's comment earlier in this debate where he questioned the government's wisdom and decisions in this regard as a waste of taxpayer money because we have debated and put together some very sensible amendments.

• (2315)

Members opposite say to bring it to committee and we will study the amendments. I sat on the committee looking into the copyright legislation, Bill C-11, where a member on the opposite side said, "I'll bet you \$10,000 we're going to move amendments". Every single amendment that we brought forward was rejected, including an amendment that would have enabled those with perceptual disabilities, those who are deaf, those who have vision impairments, to access works that they otherwise would not be able to access. Even an amendment like that was voted down.

Therefore we have no trust in the government's interest in looking at reasoned amendments from our side.

The issue of process is really a concerning question for us here on this side because we see, time and time again, the government playing games with the process, in fact gaming the process, actually.

Tonight is a perfect example. We have seen the government go through time allocation, limiting debate throughout this year that we have been here in this Parliament, time and time again. In fact, with its pooled pension Ponzi scheme, the debate was limited to an hour or two. Then it says, "Okay, we've limited debate. Now, we're going to extend Parliament because we're going to ram all this stuff through in the last minute".

That is the kind of respect the government has for process in this place.

Now I will go back to Bill C-15.

We believe there are elements of Bill C-15 that are a step in the right direction. However, unlike the member from the corner party there who asked us, "If there are some things that you agree with, why don't you just vote for them?" I think he wanted to go home early, which is the kind of culture to which his party subscribes. We cannot swallow that.

As my hon. and esteemed colleague, the member for Windsor—Tecumseh, commented earlier, we are not going to vote for a bill that does not support the men and women in our armed forces.

I have sat and listened to the debate, and it is an honour to do that, I have to say. It really is, because I have a chance to listen to some of the acquired wisdom of some of the members here. I started to think, as I was listening to the debate tonight, about some young people I had the good fortune to interview many years ago in Toronto. These were high school students who had decided to sign up for a high school co-op course. The co-op course was, essentially, to join the reserves. That was part of the course. Now, these were young kids. They were 16- and 17-year-olds. They told me they had decided to join this co-op program to get into the reserves, for a variety of reasons. Some of them just did not like school. Some of them had a tough time at home. Some of them were from families where the socio-economic situation was such that they could not see where the future was going to lead them. They thought that maybe the military was an option, and so they joined. They were young kids.

• (2320)

We have a situation where, not too much further down the road, these individuals, 20 years old, 21 years old, could be full members of the Canadian Forces. Maybe they get into a dust-up one night and they get a reprimand or they go before their commanding officer in a summary trial and end up with some kind of criminal record for which, depending on the infraction, it could take them 10 years down the road to clear their name.

The fact is that they would have no recourse to representation. There would not even be transcripts of the procedure. On our side, we see this as a huge problem. It is a judicial issue, but it is also an issue of morale, and we take this issue of morale seriously. That is why we advocate tirelessly on behalf of veterans of the forces, because if we do not do that, then we set up a culture where we are saying that we want the forces to do all this stuff, but then when we are done with them, we do not want to hear from them again.

We adamantly oppose the creation of that kind of culture within the military, and we believe that it is paramount, as parliamentarians, to ensure that kind of culture does not creep in.

Government Orders

We see that time and time again with the government. The Conservatives like to wrap themselves in the flag, but when veterans come to them in need of help, too often there are roadblocks put up in their way.

When I start to think about these kids I interviewed, they were fresh-faced but a little confused. They were young, and one could see that, depending on how luck went, they could get into trouble. We want to make sure that, in those situations, they are accorded the same rights, the same access that any other Canadian citizen would expect. It is amazing that many Canadians, and we heard tonight that many members of the military and lawyers, are surprised to know that members of the forces do not and cannot access some of these.

We have heard as well that the bill has gone through several different iterations and that some of these amendments have been kept in, and there are some that we can support, but like so many bills that the government puts before this House, we cannot swallow this bill whole. We simply cannot.

It needs to be noted that over the last year the government has, as a way of excusing this anti-democratic practice of serial use of time allocation to shut down debate in this place, tried to say that since we have debated some of these issues in previous Parliaments, we do not need to give them full airing here, yet this is a case where the Conservatives had a bill ready to go, and as my colleague earlier attested, they could have passed it in March if they had wanted to, but they chose to let it fly, and here we are again.

People must be wondering why the Conservatives would strip out some of these amendments. Why would they reduce the numbers of minor infractions that would potentially lead to criminal records?

We have heard overheated rhetoric from that side too often that they want to use the issue of crime and criminality as something with which to beat people over the head. One has to wonder when we look at the bill whether this is part of a piece of the government. This is about locking things down. This is about crime and about punishment. That is what we are seeing here.

● (2325)

It is really hard to understand why the government would not have retained the amendments proposed by the NDP, which passed at the committee stage last spring after long hours of debate and seemed to have resulted in positive steps forward. By failing to include those amendments in Bill C-15, the Conservatives are undermining the important work of all members in the national defence committee and the recommendations of Canadian Forces representatives during the last session of Parliament.

In other words, the government is not building on the work of past Parliaments. It is not taking best practices or wise counsel. It is not looking at the ways in which parliamentarians have come to mutual consensus. That is what Canadians want to see from this Parliament. They want to see mutual consensus, not dictatorial edicts from a parliamentary majority masquerading as a majority of Canadians who support it, which as we know, is not the case.

Retired Colonel Michel Drapeau has been quoted before in this debate, but I am going to quote him again:

I strongly believe that the summary trial issue must be addressed by this committee. There is currently nothing more important for Parliament to focus on than

fixing a system that affects the legal rights of a significant number of Canadian citizens every year.

That is very interesting, because he particularly calls out those of us in Parliament. Nothing is more important than for Parliament to focus on fixing a broken system as opposed to breaking it even further. This is what we are called on to do in Parliament. This is our job.

In fact, Canadians do not understand the amount of time that has been spent stripping away and undermining the work of Parliament in order to push flawed legislation through. There was an example earlier this year of a piece of legislation on which the government refused to acknowledge any amendments, but then it realized at the final minute that maybe it had better introduce some of the amendments. It missed the deadline and the Speaker ruled that the amendments were inadmissible. This is the kind of government we in the House and Canadians are faced with.

Unfortunately those in the military are also faced with a government that does not like to listen. It is the government's way or the highway, even if the highway is a highway to hell. That is the problem with the government. It is obstinate in its refusal to listen to wise counsel. It would rather drive the bus over the cliff than gear down, look at the map and maybe even ask someone it is driving with if there is a better way forward. That is what New Democrats are saying.

Members on this side of the House have spent years engaged in issues of Canadian justice and fairness within the military. It is fair to say and I think members on the government side would acknowledge that we are reasonable in our issues and our demands. What we are asking the government to do and what all Canadians are expecting is for the government to be reasonable too. That is the Canadian way, and we would like the government behave the way Canadians expect it to behave and Parliament to work.

● (2330)

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was amused by the comment about process, to which my hon. colleague referred.

In the budget debate, the member for Burnaby—New Westminster used up virtually 98% of the time that was available to members of the House by continually speaking about the budget. He did not even allow his own members to discuss the budget, let alone members on this side. I guess that shows a bit about the NDP's respect for process.

The other night we were here for roughly 23 hours, voting time after time, and saw how New Democrats actually slowed down the process that should be expedited in the House, by their trademark arthritic voting pattern when they rose slowly from their chairs.

I would ask my colleague if he would finally, on behalf of the NDP, support the legislation and get it to committee, so it can be studied, and actually stand up for the men and women in uniform.

Government Orders

• (2335)

Mr. Andrew Cash: Mr. Speaker, if I heard and understood the member correctly, he characterized our expressing the concerns of Canadians on the Trojan Horse budget bill that guts Kyoto, that guts environmental oversight and that guts oversight of CSIS as arthritic voting. I think that underlines the cynicism that has crept into the government.

What we are actually trying to do our own side is do what we were elected to do, which is express the concerns, hopes and dreams of Canadians and to hold the government's feet to the fire. If the member calls that arthritic voting, I say shame on him.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the member has more to say about the new-found respect for processes and procedures that the Conservatives are professing on the other side.

I notice that they made reference to the speech by the member for Burnaby—New Westminster on the budget where the time was limited. What it illustrates to me is that the Conservatives did not listen to anything he said. The member used his time to invite Canadians to send their input through emails and Twitter. He used that time to express Canadians' concerns in the House of Commons.

It is very obvious that the Conservatives did not listen to what the member was saying during that 12-hour period because they are not very interested in process or listening.

I would just like the hon. member to comment on both legislation by exhaustion and the lack of listening skills on the other side.

Mr. Andrew Cash: Mr. Speaker, when members on the government side listen to their constituents and express the concerns of their constituents, they get shut down by the government. We have seen this time and time again in this Parliament. We saw it around the budget implementation bill where on the one hand members of the government are in their ridings saying that we need an environmental assessment for something like a quarry, which the bulk of the community does not want, but, "Oops, wait a second, I am about to vote with the government to gut environmental assessments".

That is what members get on the government side for listening to their constituents.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-François Larose (Repentigny, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this is another half measure. We are fed up with them. How can the government take Canadians for complete fools and continually hide behind all sorts of statements without ever actually getting anything done?

I simply cannot understand why, after having the opportunity to do a thorough job, the Conservatives are hiding behind a committee when the work should have been completed. For the last 10, 15 or 20 years, professionals, members of the military and experts have been requesting changes that should be made.

These amendments were brought forward and agreed to during the previous Parliament. Everyone agreed. Now the Conservatives are proposing half measures by saying that they are going to send the bill to committee for review, but they are not giving any guarantees.

I cannot understand why the government is so arrogant and why it does not take the time to listen to what we are telling it yet again: its work is incomplete and it should have done it right from the outset.

[*English*]

Mr. Andrew Cash: Mr. Speaker, I could not agree with my hon. colleague more.

The government shows a lack of respect for Parliament far too often. We have members working in good faith, and I think that most of the members, even on the other side, would agree that at the committee stage members try to come to the best possible solutions around important matters.

We can battle our partisan battles till the Speaker tells us to stop, but what I think Canadians want to see is good legislation that is fair and balanced. What we are arguing for tonight and what we have been working on since this was Bill C-41 and before, is something that does not just come from our side. There are experts and studies that support our position, especially around the issues we raised tonight.

• (2340)

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when the Conservatives talk about procedure and rules of the House, one of the rules I learned in a hurry, because I am fairly new here, was this thing called time allocation. The first time someone mentioned that we were having a time allocation motion, I asked what it was. I was told that it was basically shutting down debate on the very legislation that was in front of us. Not only that, the government has used that over 25 times now to shut down debate in Parliament.

Now the Conservatives are lecturing us about the due process that we have in this place, yet they are the ones who have been constantly using time allocation to shut down debate. In addition to that, if debate is being shut down, how am I supposed to represent my constituents from my riding?

That is one part of it. The other part is the amendments. That is where in committee people bring forth good ideas that could work better for the laws that we are making here. However, there has not been a single amendment from the opposition that the Conservatives accepted.

When the Conservatives talk about due process or the process in this place, are they speaking out of both sides of their mouth?

Mr. Andrew Cash: Mr. Speaker, as my father would say, they are speaking through their hat. It is true that they are playing two halves against the middle most of the time. They like to talk about due process and they like to hector us and all Canadians around process in this place, yet they subvert it and play tricks with it on a constant basis.

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I will double back to the beginning of my little speech tonight to say that had the government not prorogued Parliament in 2007, we might have had a decent bill then. Had the Conservatives not broken their own fixed election laws in 2008, we would have had something then. Had they not been in contempt of Parliament in 2011 we might have had something then. They could right some of their sins of the past by actually looking at this thing in a sensible way, looking at what they had in Bill C-41 and listening to some of the good advice and wise counsel from our side and from others across Canada.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to join with my many competent and capable colleagues who have spoken tonight. I want to recognize and pay tribute to some of the wisdom we have heard on this side of the House. It has been a truly stimulating debate. There have been a lot of good points and well argued.

If I could, I will pick up and preface my remarks to Bill C-15 by following through on the theme that was introduced most recently by my colleague from Davenport. I will focus on one word in the same context that he was speaking, and that word is “consultation”. We have members of our caucus on the front bench here who are experienced lawyers, and they know that the word “consultation” has legal weight. It is not just as simple as a conversation between two people. There is the duty to consult, and the Supreme Court of Canada has spoken at length to the meaning of true consultation in the context of first nations and aboriginal people. What the Supreme Court has arrived at is that true consultation not only includes the conversation and exchange of ideas, it includes the accommodation of some of the reasonable concerns brought forward by the other party.

I have been here 15 years now and I have noticed a couple of colleagues who have been here as long as I have, six terms. We used to do that extensively, even in majority governments. The majority government would consult with the opposition. If the members were sincere about moving a piece of legislation forward that they knew had merit and that there was a real public interest in achieving success of that legislation, the House leaders would meet and maybe even the leaders of the parties would meet and they would discuss what it would take and what was needed to make this work. It was not quite Camelot. It was not beautiful or anything, but it was functional. Parliament used to function that way.

What we are experiencing today, and my colleague from Vegreville will probably agree, is unprecedented. I do not think there is any precedent in Canadian history. I have talked to former leaders of our party going away back. Ed Broadbent shared with me how that was a not uncommon occurrence, that they would have dinner together. The leader of the NDP and the prime minister of the day would have dinner from time to time and talk over the legislative agenda coming up for that fall session. There would be some horse trading and some feeling out of each other. Accommodating the legitimate concerns brought forward by the other parties is not a sign of weakness. It is a sign of maturity and the public would welcome it, the public expects it and I think the public misses it in this Parliament.

I caution my colleagues on the Conservative side. I am not a scholar or an academic but I have been here long enough to ascertain that our parliamentary democracy is a fragile construct. When it

operates well it is the best system in the world. However, all parties have to stipulate themselves to a certain set of rules and part of that is accommodating one another's legitimate concerns because the very nature of our electoral system is that no one party represents all the people. However, when a party is lucky enough to form government, it has an obligation to represent all the people, even those who did not vote for it.

I learned from my friend Gary Dewar that the first thing a smart government does when it forms government is to try to convince the people who did not vote for it that it is not such a bad thing, that it is not the end of the world that their side lost and our side won because the government will accommodate some of the voters' legitimate concerns in the process of governing. There is no evidence of that whatsoever in this Parliament and that leads to the frustration felt on our side.

We, on this side of the House, represent roughly 60% of all Canadians. They elected us here to speak on their behalf and to bring their legitimate points of view into the debate for consideration by the ruling party. It has an obligation and I argue that it will do irreparable harm to the integrity of our democratic institutions if it fails to accommodate those legitimate concerns that we bring forward.

● (2345)

The integrity of our institutions is not like some kind of a light switch that can be turned off for a while and then turned back on at will. It cannot be corrected that easily.

At the same time that the government is undermining the integrity of our democratic institutions, it is fueling the cynicism of an already jaded electorate who already has a fairly low opinion of government and a lack of confidence that government can and should play an active role in the well-being of the economy and their quality of life issues. The neo-conservatives have told them time and time again that government is bad, that government should be reduced. The Conservatives are an anti-government government. The Conservative government is a government that does not believe in playing an active role.

I notice my colleague who was elected the same year I was is somehow still with us. We keep asking ourselves how we both keep getting re-elected. He believes firmly that less is more when it comes to government, that there is no role.

If that message is continually pounded home, more people will ask themselves why they should even bother voting because governments are bad things, governments never listen to legitimate concerns anyway. It is an unvirtuous, whatever that term is, downward spiral.

An hon. member: A self-fulfilling prophecy.

Mr. Pat Martin: A self-fulfilling prophecy, Mr. Speaker. That is right. I would like to know what the government's end plan is, the conclusion. Where does that lead us when we undermine the ability of governments to play an active role? I do not know who we leave it up to.

Government Orders

In the context of this legislation, the legitimate concerns brought forward in the previous Parliament were accommodated by committee and they were stripped away. Why should we believe the government? The Conservatives ask why we have to be up until midnight. If we are serious about moving the bill forward, we will let it go to committee. They say they will let it move forward. We do not believe them. They have not earned our trust or our confidence. There are no tacit agreements. There are no deals. There are no handshakes in this Parliament. The 41st Parliament is handshake-free. That is a real shame and a real loss.

I am starting to sound like an old guy. I lament and I miss the common sense of purpose that we enjoyed at one time when we were all elected to Parliament, yes to different parties, but moving forward, paddling our canoe in the same direction in the best interests of the country, especially in this matter, in the best interests and the well-being of our men and women in the armed forces. Surely this is one example of where we could extend the goodwill to make this particular bill work. We have been burned in the most egregious possible way.

I was wondering how I was going to use my time in this debate. To understand why we behave the way we do, we have to scratch the surface a bit and back up and take a look. I hope members can understand the level of frustration.

I represent a lot of armed forces personnel in my riding: the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry that was at the Kapyong Barracks until recently when it was moved to Edmonton and the Cameron Highlanders Reservists at the Minto Armoury in my riding. A lot of people do not realize that Winnipeg has a navy but the HMCS *Chippawa* is based in my riding of Winnipeg Centre. The 17th Wing Air Command is in Winnipeg. The Sgt Tommy Prince Cadet Corps, Canada's newest cadet corps named after the most decorated soldier in the Canadian armed forces, a first nations man named Tommy Prince affiliated with the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, is in Winnipeg.

When I enter debates about the military I like to make reference to my own father who was a lieutenant colonel by the end of his career and secretary treasurer of a Canadian military intelligence association, what he called his spy agency. He served in Italy in the liberation of Holland. He often spoke about the veterans who came home from war and were promised so much and treated so badly. It was a recurrent theme throughout his life. He spoke of the veterans as we licked the envelopes, all of us kids around the dining-room table stuffing envelopes for the dues for the Canadian military intelligence association. That is how I started as an organizer, I think.

● (2350)

He often commented on the “deemed never to have served” for the 14,100 veterans of the Second World War. In the demobilization of a million-some-odd soldiers, some of them did not get to the office in the correct period of time to hand in their papers. In fact, when some went, the lineup was so long that they were told to come back in a couple of months. They went back to the farm and did not return in time, so they were deemed AWOL.

The way the government solved that problem was that instead of dispatching military police to round them up, the government passed an act of Parliament to deem them never to have served. Their

military records were erased and their benefits were erased, 14,100 of them. It was a terrible injustice.

Many had to come back to try to have their service recognized now that they were not 21-year-olds any more. They were getting married and having children, and they wanted the benefits due to a veteran, whether it was housing or education. Of course, by then Parliament had deemed them never to have served.

My father was adamant that this was one of the greatest injustices to his colleagues in the Second World War. I am trying to imagine what he would have to say on this today. Colonel Drapeau reminds me of my dad physically and in the types of issues that he champions.

I believe that an awful lot of World War II veterans, were they alive today, would be of the same mind as the debate that we heard on this side of the House for the last couple of hours. The idea of the morale of the armed forces being compromised, undermined and jeopardized by a system that is simply not fair and the lack of a grievance system that meets the test of natural justice and the justice afforded to people outside of the armed forces would be galling to the sensibilities of anybody who served and wore the uniform.

I am a trade unionist. The combination of things that describe me in my CV are the things that the Conservatives probably most loathe. I am a socialist, a trade unionist and an NDP member of Parliament. I served as a union leader, to make me even more unpalatable to my colleague for Vegreville—Wainwright.

I was a union boss, I guess one could say, so I know the need for a fair system to deal with grievances in any kind of institutional setting, be it a large workforce or the Canadian military. There is not only an advantage but also a need to have an avenue of recourse for those who feel that the system has not treated them fairly.

That avenue of recourse has to meet certain tests. It cannot be arbitrary and it cannot be biased. It has to meet the same tests as our justice system. The very system that use to measure the health and well-being of our democracy is the health and well-being of our justice system.

How can anybody think that the current system is fair if it is one's commanding officer or one of his subordinates who rules on the grievance? There is no arms-length in the process.

These legitimate issues, brought forward by some of the most respected jurists in the land, led to the amendments in two previous incarnations of the bill. One was the Rt. Hon. Antonio Lamer, the former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, and another was Patrick LeSage of the Superior Court of Ontario.

These people know what they are talking about, and their observations and recommendations deserve implementation. They do not deserve to become a political football, subject to whims and vagaries. They should be handled better. This is one example in which I urge the government of the day to perhaps try something new.

• (2355)

We have three years that we have to live together before the next federal election. If the Conservatives continue with their bully tactics, they are not only doing irreparable harm to the integrity of our democratic institutions, they will watch themselves plummet even further in the polls.

Canadians have pretty much had it with these guys. Canadians are getting fed up with the way they conduct themselves. That is starting to resonate. Now that people are getting some idea of who these people they elected really are and how they conduct themselves, they do not like it.

The impression is that they are a bunch of bullies and thugs. They may not realize that. Some of them are nice people. Individually, they are nice people. I am the first person to admit that. Collectively, the persona they have put forward to the Canadian people is that they are a bunch of thugs who will get their way and they do not care what they trample on or who they trample over to get it. They will never accommodate a single issue or a single legitimate concern by the opposition because they view it as a sign of weakness and that is not the way these guys behave.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order. The time for government orders has expired. The hon. member for Winnipeg Centre will have four minutes remaining when this matter returns before the House.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

• (2400)

[*English*]

SEARCH AND RESCUE

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak to the issue of search and rescue, which is so important, not just to the riding of Random—Burin—St. George's but to all of Canada. In fact, the idea that anyone could require the services of search and rescue and not be able to avail of them, I would suggest was probably unheard of in Newfoundland and Labrador, until recently when the government went to the extreme of closing down the maritime rescue sub-centre in St. John's, Newfoundland.

The problem is that those people who make a living from the sea, who work on oil rigs, who fish, who travel on ocean-going vessels, who travel on Marine Atlantic, are all at the mercy of the weather and the ocean. To suggest it is appropriate to close down the maritime rescue sub-centre and have the issue with respect to search and rescue handled by the joint rescue centre out of Halifax is something that leaves one wondering why the government would even go down this path.

To suggest that it would save \$1 million by doing this is foolhardy. We know only too well that will not happen. We know that the joint rescue centres in Halifax and in Trenton cannot accommodate those who will be put out of work, as well as hire

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others, in the existing facility. It will have to expand that facility. There is a cost associated with that expansion, and we know only too well what happens when we have to expand a facility. Therefore, for the government to suggest that this will save money, again begs this question, how much is a life worth?

We only know too well in Newfoundland and Labrador what it means to be at sea and to require the services of search and rescue. It has not been easy for people who make a living from the sea. Being all too familiar with the issues that arise when people are in distress on the ocean, I can say they really need that comfort that someone in search and rescue will be able to respond immediately to their needs and to make sure they are saved.

In a lot of cases, the maritime rescue sub-centre did just that. In fact, it responded to over 500 distress calls a year, which resulted in over 600 lives being saved.

Therefore, for the government to even think about closing the maritime rescue sub-centre, as it has done, points to the carelessness and recklessness of this decision. It will mean the loss of life. Anybody who has any appreciation for people who work on the ocean knows only too well what it means to try to make a living off the ocean, and to go down this path is indeed a reckless and irresponsible one.

When we talk about search and rescue, we cannot speak of it in Newfoundland and Labrador without talking about Burton Winters, the 14-year-old young man who should never have lost his life. We know only too well how difficult the terrain and weather can be in Labrador. When that young man went missing, for there not to have been a search and rescue helicopter made available, again speaks to the issue of what the government is doing with respect to search and rescue.

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to respond to the issue raised by my hon. colleague, the member for Random—Burin—St. George's, regarding the consolidation of the rescue centres in St. John's and Quebec City with the joint rescue coordination centres in Halifax and Trenton.

Let me please begin by first offering my deepest condolences to the Winters family. Burton's story has touched Canadians across the country, and our thoughts are with the community of Makkovik during this difficult time.

It remains to be said that the consolidation of the marine rescue sub-centres is in no way connected to this tragedy. In order to be respectful, perhaps it is best that we refrain from crafting tenuous links between two entirely separate issues to show compassion for the family and community as they mourn such an unfortunate loss.

The Canadian search and rescue system is comprised of hundreds of federal, provincial and local partner organizations, each with their own distinct mandates and responsibilities.

The marine rescue sub-centre located in St. John's, Newfoundland was operated by the Canadian Coast Guard until its responsibilities were transferred to the joint rescue coordination centre in Halifax on April 25.

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The mandate of the Canadian Coast Guard with regard to search and rescue is clear: to provide maritime resources in support of search and rescue in areas of federal responsibility. This explains why the sub-centre was not involved in this incident. Its mandated responsibility, and therefore area of expertise, is in on-the-water response. Ground search and rescue, as was required in this incident, is conducted under the jurisdiction of individual provinces and territories.

With that being said, this incident only serves to highlight the value in consolidating the marine rescue sub-centres into the joint rescue coordination centres located in Halifax and Trenton. This initiative will facilitate incident response coordination by co-locating both air and maritime personnel in a single rescue centre. Co-location will provide for closer communication between Canadian Coast Guard and Canadian Forces personnel, ultimately to the benefit of Canadians.

The decision to consolidate the rescue centres in St. John's and Quebec City with the joint rescue coordination centres in Halifax and Trenton resulted from the Government of Canada's strategic review exercise, which provides us with the opportunity to streamline programs and the way in which services are delivered to Canadians.

It was determined that search and rescue coordination services could be delivered in a more efficient and effective manner, with no impact on service delivery or safety. This process ensures that the tax dollars of hard-working Canadians are used in the most efficient way possible, a value that Canadians demand of us.

It is for these reasons that Fisheries and Oceans Canada will not reconsider its decision to consolidate the marine rescue sub-centres in St. John's and Quebec City with the joint rescue coordination centres in Halifax and Trenton. Implementation is currently well under way in co-operation with our partners at the Canadian Forces.

Finally, I would like to reaffirm this government's commitment to ensuring the safety and security of all Canadians. Despite the best efforts of everyone involved, it is unfortunately impossible to save everyone, as recent events humbly remind us. However, it is the duty of this government to provide the means for a strong, responsive search and rescue system in Canada and it is the dedication of search and rescue personnel across this nation that make such a promise reality.

• (2405)

Ms. Judy Foote: Mr. Speaker, we have heard that line so many times that one would think by now the government would understand that we are not buying it. No one is buying it. The family of Burton Winters is not buying it. People in Newfoundland and Labrador are not buying it. Canadians are not buying it.

It simply is not true that there is no connection. In fact, JRCC out of Halifax was called. There was an aircraft available, but it chose not to deploy it in case it was needed elsewhere. The premier of Newfoundland and Labrador said that if an aircraft was available that was not being used for its primary function, then it should have been deployed on a humanitarian basis.

This was a 14-year-old young man out of Labrador who was lost. He was missing. If an aircraft was available, it should have been

deployed to look for this young man instead of being held in the event that something happened at sea.

Mr. Colin Carrie: Mr. Speaker, Fisheries and Oceans Canada remains steadfast in our dedication to the safety of mariners traversing Canadian waters.

While what occurred in Makkovik was undoubtedly tragic, it has absolutely nothing to do with the St. John's marine rescue sub-centre. The responsibility of coordinating and responding to ground search and rescue incidents falls outside the mandate of the Canadian Coast Guard.

However, this incident does highlight the value of consolidation. By co-locating both air and maritime personnel in a single rescue centre, there would be closer communication between Canadian Coast Guard and Canadian Forces personnel, ultimately to the benefit of mariners in Canadian waters.

Finally, I would like to reaffirm this government's commitment to marine safety and our dedication to providing the means necessary to ensure that Canada's search and rescue system remains among the world's best.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Regarding the second item on tonight's agenda, the hon. member for Edmonton—Strathcona is not present to raise the matter for which adjournment notice has been given. Accordingly, the notice is deemed withdrawn.

[*Translation*]

SEARCH AND RESCUE

Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, nobody can argue that Canada, which is surrounded by three oceans and has the longest coastline in the world, is a maritime nation.

Inhabitants of the Gaspé and the Magdalen Islands are the perfect example of this. In my riding, the coastal communities' way of life depends on marine safety.

It seems totally logical to me that good comprehension of a distress call is fundamental to ensuring adequate maritime safety. I would therefore like to know how good comprehension will be possible once the Conservative government closes the Canadian Coast Guard's Quebec City search and rescue centre, the country's only officially bilingual centre.

How can the government ensure that the lives of the mariners, fishers and recreational boaters in my riding, most of whom are francophone, will be protected if the operator does not understand them? It seems to me that good knowledge of the local environment is also critical to ensuring marine safety.

I would therefore like to know why the government is closing the Rivière-au-Renard marine radio station, which has been supporting navigation, communications, marine traffic and rescue operations for over 100 years. Because people working at the station have extensive knowledge of currents, tides and the geography of the seabed and the surrounding area, they are key to ensuring safety at sea.

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Sixteen employees, including twelve communications officers, work at the Rivière-au-Renard station. This is another serious blow to the economy of the Gaspé and the Magdalen Islands. It will result in the loss of \$1.5 million in payroll and other spinoffs for my region.

Like the changes to the owner-operator and fleet separation policy that threaten the livelihood of coastal communities, and the changes to employment insurance that will penalize seasonal industries, closing the Rivière-au-Renard station is another direct attack on the Gaspé and Magdalen Islands. Why are the Conservatives attacking my region again?

Not only are cuts to the Canadian Coast Guard endangering the lives of the inhabitants of the Gaspé and the Magdalen Islands, but the savings resulting from these cuts have not been identified. The Conservatives talk about saving only \$1 million by closing the Quebec City centre, but we do not know how much they will spend on relocating employees. How much money do they expect to really save just on the Rivière-au-Renard centre?

In addition, the Minister of Finance claims that these cuts will only affect “back-office operations”. Contrary to what he said, it is obvious to me that marine safety should not be considered back-office operations by the federal government. That is further proof that the Conservatives are completely out of touch with the regions.

The reality is that this government is abandoning mariners, fishers or recreational boaters in the Gaspé and Magdalen Islands region in order to save minuscule amounts. Will this government finally listen to the NDP and rescind its decisions to close the search and rescue centres in Quebec City and St. John's and the Rivière-au-Renard marine radio station?

• (2410)

[*English*]

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to respond to the issue raised by my hon. colleague, the member of Parliament for Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, regarding the consolidation of the marine rescue sub-centre located in Quebec City with the joint rescue coordination centres located in Halifax and Trenton.

This is an issue that we have addressed repeatedly in the House, as it seems there is quite a lot of confusion over the facts. Put simply, much of what opposition members are stating is simply untrue. Today, I want to set the record straight.

I will begin by reiterating that Fisheries and Oceans Canada remains steadfast in our dedication to the safety of all Canadians from coast to coast to coast. We are a national and international leader in marine safety and the Canadian Coast Guard's search and rescue program is among the best in the world.

As we have stated many times before, this change does not affect the availability of search and rescue resources. Coast Guard ships and the Coast Guard auxiliary will continue to respond to emergencies as they have previously with the joint rescue coordination centres maintaining the current levels of service provided by the Canadian Coast Guard. We will continue to ensure that timely and appropriate maritime search and rescue coordination and response services are available to all mariners.

With regard to the preliminary report by the Commissioner of Official Languages, the Canadian Coast Guard has already taken action to address the key issues raised in the report.

However, the allegation that bilingual capacity is scandalously inadequate is simply inaccurate. In fact, the national level of bilingual capacity will be maintained and enhanced over time, above and beyond that which is currently provided.

Here are the facts. Currently, bilingual services are provided by two rescue centres: the joint rescue coordination centre Halifax and marine rescue sub-centre Quebec. The consolidation team has taken great care to ensure that this capacity be enhanced before the Quebec centre is fully consolidated.

First, our ongoing campaign to recruit successful bilingual applicants continues to bring forward motivated professionals who are dedicated to ensuring public safety.

Second, we are providing existing maritime search and rescue coordinators with additional language training.

Last, we have added additional bilingual coordinator positions and increased the required level of language proficiency. With such enhanced bilingual capacity, French-speaking mariners can be confident that their calls for assistance will be answered, as has always been the case.

I will assure members that this transition will have no impact on existing search and rescue coordination service standards. Coordination services will still be available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week in both official languages and will be delivered by the joint rescue coordination centres in Halifax and Trenton. The provision for bilingual services is critical. Recognizing this, the Canadian Coast Guard has taken steps to address this important issue.

We understand that change can be disconcerting to some, as sometimes the future can be difficult to predict. However, in this case, there is quite simply no cause for concern as we have taken steps to address these requirements. The Canadian Coast Guard prides itself in providing reliable services that Canadians can rely on and this will not change. Such is the pledge that we are committed to keep. Public safety is and always will be this government's first priority.

• (2415)

Mr. Philip Toone: Mr. Speaker, I find the member's comments to be dismissive and absolutely abhorrent. We already have incidents at sea where people's lives have been put at risk because of a lack of sufficient francophone services. There was a French mariner who was not able to get adequate francophone response. This is a situation of transition that the government is saying will cause any harm. We have already put people's lives at risk. We have already put at risk the life of another mariner who could not get any service from St. John's because the centre was closed and the call had to be relayed to Rome. A doctor in Rome probably has a very hard time understanding, first, the accent of Newfoundlanders and, second, the geography of the region.

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Frankly, saying that we have no reason to worry is a gross misunderstanding of the situation. We are putting lives at risk.

Mr. Colin Carrie: Mr. Speaker, public safety is the government's first priority. As we have stated many times before, the consolidation of the marine rescue sub-centre in Quebec into the joint rescue coordination centres in Halifax and Trenton will not affect the availability of search and rescue resources. The national level of bilingual capacity will be maintained and enhanced over time, above the levels currently in place. With such enhanced bilingual capacity, Canadians, including French-speaking mariners, can be confident that their calls for assistance will be answered in their official language of choice.

We recognize that some people are concerned with this transition. However, I stand before the House tonight to reassure Canadians that bilingual search and rescue services will always be available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week in Canada. Such is our commitment to Canadian mariners now and such is our pledge for the future. The safety and security of Canadians will not be compromised.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until later this day at 2 p.m., pursuant to an order made on Monday, June 11, and Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 12:19 a.m.)

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