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(HANSARD)

Thursday, October 18, 2012

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, October 18, 2012

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

• (1000)

[*English*]

PUBLIC SECTOR INTEGRITY COMMISSIONER

The Speaker: I have the honour, pursuant to section 38 of the Public Servants Disclosure Protection Act, to lay upon the table the special report of the Public Sector Integrity Commissioner concerning an investigation into a disclosure of wrongdoing.

[*Translation*]

This report is deemed permanently referred to the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[*English*]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS AND ESTIMATES

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 109, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to the seventh report of the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates on strengthening parliamentary scrutiny of estimates of supply.

* * *

JOBS AND GROWTH ACT, 2012

Hon. John Baird (for the Minister of Finance) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-45, A second Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on March 29, 2012 and other measures.

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

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Hon. Rob Moore (Fundy Royal, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the fifth report of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage in relation to Bill S-201, An Act respecting a National Philanthropy Day.

The committee has studied the bill and has decided to report the bill back to the House without amendments.

* * *

SAFE FOODS FOR CANADIANS ACT

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC) moved that Bill S-11, An Act respecting food commodities, including their inspection, their safety, their labelling and advertising, their import, export and interprovincial trade, the establishment of standards for them, the registration or licensing of persons who perform certain activities related to them, the establishment of standards governing establishments where those activities are performed and the registration of establishments where those activities are performed, be read the first time.

(Motion agreed to and bill read the first time)

* * *

[*Translation*]

CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill S-209, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (prize fights).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to introduce Bill S-209, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (prize fights).

This legislation seeks to amend the Criminal Code by expanding the list of permitted sports under the prize fighting provisions. This change to Canada's prize fighting laws is long overdue.

Mixed martial arts have come a long way as a sport in the past 20 years. Their safety record is admirable, their product is popular throughout Canada and worldwide, and the list of Canadians like Georges St-Pierre who excel at this sport is constantly growing.

I am proud to do my part as a member of Parliament to modernize our laws, since this particular part of the Criminal Code has not been updated since 1934.

Routine Proceedings

•(1005)

[English]

Currently, close to 100,000 Canadians who practice combat sports, some of these sports are recognized by the International Olympic committee, such as judo and tae kwon do, can be considered to doing so illegally under the current provisions of the Criminal Code. Bill S-209 would merely correct this oversight so that Canada can effectively regulate acceptable combat sports openly.

Seeing as how this bill is non-controversial and is a sensible piece of legislation that clearly addresses a blind spot in the Criminal Code, I look forward to seeing the bill passed expeditiously with the support and co-operation of all members.

(Motion agreed to and bill read the first time)

Hon. Gerry Ritz: Mr. Speaker, there has been consultation with all of the parties regarding the second reading of Bill S-11, the safe foods for Canadians act, and I would ask for unanimous consent for the following motion. I move that notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House, Bill S-11, An Act respecting food commodities, including their inspection, their safety, their labelling and advertising, their import, export and interprovincial trade, the establishment of standards for them, the registration or licensing of persons who perform certain activities related to them, the establishment of standards governing establishments where those activities are performed and the registration of establishments where those activities are performed, be deemed read a second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food.

The Speaker: Does the hon. minister have the unanimous consent of the House to propose this motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, I rise on this point of order because I am slightly confused by what the Minister of Agriculture just proposed. He suggested in his submission that there had been some sort of consultations that had been agreed to by the other parties. The bill sat in the Senate for more than 120 days. The bill was also killed by the government by prorogation. We have told the government quite clearly that we are looking to expeditiously move this through to the second phase into the committee for study—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Allow me this, Mr. Speaker, because I thought the government actually had some respect for the parliamentary process. If the Conservatives sought some urgency on this, clearly more than four months in the Senate does not describe urgency. If they had sought some urgency on this, why was it killed through prorogation in the previous iteration of the bill. It seems like a strange idea that they would now come through and say that there have been consultations to do what the minister has just suggested when there have not been.

We will move this expeditiously through while respecting the democratic principles that I thought we had all agreed with.

*[Translation]***BUSINESS OF SUPPLY**

Ms. Nycole Turmel (Hull—Aylmer, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I believe there is unanimous consent among all parties to adopt the following motion. I move:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House, at the conclusion of today's debate on the opposition motion in the name of the Member for Welland, all questions necessary to dispose of the motion be deemed put and a recorded division deemed requested and deferred to Tuesday, October 23rd, 2012, at the expiry of the time provided for Government Orders.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member for Hull—Aylmer have the unanimous consent of the House to move this motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Speaker: The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

*[English]***PETITIONS**

RIGHTS OF THE UNBORN

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am still getting petitions in which the petitioners ask that Canada's 400-year-old definition of a human being be debated, be dealt with at committee and be changed to reflect the knowledge gained through modern science.

MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present this petition regarding CCSVI. The Conservative dominated Senate committee is refusing to hear from those who have MS. Can anyone imagine a committee silencing a cancer patient, a heart patient or someone living in poverty? Why, then, are MS patients being silenced as well as a well-known Canadian CCSVI expert, Dr. Sandy McDonald? Why is the government shutting down these important voices?

The petitioners call for the Minister of Health to consult experts actively engaged in the diagnosis and treatment of CCSVI to undertake phase III clinical trials on an urgent basis at multiple sites across Canada and to require follow-up care.

•(1010)

JUSTICE

Ms. Roxanne James (Scarborough Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a number of petitions today from concerned Canadians asking that Omar Khadr be tried for treason under the laws of Canada for his actions against coalition forces in Afghanistan.

SECURITY CERTIFICATES

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present two petitions. The first relates to the use of security certificates.

Business of Supply

The petitioners from the Toronto area call on the House to note that the use of these provisions really offends traditions of common law and respect for human rights going back to Magna Carta and they ask for the House to take action against security certificates.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is from residents of the Vancouver area calling for the House to take action to ensure that the coastline of British Columbia is safe from the risk of spills from large supertankers.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Cardigan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present a petition on behalf of a number of Canadians who wish to draw to the attention of the House that freshwater is essential for life and vital to the social, spiritual and economic well-being of Canadians. Canada's Experimental Lakes Area is a unique world-renowned facility for freshwater research and education. Since 1968, the ELA has been a global leader in conducting whole ecosystem experiments that have been critical in shaping environmental policy and understanding the human impact on lakes and fishers.

Therefore, the petitioners call upon the House to recognize the importance of ELA to the Government of Canada's mandate to study, preserve and protect aquatic ecosystems, reverse the decision to close the ELA research station and continue to staff and provide financial resources to the ELA at the current or higher level of commitment.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—FOOD SAFETY

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP) moved:

That, in light of the current contaminated meat scandal at XL Foods, and considering that the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food has not learned the lesson from the 2008 listeriosis scandal that cost twenty-two Canadians their lives, this House call on the government to restore Canadians' confidence in Canada's food safety system by: (a) removing the current minister from office and assigning the food safety portfolio to a minister who can restore public trust; (b) reversing budget cuts and halting the de-regulation of Canada's food safety system; (c) directing the Auditor General to conduct an immediate assessment of food safety procedures and resources and report his findings to the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with my colleague from Berthier—Maskinongé.

I am pleased to speak today to our opposition day motion, inasmuch as it has a very serious tone to it from the perspective that

one never takes lightly the position that calls for a minister of the Crown to step aside. It should never be taken lightly and, in this case, it is with a great deal of thought and understanding of this issue that this side has come forward with a motion to this House to seek the resignation of the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food. It lends one back to exactly why one would want to do that.

What is the food safety system all about? It is about a chain and, as we know, the chain is only as strong as its weakest link and, in this particular case, the weakest link in the chain was at a processing facility.

Cattlemen, producers and ranchers across the country have worked extremely hard over the last number of years, and, indeed, decades, to have a first-class industry that is recognized worldwide to be the best in the world. They have continued to do that. They, just like consumers who bought from the retail stores, have found themselves the unwilling victims of a processor. Some of the blame lays at the feet of the processing plant, without a doubt, especially those who were responsible for its inspection systems and not allowing them to happen.

● (1015)

We watched this crisis unfold over the weeks, and in fact we still see recalls happening. As of just the other night, CFIA put out another notice that said that another batch of meat from that facility had to be taken off the retail shelves. At the end of the day, it is the minister who is ultimately responsible for food safety and the food safety system. That is his responsibility and his alone.

Where we believe he failed in the system was not ensuring the Canadian public was treated in the same manner as we would treat anyone else. We decided on September 13 to stop meat shipments going to the Americans because of safety concerns, some that the Americans had identified and some that the minister said, in the House, that we identified in this country.

It is not just a question of saying that the Americans asked us to stop. We decided that because we found E. coli on September 4. Within 10 days, we said to our American counterparts that we would not send any more of this tainted beef to them. We did not do that for Canadians and yet this is a minister of the Crown in this country. He is not in the cabinet in the U.S. He belongs here. He is responsible to the House, to his constituents and ultimately to the Canadian public to ensure that our food system is safe. He failed miserably in that case.

Not only have we been putting questions to him on a constant basis, but we have seen some of the comments he has made publicly. His most recent was here in the House yesterday, which he apologized for, when he decided to describe the emergency debate as "silly". I am not sure why one would suggest it was silly when we have a crisis of this magnitude.

What brought on the crisis? Why is CFIA finding itself in the place where it is?

Business of Supply

There was an ongoing back and forth about money and numbers and all of the rest of it. However, what we do know is that the minister actually signed the document of planned spending for plans and priorities for the Canadian Food Inspection Agency for this year, 2012-13, which said that its budget would decline by \$46.6 million.

That is not me finding a page somewhere that someone else wrote. This is under the signature of the minister. The minister signed that \$46.6 million would be taken away, would go into decline. He also said, in the same report that his signature is affixed to, that 314 full-time equivalents, FTEs in the jargon of human resource managers, will be eliminated in the next two years. It flies in the face of the government's assertions that we have 700 net new inspectors.

When we look at the absolute numbers, we can see in 2012-13 that the numbers are less than they were two years ago, as much as it pains me to say that. I know it pains the other side but the difficulty with numbers is that they are what they are. When the minister signs \$46.6 million in cuts, it is his signature not this side's signature that has been tied to it.

Today it is kind of prophetic that we are getting a new implementation piece of the budget. If we look at the Conservatives' budget, we see that \$56.1 million will be taken out of CFIA on a go-forward basis. That is also a decline. The minister is also responsible for that.

What other pieces and attributes of the system have gone wrong?

We know the compliance verification system is one of the backbones of the safety system. It was a pilot program started in 2005 that continued on right through 2008 when we had a listeriosis crisis. The minister today was the minister responsible then. Twenty-two people died in 2008 because of listeriosis and yet we were running a pilot program in CVS that was never verified.

There were two committees struck. One was a subcommittee of the agriculture committee of the House to study listeriosis, which I had the great pleasure of sitting on and looking at all of that. In addition, the government appointed an independent inquiry through Ms. Sheila Weatherill who decided to look at the same thing. Remarkably enough, the committee's and Ms. Weatherill's recommendations were very similar, minus a couple of differences here or there.

•(1020)

One of the things that Ms. Weatherill said had to happen was that there absolutely had to be an audit, not a review but an audit, of the compliance verification system for two reasons. First, it was a pilot program and it had to be proven that it actually worked. She said to make sure it does what it is supposed to do and that it will do what people think it will do. Second, figure out how much it needs to be resourced. If no one knows how much it needs to be resourced, it does not matter if it is actually the best system in the world. It would never work if it is not appropriately resourced.

What did we find out? The government will say that it had PricewaterhouseCoopers look at this. That is absolutely true; it did. It did a review. Let me quote Carole Swan, who is the former president of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. She told reporters that Agriculture Canada did not conduct a traditional audit. "They didn't conduct it as an audit", Carole Swan said.

If the former president of CFIA says an audit was not conducted, I have to take her at her word because she was the president of the CFIA. She was tasked with getting the audit done and she said it was not done and that they just did a review.

If that is the case, at the very least one would think the government would want to make sure that the compliance verification system actually does what it thinks it does and that it is resourced to the extent it needs to be, whatever that resource capacity is. Because it has never been audited, we do not know. We do not know how many inspectors should be in meat hygiene plants. We do not have a clue because an audit was not done. The review counted the numbers, but it only gives a number.

That is why New Democrats say we need to it from base one. We cannot wait five years to do a review. What would we measure it against? We do not know what we started with. In five years we will have a baseline. We need a baseline today that actually says what this is all about.

What is needed here is leadership and what we have seen from the minister is a lack thereof. That is why the House needs to tell the minister that it is time to leave the portfolio and put it in the hands of someone who will show true leadership. This is not a first-time event, unfortunately, for the minister. It does not give me a great deal of satisfaction to stand in my place and ask for it.

This is not about what we should do or politics. It is not. It is about ministerial accountability. The minister now needs to stand in this place and say he understands what happened and that he is, indeed, stepping aside.

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, earlier this morning the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food tried to present a motion before the House fast-tracking Bill S-11, the safe food for Canadians act, claiming it to be a panacea for food safety. Yet the current Meat Inspection Act, section 13, gives the CFIA full authority to demand production of whatever documents may be necessary, including documents related to testing, and compels the manager or owner of the plant to produce those products and facilitate any investigation. We have seen with the closure of the plant that clearly the CFIA has the authority to enforce its rules.

I am wondering if the member could comment on this trick, this ruse, that is being played by the government over Bill S-11.

Mr. Malcolm Allen: Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Guelph is absolutely right about Bill S-11. If there was such a real need to push this through, then why did it languish in the Senate for 120 days? Why did the Conservatives not shove it through?

•(1025)

Mr. Nathan Cullen: There was a summer break.

Mr. Malcolm Allen: I hear my colleague across the way helping me.

Business of Supply

The reality is that they have a majority in the Senate. If they actually wanted to move it by unanimous consent, why did they not do it over there if that was the urgency?

Clearly, what we saw in this crisis was that the ability of the CFIA to close the plant to exports to the U.S. was there and carried out, and that the closure of the plant 14 days later to the Canadian public was executed as well. That authority was always there.

What happened was that the minister did not order his officials to do it. What was done on the September 13 was that he made sure Americans did not receive any more tainted beef, but we were still allowing that beef to head to Canadian store shelves. When the minister stood in the House and said that there was none on the retail shelves and that no one had to worry, he was wrong because that plant was still putting beef out. We know as of just about 30 hours ago that the CFIA put out another recall from plant 38 to pull another product back. Clearly, that ability has always been there.

We will deal with Bill S-11 appropriately when it comes, but it is not a panacea that would give the CFIA more powers than it has today. It simply codifies its powers a bit better.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, at the heart of the opposition motion today is a question about ministerial accountability and responsibility. This speaks obviously to the role that the agriculture minister plays on behalf of Canadians, but also the role that the Prime Minister has to play in holding his ministers to account.

I want to pick up on the last point my friend raised, because I remember well being in the House the day the minister got to his feet and said that no tainted meat will reach the store shelves of Canadians. That was the reassuring work that the minister was doing that day, when in fact that was not true at all.

Canadians get frustrated, when looking to the government to protect them and their families when an incident like this happens, if they are not told the truth.

Here is my question. Why does the government seem so comfortable with the double standard of allowing meat to continue to ship to Canadians while preventing that same meat from travelling to American families? I do not understand how a minister of the Crown, of the Canadian government, can feel comfortable sitting in that role knowing that is what went on day after day.

Mr. Malcolm Allen: Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Skeena—Bulkley Valley is absolutely right. How can Canadians have faith in a minister who was telling them something that was untrue? Did he know that to be true or did he not?

Either way, it does not matter. If he did not know what the facts were, then he has not taken control of his ministry and really does not know what is happening around him. That is reason enough for him to leave. Clearly, we have seen that through what he said in the first week. He was making statements in Saskatchewan and suggesting that Canadians did not have to worry about eating beef because it was safe, when indeed we knew the recall was ongoing. What we saw was the double standard of no exports to Americans, while putting the health of Canadians at risk.

The minister simply needs to step aside.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to support the motion moved by my colleague from Welland, and I commend him for his hard work since the beginning of the E. coli crisis.

Today, to prepare myself, I reviewed the chronology of events in this crisis. There have been so many delays, so many unanswered questions, so many lapses and failures in the Minister of Agriculture's story that it was not an easy task.

Let us go over the main events in this crisis. On September 4, the CFIA and the United States discovered, at the same time, E. coli bacteria in beef from XL Foods. On September 13, XL Foods' American permit was revoked. The CFIA removed XL Foods from the list of companies that can export to the United States. However, it was not until September 16 that the first beef recall was issued. XL Foods' operating permit was suspended on September 27. These are huge delays when we are talking about Canadians' safety.

One of the things that upsets me the most about this crisis is the Minister of Agriculture's handling of it. Initially he stayed away from Ottawa, but then when he did show up, he just kept repeating talking points that did not answer anyone's questions. On September 26, he assured us that no tainted meat would end up on grocery store shelves. Less than one month later, 15 people became sick.

How could the Minister of Agriculture allow tainted meat to be sold at Canadian supermarkets after he imposed an export ban to prevent tainted meat from going to the United States? If the meat was not good enough for our neighbours, then why was it good enough for us? The minister had the authority to take immediate action, but he did not. He hid. He was not transparent and he did not take this crisis seriously.

Today, we are discovering that the U.S. had warned the CFIA a number of times over the past few years about major problems at XL Foods, such as poorly kept records, facilities that were primed for cross-contamination, equipment held together by duct tape and—plug your ears if you are squeamish—animal blood that was dripping onto meat products.

If a company has major problems, then the minister must take action. Instead of sounding the alarm as soon as he found out that the U.S. had doubts about the safety of the beef, the Minister of Agriculture did nothing, which is irresponsible.

Things like that make me wonder about ministerial accountability. The 2011 “Guide for Ministers and Ministers of State” says the following:

Ministerial accountability...require[s] that the minister attend to all matters in Parliament that concern any organizations for which he or she is responsible, including responding to questions. It further requires that the minister take appropriate corrective action to address any problems that may have arisen, consistent with the minister's role with respect to the organization in question.

I do not believe that describes this minister's actions over the past 45 days, which is why I am joining my voice to that of my colleague from Welland to call for the Minister of Agriculture's resignation.

Business of Supply

This week, I asked the minister how many people he allowed to get sick after September 13, the date when the minister protected U.S. consumers by banning the export across the border of meat from XL Foods, but left Canadians in the dark.

His answer was this:

...that is a well-known number. Fifteen people have taken ill. They have all recovered, gone home and gone about their lives. That is the good side.

It is as though it is no big deal that these people got sick. I would like to describe the effects of an E.coli infection: severe stomach cramps, diarrhea that is often watery and may be bloody, vomiting and fever. Symptoms usually last five to seven days. That is not all. From 5% to 10% of all those who get sick from E. coli and about 15% of young children and the elderly develop a syndrome that can be fatal. Some people have seizures or strokes and some need blood transfusions or kidney dialysis. Others live with side effects such as permanent kidney damage.

●(1030)

But that is okay. I should not worry because the worst did not happen. We were lucky. The fact remains that this is not the way to prevent other incidents like this from occurring—far from it. Canadians have to be able to have confidence in their food inspection system. If the Minister of Agriculture is not able to reassure Canadians, he should let somebody else take over.

This week, I asked the minister if he had a plan to help the cattle industry. Two thousand plant employees were laid off. Since then, 800 of them have been called back to work, but where is the assistance plan? There is still nothing. The minister told me that solutions would be found in the future.

The NDP is proposing that the Auditor General conduct an audit of food safety procedures right away and submit a report to Parliament. We cannot wait five years for this audit. It must be done right away so that Canadians can once again have confidence in the food inspection system. This is a necessity, not just for producers but also for families, who have to be able to have confidence in Canadian products.

The Auditor General said that he would issue a report on the food recall in the spring of 2013. We applaud this effort, since tracing is an important issue for Canadians.

We have been waiting for a compliance verification of the food inspection system, as the Weatherill report on the listeriosis crisis recommended. Twenty-two Canadians lost their lives during that crisis in 2008.

This situation is no accident. The Minister of Agriculture's accountability goes further than that. Not only did he mismanage this crisis, but he also undermined the CFIA's ability to do its job and increased chances that such incidents would happen.

If the CFIA has fewer inspectors and resources, how can Canadians have confidence in the food inspection system? What happened at XL Foods revealed that there are flaws in the system. I cannot imagine what will happen when the CFIA is weakened even more.

Every time the opposition expresses concern, the government responds that it has hired 700 net new inspectors since 2006. That

figure is misleading. What the government is not saying is that this total includes hundreds of people whose job has nothing to do with protecting Canadians from unsafe food products. For example, the total includes 200 inspectors who were added to the invasive alien species program, which was designed to keep potentially dangerous species out of Canada and not to protect Canadians from unsafe food. Furthermore, the 170 new meat inspectors were hired after the listeriosis crisis and inspect only processed meat.

We need better resources, but we must also ensure that inspections are done well and that businesses have a culture of accountability when it comes to food safety.

The CFIA's report on plans and priorities, signed and tabled by the Minister of Agriculture himself on May 8, 2012, said, "Planned Spending is declining by approximately \$46.6 million and 314 FTE's from 2012-13 to 2014-15."

The Minister of Agriculture approved these cuts to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency budget. If he has the power to make those kinds of cuts, he also has the power to restore the system. It is his responsibility to do so. We are calling for his resignation.

●(1035)

[English]

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for my colleague. We have important legislation coming to the House from the Senate. This morning we asked all parties to agree to get that legislation to committee. It is legislation to make our food safety system even better, to give more regulatory authority to CFIA.

We asked for consent. Her party members rejected consent. They want to slow the bill down in the House. Any kind of amendments they want to bring, they can bring forward in committee. I would like to know why the member and her party have refused to move the bill forward through the House in an expedient manner.

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau: Mr. Speaker, I would like to know why it was 120 days in the Senate. Why was it not brought to committee?

We are not slowing anything down. We have the right to debate this in the House, and I think it is very important that we do.

Why was it in the Senate? Why is it not here? The hon. member should answer that question.

An hon. member: It is here.

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau: Oh, it is.

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her very eloquent speech, and I ask her about that same bill that just came to the House from the Senate.

Business of Supply

Is she aware when the bill actually started? Did the government act quickly and develop this bill in the Senate, and not in the elected House of Commons, where we have elected representatives? Did the bill actually come to the House first and then get sent to the Senate at some point? Was it right after the tainted meat was found by the Americans, of course, or was it actually years or months in advance that there had been proposals for this type of bill and now the government is just taking ownership of it, pretending to actually have a quick response?

• (1040)

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau: Mr. Speaker, that bill has spent 120 days in the Senate. It is important, and we will support that bill. We have supported that bill from the beginning. Of course we wanted to see it. Of course—

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq: You did not support it.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: No, not from the beginning.

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Berthier—Maskinongé has the floor. Order, please.

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau: Mr. Speaker, we support the bill. It is a good bill, but I think we could do better with it. We would be proposing amendments to it. I cannot wait to see it and actually work on the bill. It is very important.

I do not think it will stop another crisis like this. That is why we need to really work on it and make sure our system is stronger, because there are a lot of holes in the bill.

Ms. Michelle Rempel (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague has spent a lot of time today talking about the efficacy of the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food. Yet I find it very convenient that the NDP members want to talk about supporting Canadian farmers and ranchers when in fact they have gone out of their way to go against measures to support Canadian farmers in the west with our Wheat Board legislation, to push back against ranchers with abolishing the long gun control registry.

If we are to talk about the efficacy of the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, who has done more for Canadian farmers than any other agriculture minister in Canadian history, how does she feel about her party's lack of support for anything we have done for Canadian farmers? Answer that question.

The Deputy Speaker: We have now had three exchanges where I have been asked to answer the question. Members must direct their comments to the chair, not to the member on the opposite side.

The hon. member for Berthier—Maskinongé.

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau: Mr. Speaker, we are talking about Bill S-11 and we are losing track of the motion. I suggest that the hon. member read it:

That, in light of the current contaminated meat scandal at XL Foods, and considering that the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food has not learned the lesson from the 2008 listeriosis scandal that cost twenty-two Canadians their lives...

I think we should focus on this. We are looking for answers, and the minister has not been responsible. He needs to step up or step down.

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I

appreciate the opportunity to address the House on the important issue of food safety. While this issue should not be construed as political, we are in fact here today to debate a highly charged political motion brought forward by the NDP.

That said, I welcome any opportunity to bring light to the positive record of this government in supporting food safety. I welcome the opportunity to remind Canadians of the abysmal record of the NDP when it comes to providing funding that keeps our food safe.

The motion gives me the opportunity to correct much of the fear-mongering by the opposition on an issue so important to Canadian families.

As always, Canadian consumers remain this government's number one priority when it comes to food safety. Canadians and customers around the world have come to rely on the high quality and safety standards of Canadian foods. Food safety is critically important to Canadian consumers.

That is why our government works to ensure that both the CFIA, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, and industry itself deliver on these expectations. We remain committed to making food as safe as possible for our consumers. Canadians know that industry, government agencies and consumers themselves must play a part right from the farm gate to their plate to ensure that food safety.

Overall, the results of our food safety system are largely positive. Since our government took office the number of cases of E. coli 0157 illnesses among Canadians has been cut in half. That is a great start. We will work to reduce that number even further.

Since March 2006 we have increased CFIA field inspection staff by more than 700 personnel. That includes 170 personnel dedicated to meat inspection.

We have also provided significant funding, including over \$50 million in budget 2012. That builds on the investment of \$100 million in budget 2011 to improve our overall food safety system.

While the NDP claims to support food safety, its track record says otherwise. The NDP opposed both of these budgets outright, and while doing so opposed our important investments in the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. Just because the party did not support them, does not mean they are not there. How can the NDP members claim that our government is not doing enough when, if they had it their way, the CFIA would not have received a single penny of these funds?

The NDP, in particular the member for Welland, have a track record of misleading Canadians. Just last spring that very member accused our farmers of trying to put roadkill on the plates of Canadian families, and since then has been forced to back down, as he should.

Business of Supply

While the opposition grandstands, our government continues to provide the CFIA with the resources it needs to protect Canadian foodstuffs. In addition, we have addressed all 57 recommendations of the Weatherill report to strengthen the food safety system for Canadians. We have made good progress but as we saw with the XL Foods situation, we must continue to make sure our system is more robust.

That is why last spring, based on extensive consultations with Canadians, industry and others, our government introduced Bill S-11, the safe food for Canadians act, to strengthen our food safety system even further. The bill passed the Senate last night and I look forward to debating it here in the House. I urge all members to give this legislation careful attention and to move it forward expeditiously, as they say they will. The safety of Canadians is not a matter of scoring political points; it is of vital importance to Canadians and our overseas consumers as well.

This is why I find it puzzling that the member for Welland will not confirm his support for this important piece of legislation. He had a chance this morning and came up short. I urge him to stand in the House today and confirm for Canadian families that he will, once and for all, vote to improve food safety.

The safe food for Canadians act would strengthen and modernize our food safety system to make sure that it continues to provide safe food for Canadians. It is not an exercise in deregulation. Indeed, the bill would provide additional food safety oversight, investigation and enforcement, not less. The bill would give the CFIA the ability to compel industry to produce timely and usable information when requested. That is a major point.

Bill S-11 would also allow for the creation of traceability systems, which would help speed up investigations and recalls in situations like the recent one at XL Foods. The proposed safe food for Canadians act would also improve food safety oversight by instituting a more consistent inspection regime across all food commodities, providing better controls over imports and strengthening overall food traceability. We can see how important it is to trace products from the farm gate to Canadians' plates, and in the event of an incident like this, to do it efficiently and effectively. This proposed regulation-making authority would help the agency in its efforts to quickly remove recalled products from our marketplace.

The bill would also implement tougher fines of up to \$5 million for intentional activities putting the health and safety of Canadians at risk. Food producers are legally responsible for producing safe food. It is their job to do what is right and it is the CFIA's job to make sure that the processors follow through.

As I mentioned previously, the regulations under the bill would also ensure that a company provides documentation in a form that can be easily understood, thus reducing time lost in seeking clarifications.

• (1045)

While strengthening food safety for Canadians, the safe food for Canadians bill will also help Canada's agricultural industry, which drives Canada's economy with over \$44 billion in exports and one in eight jobs for Canadians. It would further align Canada's food safety systems with our key trading partners' and increase importing

countries' confidence in Canadian food commodities through expanded export certificates.

Finally, to help ensure that imported food commodities meet our high standards, this same bill would strengthen controls over imported food commodities and introduce powers to be able to license all food importers. This bill is good for Canadian families. It would strengthen and modernize our food safety system and help our agriculture and food industry to continue to drive Canada's economy.

In regard to the hon. member's motion, the CFIA continues working to verify that the plant in question has put corrective measures in place and is following those measures to effectively control possible E. coli contamination at all stages of production. Once the agency is confident in the food safety controls at establishment 38, they will thoroughly review the situation to determine what improvements to Canada's food safety system can be made.

While the NDP and the Liberals would like to dictate what the Auditor General does, on this side of the House we respect the Auditor General's independence. In fact, the Auditor General already has the authority to audit any federal agency he sees fit, including the CFIA. That is very important.

Some of the comments I have been hearing from hon. members would lead us to believe that they have no idea what happens during a food recall. Although the members opposite do not like to hear it, when a food recall happens or is continued, it shows that our robust system is working. When a food recall gets under way, the CFIA literally works around the clock to get the products off the shelf as fast and as comprehensively as it can.

The agency is committed to providing accurate, useful information as quickly as possible to inform the public about products that may also be in their fridges or freezers at home.

We must help the hon. members across the aisle separate fact from fiction. The opposition will stand today and try to scare Canadians with talk about cuts to food safety. Canadians need to be assured that no such cuts exist or are contemplated. In fact our government has increased the budget of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency by some 20% since taking office.

The opposition will also claim that we are reducing the number of inspectors. As I stated earlier, we have hired over 700 net new inspectors. At the XL facility in Brooks, we have increased the number of inspectors by 20% in recent years. We have done all of this without one ounce of support from the opposition. That is sad.

Business of Supply

Canadian families need to know the truth when it comes to food safety. Going back to the beginning to when the problems were first revealed, the CFIA discovered *E. coli* in a beef product on September 4. This product, discovered in a secondary processing facility, had originated from XL in Brooks. The agency acted to contain the specific affected product on that date and has been acting ever since.

At that time there was no evidence that any additional product had been affected. On that very same day, the CFIA was also informed that the USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service had discovered *E. coli* in a sample of beef trimmings that had also originated from that same plant. Those particular meat products were destroyed.

To repeat, at that time there was no evidence that any additional product had been affected or had been placed on store shelves. That is the famous quote they keep misquoting. Thus, no recall was needed. We had it all.

The CFIA immediately launched a full investigation into the causes of the problem on September 4 and has been acting ever since. With the onset of the CFIA investigation, inspectors stepped up their oversight of operations within the plant. At that point, there was still no definitive evidence that any other product was affected or in the marketplace. The Public Health Agency of Canada had been called and begun an assessment with its provincial colleagues. There were no confirmed illnesses before our recalls were initiated. Risk factors were, however, being investigated and evidence was being gathered by both the CFIA and the Public Health Agency of Canada.

The CFIA acted swiftly to address the problem once it was discovered. It was discovered by our own inspectors during routine testing. As my hon. colleagues are well aware, XL Foods has taken full responsibility and shown a renewed commitment to working with the CFIA through this situation.

The speed at which XL Foods begins normal operations is solely dependent on its ability to demonstrate to the CFIA that it can produce safe food. We recognize that the company wants to return to normal operations as soon as possible, but the CFIA has a responsibility to ensure that the plant will produce safe food going forward under any management team. Canadian consumers have the right to that assurance, and it is CFIA's responsibility to provide it.

To correct another piece of fiction spread by the opposition, it has been said that budget 2012 cut CFIA's inspection capacity, which led to this facility being under-resourced. That is absolutely, categorically false. In the case of this particular XL Foods facility, CFIA inspection staffing levels have actually gone up by some 20%, not down.

• (1050)

In fact, our government's budget last year, as I said, committed \$100 million over five years for the CFIA to modernize its overall food inspection system. That included new resources to improve inspection delivery, increased training for inspection staff, scientific capacity in food laboratories and information management and new technology.

All the while our government continues to invest in food safety. To cite just a few examples of the kinds of strategic investments we

are making in food safety from the farm gate to the plate, we have allocated \$6.6 million for the Canadian Pork Council to develop the national swine traceability system, over \$950,000 to help the Canadian Pork Council strengthen the national on-farm food safety system for its industry, and over \$4.5 million to help the Canadian Cattlemen Identification Agency to strengthen overall livestock traceability.

I would also add that these strategic investments are a great example of more things to come.

As members know, last month in the Yukon the ministers of agriculture agreed to invest \$3 billion over the next five years in proactive programs in the areas of innovation, competitiveness and market development. This will include continued support for the development and strengthening of food safety systems and the overall traceability of foodstuffs.

The bottom line is that Canadian consumers and their families have always been and will continue to be the Government of Canada's first priority when it comes to food safety. Whether through Bill S-11, Safe Food for Canadians Act, or our investments that I have outlined here, our government will continue to build a world-class food safety system that safeguards Canadian consumers.

The motion today does nothing to support food safety. It is purely politically driven. I encourage the member for Welland and his colleagues to cease this partisanship and finally do something constructive to support food safety and the industry. He can do that by supporting Bill S-11 as a start.

• (1055)

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was amused and somewhat befuddled by some of the comments by the minister. He said that the government's number one priority was Canadians' food safety, yet his first act when it came to XL Foods was to close the exportation of beef to Americans, not to us. If the minister knew that we should not send the product to Americans, why would we continue to send it to Canadians if indeed the government's first priority is Canadians' safety?

Talking about facts, I would ask the minister if it is indeed his signature on the Canadian Food Inspection Agency's report on plans and priorities that says that the government will reduce it by \$46.6 million and 314 full-time equivalents. Is that the case?

When the minister stood in this House and said, "None of it made it to store shelves", he was indicating that the government kind of did not know then. Why not? When we did know that it got out, why did we continue to produce?

Business of Supply

As for Bill S-11, to be clear, what I said during the emergency debate in this House was that the government should bring forward Bill S-11 as fast as possible and that we would help the government get it to committee, because we have some great ideas to make it a better piece of legislation. We indeed would support it to get it to committee.

However, you left it in the Senate for 120 days. We cannot help you move it faster if you actually start over there rather than here and then drag your feet over there and do not bring it here.

The Deputy Speaker: I would point out again that I, the Chair, did not leave it in the Senate. Please direct your comments to the Chair and not to other members of the House.

The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food.

Hon. Gerry Ritz: Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House we recognize how diligent you are in your job. We know that you would never drag your heels on this as your NDP colleagues are doing.

When the member talked about 120 days, he forgot about the summer recess when the Senate is not sitting. I wish he would be honest with Canadians. That is the type of thing and misinformation that is constantly being put out there by members like him, and it is just shameful.

Having said that, the member continues to talk about my line that "None of it made it to store shelves". I actually did say that, but it was pertaining to the September 4 initial containment of the initial tainted product that we found in Calgary and Americans found at the border. It is absolutely true: no recall was necessary. None of it made it to store shelves because we contained it all that very day. The member has seen that on the timeline.

Please be honest with Canadians and put out the right information. The member for Welland should know better than that, after he stepped in the mud up to his ears with his roadkill comments earlier this year.

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to express dismay and frustration, not only on behalf of the opposition, but on behalf of all Canadians who are frustrated with the fact that the Conservative government simply does not want Canadians to know the truth. How can the minister stand and say there were no cuts when his own senior management in the spring, following the presentation of the budget implementation bill, said that there could not be a 10% cut without there being cuts at the front line? The minister continually stands and denies the cuts.

My question is about Bill S-11, which we support. The Meat Inspection Act, section 13, allows the CFIA to demand production of whatever it needs to ensure that the intent of the act is honoured. The owner and operator has the obligation to facilitate and produce those documents. Other abattoirs in the country are getting along just fine with the current legislation. Why are they not finding themselves in difficulty? Why was it possible for CFIA to finally step in and shut the plant down if it did not have the requisite authority to do what it needed to do? Yet the minister continues with this ruse saying that Bill S-11 is the panacea to food safety, that it will solve all the problems. He is hiding behind that bill. We need to know the truth. When will he tell us the truth about what happened?

● (1100)

Hon. Gerry Ritz: Mr. Speaker, we have been doing exactly that since day one. The timeline is well defined. It is on CFIA's website. It clearly shows that the original product that was tainted was contained that day. There was no need for a recall or for searching store shelves because it never got there.

When it comes to the member talking about priorities and planning, of course I signed the letter. We are looking for efficiencies across government, but none of the trimming of CFIA's budget affects food safety. I would challenge the member to point to any particular instance where he can actually show that fact. He is making that up. He is scaring Canadians. I know Halloween is coming, but he might want to save that for when he puts on his mask for Halloween, because it is not true. I am not trivializing. I am very intent on this. The member is scaring Canadians when it is not necessary. There are no cuts to front line food safety proposed or even thought about. None of that is on.

The member also talks about Bill S-11 and the preparation and presentation of documents. Yes, we have rights under the existing legislation, but they do not include demanding those documents and having them delivered in a timely way. Rather than waiting days for an industry such as XL or others to go back through their files and find documentation, we need it much quicker than that. We need it at the speed of commerce, and that is what we are demanding with Bill S-11. We hope he is serious about his support of it and does not drag his heels, as some of his Senate colleagues tried to do.

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am sure most members recognize that the XL Foods facility is in my riding and it has certainly been very difficult for all of the employees, the community and people across the country. The minister has said, over and over again, that this facility will not reopen unless it meets CFIA safe foods standards.

I know the company had a temporary recall for employees to come back to process, I believe, some 2,500 carcasses. Could the minister tell us what that process was and why it was necessary?

Hon. Gerry Ritz: Mr. Speaker, there are scientific procedures and protocols that are internationally recognized and must be followed in a situation like this in order to get back into export markets and to assure Canadian consumers that the plant has the capacity to produce safe food.

The professional people at CFIA were on site all through this. They continue to work through some existing carcasses that were in the cooler to show the efficacy of the programming that XL has in place. They are called HACPP protocols. We have done that now. We have sent the samples away. Hundreds of samples have been taken from the carcasses that were cut. We are waiting for some of those samples to return.

Business of Supply

CFIA people have begun to put together a report on what they have seen, what they have heard and what they have done in the plant during this time. They will have that report for the president of CFIA in the next days. He will compile that, another adjudication will be done by the professional people in Ottawa and once they have that, they will send a letter to me as to whether that plant is ready to reopen.

Last night we heard the announcement that JBS had been brought in as a new management tool. It will run the plant over the next few months to get it back up to speed. We welcome that.

I am here to tell Canadians that the certification of that plant will be as rigorous as it always has been intended to be, regardless of what the management will be. It will have to prove to us, on an ongoing basis, that the plant continues to deliver safe food. There will be continued oversight by CFIA, some 46 CFIA personnel in the plant, with the addition of a couple more during that re-certification process.

We look forward to positive results and to get the industry back on normal footing.

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have two questions for the minister. Is the Canadian Food Inspection Agency your responsibility? Also—

The Deputy Speaker: The member should direct her questions to the Chair.

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau: Sorry, Mr. Speaker. XL Foods had a lot of problems at that plant. It had broken sprinklers, improper cleaning, an inadequate monitoring system and thousands of pounds of beef became contaminated. This went on for weeks and weeks. Is CFIA one of the minister's responsibilities?

• (1105)

Hon. Gerry Ritz: Mr. Speaker, every government agency has to report through a minister. That is the protocol in this place. I have the responsibility to report on plans and priorities and outcomes for CFIA. I continue to do that. The professional people at CFIA in the plant have carried themselves well during this. They are under a lot of stress to perform as well.

My responsibilities as minister stop there. I am not involved in the day-to-day inspection. My responsibility as minister is to continue to build a robust food safety system through the regulatory and legislative channels to ensure that CFIA has ongoing support when it comes to budgetary and manpower requirements. We have proven ourselves up to that task, with some 700-plus front line inspectors being added, 170 dedicated to the processed meats systems. We have increased the budget by some 20% and have addressed all of the issues raised in the Weatherill report. We are ensuring that CFIA has the robustness and capacity to deliver safe food for Canadians.

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak to this motion, which is a timely one. It follows up on the emergency debate the Liberals had asked for a few nights ago.

This is all about the responsibility for the safety of the food that Canadians eat. Canadians need to know they can buy food, eat it and not get sick when they buy it from a reputable grocery store or from a place where they know the food has been inspected and has a CFIA

stamp. That is how the system is supposed to work. The responsibility of governments is all about that.

In the case of food-borne illness, in the case of food safety, there are three groups in the government that are responsible to ensure there is safe food in our country. The first is the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food. The second is the Minister of Health. The third is the Public Health Agency of Canada. The three of them, working together, are responsible to ensure that the food we eat is safe.

There is even a written protocol. When there is any question of the safety of food, when there is any hint of contamination of food, this protocol kicks in and implicates these three departments. It gives them very clear guidelines as what their role is and what they are supposed to do.

Ultimately, this issue is about the health and safety of Canadians and their confidence that the government, which is responsible for that, is on the job and on the watch.

Let us look at how the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, who is one of the people responsible for the safety of the food we eat, has handled this.

The minister has mishandled the file from the word go, and for very many reasons. The minister could not give us clear answers. He loves to stand in the House and blame everyone for ratcheting up the noise and for creating anxiety among Canadians. Canadians are anxious because they are not getting answers, because they are not getting very clear assurances about the food they eat. This is at the heart of the problem.

The three groups responsible, the Public Health Agency, the Minister of Health and the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, should be out there every day, if necessary. We saw that happen with the SARS outbreak and with the BSE incident. The Liberal minister of agriculture and agri-food at the time was out there telling people what was going on, everything that was being done and keeping Canadians in the loop. This is at the heart of the problem. Not only could we not get any answers, we could not get the truth. We could not get any rationale for why there were no answers and how and why this happened.

I want to look at the facts.

This was not the first time that the U.S. Food Safety and Inspection Service had to notify CFIA about Canada's food safety, especially with regard to beef, chicken, et cetera. It seems that Canada cannot not take care of this problem. We have to depend on the Americans to help us out.

Reports show that the CFIA was sent reports by the United States Food Safety and Inspection Service several times in the last 10 years regarding deficiencies found in Canada's meat processing plants, including XL Foods.

The Liberals were in power when this problem was flagged in July 2003. We immediately delisted XL Foods and told it that it had to fix things. Then, when it fixed things in 2004, it was reinstated and put back on the list.

Business of Supply

In 2004 the CFIA and the United States looked at the plant and found there were some new problems. At that time, the Liberal government minister warned the plant and told it that it had 30 days to fix it. It was reinstated again in 2005 and everything seemed to be going right.

The U.S. was concerned at the time, and still is, that we were not tracking the trends. Everybody knows that in food processing there is always going to be E. coli and various contaminants because of the nature of the product itself. One is supposed to trend track.

• (1110)

There should always be random testing to make sure there are no sudden rises in super-shedders within the cattle, which are suddenly bringing in large amounts of pathogenic E. coli. That is supposed to be done on a regular basis. The U.S. does it. We do not, even though we have been asked to do it. Of American processing companies, 75% do that. We do not. Why did the CFIA not begin to take action when the government came on the watch in 2006 and the American food safety group told it that this was continuing to happen? It did nothing.

In May of this year, the United States told the CFIA that it was not tracking the trends for E. coli, and we got no answer for that. Here we found that it continued to ask the question and had to do the tracking itself. Having done that tracking itself, that is how it found out that we were having problems on September 4 and flagged it for us because we were not on the watch. The government was not doing its job. It was not watching what was going on.

Therefore, it took 13 days for the government to pay attention after the September 4 notification by the U.S. inspectors. We did not even find that it did bracketing in those 13 days. When it did the recall on September 16, which was 13 days later, it did not bracket. That is an important part of recalling a food. The shipments that went prior to and after the knowledge that the food was contaminated are recalled so that people do not buy it, put it in their fridges and freezers and leave it there not knowing, thinking that it was only from the date the recall was given and onwards that there was a problem. That was not done.

Then it was another two full weeks before the plant was shut down, by which time that food had gone out into the retail grocery chains and was in people's fridges, in small butcher shops and everywhere. People were buying it continuing to believe, as Canadians do, that the government was on the watch and that their food was safe.

I want to hear an answer from the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food as to why it took him two weeks—and we still have not got that answer—why he did not bracket, and why he allowed that food to go out into the food chain, where we do not know who has that food in their freezers right now. It is not a good enough answer to say that people should cook the food properly or, as we heard in the last debate from the parliamentary secretary across the way, that if everyone washes their hands everything will be fine. This is the kind of stuff we are hearing. There is no question here of a sense of responsibility for Canadians, none at all.

That was the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food who completely mismanaged the whole thing. Now we will look at the

role of the Minister of Health and the Public Health Agency of Canada.

What should have happened was this. Health Canada is responsible for something called a health risk assessment, which states that it must be completed “in a rapid and timely manner in order to ensure that appropriate risk management decisions are taken to prevent contaminated food from reaching the consumer”. The Canadian mom and dad out there who are cooking steaks on the barbecue must be prevented from getting that contaminated food. That is from the Foodborne Illness Outbreak Response Protocol, which is normally called FIORP. So when I mention FIORP from now on, members will know that I am talking about a protocol written up, agreed upon and signed by those three departments that were responsible.

There was no rapid and timely manner in which that appropriate risk management was taken, or if it was taken it did not get out to the consumer at all. We did not hear about it until September 26, which was two weeks later. We suddenly heard on the Health Canada and Public Health Agency of Canada websites that there was a problem. In the meantime, 15 people had become ill.

What immediately triggers the Minister of Health and the Public Health Agency of Canada to get involved is that a person gets sick. One person has to get sick. It does not say that a person dies; it says a person gets sick and there is reason to believe or to suspect that there is a potential for more people to get sick.

We know that XL Foods processes 40% of the food in this country. We know it took two weeks for the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food to actually even recall. We know it took him a further two weeks, in which this was all over the food retail stores.

• (1115)

Why is it that the Minister of Health did not get out there? The Minister of Health remains silent. There is a deafening silence from the Minister of Health and the Public Health Agency. They get in when a person gets sick. They get in when there is reason to believe that an illness will go across the country, not when people die, not when we have 25 or 30 people sick; there is no magic number. It is said that it is when it reaches over one province. Well, we know that the extent of that food going out in the food chain was across this country. It was not limited to Alberta alone. So the word here is “potential” and we have no explanation at all as to why the silence and as to why this was not done. There is a four-year-old child with kidney failure. As far as we know right now, 15 people are sick from this E. coli outbreak.

Business of Supply

The point is this. If we have seniors, young children and immunocompromised people eating that food, they have a higher risk of dying. Healthy people eating it can get very sick and hopefully get better. So it is only a matter of sheer luck that no one died. It is not because of good care. It is not because of good handling on the file. It is simply sheer luck as to who ate this. The Minister of Health was slow to respond and she was silent. She knew about the contamination.

The minute someone gets sick, does not die but just gets sick, and it crosses over one province, the Public Health Agency of Canada takes the lead right away as per the FIORP. The protocol says:

Once a potential multi-jurisdictional food-borne illness outbreak has come to the attention of public health or food regulatory agencies, there is a requirement...

That is a requirement, not a “maybe should”. It goes on:

...to examine the current available information and determine if it is sufficient to indicate the presence of a potential multi-jurisdictional food-borne illness outbreak that requires a collaborative and coordinated investigation and the activation of an OICC...

That is an Outbreak Investigation Coordinating Committee.

The FIORP OICC should be activated when the investigation and response to the identified potential multi-jurisdictional risk of human contamination “...is known or has the potential to be related to a widely-distributed food product”. Read: XL, 40% of the processing of food. How much wider can we get when that food goes all across this country?

We are saying that they have mismanaged the file as well, from the perspectives of the Minister of Health and the Public Health Agency of Canada. The reason the Public Health Agency has to take the lead as soon as a person gets sick is that it has been given the funding to have the capacity and the resources that can be mobilized immediately to assist in the investigation of food-borne illness outbreaks and for surveillance and tracking.

Surveillance and tracking is not just about checking where the meat went. It is in letting every emergency department and all the health professionals and hospitals across this country know that anybody who presents with an illness that is an enteric illness in this case, abdominal illness caused by food, gastroenteritis or whatever we want to call it, that those cases should be reported immediately to decide whether they are linked to this particular thing. That is what surveillance is, and it did not happen, or if it did happen, nobody knew about it, including the people who were supposed to be informed. This again is mismanagement of the file.

Has the current government learned nothing from Walkerton? I say the “current government” because there are three ministers currently on the front benches of the government who were there and had responsibility for what went on with Walkerton. The Minister of Finance, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the President of the Treasury Board were there. What the audit on Walkerton says, from the O'Connor inquiry, is that Walkerton happened because of government cuts to food inspection, government cuts to water inspection and privatizing of the system in order to save money. This is what we are talking about. We have to save money when we have a deficit, but we have to save it in places where we know people are not going to get sick, and we do not put Canadians at risk. Did the

Conservatives learn nothing from the listeriosis outbreak that occurred in 2008?

• (1120)

We got all of the information from the Weatherill report after that listeriosis outbreak, and the Weatherill report said the same thing that the Walkerton inquiry said. It said that there should be tracking, that the three ministers have to be involved, et cetera. Nothing happened. Four years later, we are facing the same problem because the government went ahead and laid off 200 inspectors since March. The Parliamentary Budget Officer tells us that \$16 million is being directly cut from food safety and that there has been a \$56.1 million cut to CFIA. This is from the Parliamentary Budget Office; I am not making this up.

The point is that not only did the government not learn from Walkerton but it ignored the Weatherill report that talked about tracking. It did not track the trends in any of the food systems looking for blips and outbreaks. It did not do any of that. It refused to listen to the U.S. that was warning it. We listened when it warned us in 2003, 2004 and 2005. We recalled, we pulled back and de-listed the company. As soon as 2006 came along and the Conservatives became government, they started to ignore it.

We listened to the minister say that everything is great and the government did a wonderful job. There is a saying in medicine. The greatest hospital in the world can have all the right equipment and the most well-trained doctors, surgeons, physicians, nurses and anesthetists who operate on a patient. People can say, “What a successful operation; look at the beauty of the work that was done and all the equipment we have”, but if the operation was a success and the patient died, then the operation was not a success.

The minister can say he has 46 people, 6 veterinarians, has added 200 people to the list and we have all the bells and whistles. It did not work. The operation might have been a success, but the patient died. Even though no one died, the outcome was a failure. That is what we are talking about: the outcome of what was being done. If it failed, it did not work. I do not know how else to say it. If it failed, it failed. If it did not work, it did not work. I do not care what there is in an operating room or anywhere else. If a patient dies, the operation was not a success. Therefore, this is not a success and we do not have answers.

We have snarky comments, snide remarks, smart-alecky, drive-by little insults being used, when the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and the Minister of Health should be standing in the House and giving some form of apology with some humility and saying, “We fell down on the job, we are sorry, *mea culpa*, and we are going to make sure it does not happen again”. That is what we want from a government.

Business of Supply

We saw what the Liberals did when they were in power with the BSE crisis. The minister was out there taking it on the chin but, at the same time, informing the public about what was going on. That is called responsible government; that is called transparency; that is actually caring about what one's department is supposed to do, caring about the outcomes and not constantly hiding behind all kinds of language and excuses. The mistake was made. Parliament should know what happened and the people of Canada should know, because confidence in food safety in this country has taken a blow. Not only that. It has hurt the food processing industry in this country; it has hurt farmers who now do not have the ability to get their steers to the processing plants. They are, therefore, paying the cost of leaving them in the field. They are also finding that the price of grain has gone up. That is costing them.

We are saying that everyone is hurting because of the lack of ability of the government to take responsibility, be up front and tell people so we can get the confidence back in our meat processing system and so the United States will know that we are on the ball, because it does not think we are, and we have not been for a length of time. They have to look over us like a parent looking over a recalcitrant child who is not doing what he or she is told. This is unacceptable. The Minister of Health's silence is unacceptable. The fact is that no one has stood up and assured the people of Canada that the CFIA will enforce the same rigorous food safety standards that everyone should expect of a government.

The Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food stated:

Canadian consumers can be assured that the Canadian Food Inspection Agency will enforce the same rigorous food safety standards at Lakeside facility regardless of the management.

He said "the same rigorous food safety standards". I have to sit down at that and ask what same rigorous food safety standards. I do not have any confidence. The same problems are going to be repeated.

• (1125)

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am not that old but I do remember the Liberals' time in government. I remember how badly they messed up the agricultural industry in this country. I remember when they sleepwalked into BSE. Their lack of leadership, investment and a proper understanding of the industry led to the borders being closed for Canadian beef to virtually every destination to which Canadian beef was exported. I remember the harm that was done to Canadian farms. They are still recovering from that.

I grew up on a beef farm. I own farms today. I understand a thing or two about agriculture. I understand that E. coli naturally occurs in meat. To think that we can put in place a perfect system is impossible. We put in place the best system that we can. We hired more meat inspectors. We put \$50 million in budget 2012 for more inspectors, \$100 million for more inspectors last year and \$75 million specifically to implement the measures in the Weatherill report. That member voted against each and every one of them. That is her record. We will take no abuse from the Liberal Party coming at us from the height of hypocrisy.

How many technical briefings has that member attended since she has indicated that she would like to know more about it?

Hon. Hedy Fry: Mr. Speaker, I should not be laughing in the House but that question was ridiculous.

What happened in the BSE crisis is on file and it is there for everyone to see. The minister of agriculture at the time was upfront. The Liberal government put in \$3 billion to help Canadian farmers weather that problem. It is in the records.

The idea that E. coli is always in the food chain is ludicrous. Of course we know that E. coli occurs in beef. It is an excrement. That is true.

The member should not tell me that we cannot do it, because the United States tracks this regularly knowing that there is a risk. The United States does what the Weatherill report asks, which is to track the trends to check when there is a super shedder. The Conservative government has not been doing it. The United States told the government that it had not been doing it. The government has fallen down on the job, and it is as simple as that. No whitewash and no insults can make that any different.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in response to a question asked by my colleague from Berthier—Maskinongé, the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food said that his responsibility in all of this was limited to simply developing regulations and verifying legislation to ensure that the Canadian Food Inspection Agency can do its job.

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency is not a crown corporation. It is not a corporation that operates at arm's length. It is a government agency that reports directly to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food. Yet the minister himself is saying that he does not have the authority to instruct the CFIA to do something to prevent this sort of thing from happening when information becomes available.

I wonder if my colleague from Vancouver Centre could tell us her thoughts on the question of ministerial responsibility. In her opinion, what is the role of the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food in a situation like this one?

• (1130)

[*English*]

Hon. Hedy Fry: Mr. Speaker, that question is at the heart of what we are trying to say in the House.

I was asked if I went to briefings. I have never been invited to a briefing. That is not the problem. Members of Parliament should be given the answers in the House. That is called accountability. We do not hear the answers in the House when we ask them. The public does not know. That is what we are talking about. We are talking about the ability to let people know.

Business of Supply

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency is responsible to the minister and the Public Health Agency of Canada is responsible to the Minister of Health. These agencies cannot do their jobs well. They do not have the autonomy to do what they are supposed to do. They are told by their masters when to cut and run, when to hide, and when not to disclose. That is not what we expect from our Food Inspection Agency and our Public Health Agency. They should be completely arm's-length.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do not think the member should worry much about a briefing from the government because I found out that its briefings are usually propaganda campaigns to cover up what the government is doing.

Mr. Randy Hoback: Are you serious?

Hon. Wayne Easter: Yes, I am serious. I am serious in terms of the briefings by the government. However, I will say that the minister, the CFIA and the Public Health Agency should be out there explaining to Canadians but they have failed Canadians in doing that.

The Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food actually hauled the president of CFIA off the stage at one point early in this development.

I have a question for the member for Vancouver Centre. Where is the Public Health Agency in this? We know the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food failed absolutely and his incompetence is shining through, but the Minister of Health has been completely absent from the file. She has the responsibility for the Public Health Agency. Why is that agency not out there doing what it should in terms of explaining to Canadians that food is safe, what is being done to make the food safe and how the system should work?

Hon. Hedy Fry: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that question very much because again we are back to the same thing. The Minister of Health has been nowhere to be seen. We have not heard from her.

As I said earlier on when I made my speech, in the file, that absolute protocol has been signed by the three departments to say what happened as soon as someone gets sick, as soon as there is a potential of risk for widespread dissemination, and we know 40% of the company's beef went across this country, the lead on the file becomes the Minister of Health and the Public Health Agency.

However, the Public Health Agency is like the CFIA. It is constrained by what the minister tells it should or should not do. I want to quickly read a commentary from the *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, which said, "the ability of the officer to bring issues forward, or to comment freely on matters that may pose a risk to the public's health, may be particularly constrained" by the current way in which it is set up.

[Translation]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Beauharnois—Salaberry, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for my Liberal Party colleague.

We know that the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, the CFIA, did not have sufficient resources to adequately respond to the current crisis, despite the fact that the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food says that there were more inspectors.

It is important for people to know that most of the inspectors working at the XL Foods plant had not yet been trained on how to use the new compliance verification system, even though that system was introduced four years ago.

They had not received proper training because the CFIA did not have sufficient financial resources and inspectors to train them.

Would my colleague agree that the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food should have taken the necessary measures to reduce the risk of such a crisis?

The minister should immediately cancel the cuts in order to prevent something like this from ever happening again.

● (1135)

[English]

Hon. Hedy Fry: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member makes a point. The government members may stand in the House and tell everyone until their noses grow that they have not cut, but the Parliamentary Budget Officer, appointed by the government to look at these kinds of issues, said that \$16 million were directly cut from food safety, \$56.1 million in cuts to the CFIA and that 200 inspectors were laid off in March. Of the 40 inspectors and 6 vets at the XL Food plant right now, only 3 of the 46 inspectors and vets were actually versed in the compliance clarification system and the other 43 were paper pushers and not completely trained.

How do we expect people to do their jobs if they are not appropriately trained and there are cuts? How can we ask the food inspectors to take the hit for this? The minister has to take the hit. The three ministers in this House responsible for Walkerton in Ontario, where people died, are now passing it on to the rest of the country. It is not acceptable.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Newton—North Delta.

I thank my colleague from Welland, our current agriculture critic, for his hard work on this file. Just as he worked diligently on the listeriosis outbreak file, he has been on top of this file meeting with producers and asking the hard questions. His back-up staff, Katie and Rosa, have put a tremendous package together for us, information-wise, and I thank them for that.

This is a debate about a crisis. The Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and I, both in my former role as critic and now, have had a good working relationship. I feel that I can address concerns to him, which I have done, whether it is in regard to food growers, organic growers or others, and he is there to respond.

However, this is not about that. This is about a serious mistake that was made by him and his department, which is why we are here today. Let us look at some of the timelines that have been gone over and will continue to be discussed here.

Business of Supply

On September 3, a shipment of beef from XL Foods tested positive for *E. coli* at the border. On September 4, the CFIA identified positive *E. coli* O517:H7 at XL Foods.

On September 7, XL Foods was formally requested to produce detailed information related to products as soon as but no later than September 10. This was six days after the positive findings of *E. coli*.

On September 13, the CFIA finally removed XL Foods from the list of establishments eligible to export to the U.S. However, and this is important and interesting, there was still no recall in Canada.

On September 16, we had beef recall number one, the first one. That was 13 days after U.S. officials discovered *E. coli*.

On September 25, the minister is quoted as saying:

The work with the CFIA to adjudicate the paperwork at XL Foods is being done so that it can start getting back into that lucrative American market just as quickly as possible.

I reiterate that none of the product made it to store shelves...

That is what he said but we found out that the health department and the CFIA determined that there was sufficient evidence to conclude that steaks purchased at Costco Wholesale in Edmonton were actually the vehicle for four cases of human illness.

On October 4, XL Foods finally issued a press release and took full responsibility for the recalled meat. This was the first statement on its behalf.

As we go through this, we can look at the implications. The basic conclusion is that the system, as it applied to XL Foods, was not working. I would like to go a bit further to say that this is a symptom of a major disease that I see coming from that side of the House: the disease of de-regulation, industrial self-regulation.

In the last Trojan Horse omnibus bill, we saw all sorts of provisions to gut the whole environmental review process, to be able to streamline the northern gateway pipeline, taking fish habitat out of the Fisheries Act, and all of this in the name of industry self-regulation, guided by, which I would say seems to be driving the government, the whole Milton Friedman philosophy of de-regulation, privatization and less government.

● (1140)

[*Translation*]

Budget cuts to the CFIA must be cancelled. That agency must be given the resources it needs to fulfill its mandate for Canadians, that is, to ensure the safety of all food in the food industry.

The Conservatives advocated for increased self-regulation, but now, inspectors are examining paperwork rather than meat. The problems in our food safety system are a direct result of this government's incompetence, and now Canadians are paying the price.

[*English*]

The consumer can now and in the future choose not to eat beef. Obviously we can survive, there are other foods people can eat. However, a cattle producer cannot choose to turn around and start producing something else or go elsewhere. Once again, the farmer

has taken the hit because of inadequate oversight by the government in collaboration with industry. That is what has happened here. It is a tough enough market for producers. They do not need this.

The idea that 700 net new food inspectors have been added to the ranks of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency is wrong and misleading. This total includes hundreds whose work has nothing to do with protecting Canadians from unsafe food products. For example, the total includes 200 inspectors added to the invasive alien species program, which is designed to keep harmful organisms out of Canada, not safeguard Canadians from unsafe food products.

In fact, since 2006, not a single meat hygiene slaughter program inspector, except to fill vacancies, has been added to the CFIA ranks. There are actually so few inspectors at XL Foods and production is so high, over 4,000 cattle per day, that responsibility for ensuring sanitary conditions at the plant have been handed to the company. As a result of staff cuts in the spring, CFIA will lose 308 positions, many of whom are food inspectors.

Let us move on to a parallel industry, the horse slaughter industry. There are certain drugs that are banned from the food chain in animals. When an animal is given a drug once in its lifetime, that meat is no longer fit for human consumption. Phenylbutazone, which we call the horses' Aspirin, is taken by approximately 80% of the horses in North America at some point in their lifetimes. This only has to happen once and, according to our guidelines, that meat is no longer fit for human consumption.

Over 50,000 horses are imported from the U.S. annually for slaughter in one of our four slaughterhouses. Sporadic checks are made, but every horse is not inspected and the checks that are made are made on muscle tissue, whereas experts say that the kidneys are what should be analyzed.

Aunt Molly sends her race horses in the United States to go to auction, they are bought by killer buyers, shipped under horrendous conditions to Canada, often with falsified documents, and then put in the food chain and the meat is exported mainly to Europe. We know that Phenylbutazone, according to science, has been linked to aplastic anemia in children and other diseases. This is another example of what I consider sloppy oversight on the part of the CFIA. Make no mistake, we can pass the buck to the bureaucracy and I have heard this often at committee. However, the bureaucracy takes its direction from the political head, the minister. That is how it works in our system.

Business of Supply

GMO is another example. A recent study called “GMO Myths and Truths: An evidence-based examination of the claims made for the safety and efficacy of genetically modified crops”. One of the findings by scientists is that GMOs can be toxic, allergic and less nutritious than natural food, yet we never hear of our government taking a precautionary principle to study this.

I would like to close with a couple of statements, one by Bob Kingston of the union representing the inspectors. He said that the CFIA did not have the resources in place to fully understand what was going on in the plant at that time. After all, the minister had assured everyone that there were more inspectors working at the plant. He went on to say:

You will be interested to know that at the XL plant only a small portion of inspectors are fully trained in [compliance verification system].

• (1145)

I will conclude by saying, yes, this is a crisis and we need to get to the bottom of it. The minister has to take responsibility to ensure that Canadians continue to have safe food in their food supply and that farmers do not take another hit somewhere down the line because some other plant is closed due to the plant not listening to the union's safety concerns or to having safety oversight in the plant.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think it is rather unfortunate that the NDP only likes to talk about food safety instead of acting to improve it. I raised previous budgets where we increased funding for CFIA. I also raised the 700 net new inspectors that our government hired. These were all opposed by the NDP.

My question deals with Bill S-11, which arrived in the House today. Despite what the opposition is saying, the bill was in the Senate for 22 sitting days. It is an important bill. It has arrived here in the House. We asked for unanimous consent this morning to have Bill S-11 sent to committee for a thorough study by committee, as happens with all bills. The member and his party denied that consent. I would like to know, does he support Bill S-11 and why will he not give his consent to send it to committee right away so that the bill can move forward legislatively?

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Mr. Speaker, there are two points there. One is the idea of the opposition voting against government bills. This is the unfortunate result of omnibus legislation. When one bill contains all sorts of different provisions, like what I guess we will see today, the opposition is forced to make a decision. Does it support the bill because it has some money in the budget for farmers, or does it not support it because it guts environmental policies and all sorts of other programs for Canadians.

I have been here for over six years and my party does not support that kind of all-encompassing legislation. We, and the other parties in the opposition, have been asking for a breakdown of the bills so that we could look at each one on its merits and either vote for it or against it, but to not have it all encompassed under one bill.

The second part is that we will look at Bill S-11. It will go through due process in the House and we will make a decision, taking the lead of our critic for agriculture, on whether or not we will support the bill.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I enjoyed listening to the member for British Columbia Southern Interior. I

really enjoyed working on the agriculture committee with the member because he was conscientious on all the issues and was never afraid to raise the tough questions.

On the last exchange, which we consistently get from the government, of “Well, you voted against it”, perhaps the member could clarify this a little further. Is it not an absolute farce that the government is saying that the opposition voted against something?

The money still went through. It did not make a difference. The government is trying to leave the impression that because opposition parties voted against it, for whatever reason, that the money did not happen. In fact, it did happen and the government got the money. Still, it has not been able to handle this file.

The second question I have for the member is because of his experience on the agriculture committee. Bill S-11 is more of the same in terms of messaging and propaganda from the government. The CFIA already has the authority under the Meat Inspection Act. Mr. Kingston, the labour union representative, when they were talking about S-11 in the Senate, said clearly that CFIA already has the powers to do its job.

I ask the member, is that not in fact true? This deals with some other issues. The government should not try to cover it up and say that the CFIA does not have the authority to do what it needs to do. It has that now.

• (1150)

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Mr. Speaker, I too enjoyed working with my hon. colleague in the agriculture committee. He has also raised, and continues to raise, very tough questions in this Parliament.

As for the whole idea of whether there is money, the bill has gone through because whatever the government decides, it does. The money goes through. At the same time, when more money should be going to important areas, we find that there are cuts. Yet funding is going to support, for example, celebrating the War of 1812 or getting more fighter jets without proper consultation.

Speaking of consultations, Bill S-11 stayed in the Senate for 120 days. The government says it has consulted the public on the bill. That is not true. The government has botched too many bills for us to help it skip over the legislative process. That is why the bill is coming to the House, to get due diligence.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I want to acknowledge the work done by my colleague for Welland. He has handled this file in a very professional manner. He has been very thorough in his research and in keeping all of us updated.

Business of Supply

It is difficult to ask for the resignation of a minister. It is not a step that we take lightly. However, we have today a motion that reads:

That, in light of the current contaminated meat scandal at XL Foods, and considering that the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food has not learned the lesson from the 2008 listeriosis scandal that cost twenty-two Canadians their lives, this House call on the government to restore Canadians' confidence in Canada's food safety system by: (a) removing the current minister from office and assigning the food safety portfolio to a minister who can restore public trust—

Those are heavy words for us to raise here and I want to focus on the history.

This is the same Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food who was in charge of the portfolio when we had the listeriosis crisis in 2008. One would think that after all the recommendations that came out to avoid another food disaster that the minister would have made it his top priority. However, obviously not, since here we are years later facing another situation where public health is being placed at risk.

We have a minister who finds it difficult to take his portfolio seriously. During the previous disaster when 22 Canadians died, he joked during that time. I am a teacher and if someone makes a mistake I hope that they learn from it. However, Canadians cannot keep giving this minister chance after chance to learn because it puts Canadians' safety at risk. That is just not acceptable.

It took this minister 14 days after the Americans had already pulled the beef and told us that there was a problem. It took him that long to implement a major recall.

As members know, we are facing the largest recall of our beef in our history. We have over 15 cases of E. coli all traced back to the XL Foods meat processing plant in Brooks, Alberta, and the agency has recalled 1,800 beef products. The recall extends to every province and territory, 40 states in the U.S. and 20 other countries.

What is absolutely amazing to me is that, despite all of this, the Prime Minister has left that portfolio in the hands of the minister. That baffles me beyond belief.

More than that, knowing all of this, we have a minister who has not demonstrated ministerial accountability by taking responsibility and stepping aside. Therefore, it is left up to the opposition to move this issue forward.

We are very concerned not only about our farmers and cattle ranchers who have raised this beef but also about the employees in Alberta. Whole communities are being devastated.

● (1155)

When looking at all of this, people in most walks of life would think that the minister would step forward. Instead, on October 1, we had the minister, not having learned from the crisis in 2008, at a Rotary Club in North Battleford, saying:

Is there an epidemic of E. coli outbreaks? Turns out there's not.

We're actually 40 per cent lower than we were three years ago, which is great news, because we're doing more testing, better testing and industry has stepped up and is doing a much better job.

Then, the most disturbing thing, when the Americans had already informed us that they were pulling our beef because of E. coli and we know that we had an E. coli situation right here in Canada, was the minister saying this:

We had some great Canadian beef for lunch. I don't know where it came from; I don't care. I know it's good, I know it's safe. You have to handle it and cook it properly. Certainly, we've identified some anomalies....

That is utterly irresponsible.

This is the same minister who was not present to answer questions during debate. That is the time we need the minister up front, reassuring the public that he has things in hand. However, we have a minister who, instead, was out there making lighthearted jokes about the E. coli breakout, assuring people it was perfectly safe if only they cooked the meat properly and, as another minister later said, washed their hands.

That is absolutely outrageous.

As I said, if this were the first incident, where the minister was new to the portfolio or did not know too much and was on a learning curve, we could maybe give him some space. However, this is the same minister who in 2008 made a joke. I am sure he must have been admonished at that time, but he did not learn a lesson from that nor implement any of the issues raised at that time.

If we consider the food inspection that takes place at the XL Foods plant, we know first of all that it is a huge meat processing plant. It covers many city blocks, I have been told. I have not been there but I am still quite impressed by its size, from what I have read.

We trusted XL Foods to do a lot of its own supervision. I am sorry, but when it comes to food inspection, the Canadian government has a major role to play.

UFCW Local 401 said in its report of October 10 that it had some major concerns, including that the line speeds were way too fast, that in order to speed up production, the conveyor belts had been speeded up. They went on to mention the lack of proper training and that although people were trained to sterilize knives between cuts, they were discouraged to do so because it would slow down production.

I would also point out that a third of the workers at this plant are temporary foreign workers and the staff turnover at this plant is huge as a result. Because it is so huge, I am worried about the kind of training that is given and the kind of investment that is made in training the staff.

In any event, I want to get back to why we are here today. We are here today for one simple reason: we do not need another disaster like this. We have a minister who, under his watch, with the portfolio in his hands, has now had a second major disaster. It is time for the minister to take responsibility and admit he has not learned the lesson of 2008. He failed this time and needs to resign as minister.

Business of Supply

• (1200)

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will ask my hon. colleague about her last point. She mentioned that our current Minister of Agriculture has held this portfolio for a very long time. We know this is the second time in five years that we have a food safety crisis in this country when he has been the minister. We know that in 2008 we had the listeriosis crisis and that 22 people died in this country, and that now 15 people are sick.

Regarding ministerial responsibility, should the Minister of Agriculture take responsibility for the actions taken and the food safety crisis in this country or should he continue to blame the public servants at the CFIA for this lack of oversight and continue to push for self-regulation by the companies that actually provide the food in our system?

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Mr. Speaker, it really does come down to ministerial responsibility and to the fact, first, that the steps needed after the crisis of 2008 were not taken. Second, it is about how this minister handled the second crisis in his file, the fact that he joked about it, was not around to answer questions and reassure the public, and that under his watch there have not been enough inspectors. Indeed, we have heard very well-experienced people say there is a shortage of inspectors.

The Conservative government also has to take responsibility because it is under its watch and the deregulation begun by the Liberals that this situation has arisen.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture, CPC): Mr. Speaker, one of the responsibilities of the minister is to ensure that the CFIA has the resources it needs to do its job. The member says there are not enough CFIA inspectors, but under our Prime Minister and our Minister of Agriculture, this government has hired over 700 net new inspectors. In our last budget, \$50 million in new dollars was allocated for food safety. In the 2011 budget there was \$100 million in new dollars for food safety. The member and her party have voted against all of these measures and should be held accountable by Canadians for doing so when the minister is trying to reinforce and increase the resources available for the CFIA.

I would like the member to give an account to Canadians how she can vote against these important measures for us to have a more robust food safety system.

• (1205)

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Mr. Speaker, the member's deflections do not take away from what we are here to debate today, namely the serious missteps by the minister in the way he has handled the current crisis. This is his second go. He is obviously a slow learner. Therefore, we are asking for his resignation.

I keep hearing about these omnibus budgets. The government throws in so many pieces of legislation, from changes in immigration to changes in retirement age to changes in EI, that it can stand up and say that we voted against this. I have no difficulty in saying that I voted against that budget and I am very proud of it. However, it is the same government that cut more than 600 jobs from CFIA and \$56.1 million of funding from the agency. This is the same minister

who is scaring the public by putting this in the budget, with more cuts coming.

By the way, I keep hearing about the inspectors, but the inspectors themselves have given evidence and made statements that there are not enough of them at this food plant, that there have been vacant positions and that even if the vacant positions were filled, there would still not be enough inspectors for such a huge enterprise as XL.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture, CPC): Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to speak to the motion, as misguided as it is. I reiterate what the hon. Minister of Agriculture said earlier today, that our government does not support the motion and fully rejects its premise.

I will speak first about the XL Foods situation and correct some of the many misconceptions the opposition has been communicating.

First, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency acted to contain contaminated products beginning on September 4 and has been acting ever since in the case of XL Foods. It continues to take comprehensive action in response to the E. coli issue. CFIA continues to rely on science-based evidence and a commitment to protect consumers.

[*Translation*]

These decisions are made on the basis of precise and compelling scientific evidence, and a prudent approach, in order to protect consumers. However, scientific evidence is not obtained instantaneously. The agency takes action as soon as it is notified of a problem in order to provide people with timely and precise information as the situation evolves, information that helps consumers decide what to do.

When the CFIA discovered the presence of E. coli bacteria on September 4 at the Alberta packing plant, it immediately took action to protect consumers. The agency immediately initiated an in-depth review, which led to the discovery of certain deficiencies at the XL Foods plant.

[*English*]

The in-depth review of plant operations led CFIA to conclude that a combination of several deficiencies played a role. As soon as these issues were detected, the company began recalling products and we alerted the public. We fully recognize that when it comes to food, consumers expect that the products on grocery store shelves are safe.

[*Translation*]

The CFIA tries to meet this expectation at all times. When a problem occurs, the agency seeks to identify the affected products and inform consumers. It conducts a transparent investigation and publishes the information on its website as soon as it becomes available. People can also sign up to be notified by email or Twitter about recalls and food safety issues.

Business of Supply

•(1210)

[English]

In an investigation of this kind the facts emerge through rigorous investigation, sampling, testing and interviewing. The agency cannot act in the absence of clear evidence, but once the facts become known they are shared with Canadians.

All of this information is available on CFIA's website at www.inspection.gc.ca, which I encourage all members of the House, the media and the public to visit to look at the timeline and the commonly asked questions section. It will certainly correct the misconceptions and the myths the opposition is communicating.

This leads me to another myth the NDP is spreading about so-called budget reductions to food safety. This is simply false. There have been no reductions made at the CFIA that would impact food safety in Canada. In fact, since March 2006 our government has added over 700 net new inspectors, an increase of over 20%. Inspectors will continue to inspect food products to ensure they meet the regulatory requirements of Canada.

To outline some of the investments we have made in food safety since forming government, in 2007, we provided \$223 million over five years for the food safety and consumer action plan. In 2009, we provided \$75 million over three years to address the report of the independent investigator. Budget 2010 provided \$13 million over two years to hire more inspectors. Budget 2011 provided \$100 million over five years for inspection modernization. In this year's budget, we are providing \$52 million over two years for food safety, which the opposition unfortunately voted against.

When we add up all of these investments, we see that the funding for the CFIA has gone up some 20% since we formed government in 2006. Only the NDP can call a 20% increase a budget cut. Of course, it is the same party that puts a \$20 billion carbon tax in its election platform and then adamantly denies that it wants to tax Canadians.

With all of this in mind, I want to take this opportunity to highlight our government's action in addressing the need for updated food safety legislation in Canada. This has become especially urgent in light of the large recall of beef products that is currently under way.

I want to take a few minutes to inform the House about some aspects of the new proposed food safety bill, the safe food for Canadians act.

First, let me stress that the objective of the bill is to enhance food safety oversight and to modernize.

[Translation]

This bill strengthens Canada's capacity to recall foods that pose a health risk and gives the CFIA the authority to have food producers adopt a traceability system.

A traceability system would allow the CFIA to more quickly trace products that pose a health risk and get them all off store shelves.

In addition, there are regulatory powers that would permit the CFIA to establish a record-keeping framework for food producers, which would force the producers to submit records by a given date.

As we can imagine, some producers keep more detailed records, while others do not. Some prefer to use paper systems, others computer programs. The upshot is that there are many record-keeping practices. If the CFIA could know in advance the format of the records and what standard information they should contain, investigations could be carried out much more quickly and more smoothly.

This bill would allow the government to make the industry submit records in a specific format in order to allow the CFIA to intervene more quickly in the event of outbreaks of food-borne illnesses.

This proposed legislation will provide a single and consistent inspection regime for Canada. Such a streamlined regime would make inspectors more efficient and effective. It would ease the burden on producers and industry. It would also allow businesses to better understand what the government expects from them, while providing Canadians with assurance that all foods are subject to the same safety standards, regardless of the commodity.

•(1215)

[English]

Food safety in Canada started with a sound regulatory framework. Food inspection was harmonized when the CFIA was created in 1997. Now is the time to harmonize the legislative framework under which it operates. Now is the time to enhance our legislative framework to provide an even more effective, responsive, streamlined, transparent and accountable food safety system to Canadians.

This bill would permit smarter, more efficient regulation. It would strengthen, modernize and consolidate current inspection and enforcement authorities around food. It is time for the opposition to step up to the plate.

[Translation]

New legislative provisions are also needed to position Canada to deal with new technologies and the realities of food production in the 21st century. The food safety environment is more complex today than it was just 10 years ago. The right tools are needed to properly manage today's risks and to better protect Canadians from unsafe food.

Consumer lifestyles are changing and the world is changing due to advancing science and technology—technology that is changing food manufacturing processes.

International best practices, new scientific tools and advances in developing food safety systems have guided Canada's move to strengthen its risk-based inspection system. This bill continues this and supports this direction.

Business of Supply

Consumers are seeking updated food safety legislation, and we have long recognized the need for modernization.

Consumer groups, producers and industry representatives have gone down this path with government before. Several attempts have been made over the past decade to get this work done.

[English]

In the Speech from the Throne, our government committed to reintroducing legislation to protect Canadian families from unsafe food. Our government respects the wishes of Canadians with this proposed legislation.

Our government is also committed to ensuring families have the information they need to make informed choices and to hold those who produce, import and sell goods in Canada accountable for the safety of Canadians.

The proposed legislation is very thorough and balanced. It addresses the desire of Canadians for better, more consistent protection of the food supply. The consolidation of the various food commodity-based statutes will mean that all foods will be governed by one consistent, rigorous set of rules.

Here is what people are saying about the safe foods for Canadians bill.

Nancy Croitoru, president and CEO, Food and Consumer Products of Canada, said, "We strongly support and applaud the federal government's strong action to modernize Canada's food safety laws".

Albert Chambers, executive director, Canadian Supply Chain Food Safety Coalition, said that it will, "position Canada's food safety regime well in the rapidly changing global regulatory environment".

Consumers and food safety experts are saying this. What has the NDP members been saying, until they had an 11th hour conversion a couple of weeks ago? The member for Welland was on the record in the *Western Producer* newspaper opposing this legislation.

This is another knee-jerk reaction of the NDP to oppose everything, before doing their homework and actually reading the bill. It was that member who claimed the CFIA would allow roadkill into the Canadian food chain. He has no credibility when it comes to food safety.

[Translation]

Canada is not the only country that is modernizing its food laws. In the United States, the Food Safety Modernization Act was signed into law by President Obama on January 4, 2011. This U.S. law sets out the requirements that American and foreign food facilities must meet, and the role that the Food and Drug Administration will play with regard to the frequency of inspections, tainted food assessments, and giving the U.S. government and local administrations more power.

The new U.S. law also gives additional powers to the FDA in order to prevent food-borne illnesses.

● (1220)

[English]

Canada already has a robust food safety system, but we have an unparalleled opportunity here to make it even better. This proposed modernized legislation provides for increased authority to prevent food-borne illnesses in our country.

The safe food for Canadians bill is needed so we can fulfill the recommendations of the report of the independent investigator in 2008 listeriosis outbreak. The independent investigator's report made it clear that legislative renewal was necessary for the government to fully meet its mandate and the expectations of Canadians. Our government committed to addressing all 57 of the independent investigator's recommendations. This is the last piece needed in order for us to follow on that commitment.

The Canadian industry has long been requesting a provision prohibiting a person from tampering with, threatening to tamper with or falsely claiming to tamper with products.

Our government also needs the authority to directly address those who perpetrate hoaxes on the public. Hoaxes generate unnecessary public fear around certain products and can be economically devastating for the producer of the product that is targeted by the hoax. With this bill, we would have the force to deal in a more immediate way with hoaxes and report them to the public.

Previous efforts in legislative renewal tried to cover statutes related to animal health and plant protection, as well as food. This bill is only about food. That is because food safety is one of our government's highest priorities.

With respect to the XL plant, this is why our government has been very clear. The plant will not reopen until the CFIA has deemed that it is safe. Consumer confidence is critical for Canada's beef industry. That is why we will not compromise when it comes to the safety of Canadians' food.

In fact, because our government is so focused on getting our safe food for Canadians bill passed, this morning the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food requested consent to immediately send our bill to the committee. The opposition said "no" to this positive initiative. It is delaying the bill in the House, rather than sending it to committee.

[Translation]

As far as the inspectors are concerned, there is absolutely nothing to prove that there were not enough inspectors at the plant as a result of the budget cuts. That claim is absolutely false.

[English]

The CFIA has confirmed that the plant has 46 full-time staff, 40 inspection staff and 6 veterinarians. As I mentioned a few moments ago, far from reductions, the number of CFIA staff at the XL Foods plant has increased by six during the last several years. These inspectors provide systematic inspection and oversight and work to ensure full coverage at all times when the plant operates.

Business of Supply

At the same time, we administer a highly effective recall system to protect and inform the public by tracing, identifying and working with retailers to remove product from the marketplace should problems occur. In fact, a recent University of Regina study of OECD countries found Canada's recall system to be among the best.

[*Translation*]

That is not to say there is nothing to learn from this event, and I am sure the CFIA, the meat-packing industry, and all our food safety partners will adopt any lessons they have learned.

Throughout the food safety investigation, the CFIA continued to maintain a very strong presence at this plant as it has with all other federally registered plants to verify that industry processes and practices are minimizing risks to food safety.

The CFIA is prepared to continue to work closely with XL Foods and complete its assessment of Establishment 38. The speed at which XL Foods can resume normal operations is solely dependent on its ability to demonstrate that it can produce safe food, as this government's top priority is the safety of the food supply. While the CFIA recognizes that the company would like to resume normal operations as soon as possible, its sole responsibility to consumers in this matter is to ensure that XL Foods can produce safe food.

I hope the Safe Food for Canadians Act will move swiftly through this House and come into effect as soon as possible in order to provide Canadians with an even more effective food safety system.

[*English*]

I support the proposed legislation because it will enhance food safety in Canada. It is time to modernize and for Canadians to have comprehensive protection from unsafe food under one legislation. I ask opposition members to support this important bill rather than playing partisan politics, like they are with the motion today.

I would like to ask for unanimous consent for the following motion: That notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House, Bill S-11, An Act respecting food commodities, including their inspection, their safety, their labelling and advertising, their import, export and interprovincial trade, the establishment of standards for them, the registration or licensing of persons who perform certain activities related to them, the establishment of standards governing establishments where those activities are performed and the registration of establishments where those activities are performed, be deemed read a second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food.

• (1225)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Does the hon. parliamentary secretary have unanimous consent to move that motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that was an interesting speech. It is important to have great debate.

In 2011 XL received \$1.6 million in growing forward grants to install state-of-the-art technology that would double its capacity per

day. Now the plant can process 4,000 to 5,000 heads. There has not been any more inspectors at that plant since 2006. Therefore, how can it increase production without more inspectors and ensure the safety of Canadians at the same time?

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Mr. Speaker, I am glad she enjoyed my speech, but I think she missed the section when I pointed out that the plant had 46 inspectors. This is an increase of six inspectors, more than 20%, over the last few years. Since 2006, there have been more inspectors at that plant.

I must also highlight that overall CFIA has 700 net new inspectors, more than it had in 2006. Unfortunately for the member, her party voted against every measure that we put in front of the House to either increase the inspector count or increase the funding for CFIA. The NDP members have to answer to Canadians for that. It is fine for them to talk about food safety, but when it comes time to stand in their places and vote for food safety, they are a failure and they must account to Canadians for that.

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I need to clear up some myths that the member and other members of his party keep perpetuating because they think we and Canadians are gullible. We are not.

The first myth is that Bill S-11 is the panacea to food safety, the bill that is coming before the House, which we will support. However, we need to clear up the myth. Currently, section 13 of the Meat Inspection Act gives all the authority the CFIA needs to compel compliance with the intent of the legislation. That means safe food. The CFIA can compel the production of documents, the production of testing, and not only that, but in February of this year the government issued guidelines saying, "You are required to provide the information set out in section 13". We must not be fooled by that myth.

The second myth is that we have more inspectors. What we know from our investigation at Food Safety First is that 200 inspectors were added to the invasive alien species program, food coming in, not to meat inspection. We lost 308 inspectors to meat inspection.

The final myth is that there has been more money for the CFIA. On page 168 of the Conservatives' own budget gives the CFIA only \$8 million per year. Other agencies got money. Then go to page—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. I appreciate this is an important matter and a spirited debate today but I would ask all hon. members to co-operate with the chair in terms of questions and comments.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Business of Supply

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Mr. Speaker, I will address some of the facts, or some of the myths again propagated by my colleague. When it comes to meat inspectors, of the 700 net new inspectors for food safety, 170 of them are meat inspectors.

The member says that he supports Bill S-11 but it is before the House and his party is slowing the passage down so it can enter into debate on the bill.

We are proposing to send the bill right to committee. The member sits on the committee. He could have an intensive review of that bill. He could propose modifications or amendments at committee if he wants. I do not know why he wants to delay the bill in the House before sending it to committee when it is such important legislation.

• (1230)

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it was interesting listening to all the speeches in the House this morning and even some of the questions, especially the question from the member for Malpeque who claimed that he did not trust the CFIA and that he did not have knowledge or information about what was going on.

I was wondering if the parliamentary secretary could inform the member for Malpeque of the website and then maybe the member could go online and get all the information that the Liberal Party seems to be missing when it comes to dealing with this issue.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Mr. Speaker, I must say that when the member for Malpeque made that statement it was both a reckless and unfortunate statement. He is questioning the integrity and the professionalism of the CFIA officials who work so hard to protect food safety for Canadians. It was a very unfortunate comment and I would ask that he retract it because it reflects very poorly on him and on his party.

The member should go to inspection.gc.ca. One of his colleagues said, "We do not know about the 700 new inspectors". It is on the website. Someone said, "Oh, we do not know about the timeline". It is on the website. If those members want to know more, they should go to that website.

I would ask the member to retract his statement.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I cannot retract a statement that I did not make. There is selective hearing on that side of the House. I do not take it lightly when members opposite try to put words in my mouth.

What I said was that the minister was responsible. He is incompetent and he has failed in his responsibilities.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The member for Malpeque is referencing a comment by the parliamentary secretary during an answer. The parliamentary secretary did not raise it as a point of order, so I did not respond to it in that way.

Questions and comments. The hon. member for Alfred-Pellan.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague opposite for his speech.

People across the country have talked about the contaminated meat crisis. It has significantly affected people in my riding, who

unfortunately have less and less confidence in the meat and ground beef on store shelves in Laval. As a future mother, I too am very concerned about the fact that these things are possible in our country and that this crisis has affected the entire country, in all provinces.

I am also concerned about the cuts to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. The real numbers indicate that in March 2011 and March 2012, employees were let go: over 250 jobs were eliminated. That is why I fear for my family and my constituents.

Does my colleague not find it a little strange that his party is saying that these cuts will in no way affect the health of Canadians?

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Mr. Speaker, Canadian consumers continue to be our government's top priority when it comes to food safety.

Regarding the cuts, our latest budget includes a transfer of federal resources to the provinces. There are now three provinces in which federal inspectors are doing the work of provincial inspectors. We are transferring resources to the provinces. It is not a cut; it is a transfer.

[*English*]

There was another change that we made. There were food inspectors washing cars in Newfoundland and Labrador. I am sorry but we just do not think that is a good use of food inspectors. We have stopped the practice of CFIA inspectors washing cars. They will continue to do examinations for the contamination of vehicles at the ferry but they will no longer be washing cars.

I think it is a bit deceiving for the opposition to say that there were cuts to food safety. There have not been cuts to food safety. In fact, in our last budget there was a \$50 million increase for food safety.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Hoang Mai (Brossard—La Prairie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques.

I rise today to speak to an issue of great concern to Canadians. It was even the subject of an emergency debate. This situation can be deemed a crisis. That is the right word for it. The XL Foods tainted meat scandal is having an enormous impact on the Canadian economy and especially on Canadians' confidence in the system.

It is the largest beef recall in Canada's history. A number of people have been infected by the E. coli bacteria and have fallen ill. Fortunately, there have been no deaths, but this is a very important health and safety issue for Canadians.

I have been an MP since May 2, 2011, and I can say that being a parliamentarian is not easy. We have many responsibilities. I can imagine that a minister also has many responsibilities. It is a very serious matter to call for a minister's resignation.

The NDP has given this much thought. My colleagues opposite say that it is simply a political move, but it is more than that. In this case, the minister is not doing his job and we are asking that he be replaced by someone who can do the job and inspire more confidence.

Business of Supply

Two weeks ago, I raised a matter with the Minister of National Revenue. I asked her to apologize because the Canada Revenue Agency made a mistake. To my surprise, she apologized; she took responsibility.

In this case, the Minister of Agriculture is not taking responsibility. Even worse, he is not taking the matter seriously.

● (1235)

[English]

When we talked about having an emergency debate on this issue, the minister called it “silly”. Afterward, he had apologized, but it shows how the minister puts things lightly when we have a crisis. It is not helpful. We want Canadians to feel reassured but, when there is a crisis or a problem, we need to address it and talk about it. In this case, the minister did not do his job.

On October 2, when we knew there were some problems, the minister had been at a luncheon conference and said, “We had some great Canadian beef for lunch. I don’t know where it came from; I don’t care”. At the same time as the minister was saying that everything was fine, we were telling Canadians to look at where their beef was coming from because there had been a recall and they needed to be careful. Saying that everything is rosy does not help Canadians. They need to be given the right information.

On October 8, *The Hill Times* stated:

There is no excuse for him not to have been in the House last week for three days, dodging questions and remaining silent.

We saw that when we asked questions of the minister. The minister has a responsibility to be here to answer questions and, if there are a lot of questions, he needs to answer all of them.

People need to be reassured but the minister has failed to do that. This is but one of the things he failed on in terms of his responsibilities.

[Translation]

There was another incident in which the minister did not do his job properly. We have to remember the past. Why do we no longer have any confidence in the Minister of Agriculture? The reason is that this same minister held the same position in 2008, when 22 Canadians died as a result of the Maple Leaf food crisis. There was a problem at that time, and we must learn from our mistakes. Clearly, the minister did not learn his lesson.

This government is pushing for cuts. We also believe in an efficient government and Parliament, but cuts should not be made when they affect services and safety. The government is giving industry and businesses more and more power to regulate themselves. The companies themselves have to take the initiative and do the inspections. We all know that a company’s main objective is to make a profit, and if measures affect that profit, the company will certainly try to do everything possible, evaluate the risks and then determine whether it should shut down or recall products.

It is up to the government to ensure that the products that are offered to Canadians are safe. We must not let businesses regulate themselves, as the government is currently doing. We should have learned from the 2008 listeriosis crisis. Twenty-two deaths is too

many. Twenty-two people died, and the government did not learn its lesson. We find that rather shocking and we do not understand it. The same minister was in office then as now, and we are facing one of the biggest crises ever in terms of the recall of beef products. Clearly, we do not have any confidence in the minister because, rather than taking concrete action, he is engaging in hyperbole and saying that everything is fine. No concrete action has been taken. The government is really doing exactly the opposite of what it should be doing.

I know that the members opposite say that there have not been any cuts. Yet, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency’s May 8, 2012, report on plans and priorities, which was signed by this same minister, indicated that \$46.6 million in cuts would be made and that 314 full-time employees would be laid off from 2012 to 2015. Clearly, cuts are being made.

I am a member of the Standing Committee on Finance. Last year, during pre-budget consultations, we asked witnesses about the potential impact of budget cuts on food inspections or food safety. The witnesses warned us in no uncertain terms during these pre-budget consultations that such cuts would jeopardize Canadians’ safety, because if cuts were made to the agency mandated to protect the health of Canadians, not only would this lead to reduced services, but it would put safety at risk. And look what happened.

If the government had invested in hiring people to protect us instead of making these cuts, then the largest beef recall in history could have been avoided. What is more, 2,000 people have lost their jobs. There are closures. The impact this is having on trade and the economy far outweighs what it would have cost to keep the inspectors in place.

This motion calls for the minister to be replaced and for the budget cuts to be reversed in order to truly address this problem instead of pretending that everything is just fine and that we can eat whatever we want with no problem.

● (1240)

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to commend my colleague on his speech and for shedding some light on this situation.

The Conservatives are saying that they offered the CFIA an additional \$100 million in funding this year, which is completely false. The investment was \$100 million over five years and, of that amount, only \$18 million will be given to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. It is important to point that out.

Remember that we are calling for the resignation of the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food. Many people have expressed their agreement with this. On October 5, Don Martin said that Mr. Ritz deserves a vote of non-confidence. On October 7, Tim Harper said that Mr. Ritz must take responsibility—

● (1245)

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): I would ask the member not to use proper names for colleagues in the chamber and to put the question.

Business of Supply

[Translation]

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau: Mr. Speaker, on October 7, Tim Harper said that the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food must take responsibility for the tainted beef scandal. This is important because the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food is responsible for the CFIA.

Does my colleague believe that the minister has been doing a good job to date?

Mr. Hoang Mai: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Berthier—Maskinongé not only for her question, but also for the incredible work she has done on this issue. She is our deputy agriculture critic and it is because of her hard work, and the hard work of others, that this issue has come to the forefront. I thank her and congratulate her for her work.

I agree that the minister did not do his job. It is not easy to call on a minister to resign. That is why we do not do it all the time. But in this case it is clear; the minister is the problem. We are told that we must have confidence in the system, but people do not have confidence in this minister. The media are saying that. My constituents are telling me that. There is a problem with the way the minister handled the issue. It is certain that some government policies focus on cuts, regardless of whether that reduces services. We see that every day, and unfortunately Canadians are the ones who suffer as a result.

But in this specific case, the minister truly did mismanage the crisis. Not only did he mismanage it, but he also did not take responsibility. Unfortunately, he dumped that responsibility on other people, and that is why we are calling for his resignation.

[English]

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I agree with what the hon. member and what he said about the minister not accepting his responsibility. There used to be a system in Canada where ministers were accountable and responsible. The Conservative government came in under the guise of accountability and we have seen no accountability since it arrived.

There is a second minister on the government side, the Minister of Health, who is responsible for Canada's national health agency. When there is a problem that affects the health and safety of Canadians, she is supposed to explain to them what is happening. We have not heard from the Public Health Agency of Canada in this instance. Does the member believe that the health minister should be held accountable, too, for being missing in action on this issue?

Mr. Hoang Mai: Mr. Speaker, it is true that we have not heard a lot from the Minister of Health. She has been absent from the debate and in reassuring Canadians. I agree that the government has changed from the time it said it would hold ministers to account, that it would show Canadians that it was responsible. That has not happened.

This is an important issue, a crisis, and we want to find a solution to it. Our focus today is on the Minister of Agriculture resigning.

[Translation]

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise in this House today to point out something that seems obvious to me and that seems obvious to most

Canadians, but that the government appears not to know anything about.

The Conservative government and the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food learned absolutely nothing from the listeriosis crisis in 2008. Many numbers have been thrown about here and there since the beginning of the debate and the beginning of the crisis. They say that 700 new inspectors have been hired, that \$51 million has been made available in the budget and that six new inspectors were hired at the XL Foods plant, the site of the latest E. coli bacterial contamination.

A number of opposition members used their time to destroy and demolish these myths. This is what I too will be doing during my speech. It is worth taking the time to clarify the situation, because unlike the opposition, the government seems obsessed with confusing the issue.

The budget cuts in the 2012 budget were the main reason why we voted against the budget. In fact, we should remember that the NDP voted against the 2012 budget because it contained budget cuts amounting to \$56 million and the elimination of important positions in the Canadian Food Inspection Agency.

Back in April, journalists reported that 825 people had received a notice saying that their position at the Canadian Food Inspection Agency was in danger. Not all the people affected were inspectors; some of them worked in administrative positions. However, some inspectors did receive notices. As of April 13, we knew that 59 inspectors assigned to meat inspection had already been laid off and it was possible that another 30 or 40 inspectors would also be laid off in the months to come. So some meat inspection positions had in fact already been eliminated.

The government says that 700 inspector positions have been created. The Conservatives repeated this number again today, a month after the beginning of the debate on the issue. This is unbelievable. It is clear and it has been noted that none of these positions were created in the slaughter plants. Two hundred of these inspectors were assigned to the review of invasive species, about 300 were assigned to technological controls, which has nothing to do with on-site inspections, and 170 were assigned to meat inspection in processing plants, not slaughter plants. Remember that XL Foods was a slaughter plant. So saying that 700 positions were created is nothing but hogwash.

This is now a matter of government accountability. This is a matter of transparency and accountability, and the government and the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food are refusing to live up to their responsibilities.

Business of Supply

When the layoffs were announced and when it became known that some employees had received a notice of that kind, journalists started asking questions, including Sarah Schmidt of Postmedia News, Jason Fekete and other journalists. They wanted to know where the notices had been sent and which positions were going to be eliminated or were likely to be eliminated. They wanted to know whether the people involved were veterinarians, seed inspectors or inspectors working in slaughterhouses and processing plants. Despite repeated requests, including requests to Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and to the minister's office, they never got any answers. They did not obtain any answers to their questions.

In terms of the \$51 million the Conservatives boast about investing, what they are not saying is that this money was meant to renew the programs that were started after that listeriosis crisis, in the processing plants. Another thing they are not saying is that the money was divided among three budgets. One part went to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, another part went to the Public Health Agency of Canada and the last part went to Health Canada. It was meant to ensure that the programs set up in the wake of the listeriosis crisis would not be eliminated. These are not new programs that have been created, but rather existing programs that have been maintained.

However, the Conservatives went ahead with cuts in the order of \$56 million in the 2012 budget. It was clear; it was set out in black and white: \$56 million was cut from the Canadian Food Inspection Agency budget. That led to the lay-offs of 59 meat inspectors on plant floors.

• (1250)

Now we should talk about ministerial accountability, because this is the reason why we are here today. We are here to discuss the accountability of the minister. The NDP is calling on the Minister of Agriculture to resign, because he has not done his job.

Since the beginning of the crisis, 15 people have fallen ill and to date there have been 16 recalls of contaminated meat. In the chronology put out by the Conservatives and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, on September 13, 2012, U.S. authorities took away XL Foods' export permit because they had detected E. coli bacteria. Nonetheless, meat continued to be produced at the plant and, despite what the minister told us, wound up on grocery store shelves and in Canadians' refrigerators for another two weeks, until September 27.

The minister has said he was not to blame right from the start. Back in the early days of the crisis, he blamed just about everyone else. He began by blaming the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, and then he blamed the opposition, the media and just about anyone but himself. The Prime Minister did the same: he said that his Minister of Agriculture had done nothing wrong.

What is the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, if not a crown corporation, an independent agency of the government that reports to Parliament and to the members? It is an agency that reports directly to the Minister of Agriculture. According to the principle of ministerial accountability, the Minister of Agriculture must take the blame for what happened. He must take the blame because, despite what he says, he has the authority to instruct this agency to take direct measures, because the agency reports to him. In everything

that the Conservative government has said to date during this debate, that is the key element that it is trying to make us forget.

There are some crucial facts. We want Canadians to have confidence in the current food inspection system. That is our sincerest wish. It is hard to have complete confidence in this system when the government talks about 700 net new inspectors, but that number does not apply to the XL Foods plant, and when it talks about injecting new money that is being used only to maintain existing programs that would otherwise have been dropped.

It is hard to have confidence in the government when it fails to mention important facts related to XL Foods in particular. Indeed, there are 46 inspectors at the plant, and the government told us it hired six new inspectors, but it failed to tell us that those inspectors were hired to fill vacancies. No new positions were created. People were hired to fill positions that had been left vacant for a long time by the Conservative government. The government is trying to cover its backside by shifting the blame and playing the public relations game.

I want to quickly come back to XL Foods and the 46 inspectors. There are two important facts that we must not overlook that are part of the current problem, which must be addressed by the minister. The first is that the 46 inspectors are not on the floor at all times. There are two shifts of 23 people. The XL Foods plant increased its production significantly. The Conservative government even gave the plant funding so that it could speed up its production. It now processes between 4,000 and 5,000 head of cattle, but there are still only 46 inspectors, or two shifts of 23 inspectors. In that context, one inspector can evaluate roughly four head of cattle a minute.

It is clear to us, but I would like to know whether it is clear to the government that speeding up production without increasing the inspection capacity is a recipe for an E. coli outbreak and could result in future outbreaks and tainted meat problems.

The government must answer this question. The minister is refusing to do so and that is why we are calling for his resignation.

• (1255)

[English]

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I come from the province where the crisis originated. Many of our workers are being affected, including inspectors, but definitely those who work in the plant and our ranchers.

One of the things we have called for in the motion is that the minister resign and that the government give consideration to reassigning this important portfolio to someone else. I noticed that in 1997, I think it was then a Liberal government that made the decision to transfer this responsibility from Health Canada to Agriculture Canada under the auspices of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency.

Business of Supply

In view of what has occurred, and it is regrettable, it is not necessarily the minister's fault. He assumed the mantle of this portfolio. He has two conflicting responsibilities. One is to promote our beef industry and the other to make sure it is safe for consumers. Does the member think maybe it is time for the government to reconsider assignment of this responsibility?

• (1300)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy Caron: Mr. Speaker, that is a highly relevant question.

First I would like to extend my sympathies to the workers currently affected, who deserve our compassion as a result of what is going on. They are currently in an absolutely impossible situation.

In fact, most of the facts, indicators and alarm signals about the way things were being done came from the workers and the union. I say that even though I know the government does not like the unions very much.

With regard to my colleague's question, I believe there is indeed a conflict of interest. One of the responsibilities of the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food is to promote economic development and the production and export of our agricultural products, to support producers, processors, all intermediaries and exporters.

At the same time, the minister is responsible for monitoring threats to the public health of Canadians through the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. That is the agency's job in a nutshell. Consequently, I believe there really is a conflict of interest. We should seriously consider the possibility of withdrawing responsibility for the agency from the Minister of Agriculture and reassigning it to the Minister of Health or to any other minister who could do the job.

[*English*]

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one of the myths that is perpetuated is that all 57 recommendations of the Weatherill report have been implemented. In fact, we know that the recommendation about an independent third-party comprehensive audit was not implemented. The government keeps telling us the survey it did is an audit. Even the former president of the CFIA said the survey is not the same as a comprehensive audit.

Does the member agree with that, and does he agree that we finally need a third-party comprehensive audit of all CFIA resources, including human resources?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy Caron: Mr. Speaker, I entirely agree with what the member for Guelph said.

The only audit that was done was a financial audit, which has nothing to do with food safety or food security. Many other parts of the Weatherill report have not been acted upon. Among other things, most employees at XL Foods had not yet been trained in the new compliance verification system. That was not the case for all employees, but it was for most. The process was being introduced. My colleague from Guelph is therefore entirely right to say that the government has not implemented all the recommendations of the Weatherill report.

I would also like to go back briefly to Bill S-11, which the parliamentary secretary and others are constantly harping on and which will be studied in the House.

Bill S-11 would have done nothing to prevent the contamination that occurred. And if it was so important for the government to protect food safety by means of this bill, it should have tabled it immediately after the 2011 election. This bill had already been introduced and it died on the order paper when Parliament was prorogued. If the bill was really important to the government, why did it not table it immediately after the election? Instead, it played political games as it is doing today by trying to impose the bill on us and to blame us for not passing it immediately without proper study.

[*English*]

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to start by saying that consumer confidence is critical to Canada's beef industry, and that is why we will not compromise when it comes to the safety of Canadians' food.

As the member of Parliament for Medicine Hat and more specifically as the MP for the people of Brooks, Alberta, I think it is rather shameful that, at this hard time for my constituents, the NDP is playing politics with this issue. As the MP for Brooks, I say that the opposition has been spreading a lot of myths and innuendo today. If members want the facts about what happened, they should simply go to the CFIA website, www.inspection.gc.ca, and read for themselves. However, perhaps in the interim I will enlighten them on the facts.

Our food safety system is the best in the world, as stated by the OECD. Canada is one of the best performing countries in the 2010 food safety performance world ranking study. Its overall grade was superior, earning it a place among the top-tier countries. We also know that the Canadian Food Inspection Agency's first priority is to maintain the safety of the food supply and that the agency acts on science-based evidence to protect public health. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency acted to contain contaminated products beginning on September 4, and it has been acting ever since. By the way, I am going to refer to E. coli strain 0157:H7 simply as E. coli.

In order to understand what happened at the XL plant, CFIA launched an in-depth investigation, which ultimately uncovered deficiencies in the establishment. In its in-depth review of plant operations, it pointed to a combination of several deficiencies that caused the problem. Regulated establishments are expected to be able to monitor higher than normal detection rates and modify their control programs accordingly. However, at this facility, this did not happen. The CFIA found that the company had an approved plan to deal with E. coli, but the plan was not followed and was not being updated. The company was unable to demonstrate that it was consistently and effectively implementing its agreed control program.

Business of Supply

The CFIA also noted deviations from the company's documented control systems for *E. coli* and its sampling and testing procedures. This was serious and likely to contribute to *E. coli* contamination going undetected. The CFIA also identified a number of other general maintenance and sanitation issues that may have been found in a high-volume plant, particularly in an older plant. These would not typically contribute to *E. coli* contamination but had to be fixed. The company made a series of commitments to correct the deficiencies identified by the CFIA. However, based on information from the company and from CFIA staff in the plant, the agency determined these deficiencies had not been fully corrected.

As a result, the CFIA suspended XL Foods' licence to operate the Brooks plant on September 27. Prior to this, on September 16, XL Foods had already begun recalling affected products and the agency alerted the public. The CFIA administers a highly effective recall system to protect and inform the public by tracing, identifying and working with retailers to remove product from the marketplace should problems occur. The CFIA continues to work with XL Foods to collect information from suppliers, distributors and retailers to identify where affected products have been distributed.

As a result, additional products have been and may still be recalled, in which case CFIA will immediately alert the public. These recall expansions are common because some of the affected products went for further processing or to other distributors before going to retailers. This means affected products could be repackaged and relabelled after leaving the XL facility. When dealing with public alerts, the CFIA needs to be sure it has identified all the right products. CFIA inspectors contacted and visited retailers across Canada to make sure all identified products are removed from stores.

• (1305)

This can be a time-consuming process. As the recall proceeded, CFIA also conducted a rigorous review of the XL Foods plant in Brooks, Alberta. The agency sent an expert review team of specialists to conduct a thorough review of the plant and the company's progress toward fixing problems.

The review conducted on October 9 and 10 determined that the plant and equipment had been cleaned and sanitized to meet requirements of Canada's meat inspection regulations. The team also verified that the specific maintenance and sanitation problems identified by CFIA had been corrected. In addition, the CFIA evaluated the company's written corrective action plan for enhanced *E. coli* control.

On October 11, the agency announced that it would allow the facility to proceed to the next stage in the review process. This means, effective October 11, the plant was allowed to process, not ship, carcasses that were in the plant when it closed on September 27.

The CFIA sampling and testing of the carcasses in the facility found that more than 99% tested negative for *E. coli*. The remainder will be destroyed and will not enter the food supply. Carcasses that tested negative for *E. coli* are being allowed to proceed to processing, so the CFIA can observe the plant's food safety controls in action. No products will leave the plant until the CFIA has confirmed, in writing, to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food

that plant controls are effectively and consistently managing *E. coli* risks and all the products are safe.

Let me say that even though the process has been hard on Brooks, the people of that great city know that if CFIA does not take every step possible to assure consumers that meat coming from XL in the future is safe, then the future of the plant is in even more doubt.

CFIA plans to do even more. As I have outlined, the CFIA's current focus is to verify that the plant has put measures in place, and follows these measures, to effectively control possible *E. coli* contamination at all stages of production.

Once the agency is confident in the food safety controls at XL Foods, the CFIA will review this incident to determine if improvements to Canada's food safety system can be made. The CFIA's first priority continues to be the health and safety of Canadians. The CFIA's decisions have been and continue to be based on science, evidence and a precautionary approach to protect consumers.

Industry has a major responsibility when it comes to safe food. It is required by law to produce it. Many food-producing companies have instituted state-of-the-art food systems in their operations, as well they should. They need to leverage new technologies and new techniques to meet their requirements to government regulators, such as CFIA, and the people of Canada to produce safe food.

That precautionary approach simply means the agency will err on the side of caution if there is a risk that some action or policy is harmful to consumers.

From the beginning, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency's actions throughout the XL Foods investigation and recall have been guided by science and by the evidence. Nevertheless, there has been some criticism of how this event has been handled.

At first the focus was on how the agency responded. Now we see the complexity of the problem that had to be assessed and acted on. The question remains as to why problems at the plant were not found during routine inspections.

I know the president of XL Foods' union has said that in fact there were many problems at the plant, and he certainly suggested that these were safety issues, and yet neither the union nor any of its employees actually went to a CFIA inspector to see if these corrections needed to be made. There is absolutely no record of a union member going to CFIA to question the food safety.

Routine day-to-day inspections focus on what are called critical control points, where food risks are greatest. Less critical aspects of production and facility maintenance are assessed, but less frequently. It makes sense to focus resources where they are most effective, where there is the most risk.

●(1310)

Normally, many of the issues identified by the in-depth review have been dealt with directly with plant management. Since they were picked up during an in-depth review, the agency was required to issue corrective action requests immediately.

Remember that the investigation determined that a combination of several deficiencies could have contributed to the problem. There was not one major issue but a few smaller ones. By themselves, each of these deficiencies would not typically be cause for immediate concern during routine inspection procedures.

New procedures at the plant will continue to provide the CFIA with more frequent trend analyses and more stringent bracketing procedures. These involve removing products from the assembly line if they are near any lot that contains a sample of meat that tested positive for *E. coli*.

The CFIA's current focus is to verify the plant has put the measures in place and to follow those measures to effectively control possible *E. coli* contamination at all stages of production. Once the CFIA is fully confident in the food safety controls at Establishment 38 of XL Foods Inc., it will review this incident to determine if improvements to Canada's food safety system can be made.

As I have said, the process has been hard on the people in Brooks and the plant workers have been temporarily laid off, pending resumption of normal activities. I have had discussions with the Minister of Agriculture and the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development on this very issue. That is why Service Canada has proactively contacted the company and assigned a reference number to track claims.

Furthermore, Service Canada staff is in town to assist employees in filing their claims and information sessions are being arranged to help those affected, along with my staff from the Brooks office. I encourage all employees to submit EI claims. I know over 800 applicants have already begun the process.

I will speak to the claims made that the government has somehow undermined food safety by underfunding the CFIA.

When we look at the government's actions on food safety, we do not see underfunding.

In response to the 2009 Weatherill recommendations, the government initiated a review of Canada's food inspection system and made an initial investment of \$75 million over three years to improve the system's ability to prevent, detect and respond to food-borne illness. That was a direct infusion coming between annual budgets.

Six months later, budget 2010 provided the CFIA with an additional \$13 million for two years to increase its capacity to inspect meat processing facilities.

Business of Supply

Budget 2011 provided an additional \$100 million over five years for the CFIA to modernize its food inspection system. This enabled the government to complete its response to all the recommendations in the Weatherill report through target investments in inspector training, additional science capacity and electronic tools to support the work of front line inspectors.

Budget 2012 underscored the government's continued commitment to keeping our food safe. It included another \$51.2 million over the next two years for the CFIA, the Public Health Agency of Canada and Health Canada to continue to improve food safety.

Since 2006, the CFIA has received funding to hire more than 700 net new inspectors, including 170 meat inspectors. It is food safety and public health investments like these that have driven down the incidents of *E. coli* illness in Canada by 50% over the last six years.

The government is also pursuing complementary activities to strengthen Canada's food safety system, including proposed new legislation. The safe food for Canada act would strengthen food safety legislation and regulations to support the CFIA's core mandate of food safety and consumer protection.

It is unfortunate that some of the proposed changes to Canada's food safety system have already drawn some fire through a misguided association with the XL Foods recall.

There have also been claims that the CFIA is reducing front line food safety inspection staff. That is simply not true. No staffing reductions have been made by the CFIA that will affect food safety in Canada. In fact, from March 2006 to March 2012, our government has increased inspectors by a net number of over 700, or a 20% increase. This staff increase demonstrates the agency's commitment to continue to direct available resources to specific priority areas, such as food safety and front line inspection.

As for the XL Foods plant at the heart of the recall, the CFIA has 46 full-time staff at the Brooks, Alberta plant comprised of 40 inspectors and 6 veterinarians. These inspectors are working in two shifts to ensure full coverage at all times when the plant is operating, providing systematic inspection and oversight. There have been no changes to CFIA staffing levels in the plant in the last 12 months.

●(1315)

The CFIA will continue to maintain a strong presence at the XL Foods plants and all other federally-registered plants to verify that the industry processes and practices are minimizing risks to food safety.

Our government is fully committed to protecting the health and safety of Canadians by ensuring that Canada's food safety system remains among the best in the world.

Business of Supply

It is true that ranchers and farmers in my riding and the industry need a strong processing sector, but everyone understands that food safety is the cornerstone of the industry's growth success. That is why the XL Foods plant will resume full operation only when the president of the CFIA confirms to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food that the health of Canadians is not at risk.

I ask that the NDP agriculture critic, the member for Welland, who I sit with on the agriculture committee, to end his political games and, for once, do something constructive and support our government's investments in food safety and support our legislation, the safe food for Canadians act.

I strongly urge all those concerned about improving the food safety in Canada to support the safe food for Canadians acts when it comes to the House. The bill would strengthen food safety legislation and regulations to support CFIA's core mandate of food safety and consumer protection.

I would ask for unanimous consent for the following motion: That notwithstanding any order or unusual practice of the House, Bill S-11, an act respecting food commodities, including their inspection, their safety, their labelling and advertising, their import, export and interprovincial trade, the establishment of standards for them, the registration or licensing of persons who perform certain activities related to them, the establishment of standards governing establishments where those activities are performed and the registration of establishments where those activities are performed, be deemed read a second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food.

• (1320)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Does the hon. member have unanimous consent to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I know the concern we all have about food safety. I would like to reference back to see if the member could answer some questions about what has happened over the past number of years with the Brooks plant.

In the past, the Alberta government invested heavily in speeding up the processing in this plant. It increased the rate of production through grants to XL Foods.

Could the member tell me what the response was from the federal government and the CFIA to the effort that was made by the Alberta government to increase the production for that plant?

Mr. LaVar Payne: Mr. Speaker, as a member of the agriculture committee, I had the opportunity to go to another meat processing facility at Cargill. When I compared the two sites, because I have been to both sites, the rate of production did not seem to be any different from one facility to the other. Therefore, I am having some issues with trying to figure out what the issue is. According to some individuals, and I believe it was the management of XL Foods, the speed of processing the cattle through their facility was actually less than in some other facilities.

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is interesting that the Conservatives continue, even the member for Medicine Hat, this ruse, this malarkey that Bill S-11 is the panacea to food safety. The member knows that the Meat Inspection Act, section 13, gives the CFIA all the power it needs to do what it needs to do. That is why Cargill got it right. That is why all the other abattoirs in the country are getting it right, because CFIA has that power. Therefore, that ruse can stop now.

However, I want to know if the member, who is deflecting all responsibility to everyone else, is prepared to take some responsibility for this himself. What he failed to say was that, on page 261 of its budget, after giving some money, the government took \$56 million away. Two weeks ago the Parliamentary Budget Officer confirmed that \$16 million of that was already gone.

Why will you not take responsibility?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): I would remind all hon. members to direct their comments and questions to the Chair rather than their colleagues.

The hon. member for Medicine Hat.

Mr. LaVar Payne: Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague from Guelph is an interesting individual, to say the least. I have had the opportunity to sit on the agriculture committee with him. He has written to the newspaper in my riding and complained that we have reduced inspection. We have not reduced inspection. We made some adjustments in the funding for the CFIA and that was because we looked at areas where we could become much more efficient and improve our system. That is where those reductions happened.

I also point out that Canadians want us to ensure we have a balanced budget rather than what the Liberals or New Democrats would do, which would be to increase the deficit to Canadians and hit their pocketbooks much harder.

• (1325)

Mr. Brian Storseth (Westlock—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first, I congratulate my hon. colleague from Medicine Hat for recognizing the importance of food safety and taking this out of the partisan realm and addressing some of the issues on the ground. He has been a leader in our caucus on this. He has been very diligent.

I know there has been some concern expressed about the need for human resource skills development staff and citizenship and immigration staff on the ground to help out at more of a humanitarian level. Could the member talk a bit about what he and the government have been able to do to assist in that?

I once again congratulate him for rising above the partisanship that unfortunately happens in the House far too often.

Business of Supply

Mr. LaVar Payne: Mr. Speaker, that is a good question. The government was able to get Service Canada's EI experts to that smaller community to help with the large amount of layoffs at XL Foods. Not only that but we have helped the community come together and have made people available for interpretation. We know there are a lot of temporary foreign workers who have come from other parts of the world.

In addition, we have been available to help with EI in many ways, including through my office. It is important to recognize that even some refugees will have some issues and we are available to help temporary foreign workers and the 2,000 employees who are currently laid off. We will ensure that we do our best to get them back to work or find alternative employment.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in 2008, when there was a listeriosis crisis, 22 Canadians died, and recommendations were made. The minister has not implemented any of those. Now we have this second major disaster, one of our largest recalls, and the member of Parliament from that very riding is not questioning the minister on why it took him 14 days to put a full recall into place, why he did not take responsibility, answer critical questions or assure Canadians. Then the member talked about refugees, though I think he meant temporary foreign workers, and everything the government is doing right now.

Today we are debating the accountability of the minister. Do you believe the minister acted in a responsible manner when he made jokes about the beef being safe and his lack of responsibility in the House?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Once again, I would remind members to direct their questions to the Chair. In this case, I suspect the question was actually directed to the hon. member for Medicine Hat rather than the Chair.

Nevertheless, the hon. member for Medicine Hat.

• (1330)

Mr. LaVar Payne: Mr. Speaker, I would point out to the member opposite that there are refugees there with whom we are working as well.

As far as the minister is concerned, I have been in regular contact, if not every day every other day, with the minister about the situation in that facility, recognizing the huge impact it has had on the community and the employees. The minister has worked his way through this. He says we will not reopen that facility until we know it is absolutely safe. I concur absolutely with the minister that there is no way that we should reopen that facility if it would damage our industry, that is, if we opened it and there were a quick recurrence.

The minister has done an outstanding job. The New Democrats think we can flip a switch and know that today we have it, and tomorrow it is solved. However, there are 4,000 head of cattle going through that plant every day. There are records that must be maintained by XL Foods' management. There are records that have to be reviewed by CFIA inspectors. As was stated earlier, the training was not sufficiently effective, which is part of the reason it took a bit longer to find out. That is why the inspectors are there and have taken the corrective action to ensure that the food coming out of the XL Foods plant will be safe for Canadians.

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I heard the member respond in terms of how the Conservatives are trying to balance the budget.

A relevant fact here is that under the Conservative government we have had a \$54 billion deficit, the largest one Canadian history and it is under the current government. What the Conservatives have done, basically—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. I was calling for a resumption of debate rather than further questions.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Beauharnois—Salaberry.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Beauharnois—Salaberry, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to note that I will be sharing my speaking time with the member for Compton—Stanstead.

The situation we are in today is far from brilliant. Yesterday, we learned that the Food Safety and Inspection Service, the U.S. equivalent of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, had warned Canada several times about shortcomings in its food safety system.

Between 2003 and 2008, not just one report, but a whole series of reports were sent to the Canadian government concerning problems in several slaughterhouses, including the XL Foods plant, and the Brooks plant in Alberta was temporarily removed from the list of authorized meat exporters by the U.S. authorities. The reports mentioned equipment with meat left on it for hours, as well as traces of blood and fat from the previous day. The reports also mentioned a shortage of qualified staff and inadequate inspection of the carcasses. This is rather alarming, is it not?

The problems at XL Foods are nothing new. Despite repeated warnings from the American inspectors and Canadian experts, the Canadian government took no action. This is completely irresponsible. There is nothing really surprising about the fact that we find ourselves today facing a new crisis that has lasted more than 40 days.

Do we really need to be reminded that this is the largest beef recall in our country's history? It is reported that 1,800 products have been recalled, in all the Canadian provinces, 40 U.S. states and 20 other countries. Canada's reputation has been tarnished, and this government, including the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, continues to claim that it did what had to be done. This is very arrogant and demonstrates incredible incompetence. It is truly a fiasco.

Is this government, which is so fond of deregulation that it prefers to protect the interests of multinationals rather than the health of Canadians, aware of the economic consequences of its inaction, at a time when it is boasting about its economic progress?

Business of Supply

I will give some examples of these fiascos. Albertan businesses and the food sector have now lost billions of dollars because of this crisis. Our beef exports have significantly declined. The company has had to pay out more than \$3 million in compensation to its employees. Despite this, many workers are currently jobless.

Martin Shields, the mayor of Brooks, is worried. The small town of 13,000 is suffering because of this crisis. The municipality is trying to help all the workers complete employment insurance forms and to assist them in their search for a temporary job or direct them to food banks. For a government that boasts of being the champion of the economy, this is a total disaster.

From now on, XL Foods will be operated by JBS, and it may even be purchased by this Brazilian multinational. JBS is the largest beef processing company in the world, with sales of \$30 billion per year. The Brooks plant will continue to slaughter more than 4,000 animals per day. Let us hope that the government will now and henceforth ensure that health criteria are met and even exceeded. But that would surprise us given that it has not yet learned anything from the last crisis, the one involving listeriosis.

Rather than strengthening our oversight system, the Conservative government deregulated it. It prefers to allow the industry to self-regulate. But who will monitor our food safety? We need to keep in mind that *E. coli* contamination can kill.

In 2008, 22 people died in the listeriosis crisis. Do we want that kind of tragedy to happen again? What lesson did this government learn from the last tragedy? None, apparently. We have teetered on the brink of disaster once again: 15 people became seriously ill. For anyone who is not aware, the effects of *E. coli* contamination last from five to seven days. A person may have a fever and suffer prolonged vomiting and also have cramps and diarrhea. It is not a pleasant thing. Fortunately, those people did not die. It could have happened. What is the government waiting for before it does something?

The motion by my colleague from Welland is very clear. It is calling for three things that are essential for reforming the food inspection system and protecting our health.

● (1335)

First, the present minister, who has not lived up to his responsibilities, has to be removed, and the essential job of protecting the Canadian public has to be assigned to a competent minister. Second, the budget cuts that have brought us to this untenable situation have to be cancelled. And third, the Auditor General has to be directed to evaluate food inspection procedures.

On September 3, *E. coli* bacteria were found in a shipment of ground beef from XL Foods. But it was not until September 16 that the Canadian Food Inspection Agency ordered the first recall. A few days earlier, on September 12, meat exports to the United States had been halted. The meat was judged to be unfit for consumption for Americans, but not for Canadians. Something is not working. What did the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-food do? He chose the strategy of deny, deny, deny.

On September 26, the minister said there was no contaminated meat on store shelves, at the same time as there were Canadians getting sick. Either the minister was not aware of what was going on,

which would be bizarre since he is supposed to be responsible for the agency, or he was continuing to underestimate the crisis. In both cases, there was a flagrant absence of ministerial accountability. He no longer has the confidence of Canadians and he must be replaced.

Now let us talk about our food inspection system. The experts have been calling for reform for some years now. In 2009, after the listeriosis crisis that resulted in 22 deaths, Sheila Weatherill, a leading expert in this area, was directed by the Prime Minister to investigate the crisis.

In her report, she recommended that the compliance verification system be reviewed since there were significant flaws in it. She also recommended that the Canadian Food Inspection Agency take proactive measures to ensure food safety. All of these elements are essential to the modernization of our monitoring system.

Some important parts of Ms. Weatherill's report have not been implemented. As well, the agency has suffered cuts of \$46 million, the equivalent of losing 308 positions, including a number of inspector positions. Today, in fact, we have heard the Conservatives refer repeatedly to the many inspectors they have added, but we must not allow ourselves to be fooled by this disinformation, since 170 inspectors were added in the wake of the listeriosis crisis, and 200 inspectors out of the 700 announced with great fanfare are associated simply with processing, and not with inspection.

When we look at all this information, we realize that the crisis was not an accident at all, but rather the result of the Conservative government's negligence. It was also a result of the ideology of the Conservatives, who do not believe that the government should play a role in protecting people and public health.

During the 2008 listeriosis crisis, we realized that Maple Leaf did not have any obligation to report the discovery of contaminated meat to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. The industry is being asked to regulate itself. Is this a joke? Is the minister giving the industry the responsibility to protect the public health of Canadians? Really?

This deplorable policy makes me think of the generic drug shortage that occurred only a few months ago. In that case too, the federal government said that it had not been informed by the company and that there had been a break in the production line. It is because the industry was not being closely monitored. The government is relying on self-regulation. It sees that there are problems but does not react. This is a serious problem. Once again, Canadians are the ones who are paying the price. Let us remember that surgeries had to be postponed and patients had to take alternative drugs.

This crisis shows that there are major flaws in our food surveillance system. What guarantee do we have that the meat we buy at the grocery store is safe? Too many doubts remain. We are asking the Auditor General to assess the compliance verification system.

Business of Supply

• (1340)

Bill S-11 does not address all the issues. It also does not fix the flaws in the current system. This bill includes a mandatory audit of the CFIA every five years. We cannot wait five years. That is too long. Canadians' health is at stake here. I do not know whether the Conservatives understand that.

Many people are aware of the amount of meat that plants process, so I will move on.

The government must play a role in the public health of Canadians. The Conservatives need to understand that. They need to demonstrate leadership, be accountable to Canadians and make the right decisions.

[*English*]

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, as if it were a cure-all for this problem, it was announced yesterday that JBS, a Brazil-based company, would be buying XL. However, JBS has many safety and trade practice violations in the United States, such as a massive beef recall for E. coli, violations of workers' hours of service, U.S. immigration raids for exploitation of foreign workers and forgery of meat quality data. Is that not a nice list?

Many Canadians have been worried about proposed foreign takeovers, such as Nexen or Petronas, of key strategic energy resources. Food is also a key strategic resource and it is not even mentioned in the Investment Canada Act.

Many Canadians have been worried about those takeovers. My question for the member and for the members on the government side is this. Will the government be reviewing this foreign takeover and will that review include food safety considerations?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for the question. Clearly, the goal is not to transfer all activities that take place in Canada to other companies. We want to keep Canadians working, but we want them to be able to do so in excellent conditions and according to best practices.

In the present case, 2,900 workers at the plant have been affected and have been temporarily laid off because of this. Meanwhile, some employees have said very clearly that workers are trained to sterilize their knives and they want to sterilize them between each cut, but they are encouraged not to do so, because it would slow down their work. Proper procedures are not followed because the workers are told to work faster. And the minister says that nothing else can be done, that everything is fine.

Will someone please set the record straight? Will the minister do his job?

• (1345)

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague on her excellent speech.

Indeed, the minister seems to have neglected his duties in this matter. We need only look at how long it took him to respond to the crisis. I have a feeling that this is going to cause Canadians to lose all confidence in the years to come. My question relates to that.

Does the member think that the minister's negligence will completely destroy Canadians' confidence in our meat processing plants and in the work of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency? And what is the only thing left for him to do? What must the minister now do in light of this scandal?

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Sherbrooke.

Yes, people have lost confidence in this Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food. A number of people are supporting our call for the minister's resignation because he misled Canadians. On several occasions he joked about the crisis and he said that no tainted meat reached the grocery stores. However, we know very well that people have fallen ill, and that we are facing the largest ever recall of such products in Canada's history.

Yes, we are quite justified in calling for his resignation. Many people support this move and many workers in the industry are quite simply calling for the resignation of the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food.

Mr. Jean Rousseau (Compton—Stanstead, NDP): Mr. Speaker, since this morning, the members opposite, including the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, have been demanding that we debate Bill S-11, from the Senate, which is an unelected chamber. This is sad. Once again, the Conservatives are trying to discredit our work. The House of Commons is made up of elected members. We were elected by the Canadian people from coast to coast to coast, and the government is preventing us from doing our job.

Today's topic has to do with an industry hit particularly hard by a number of problems in the past decade. From the mad cow crisis to listeriosis and the current E. coli concerns, the agriculture industry has been harshly singled out, especially in how it is treated by the current government.

This sector is very important to our economy. In fact, one out of eight jobs in Canada is in the agriculture and food processing industry. We have to give the industry the attention it deserves because it is such an important part of our daily lives.

When I think of all of the farmers in my riding who are trying to make a living, I feel compelled to stand up for these Canadians across the country by supporting the action plan proposed in the motion we are debating today.

Years ago, we never would have thought that our cupboards would be filled with foods from around the world. I am not talking about unusual and exotic meats and fruits. The range of foods available on supermarket shelves has changed dramatically.

Farmers face challenges every day, and they are now facing a serious crisis of confidence in their products, which could jeopardize the survival of many family farms weakened by the Conservatives' inaction for far too long now.

Business of Supply

I would like to start my speech by reading the last part of this excellent motion:

(c) directing the Auditor General to conduct an immediate assessment of food safety procedures and resources and report his findings to the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food.

And to think I believed that our system was one of the best in the world. At the beginning of this crisis, I was convinced that the contaminated beef was American. I thought the government was taking its usual approach, which means taking a long time to react to an order from the American authorities. I must have been really naive to think that the Conservatives were really governing the country.

After visiting slaughter facilities, food processing and manufacturing plants, and training facilities for young farmers in my riding and in many regions of Quebec, I found that all stakeholders on the ground agreed that our standards are among the highest and that our system is one of the most effective in the industrial world.

So what happened on the front lines? Where were the CFIA inspectors? Why did the chain of command between the CFIA and the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food break down? This minister is responsible for this. Why was nothing done to ensure the safety of Canadians and to maintain confidence in an industry that was already suffering from the folly of this government's ideology?

An investigation is absolutely necessary in order to finally shed some light on the current crisis facing this very crucial industry. An investigation is crucial in order to restore consumer confidence.

Today the House is calling on the government to adopt this motion in order to restore Canadians' confidence in our food safety system.

Here is how this can be achieved, as indicated in the second part of the motion:

(b) reversing budget cuts [of over \$100 million] and halting the de-regulation of Canada's food safety system;

How can Canadians trust a system when the government claims to be investing in that area, but is actually gradually withdrawing from it? Self-regulation does not always work, especially when it comes to a beef processing plant of that size.

• (1350)

A number of stakeholders in the agriculture sector had warned us that sooner or later someone would make mistakes at this company. What did the cuts affect? Training of front-line officers, the number of officers working in real time, the modernization of regulations and their harmonization with those of our neighbours south of the border.

Instead of paying attention to the people who devote themselves to these activities that are so important to our country and thus restoring consumers' confidence by providing them with access to local products, the government is investing in advertising and photo ops. There is no accountability and no sense of ministerial responsibility.

While the minister spends more time with certain male colleagues in tanning salons, an industry is being hard hit by the lack of action or involvement in an area that demands credibility, collaboration, co-operation and, above all, communication. By firing the current minister and handing over the food safety portfolio to a minister

capable of restoring public trust, we will ensure that new impetus is given to investigating this situation.

I realize that the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture would love to be the next agriculture minister, but does he have the right stuff? Listening to him, we can be sure of one thing: like a number of other Conservative cabinet members, he is either living in a parallel universe or he is just following orders that come directly from the Prime Minister's Office. Come to think of it, we should perhaps also include the ministers of industry and transport. We can talk about this another time; it is an entirely different matter.

In closing, I wish to pledge my complete and utter support for the fantastic motion we are currently debating in the House, and I assure my colleagues on the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food of my unwavering support for their demands. What is happening is truly unfortunate, but the Conservatives have pushed for more self-regulation, and inspectors are now inspecting paperwork instead of meat.

Today's motion is the direct result of the Conservatives' incompetence, and Canadians are paying the price, especially our hard-working western farmers who do their work with integrity and often devote their lives to it. Thank you and bon appétit.

• (1355)

[*English*]

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member for Compton—Stanstead talked about the crisis of confidence in the minister as it relates to the food safety issue and to not taking responsibility for the crisis as a minister should.

The member also talked about the producers in his riding and that is a big reason why the minister should step aside. The minister has been responsible for the biggest gutting of the agriculture safety nets in Canadian history. AgriStability was cut from 85% reference margins to 70%. AgriInvest was cut from 1.5% to 1%. Those are the safety nets that are there for producers in difficult economic times. The minister has not only failed Canadian consumers on his lack of responsibility on food safety, but has failed producers in terms of protecting their safety net.

What will be the impact on producers from both the loss of the safety net and the problems on pricing as a result of the beef crisis because the minister just was not there?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean Rousseau: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for that question.

Indeed, this sector was already fragile. Cattle producers and even those from a number of other food sectors are having difficulty making ends meet because the government is doing nothing. Producers are being left to fend for themselves. They are no longer able to keep up and produce the way the Conservative government wants them to. In other words, the Conservatives favour large factories.

Small producers are already vulnerable and in jeopardy. They need help because they are truly essential to rural communities across Canada. They are facing this crisis and the government is refusing to support them. The government is also refusing to help them access decent incomes so that they can pass their farms on to future generations. This situation is intolerable.

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Compton—Stanstead for his excellent speech. He clearly showed why the Minister of Agriculture must resign. It is rare that we call for the resignation of a minister, but in this case, we see that the minister did not fulfill his responsibilities and that he was negligent in managing this file. Fifteen people became ill and he still did not take the situation seriously.

Does the hon. member believe that the government's decision to make budget cuts to such an important and strategic area as food safety is in the best interest of Canadians?

Mr. Jean Rousseau: Mr. Speaker, what is absurd about this situation is that small farms have to abide by extremely strict production standards in terms of food safety and quality. Yet, large factories such as XL Foods lower the standards, reduce the number of inspectors and do not pay any attention to the quality of training given to agents. This is a terrible and unfortunate thing.

Farmers want to produce quality food and serve their communities well. These people are being asked to take on an enormous burden. The NDP will continue to stand up for them and to do what it takes to protect our family farms.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

• (1400)

[English]

ENTREPRENEURS

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for the third year running, the city of Grande Prairie has been named the most entrepreneurial city in the country by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business.

I am proud to represent the hard-working, innovative and forward-looking entrepreneurs who have led this country in building a thriving local economy that has created significant opportunity and prosperity.

Our community has been blessed with abundant natural resources and fertile land, but to carve opportunity out of the often challenging climate and remote location has demanded unceasing innovation, determination and vision.

Statements by Members

Our local entrepreneurs embody the pioneering spirit that settled our region 100 years ago. Like the first pioneers, our local business owners are industrious, generous and committed to their families, neighbours, our community and our country.

On behalf of our Conservative government, I congratulate the business leaders from the Grande Prairie region for truly leading this country.

* * *

[Translation]

WOMEN'S FORUM

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on this Persons Day, I want to take the opportunity to acknowledge the women's forum being held today at the Government of Canada Conference Centre in Ottawa.

The forum was put together by our NDP colleague from Churchill. Women from across the country have come together to have a dialogue on women's equality. Throughout the day there will be speeches by women's rights advocates, academics and leaders on the subject of economic equality, social equality and equality in our communities.

Today we have an opportunity to set a course for the future. Inspired by the women attending the forum, the women who were at the heart of the Persons Case and women from across Canada, we have made a conscious decision to come together in this way.

The first step is to gather together to have this discussion. It is crucial to be aware of the challenges facing women and to realize that working together is the answer.

Together we can make progress in the fight for women's equality.

* * *

[English]

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

Mr. Mark Adler (York Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this past summer, I had the opportunity to visit over 60 organizations in York Centre to see the important work they are doing and to discuss ways we can work together to build a better community.

One of the many highlights of my summer was when the Minister of State for Science and Technology visited York Centre to announce our government's \$5.4 million investment in the B'nai Brith and the Ivey International Centre for Health Innovation for the creation of the Centre of Innovation Excellence for Alzheimer's Care.

As the member for York Centre, it gives me much pride to know that our government is investing in the future well-being of all Canadians.

On that note, I am excited to announce that, on November 1, a global leader in developing and providing brain health innovations, Baycrest, will be visiting Parliament Hill. During Baycrest's visit, my office has meetings and events planned that I hope many members will attend.

Statements by Members

York Centre is home to many wonderful organizations that are making incredible advances in research and innovation. It makes me proud that our government is choosing to invest in organizations like B'nai Brith to help all Canadians enjoy a better quality of life.

* * *

SMALL BUSINESS WEEK

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this week, Canadians all across the country are celebrating Small Business Week.

As I was an entrepreneur and business owner for many years before running for public office, I know the hard work, dedication and optimism it takes to succeed. I know that small businesses give much to Canadian society and they need government to do its part.

Right now, the Conservative government is not doing enough. Shops near the border are losing customers to the United States, thanks to higher duty-free limits. Hotels near national parks and tourism operators are struggling. The government's payroll tax increases are hurting many small businesses and discouraging them from hiring.

The government does not get it. Small businesses are the engine of our economy and they need government in their corner.

Today, I congratulate everyone who owns, runs or works in a small business for their immeasurable contributions to Canadian life.

I ask all Canadians to remember that if we all shop small it can make a big difference.

* * *

PRIME MINISTER'S AWARDS FOR TEACHING EXCELLENCE

Ms. Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay (Delta—Richmond East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's Awards for Teaching Excellence honour outstanding and innovative Canadian school teachers.

In my riding of Delta—Richmond East, I am very proud of those named for the singular recognition with certificates of achievement.

Wanda Graham, a grade 6 teacher at Delta's Sacred Heart Elementary, shows obvious care and concern for her students, combined with endless energy and commitment to lessons that are current and interesting. Her career success emanates from an abiding respect shown for each child she guides through her classroom.

Dianne Simonson teaches grades 10 to 12 at Richmond's R.A. McMath Secondary School and helps students with career preparation. She launched the link crew initiative where 100 seniors mentored 245 new grade 9 students. This success led to helping other schools do the same and authoring a peer tutoring resource guide. She challenges, guides and builds leadership skills that have allowed her students the confidence to pursue their dreams.

* * *

● (1405)

SMALL BUSINESS WEEK

Mr. François Lapointe (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, NDP): Mr. Speaker, small and medium-sized

businesses make up more than 99% of all companies in Canada and employ over 60% of all private sector workers.

If the Canadian economy is still standing, despite a very difficult global economy, it is thanks to the amazing capacity of those businesses to adapt and innovate.

To celebrate entrepreneurs, the Business Development Bank of Canada has created the BDC Small Business Week. This week, the BDC has organized activities like conferences and trade fairs all over Canada.

[*Translation*]

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business has designated October 20 as the first Small Business Saturday. This initiative will allow business leaders to showcase the crucial role that small and medium-sized businesses play in our local economies.

[*English*]

These two initiatives truly deserve to be recognized in this Parliament.

[*Translation*]

On behalf of all members of this House, I want to thank and commend the millions of Canadians who support and develop small and medium-sized businesses, which generate 50% of our GDP.

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[*English*]**CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION**

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, three years ago, the Federal Court of Canada and the Immigration and Refugee Board ruled that former KGB agent Mikhail Lennikov was inadmissible to Canada.

Lennikov is now a fugitive evading deportation orders and has illegally taken sanctuary in a church basement in Vancouver.

Two weeks ago, the NDP MPs from Burnaby—New Westminster and Vancouver Kingsway had Thanksgiving dinner with the former KGB agent in a show of support.

It must be said that anyone who was part of the former KGB assisted in one form or another with the atrocities carried out by the KGB. It does not matter how basic or advanced their role was, they all worked together to fulfill the KGB's brutal mission. How many people were wrongfully arrested or killed by the KGB as a result of Lennikov's services?

Those two NDP MPs have insulted Vancouver's Ukrainian community and over 1.2 million Ukrainian Canadians across Canada, as well as the other ethnic groups who suffered under the cruel hand of the KGB. I demand that these MPs apologize.

*Statements by Members***SMALL BUSINESS WEEK**

Mr. Brad Butt (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is national Small Business Week and I rise in the House today to pay tribute to the Streetsville Business Improvement Association. On October 10, I attended its fall open house and enjoyed speaking with the members.

Established in 1979, the purpose of the SBIA is to maintain and promote a vibrant business community within the historic village of Streetsville and is dedicated to serving the needs of local businesses and residents.

With close to 325 member businesses, the Streetsville BIA manages the beautification of the area, marketing and promotion of the village, and provides important business services. It hosts many season events, including Canada Day, the Bread and Honey Festival, Streetsville Santa Claus Parade and Tree Lighting, and Historic Walking Tours.

I pay tribute to board members Todd Ladner, Al Yeomans, Harold Johnson, Charmaine Tavares, Julie Walker, Christian Kennerney, Todd Smith, Tony Asta, Bruce Daley, George Carlson and staff Angela Trewartha and Kim Bunting.

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[Translation]

POVERTY

Mrs. Sana Hassainia (Verchères—Les Patriotes, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday was the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, which was created to encourage poverty-fighting initiatives. This was the perfect opportunity to support the Dignity for All campaign for a poverty-free Canada. In my riding there are a number of organizations working every day to improve people's lives. There is the Table itinérance Rive-Sud, which works to help the homeless on the south shore, and the Maison de l'entraide, which supplies food vouchers to a number of economically disadvantaged families in Sainte-Julie. I must also mention the work done by the Knights of Columbus and the Daughters of Isabella, who are dedicated to raising money to help the poor. Lastly, there is the Centre d'action bénévole, whose primary mandate is to promote volunteerism.

Today, on behalf of all of my constituents in Verchères—Les Patriotes, I want to thank all those who are fighting poverty in our region. Together we can make a difference.

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[English]

CHILD PORNOGRAPHY

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the RCMP announced the results of operation snapshot, targeting online child predators.

One child was rescued and more than 30 individuals were arrested on charges that include indecent exposure, invitation to sexual touching, accessing, possessing, distributing and making child pornography and Internet luring. Over 1,000 computers were seized along with hundreds of thousands of images. I am very proud of the work of our RCMP officers.

These types of successful investigations send a clear message to individuals who are engaged in this despicable behaviour. The police will find them and prosecute them to the full extent of the law.

Our government has taken strong action to protect children and put in place new mandatory minimum sentences for child sex predators.

We have eliminated the ability of those who sexually abuse children to get criminal record suspensions, and we have taken steps to ensure police have the tools they need to do their job. Sadly, the NDP has voted against these common sense measures.

Canadians know that the Conservative government will always—

• (1410)

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Beauharnois—Salaberry.

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[Translation]

PERSONS DAY

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Beauharnois—Salaberry, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today is Persons Day, when we commemorate the fact that, in 1929, the word “person” was deemed to refer to both men and women. I would like to take this opportunity to remind the House that despite the significant gains that have been made in terms of women's rights in Canada, the fight for gender equality is unfortunately not over.

Must I remind the House that women are still disproportionately affected by poverty and violence, especially aboriginal women? Women also face substantial barriers in the labour market. Harassment seems to be part of the corporate culture in many organizations, and we do not have enough women in executive positions.

On top of all of that, we have the Conservatives' repeated attacks on women's right to choose. Fortunately, there has been some positive action. Today my colleague from Churchill has organized the very first women's forum, bringing women together from across the country. I would like to thank her for this excellent and very important initiative. As parliamentarians, we have a duty to continue this—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Calgary Centre-North.

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[English]

STATUS OF WOMEN

Ms. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Centre-North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this year marks the 85th anniversary of the historic Persons Case. The Governor General's awards in commemoration of the Persons Case are given to outstanding individuals who have advocated for the equality of women.

This week, five Canadians will receive the 2012 Persons Award, including two youth award recipients in honour of the first ever International Day of the Girl, a day championed internationally by Canada.

Statements by Members

[Translation]

On behalf of all Canadians, I would like to say a heartfelt thank you to everyone who contributes to advancing women's equality in Canada.

[English]

When my women colleagues and I rise in this place we do so with a deep appreciation for those who championed our right to be here. Let it never be lost on us that our right to have our voices heard in equality is a stance that forever binds us together for the sake of those who should one day follow us here.

As a woman parliamentarian who is profoundly proud of her free and democratic country, I congratulate this year's winners.

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PIERRE ELLIOT TRUDEAU

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today, October 18, is Pierre Elliot Trudeau's birthday. He served as prime minister from 1968 to 1979 and again from 1980 to 1984.

[Translation]

Mr. Trudeau served the Canadian public with remarkable talent and dedication. Regardless of our political stripes, I am sure that all members of the House will agree that Mr. Trudeau deserves our respect.

[English]

The entrenchment of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, a cause to which he was dedicated throughout his life, has provided Canadians with not only a symbol but a real and living protection for human rights in Canada.

His voice was clear and his courage and determination an example to all who aspire to leadership.

We celebrate his life on the anniversary of his birth.

[Translation]

What a man and what a life.

* * *

[English]

NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF CANADA

Ms. Eve Adams (Mississauga—Brampton South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, just last week in my riding I was speaking with constituents at our local hospital fundraiser. My constituents are firmly opposed to a new \$21 billion carbon tax that the NDP would propose.

NDP members can deny it all they want but they cannot hide from their plan to bring in \$21 billion of new revenues from a carbon tax. The NDP leader said on December 4, 2011 that his cap and trade system "will provide a lot of revenue". Then last February he further boasted about the plan, saying that "The cap-and-trade system that I propose...will produce billions".

Our government will never allow the NDP to bring in \$21 billion of new revenues from a carbon tax.

●(1415)

MEMBER FOR ELMWOOD—TRANSCONA

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Conservative member for Orléans and the Parliamentary Secretary for the Minister of Public Works did not talk about their ridings; they talked about the official opposition.

The member for Elmwood—Transcona has only made one statement in the House since we returned. What did he do with his precious, limited opportunity? He also parroted the PMO's blatantly misleading lines about the NDP. If that member does not want to talk about his great riding, I am proud to tell the House some of the fantastic things going on in Elmwood—Transcona.

For instance, Transcona is celebrating its 100th anniversary this year. This coincides with the annual Hi Neighbour Festival, also celebrating its own 40th anniversary. These celebrations have allowed people in Transcona to reflect on the famous Canadians who have also come from the area, including Terry Fox; Olympic speed skater, Susan Auch; sports commentator, Rod Black; and of course our own Bill Blaikie.

We on this side of the House take great pride in celebrating the centennial. Shame on the member for kowtowing to the PMO—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Cypress Hills—Grasslands.

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NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today Canada's Minister of Finance introduced the second phase of our low-tax plan. What a contrast with the NDP's election promise to impose a \$21 billion carbon tax. Our plan creates jobs, strengthens economic growth and ensures long-term prosperity. Theirs takes us back to high taxes, no growth and higher prices of absolutely everything.

Now the New Democrats do not want to talk about it. Even their pet bloggers will not acknowledge that they were very clear. On page four of the 2000 election platform, there it is, a proposal to bring in \$21 billion in revenues with a carbon tax. The NDP leader mentioned his plan multiple times during his leadership campaign. He promised that if elected he would propose a system of carbon pricing that would produce billions. Now he wants to hide from it. However, last week the Broadbent Institute, already funded illegally by the NDP, backed up his plan.

The New Democrats are clear: Canadians must pay higher taxes. We are just as clear: our government will not support a job-killing tax hike and a backwards-looking carbon tax—

The Speaker: Order, please.

Oral questions, the hon. Leader of the Opposition.

*Oral Questions***ORAL QUESTIONS***[English]***BUDGET IMPLEMENTATION LEGISLATION**

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are trying to shove another 450-page budget bill down the throats of Canadians. The finance minister once again showed total disregard for our democratic institutions, choosing photo ops rather than Parliament for his some 450 pages. The Prime Minister once criticized the Liberals for their omnibus approach. He was right then, he is wrong now.

Will the Prime Minister respect Canadians, respect the role of Parliament and split this omnibus bill to allow for proper study?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians' priorities are focused on the economy. They remain jobs and growth. This government continues to move forward with the latest version of the plan presented in March to promote jobs and growth across this country and to continue the relatively superior performance of the Canadian economy.

What we, of course, will not do in all of our proposals is propose tax hikes and, more specifically, a carbon tax. Our goal is not to kill jobs, our goal is to create jobs.

[Translation]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last spring, even some Conservative MPs criticized the government's mammoth bill.

But the Conservatives have learned nothing. They intend to introduce another 450-page monster bill just in time for Halloween, and not give members the opportunity to do their job and take the time needed to study the disparate elements.

This is the underlying question: What is the reason for the Prime Minister's contempt of parliamentary institutions? Why not do things the right way by splitting the bill and letting us study it properly?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is the NDP that has not learned anything.

Canadians' priorities remain the economy, job creation and economic growth. Those are our priorities. We now have the second instalment of legislative measures for our budget, which was approved by the House several months ago.

I urge the NDP to change its position. Our government wants to lower taxes, not increase them. And we certainly do not want to create a carbon tax, as the NDP is proposing to do.

* * *

● (1420)

FOOD SAFETY

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this lack of respect for Canadians explains a lot of things, such as the complete lack of concern over the tainted meat crisis.

It was the American inspectors who were the first to sound the alarm. Again it was the Americans who forced the most recent meat recall just a few days ago. And now we find out that the American

inspectors have been documenting glaring sanitation violations at XL Foods for years.

Why do the American inspectors know more about the serious problems at XL Foods than Canada's Minister of Agriculture does?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is absolutely not true.

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency reacted immediately to the information that was available and it took a number of measures, including closing the plant. Its priority is to keep the plant closed until it is safe to reopen it.

[English]

Canada continues to have one of the strongest, if not the strongest, food inspection systems in the world and we will continue to work with our partners around the world on that.

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are worried about troubling news stories exposing deficiencies at the Brooks beef plant. During routine audits, the USDA documented proof of an ongoing pattern of mismanagement at Brooks, including cross-contamination, sloppy maintenance and bad record keeping. These are the very problems that led to this E. coli crisis.

Why does the minister not think it is important for CFIA to enforce food safety and why is he gambling with the reputation of our great and proud beef industry?

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is exactly what CFIA does. We continue to build a robust food safety system. Of course, the NDP continues to vote against it. We saw a shameless display again this morning. New Democrats had the chance to expedite Bill S-11 to give the CFIA more powers, but they chose to sit on it rather than move it through expeditiously. That is shameful.

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): The reality, Mr. Speaker, is that the government left it in the other chamber controlled by its Conservative senators.

The reality is that the more we learn, the more we find out that warning signs were ignored and that the minister has simply failed to act. In fact, he cut back funding for food safety, let plants regulate themselves and now refuses to clean up the mess. The agriculture sector and the beef industry need leadership and stability, but the minister's mismanagement is putting the livelihoods of communities, industries and farmers at risk.

When will he do the right thing and resign, step aside and let somebody do the job properly?

Oral Questions

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the latest OECD report is very commending of Canada's system, calling it superior. We certainly will not rest on our laurels. We continue to add resources to the CFIA to build a robust food safety system.

Every chance the NDP has had to help us along the way, it has come up empty.

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BUDGET IMPLEMENTATION LEGISLATION

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with respect to the omnibus legislation, which has been put before the House today, I would like to ask the Prime Minister if he would agree with us that we could separate out the sections of the bill with respect to members of Parliament pensions and if we could agree to pass those today by unanimous consent, because for our part, there is no disagreement with respect to that measure. In fact, we are even prepared to discuss the acceleration of the timetable of implementation.

I would like to ask the Prime Minister: Why lump all these things together instead of giving the House a chance to discuss them separately?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will take that specific suggestion under advisement.

As the House knows well, this government committed to the Canadian public, both during an election and most recently in March, to move ahead with a comprehensive economic action plan. These measures in various forms have been before the House now for months. I encourage the opposition to use the remaining time productively to study them. I do not know what specific objections the opposition has to them, but they have been well received by the Canadian public and they are important to continue the superior performance of the Canadian economy.

• (1425)

[Translation]

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would be surprised if Canadians had the opportunity to read 400 pages of the government's proposals. If the government has the public's support, then the Prime Minister seems to be the only one in the loop.

I will repeat my offer: we on this side are prepared to pass all the measures having to do with MPs' pensions in one day. We have no problem with that.

Splitting up the bill that way will give us a chance to study the rest of it and pass the measures on MPs' pensions.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the Liberal Party has already taken the time to read dozens of pages on changes to the pension plan and it is in favour of those changes, then I encourage it to adopt the same attitude to the rest of our plans.

This bill includes measures that were proposed in the budget last March. They are important to the economy and to continue the superior performance of the Canadian economy. I encourage the Liberal Party to support these measures.

[English]

FOOD SAFETY

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, could I just now ask the Prime Minister if he is in a position to tell us whether or not the Minister of Agriculture was in fact aware of the reports from the United States with respect to the complaints at the XL plant? Is the Prime Minister prepared to tell us that? If he is not prepared to tell us that, why does the government continue to resist the very simple proposition that was made in the other place and that will be made by us here with respect to the Auditor General's responsibilities to have a look at the entire system and to know what went on and to give Canadians—

The Speaker: The right hon. Prime Minister.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Once again, Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, which is responsible for dealing with the information at its disposal, reacted to this information as soon as it had it and took action as information continued to come in, up to and including shutting down the plant.

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency and others have indicated that it needs greater power to compel information. That is why the government has had before Parliament for some time legislation to give it that additional power. Rather than delay it by saying it wants the Auditor General to have powers that the Auditor General already has, let us give the CFIA the powers it is asking for.

* * *

[Translation]

BUDGET IMPLEMENTATION

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today's omnibus bill offers nothing in terms of job creation.

Not only is this bill filled with non-budgetary measures, but it also does not do enough to stimulate our fragile economy. Youth unemployment is growing rapidly and our seniors' pensions are in jeopardy, as are essential services for Canadians. But the Conservatives are ignoring the public's concerns.

When will we see a meaningful employment plan?

[English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have a real plan for jobs. We had it in the first budget bill and the second budget bill.

The budget is a wonderful document. Here it is. We delivered it in March. There is nothing new. What is in the bill today is in the budget. If you have not read the budget, I say to my hon. friends on the other side, I do not know what you did all summer. You got paid. You had a good pension plan. So, do your work; do your job.

The Speaker: I will just remind the minister to address his comments through the Chair and not directly at other colleagues.

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I do not know what this member did all summer. He clearly did not learn his lesson from the spring.

This is another massive budget bill jammed with non-budgetary items from overhauling the Canada Grain Act to gutting the Navigable Waters Protection Act, so only 10 heritage rivers will still be protected, and this is after exempting pipelines altogether.

Will the minister now agree to split up this monster bill and allow MPs to properly scrutinize these radical changes?

• (1430)

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, one of the pillars of the budget was the deficit reduction action plan. Part of that dealt with the issues at environment and the Navigable Waters Protection Act.

All of these matters are matters with reference to the budget that was delivered on March 29, many months ago. If members have not bothered to read it and have not bothered to pay attention, I suggest they ought to perhaps take the weekend and review it.

[Translation]

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let us be clear. There is not a single practical measure in the budget implementation bill to help Quebecers who are receiving employment insurance.

With their new mammoth bill, the Conservatives are once again going after environmental protection. Undermining the Navigable Waters Protection Act will once again jeopardize wetlands, which cover 10% of Quebec's land mass. Ten percent—that is not insignificant.

Why did they bury such a measure in the omnibus bill?

[English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said a moment ago, the deficit reduction action plan was a major part of the budget. It was important so that we could control the growth of government expenses. Part of that was dealing with the environment and getting to one project one review with time limits.

I am sure the hon. member wants to be informed on these matters. Once again, I suggest that he read the budget this weekend.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives obviously do not care about the economic reality of Canadians. Their biggest change focuses on the economic reality of 308 members of Parliament. Today they introduced a massive 443-page bill that amends more than 40 acts. There are changes to the Navigable Waters Protection Act that will give more powers to the minister.

This bill is flawed and amendments will be necessary. Will they agree to them?

[English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said a moment ago, there are no surprises. The budget was delivered on March 29. The budget document itself is almost 500 pages. It is the economic action plan of the Government of Canada for our country, not only for this year but for the ensuing years.

Oral Questions

This is the plan. This is the creation of jobs, growth and prosperity for our country. I urge the hon. members to read it for their own edification.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the minister and the government seem to have learned nothing from their experience in bringing in the first omnibus bill. Now they want to ram through another bill of over 450 pages.

How do they expect Canadians to understand all the devious schemes and plans the government has for them in such a short amount of time?

This is a Prime Minister who used to have contempt for such tactics. Why is the same Prime Minister so keen to misuse his power and ram this budget down the throats of Canadians?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have had budget bills in this place, including under the previous Liberal government, that were many pages longer than this budget bill.

Having said that—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please.

The Minister of Finance has the floor.

Hon. Jim Flaherty: I am sure the hon. member for Outremont wants to work, just like everybody else in this place.

Four hundred pages, can you not—I am sorry. You are not the hon. member for Outremont. I am sure you want to work, too—

The Speaker: The minister has to address his comments through the Chair and not directly at other colleagues.

The minister is out of time now anyway.

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

* * *

ETHICS

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on the one hand we have \$18,000 in free flights; a campaign manager the Conservatives call incompetent; and a minister claiming he is not responsible because he is new.

On the other hand we have Reg Bowers, the scapegoat, rewarded with a plum patronage appointment by the Prime Minister; the minister's brother-in-law negotiating questionable agreements after the fact; and potential campaign overspending of 21% by a minister who won by only 79 votes.

Would the minister admit that his campaign broke the law?

• (1435)

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, this is a hard-working and honest Labradorian and Canadian. We are proud to have him in our caucus.

Oral Questions

The new official agent in place will work with Elections Canada to correct any mistakes that have been made.

However, one mistake that still needs correcting, for the benefit of all Newfoundlanders in that member's riding, is that he and his party are promoting a devastating carbon tax that would kill the jobs of Newfoundlanders.

We, as Canadians, are all proud of the prosperity that Newfoundlanders have worked hard to build, particularly in natural resources. We do not consider that a disease. We consider that an achievement.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when someone breaks the law, he breaks the law, period.

If a new financial advisor defrauds his clients, he cannot get out of it by simply saying that he is sorry, that it was a rookie mistake and that he will not do it again. Yet, that is exactly the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs' strategy. He illegally spent thousands of dollars. It is tantamount to stealing the election.

Does the Prime Minister find the minister's pathetic and ridiculous explanations acceptable?

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, the minister in question is working to build a better Canada.

[English]

He is working to build a better Canada.

However, the first thing one must do before proposing to build a better Canada is to believe in a united Canada. That member has donated not once, not twice, but 29 times to the hard-line, separatist Québec solidaire.

For Canadians to trust and believe in that party, they need to know that party believes in Canada.

Would the member confirm if he is now a federalist?

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let me set the record straight.

I love Canada. I love Quebec and I love Montreal, but above all, I love the people, and I would never let them get sick by eating tainted meat as the Conservatives are doing.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Mr. Speaker, I want a society that is fairer for everyone: families, workers, seniors and students. I am proud to work with the future Prime Minister of Canada.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. There is far too much noise. The hon. member has 10 seconds to finish his question.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Mr. Speaker, can the minister stop hiding behind this joker and admit that there was election fraud?

[English]

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, no one questions all the love that he has for everybody and everything that is good and great in the world, but he still will not answer the simple question. After he donated 29 times to the same hard-line separatist party, Canadians have reason to simply ask the question if he believes in a united Canada.

There is nothing more beautiful than when someone who was a separatist becomes a federalist and comes to be part of this big, beautiful Canadian family. We invite him to stand to do that right now.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are wondering if it is possible in Canada in 2012 to buy an election, so let us see. The member for Labrador buried \$18,000 in free flights, blew past the spending limits by 21% and then squeaked into Ottawa with just 79 votes. For this, he gets promoted to cabinet and his political agent gets a plump patronage job for which he has no qualifications. When he gets caught, he just shrugs.

Will he stand up and tell the House whether he believes that subverting the electoral laws of Canada is just part of the cost of doing business?

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, subverting electoral law is just part of the way the NDP regularly does business. In fact, his party attempted to buy elections through \$340,000 in illegal union money, forcefully taken out of the pockets of honest, hard-working Canadian employees who had no choice in the matter.

The member can try to redeem himself by agreeing to support a bill before the House of Commons that would require financial transparency in how unions spend the money they take from workers. Will he support it?

● (1440)

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let us return to the issue with the minister from Labrador for just a minute. We now know he spent over \$20,000. Let us look at the facts. He said that he made a rookie mistake, but here are the real facts.

He ran in half a dozen Innu Nation elections going back to the 1990s. His campaign manager has been heavily involved with the provincial Conservatives for decades. Therefore, they are hardly political rookies.

Could the Prime Minister fire this minister? Since he is the skipper of the ship, could he answer the question and not Gilligan?

The Speaker: Order. I do not know that these kinds of characterizations are helpful.

The hon. parliamentary secretary to the minister of transport.

Oral Questions

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, I always like to hear a question from the sinking ship way over there in the corner. It is taking on water over there.

The Liberals have four leadership candidates from five years ago who have almost a half a million dollars in illegal loans, which have now become illegal donations. Yet the member has the audacity to rise in the House and attack the integrity of one of the finest Labradorians and Canadians. It is shameful over there.

* * *

GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with the latest scandal surrounding the Prime Minister's government, I ask this. Is he attempting to turn these scandals into a new fundraising scheme for the Conservative Party?

We know Conservative political insiders were appointed to senior positions in ACOA. We know the Public Service Commission has placed sanctions on some individuals and revoked the job of Kevin MacAdam. Now we learn that the government has hired the law firm of Murray Murphy, the PC island fund chair.

Why, in defending wrongful hiring, is the government using taxpayer—

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member is out of time.

The hon. minister for ACOA.

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Associate Minister of National Defence and Minister of State (Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency) (La Francophonie), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I understand the member has difficulty understanding, but this is not a political issue. The commissioner was—

Mr. Marc Garneau: No, no.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. The hon. minister has the floor.

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Speaker, this is very unlike in 2006 when the Public Service Commission reported that the Liberals gave their employees a free ride into the public service.

In this instance, there is no political interference. The—

Hon. Ralph Goodale: You don't know what you're talking about.

The Speaker: Order. There will have to be a bit more order during the questions and answers.

The hon. member for Random—Burin—St. George's has the floor.

* * *

ETHICS

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, former Conservative Party candidate, Loyola Sullivan, was also the federal ambassador for fisheries conservation, a high-level patronage position. When Mr. Sullivan left his position to become vice-president in his family's fishery business, everyone in government should have known he was subject to a one-year

cooling-off period. Yet the Ethics Commissioner found that Mr. Sullivan contacted DFO, Foreign Affairs and the fisheries minister's office 17 times during this period to lobby for changes in fish quota for the family business.

Why did nobody blow the whistle on this Conservative crony?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as you know, this report of the commissioner deals with the conduct of a former ambassador after he left the employ of the government. We have put in place very strong rules to deal with exactly these kinds of situations. We expect that all former officials will respect the cooling-off rules that are in place and we will be reviewing the report.

* * *

●(1445)

PUBLIC SAFETY

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last week the Prime Minister's spokesperson said the government will invoke a national security exemption for Shared Services Canada. Yesterday, when the Minister of Public Safety was asked about this exemption he said that he did not know where they got that information. They should talk to each other.

If the Minister of Public Safety does not know about this national security exemption, how can we trust that Huawei will not be getting contracts to control our critical national security infrastructure?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our Conservative government has put in place a cyber security strategy designed to defend against electronic threats, hacking and cyber espionage. In fact just the other day, I announced an additional \$155 million over five years to strengthen Canada's cyber security network, working together with not only our domestic private partners but also our international partners.

[Translation]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, obviously the Conservatives are having some internal communication problems. They are contradicting each other left and right. Many foreign countries have been very clear. Huawei and certain other state-owned Chinese businesses constitute a threat to national cybersecurity. Yet the minister continues to be evasive and refuses to specify the nature of the threats.

Why not be more transparent? What threats have been identified by the Prime Minister's spokesperson?

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, perhaps the member could speak to her colleague who said the last time a country was named by this government or an official of this government that it was a piece of novel fiction. That member over there said exactly that. I do not think it helps naming a particular country or a particular company unless we are prepared to take specific action.

Oral Questions

Our government continuously reviews security matters to ensure that Canadian interests are protected and we will do that even without the opposition's help.

* * *

[Translation]

FOREIGN INVESTMENT

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this government is steadfastly refusing to do a detailed study of all aspects of the takeover of Nexen by CNOOC. There are serious questions that deserve answers, but the minister is hiding behind an incomplete process and refusing to answer.

Will jobs be preserved? Will environmental standards be respected? There are national security concerns. Taking all this into consideration, do the Conservatives think a foreign government should be controlling Canadian natural resources?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, one thing is certain: every foreign investment made in Canada has to create a net benefit for Canada and every decision has to be made in the best interests of Canada.

There are factors clearly set out in section 20 of the Investment Canada Act. Again, I repeat: there are guidelines relating to foreign state-owned corporations. In addition, new provisions regarding national security have been put in place.

That said, the transaction is being carefully studied as we speak.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians across the country are concerned about the idea that an important player in the Canadian natural resources industry like Nexen may end up in the hands of the Chinese state-owned corporation CNOOC.

Does the Minister share Canadians' concern about foreign governments getting control of our natural resources? Is he going to listen to concerned Canadians in his decision-making process, so that they can have their say?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, first, resources are the property of the provinces, and under section 20 of the Act, all Canadians are welcome to submit their opinions for consideration, as are the provinces and the individuals concerned. There is a process and we are following it.

Again, I repeat: this transaction is being and will be carefully studied. We know that generally speaking, the NDP is anti-investment and anti-trade. That is not what we believe in. We believe in a prosperous Canada, and the way that happens is by being open to foreign investment.

* * *

[English]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Blake Richards (Wild Rose, CPC): Mr. Speaker, unlike the NDP and its job-killing carbon tax, our government's top priority is keeping taxes low and growing the economy with economic action plan 2012. Our plan is working with over 820,000 net new jobs

created since July 2009, the best record in the G7. However, the global economy remains fragile, especially in Europe and the United States who are our largest trading partners. That is why we are taking the next step in our plan with the Jobs and Economic Growth Act 2012.

Can the Minister of Finance please inform Canadians on how this legislation will support the Canadian economy?

● (1450)

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for the very informed question. Our government is supporting the economy with jobs, growth and prosperity. The New Democrats need to explain why they are against that. Why is the NDP against extending the hiring credit for small businesses to create jobs, against promoting interprovincial trade, against improving the registered disability savings plan, against new tax relief for clean energy generation equipment and against closing tax loopholes?

Why is the NDP against all of this and against growing the Canadian economy?

* * *

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it took 18 years to negotiate a trade investment deal with China but Conservatives want it approved in 21 days. They refuse to bring it before the House for debate, a vote or input from Canadians.

Trade with China is important for our economy if it is done right. However, Conservatives are proving to be incompetent negotiators. They agreed to a 31-year deal that lacks reciprocity, fails to open doors for our companies in China and abandons Canada's commitment to an open and transparent arbitration process.

Why will Conservatives not allow debate and input for this important deal?

Hon. Ed Fast (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member is quite wrong. This treaty has been very well received by the business community in Canada. It is very similar to treaties we have signed with other countries. It is designed to protect and promote Canadian investors in China through stable, predictable rules and protection against discriminatory and arbitrary practices. Our government is committed to creating the right conditions for Canadian businesses to compete internationally.

In the meantime, of course, the NDP's investment strategy is to suck \$21 billion out of taxpayers' pockets. We will not do that.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is unacceptable to shove this down Canadians' throats without discussing it with anyone. Think about it. We are talking about less than a month to approve an agreement that we will be bound by for the next three decades. That is ridiculous, but we know that when it comes to ridiculous, the people across the way have no equals. They are again proving that they are amateur negotiators and unable to achieve a mutual benefit. This agreement is going to wreak havoc on the Canadian economy.

Why refuse to hold consultations with Canadian workers, the people who are going to suffer the consequences of this agreement?

[English]

Hon. Ed Fast (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government has introduced an unprecedented process for putting Canadian international treaties through the scrutiny of the House. That is why the Canada-China investment treaty was tabled in the House and if opposition members wish to debate it, they have an opportunity to do so. However, surprisingly the NDP has already missed three opportunities to debate it in the House with opposition days.

Canadians know that New Democrats are anti-trade. Today they know that they are also anti-investment. Shame on them.

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[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today we have another example of the Conservatives' callous approach. In its final report before being dismantled by the Conservatives, the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy said, "Canada is not yet well positioned to compete in a carbon-constrained world".

Why are the Conservatives choosing to jeopardize our economy and our jobs by ignoring climate change?

[English]

Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government has pursued green economic opportunities, including the clean energy fund, the ecoenergy for alternative fuels and the ecoenergy innovation initiative.

Unlike the NDP, we will not impose a job-killing carbon tax that would increase the cost of groceries and electricity. The NDP leader plans to raise \$21 billion through his new tax which would cost Canadian families \$1,500 over the next four years.

● (1455)

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it does not matter how many times the Conservatives repeat the same fib, it will not magically come true. They are embarrassing themselves.

What we do know is that the Conservatives' reckless sector-by-sector approach will cost us billions. Waiting to reduce emissions will cost all of us. The national round table estimates that by rejecting a practical economy-wide approach to tackling climate change, it could cost Canada \$87 billion by 2050.

Why are the Conservatives locking Canada into an approach that kills jobs and hurts our economy?

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as my colleague knows, there are different approaches to climate change. The Liberals tried to talk it away and then campaigned—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. Minister of the Environment has the floor.

Hon. Peter Kent: Mr. Speaker, as I was saying, the Liberals tried to talk climate change away and then campaigned on a \$15 billion carbon tax.

Now the NDP would pick the pockets of Canadian taxpayers with a \$21 billion carbon tax which would increase the price of everything.

Then there is our government's plan to responsibly regulate and actually reduce greenhouse gas emissions without disruption to our economy or imposing a heavy financial burden on Canadians.

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CANADIAN FOOD INSPECTION AGENCY

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, since the Minister of Health refuses to answer public health questions, today I have a question for the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food.

The inability of the Conservative government to properly regulate XL Foods has put Canadians and the Canadian beef industry at risk. Today we learned that the plant may be headed for a new foreign ownership. This will not fix the problem.

Only an independent audit of the CFIA by the Auditor General will ensure improved health and safety protocols to better protect Canadian food. Will the government commit to this audit here and now?

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, regardless of who is managing the day-to-day operations—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. Minister of Agriculture has the floor. If we keep on having these interruptions we will need to make up the time somewhere else.

The hon. Minister of Agriculture.

Hon. Gerry Ritz: Mr. Speaker, regardless of who is managing the day-to-day operations of XL Foods, there will be a robust food safety system adjudicated by the CFIA on a day to day basis.

To talk about the review the member is screaming about, an expert panel was constructed during the Weatherill report and that expert panel will be doing a concise review and we will table that publicly.

*Oral Questions***THE ENVIRONMENT**

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, an American businessman dumped 100 tonnes of iron sulphate into the ocean off B.C.'s west coast this summer. Scientists are puzzled because this experiment may have breached an international moratorium. The proponent claims that he had the government's blessing but the minister denies it. That is worrisome. Who dropped the ball?

When did the minister's department know about this experiment? Why was there no scientific oversight? Why is the minister ducking responsibility?

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Environment Canada was not asked to approve this apparent violation of the Canadian Environmental Protection Act. Environment Canada did not approve this non-scientific event. Enforcement officers are now investigating.

This government takes very seriously our commitment to protect the environment and anyone who contravenes environmental law should be prosecuted to the full extent of the law.

* * *

[Translation]

HEALTH

Mr. François Lapointe (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, NDP): Mr. Speaker, some important questions that go beyond partisanship have been raised in the House.

Two weeks ago, I asked the Minister of Health to help get foreign cancer drugs shipped quickly to Michèle Lajoie, as ordered by her doctor. Her life depended on it, but the only thing the minister did was read talking points in the House.

We will never know whether those drugs could have helped Ms. Lajoie beat her cancer. She passed away on Tuesday after waiting two months for drugs she never received. It was an urgent case.

Why did the Minister of Health not help in time?

[English]

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our condolences go out to the family and friends of the person we have lost.

As I stated earlier this week, the special access program is available to physicians who would like to access special drugs to treat patients who require them through the application process. I would be happy to provide the members of the House a briefing on the special access program and how the process works if the members require more information on it.

• (1500)

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the minister is missing the point. This is about a system that does not work and the need for the minister to sometimes choose compassion over bureaucratic red tape. Unfortunately, Madam Lajoie passed away last Tuesday. Her drugs were finally approved last week, but not without a two-month battle to get them, and no help at all from the minister even after we raised the issue repeatedly with her.

It is now too late for Madam Lajoie but would the minister at least promise that this sad situation will never repeat itself?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said last week, the process starts when a physician applies under the special access program. Within 24 hours, Health Canada responds to the applications. The special access program is available to individuals who require drugs. Under the normal system, it would probably take about 12 months. The special program is there to access drugs and within a month that application was approved.

Again, I would be happy to provide a briefing to all members of the House on the special access program if the members require more information.

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ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Rob Clarke (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today, my private member's bill on the Indian Act will be debated for the very first time. It has evolved through four drafts based on my discussions with first nations people from across Canada. My bill reflects their desire for real change. It would ensure that bylaws are made accessible to band members by first nations governments. It would remove all references to residential schools. Finally, it would create a process to review and consult with first nations on the way forward toward repeal and replacement of the Indian Act.

Will the government support my bill and contribute to unlocking the potential of Canada's first nations people?

Hon. John Duncan (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Indian Act is a barrier to the success of many first nations, which is why we support in principle the private member's bill that proposes concrete, incremental steps to create the conditions for healthier, more self-sufficient first nations communities. This approach is consistent with the government's own approach to Indian Act reform. We look forward to studying the bill, exploring opportunities to improve it and passing it into law.

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[Translation]

HOUSING

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, more than 200,000 families across Canada live in co-operative or non-profit housing and could lose their subsidies. The government has said that it does not consider housing to be its problem. But that is of no comfort to hundreds of thousands of Canadians who could lose their homes.

Will this government commit to reinvesting the billions of dollars that it has gradually cut from affordable housing programs?

Oral Questions

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, quite the opposite is true. Under the 2009 economic action plan, we invested \$2 billion in affordable housing. We believe that people should have access to safe and affordable housing. That is why we are helping them. Unfortunately the Liberals did not support our efforts in that regard.

* * *

[English]

AVIATION SAFETY

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, with \$112 million in cuts to airport security, the Conservatives are putting air travellers at risk and Canadian jobs on the line. Sixty security jobs are gone and over 400 workers have had their hours cut even though the government fleeces Canadians \$624 million a year in security fees. It is no wonder more Canadians are flying out of the United States.

Why are the Conservatives putting people at risk and subjecting travellers to long, unbearable lineups?

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Transport), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a lot of respect for the member but in this case the member is way out of line. Canada has the safest airline standards in the world. The government has invested \$1.5 billion in airline security. The number of people working on the lines at the various airports adjust depending on the usage of the airlines and airports. By the way, a carbon tax would make it a lot more expensive.

* * *

● (1505)

[Translation]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Bernard Trottier (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, CPC): Mr. Speaker, entrepreneurs are the engine of Canada's economy. The main elements of Canada's economic action plan 2012 are job creation, growth and long-term prosperity.

Could the Minister of State for Small Business and Tourism tell the House about a measure introduced today to support the prosperity of Canadian entrepreneurs?

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of State (Small Business and Tourism), CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to tell the House about the measure and also to thank my colleague for his work on behalf of his constituents and especially for the entrepreneurs in his region. Today, our government is following suit by introducing the Jobs and Growth Act, 2012. I would like to remind our opposition colleagues that this bill contains a measure that is very important to small entrepreneurs, who create Canada's wealth. We know that SMEs represent over 90% of Canada's businesses. Today, we are renewing the employment credit, which more than one million employers have used. It is popular and we are keeping it in place.

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Beauharnois—Salaberry, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Stanstead border crossing in the Eastern Townships

is basically a sieve. In six months, no fewer than 300 people entered Canada illegally, according to data we received yesterday under the Access to Information Act. Yet this government decided to cut \$146 million from the Canada Border Services Agency. Over a thousand jobs are at risk, including 260 in Quebec.

Does the minister realize that these budget cuts are jeopardizing public safety?

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, perhaps I could repeat the answer I have given so many times.

Since coming to office, our government has increased front-line border officers by 26%. We have taken steps to make the border faster and more efficient for law-abiding Canadians. We are reducing unnecessary spending and duplication of work. We are not reducing front-line positions at the border.

* * *

[Translation]

BUDGET IMPLEMENTATION

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the government just introduced its second mammoth budget bill, in which it is again trying to hide a number of controversial measures. For Quebec, this means another attack on the economy of the Gaspé, the elimination of the Employment Insurance Financing Board so that the government can set contribution rates itself, lowering environmental standards for the umpteenth time and more arbitrary powers in the hands of ministers.

Since everyone is criticizing this second mammoth bill as antidemocratic and since the Prime Minister himself criticized this kind of practice not so long ago, will the Minister of Finance agree to split up this second mammoth bill?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the budget implementation bill follows up on the budget that was presented on March 29 and contains a series of important measures for Canada's economy.

Canadians and Quebecers elected us as their government to look after the economy, ensure economic growth and create jobs. We have introduced good measures, such as the renewal of the hiring credit for small business. That is the kind of measure that Quebecers want to hear about, and we will continue in the same direction.

Business of the House

[English]

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of the recipients of the Governor General's Award in Commemoration of the Persons Case: Caroline Andrew, Saara Bhanji, Joanne Cave, Corinne Gallant and Régine Alende Tshombokongo.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today in question period, in response to a comment by the Minister of Natural Resources about the NDP proposal for a carbon tax, the member for Halifax suggested this was something that was being made up. Therefore, for the benefit of everyone in the House, because I know a number of members of the NDP have suggested the same, I would like to table the proposal, in both official languages, so they can read it. Also for the benefit of some members in the press gallery who have taken the opposition leader's invitation to deny that this exists, it is an opportunity to actually read it. At page 4, they will find reference to the \$21.5 million in proceeds.

● (1510)

The Speaker: Ministers do not need unanimous consent to table documents as long as they are in both official languages.

Mr. Marc Garneau: Mr. Speaker, I rise to seek the unanimous consent of the House for the following motion: That the House recognize that sections of Bill C-45 dealing with members' pensions should be enacted as quickly as possible and passed without further debate; that Bill C-45, the second act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on March 29, 2012 and other measures, be divided into two bills: Bill C-45A, an act to stop the delay on making MP pensions fair act, and Bill C-45B, a second act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on March 29, 2012 and other measures; and

That Bill C-45A be composed of clauses 475, 476 and 477 to 553 inclusively and subclause 545(1); that a clause adding the short title stop the delay on making MP pensions fair act be added to Bill C-45A; that Bill C-45A be deemed to have been read the second time and deemed referred to committee of the whole, deemed reported without amendment, deemed concurred in at report stage and deemed read the third time and passed; that Bill C-45B be composed of the remaining clauses of Bill C-45; that Bill C-45B retain the status on the order paper that Bill C-45 had before the adoption of this motion; that the law clerk and parliamentary counsel be authorized to make any technical changes or corrections as may be necessary; and that Bill C-45A and C-45B be reprinted.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member for Westmount—Ville-Marie have unanimous consent of the House to propose this motion?

Some hon. members: Yes.

Some hon. members: No.

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, simply to clarify, we think the sentiment is a very good one. It is something we would like to see. We only received the motion, which you heard was quite lengthy, just before it was presented. As such, we would like to satisfy ourselves as to the form, content and so on.

We are pleased to see the enthusiastic support for at least part of the budget. We hope it will continue on to other elements of the budget.

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to correct a statement made by the member for Parkdale—High Park during question period. She made a comment saying that changes to the Navigable Waters Protection Act—

The Speaker: I will stop the minister there. We have had a few of these where members or ministers try to correct the record after question period. That is not a point of order; that is a point of debate. If the minister wants to address it in a future question period, he can do so, but unless he has a point of order we will move on.

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on a point of order rising out of in matter question period, I would like to table the publicly available request for qualification for the email transformation initiative, which clearly states this procurement is subject to a national security exception. It is in both English and French. As such, I understand as a minister I do not need consent in order to clarify the misinformation being spread by the NDP member.

The Speaker: Why do we not move on to the Thursday question.

The hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley.

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what a great idea.

● (1515)

[Translation]

It is an honour for me to rise to ask the government, on behalf of the opposition, what it has in store for the House for the rest of this week and for next week.

This government clearly did not understand the message that thousands of Canadians sent it last spring regarding the omnibus Bill C-38 on the budget. Canadians said that the bill was an attack on the democratic process and on the integrity of the House, and a violation of the right of all Canadians to hold their government to account.

Today we have received Bill C-45, another monstrous bill from a government that simply does not seem to understand. The bill is 450 pages long and combines measures such as cutting funding for research and development and watering down environmental assessment rules with actual budgetary measures.

Business of the House

Clearly this government has not learned its lesson. Canadians expect more transparency and accountability from the Conservatives.

[English]

Eighteen years ago, the member for Calgary Southwest, the Prime Minister, said, and I want to quote him to set the context for what I am about to approach:

Mr. Speaker, I would argue that the subject matter of the bill is so diverse that a single vote on the content would put members in conflict with their own principles.

We now know that same member, as the Prime Minister, does not believe that applies to him any longer. At the very least, as we need to understand this bill and fully analyze, I will ask the government three questions about what follows.

Will the government split this bill into its component parts to allow for proper study?

If not, will it allow for multiple standing committees to study the divisions of this bill that fit into those committee mandates?

At the very least, will it allow for full debate on this bill without slamming the door with further closure or time allocations, as we saw last spring?

Last, New Democrats welcomed this morning's long overdue arrival of Bill S-11 from the Senate, which has been waiting for passage there for more than 120 days, and was killed by prorogation by the government previously. We are interested in passing this bill quickly to committee.

We are also interested in the integrity of the legislative process. I am somewhat surprised that the government is not so much. It has had to amend a number of its hastily written bills and has asked Canadians to simply trust it on this one and move it all stages. It cannot work with a Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food who has failed us repeatedly and seriously in his role.

With Bill S-11 in mind, I believe that if you seek it, you will find unanimous consent for the following motion: That notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House, this House move immediately to debate at second reading of S-11, that today's order for supply be deemed not to have been called, and that the order for the putting of the question on the supply motion and the deferral of that vote be deemed to have been withdrawn.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley have the unanimous consent of the House to propose this motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, just to clarify, I would have been quite happy to have consented to the motion had the member not included in it a provision for an additional opposition day. Had the member decided to conclude that NDP was prepared, since its subject for today was food safety, to make the balance of the day the debate on Bill S-11 and then have it proceed to committee, we would have been quite delighted to consent.

In terms of his suggestions on the budget bill, I am looking forward to meeting with him and discussing with him what opportunities might exist there further.

[Translation]

Earlier today, the Minister of Finance introduced Bill C-45, the Jobs and Growth Act, 2012.

This important piece of legislation will bolster Canada's economy and help improve communities with initiatives that build a strong economy and create jobs, support families and communities, promote clean energy and enhance neutrality of the tax system, and respect taxpayers' dollars.

We will start second reading debate of Bill C-45 on Wednesday—once honourable members have had a chance to review the bill and discuss it at next week's caucus meetings. The debate will continue on Thursday and Friday.

● (1520)

[English]

I genuinely hope all members will take advantage of the budget bill study week that is available to review the valuable measures that are set out as the second half of our legislative arm of our comprehensive economic action plan 2012. One highlight of the study week will be a briefing arranged by the minister for all hon. members on Monday evening. I hope many MPs can attend, and certainly more than the paltry attendance of opposition members that appeared this spring for the briefing on Bill C-38.

I look forward to a vigorous policy debate on the economy and not on procedural games.

I turn now to the business of the House leading up to Wednesday.

This afternoon we will see the conclusion of the NDP's opposition day. Regrettably, I was personally disappointed that the official opposition did not answer my call last week to lay out the details of its \$21.5 billion carbon tax and how it would raise the price of gas, groceries and electricity. Though, I was encouraged that this week in question period the New Democrats actually did acknowledge the subject and raised it.

Tomorrow and Monday will see us resume second reading of Bill S-7, the combating terrorism act. I understand we should finish that debate sometime on Monday, at which that time we will then turn to Bill C-15, the strengthening military justice in the defence of Canada act; Bill S-2, the family homes on reserves and matrimonial interests or rights act; and Bill S-8, the safe drinking water for first nations act.

On Tuesday, we will debate the second reading of Bill S-11, the safe food for Canadians act, unless we find some other approach that would allow us to move on a more urgent basis. Since we did not get unanimous consent to move it forward quickly, we are hopeful there will be some other approach that can be agreed upon to move quickly with it. We hope that if we do debate it that day, we will be able to deal with it quickly and then spend the balance of that day debating Bill C-15 and Bill C-12, the safeguarding Canadians' personal information act.

*Business of Supply***GOVERNMENT ORDERS***[English]***BUSINESS OF SUPPLY**

OPPOSITION MOTION—FOOD SAFETY

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Calgary Centre-North.

I am thankful for the opportunity to speak to this motion, as it will permit me to update the House on the government's actions, roles and responsibilities with respect to food safety from a public health perspective primarily. The health and safety of Canadians has always been, and will continue to be, our top priority.

I will talk about the role that the health portfolio plays in food-borne safety. Before I do that, I will focus my remarks on the role of the health portfolio in responding to this incident and, in particular, the progress made over the past few years to enable federal departments and agencies to better anticipate and respond to food safety incidents.

The Public Health Agency has been working with the provinces and territories from the very beginning of this process on a daily basis. It has been dealing with the public as well as the provinces and territories in providing support on this very important matter.

In Canada, the number of cases of E. coli infection reported annually has been declining over the past several years. Our national laboratory surveillance systems are detecting linked cases faster than ever before and enabling quicker action to identify the source of the outbreak and limit the spread.

From a health perspective, we are of course concerned by any food-borne illness that arises.

The following protocols are in place to address food safety incidents. Here I believe it is important for members to understand the roles and responsibilities of the federal, provincial and territorial governments when an outbreak such as this one occurs.

It should be noted that whenever there is any question of food safety posing a risk to Canadians, the health and agriculture departments and agencies at all levels of government work together to address the outbreak. When an outbreak takes place in a single province or territory, that particular province or territory conducts its own investigation.

The Public Health Agency maintains databases that allow provinces to compare the fingerprints of the strain that is causing infection with those that have been seen in other Canadian provinces or the United States. This allows more rapid detection of clusters of food-borne illnesses.

In certain cases, a province or territory will call upon the federal government for support. When a food-borne illness outbreak spreads beyond a single jurisdiction, the Public Health Agency of Canada works closely with Health Canada and the CFIA to address outbreak investigation and response issues. In this particular situation, provincial public health authorities in the affected provinces are

leading the investigations into the E. coli illnesses in their jurisdictions in consultation with their local and regional medical officers of health.

However, given that the situation involves a food-borne illness in more than one province, the Public Health Agency of Canada is leading the multi-jurisdictional public health investigation. This involves consultation, content expertise, coordination and leadership at the national level with the goal of preventing additional illness and sharing and integrating their communication practices. In fact, from the start PHAC has been speaking daily with the provinces and territories to exchange information. Since then the 15 affected cases have all recovered or are recovering.

When the agency undertakes an investigation of a food-borne outbreak, it first tries to develop a full picture from the public health perspective. This can be trying for the agency as not all people who suffer from food-borne illness will actually visit their doctor.

Samples are taken from those who do seek treatment and are sent for testing by the agency and/or other public health laboratories to identify the pathogen causing the illness. These tests provide detailed information about a pathogen very similar to that of a fingerprint. The results of the tests are entered into PulseNet Canada, a network of federal, provincial and territorial public health and food laboratories coordinated by the agency, for comparison across the country. This helps identify matching patterns and clusters of illness that may indicate outbreaks.

Every case of food-borne illness is examined. To be in a position to identify an outbreak, public health officials need to identify unusual rates of illness and a cluster of cases, each with a string of the same DNA fingerprint. When more illnesses than normal are identified, the agency assesses whether an outbreak is occurring. This requires a comprehensive epidemiological investigation and response.

If illnesses are occurring in more than one province, territory or country, the Public Health Agency of Canada establishes and manages an outbreak investigation coordinating committee. The committee's role is to coordinate a multi-agency response to a multi-jurisdictional food-borne illness outbreak, with the goal of protecting the health of Canadians. All provinces and territories are invited to participate, along with the agency, Health Canada and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency.

● (1525)

The main purpose of the committee is to allow partners to share information, coordinate the outbreak investigation, identify the source of illness and contain the effects of the outbreak. It is worth noting that in some cases the committee can be struck even when an outbreak is restricted to one province or territory, such as in the current situation where Alberta requested committee investigation when illnesses were limited to that province.

Business of Supply

These efforts are guided by the food-borne illness outbreak response protocol, also known as the FIORP, a protocol that was collectively developed by the Public Health Agency of Canada, Health Canada and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, in consultation with provincial and territorial stakeholders.

The protocol is put together for the collaboration and the overall effectiveness of the response during multi-jurisdictional food-borne illness outbreaks. The protocol provides guidance that enables governments to work together and to communicate quickly when managing national or international food-borne illness outbreaks.

Once the food source is identified, a health risk assessment is required to determine the level of risk associated with the food and informed risk management decisions. These health risk assessments are conducted by Health Canada and help determine appropriate interventions and mitigation strategies, such as recalls and/or public advisories. Health Canada works closely with federal partners to ensure a coordinated approach to addressing the risks and communicating with Canadians.

When there are illnesses, the Public Health Agency takes the lead in communicating to Canadians about the risks, the response and how they can protect themselves. This requires close collaboration among a number of parties. It also includes strong national public health surveillance tools, solid laboratory diagnostic and networking capacity and excellent communication.

I am pleased to say that the coordination of the investigation with provincial health authorities has been going well. That is thanks in large part to the protocols in place, which were modernized as part of actions taken over the past several years.

Following the 2008 listeriosis outbreak, the government immediately took a number of actions to prevent and reduce risks to our health, guided by the Weatherill report. Moreover, working in collaboration with our federal and provincial partners, the health portfolio continues to strengthen its capacity to prevent and respond to food-borne illness, building on the significant progress made in addressing the Weatherill recommendations.

I would like to take a few moments to outline that progress.

As we have said before, our response to the XL Foods recall exemplifies the improvements that our government has made to strengthen the food safety system. We are better at detecting and responding to outbreaks of food-borne illness through a number of improvements, such as strengthening our national surveillance systems.

During a potential outbreak of any kind, early detection and fast response is absolutely crucial. I am proud to say that Canada's ability to do so is truly world-class and has been greatly improved in recent years. We are now able to use innovative, state-of-the-art laboratory technologies to identify outbreaks more quickly and with more scientific certainty. For example, because this particular *E. coli* strain has a common DNA fingerprint, a lab method requiring more detailed analysis is needed to accurately confirm suspected *E. coli* cases and link them to recalled products.

The National Microbiology Laboratory is the only lab in Canada certified to perform this more detailed analysis and is playing a

leadership role in confirming all suspected cases of *E. coli* linked to this outbreak. Federal agencies are continuously developing faster and more accurate methods for detection of food-borne pathogens.

In addition, Health Canada has taken measures so that it can sustain its immediate response to outbreak situations on a 24/7 basis. The department has increased its health risk assessment expertise and capacity to assess the risks posed by products and processes to the Canadian public, and to provide expert advice on the effectiveness of proposed corrective actions. It is also crucial to ensure that all who are involved in addressing food-borne illness outbreaks have a clear understanding of the protocols.

That is why our government strengthened measures under the food-borne illness outbreak response protocol with provincial and territorial authorities.

The recent update of protocols to include strong communication mechanisms allows public health and food safety authorities across Canada to respond faster, more efficiently and more effectively to specific food-borne illness outbreaks.

Over and above the need to communicate with authorities, it is important to communicate with Canadians. The health portfolio and CFIA have provided regular updates to Canadians on the situation and on how to protect themselves from food-borne illness. Public health notices are issued when new cases are confirmed.

Each of these initiatives highlights the important contribution of the health portfolio during an outbreak and the importance of coordination and collaboration with a large network of partners. The public health response to the XL Foods incident exemplifies many of the improvements our government has made to the food safety system.

• (1530)

Given that the opposition House leader said that he would like to see speedy passage of Bill S-11, I would ask for unanimous consent for the following motion, that notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House, Bill S-11, an act respecting food commodities, including their inspection, their safety, their labelling and advertising, their import, export and interprovincial trade, the establishment of standards for them, the registration or licensing of persons who perform certain activities related to them, the establishment of standards governing establishments where those activities are performed and the registration of establishments where those activities are performed, be deemed read a second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Does the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health have the unanimous consent of the House to propose the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Business of Supply

[Translation]

Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like the Conservative member to understand that it would be preferable if he were to inform us in advance before making a request for unanimous consent in the House.

[English]

I was interested to hear that he was very proud of the fact there is now a rapid response. I would like him to explain what a rapid response is. What is an acceptable response if the government had known for over two weeks that there was a problem and people were getting sick? It seems to me that its rapid response was rather slow.

Would he please define what rapid response is so that the people who got sick through this crisis will actually understand it? Perhaps they got sick a little too soon.

Mr. Colin Carrie: Mr. Speaker, I would let the hon. member know with regard to our request for unanimous consent that we have actually read the motion to the House several times today, and his own House leader read a very similar one. We have to be realistic. If we would like to move this issue forward, why does the NDP keep voting against our motion?

Of course, I do not accept the premise of his question. It is incorrect. Food safety officials learned of concerns with some products on September 4. They acted based upon the information available and contained that batch. Since then, the CFIA has been responding to available information in order to protect consumers, and the Public Health Agency of Canada has been engaged on this since it was contacted by the CFIA on September 6.

Actually, the minister has offered more information to the opposition. One of the important things that opposition members should know is that they should become informed about the protocols and exactly what happened in this situation. They should not be out there fear-mongering.

I think all of us want the health and safety of Canadians held as a high priority and it is important that all of us become educated about the system out there and how it works, in order to keep our constituents informed about the very important issue of food safety.

• (1535)

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I actually quite enjoyed listening to the parliamentary secretary's speech. Maybe it is because it is the one I made this morning, outlining FIORP and the responsibilities of the Public Health Agency of Canada and the Minister of Health and the Department of Health. Obviously, someone found the document and read it in the ministry of health

My question repeats that of my colleague from the New Democratic Party earlier today. If they knew that this was the protocol, which was written incidentally in 1999, why is it that the only time we saw anything on the website of Health Canada and the Public Health Agency was on September 27? What about warning Canadians? What about putting out something that says, "Please be aware there is an enteric illness. If you have one, please let us know"? What about sending it out to hospitals and doctors, saying, "If you have a person with an enteric illness, please let us know"?

That is called surveillance. Why did they not—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please.

I need to give the parliamentary secretary a little time to answer the question.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health.

Mr. Colin Carrie: Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, as soon as we became aware of it, we did act.

I think what the member has to understand and realize is that Canada has one of the safest food systems in the entire world. We have learned from the listeriosis issue in 2008. We have worked with Ms. Weatherill and her report to implement those recommendations and we have shown that we have actually been able to respond more quickly.

Again, the health and safety of Canadians is our priority and we will continue to work with our partners to ensure that we still have one of the safest food systems in the world.

Ms. Michelle Rempel (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague does a lot of work on the health portfolio in his role as parliamentary secretary. Perhaps he could speak to some of the good work that CFIA does in partnership with Health Canada, some of the investment measures we put forward in the budgets over the last few years to help increase food safety and ensure that Canada's food safety stays at that superior rating, which the OECD report mentioned very recently.

Mr. Colin Carrie: Mr. Speaker, this government has been acting in a coordinated fashion. In fact, we have made huge investments in more inspectors, and each time we have made an investment to improve food safety, the opposition has voted against it. That is very sad for Canadians because there is a lot of talk going on in this House, but when it comes to action, Canadians can count on this government to take action for food safety and they can count on the opposition to vote against it.

Ms. Michelle Rempel (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is always a pleasure to rise and speak in the House. On the topic today, it is important to know that whenever there is a food recall of unsafe products it does cause concern for Canadians about our food safety system. But what Canadians need to know is that we have one of the best food safety systems in the world. Our recall system is proof positive that our food safety system is functional. It catches problems, it alerts us to problems and it alerts Canadians to things they need to know about their food supply.

Business of Supply

I mentioned this earlier in my question to the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, but a recent OECD report recognized Canada's superior food safety system. So there is international recognition that Canada does have stringency in food safety rules, in inspection and in making sure that Canadian consumers have that right, have that access to safe food.

However, no system is foolproof and there are clear safeguards in place to detect problems and clear procedures and policies to address these problems as quickly and as efficiently as possible.

Canadians expect safe and healthy food, and this is why our government has heavily invested in strengthening Canada's food safety system and has introduced Bill S-11, Safe Food for Canadians Act. It would strengthen our ability to trace and recall foods, including the authority to allow the creation of tracing systems and stronger record maintenance requirements; enhance food safety oversight, including new prohibitions targeting unsafe practices such as tampering, hoaxes and deceptive practices; reduce regulatory duplication; increase co-operation among food safety authorities; provide standardization and uniformity in the way CFIA carries out its inspection and enforcement duties; provide stronger import controls on food coming into Canada; further align our food safety systems to those of our key trading partners; and provide the authority to provide export certification for all food. I am very glad to highlight these things in the House today.

These are great things. These are timely issues that are going on in our country right now, and I find it very unfortunate that my colleagues opposite are not willing to expedite the bill's passage through the House of Commons. I really do not understand their rationale for doing this, and I hope that one of them can accurately speak to this today because I have not heard any good rationale whatsoever in the debate today.

Bill S-11 builds on our government's already strong track record of investment and policy-making in Canada's food safety system, including delivering the biggest budgets ever for the Canadian Food Inspection Agency—budget 2011 in fact committed an additional \$100 million over five years to the CFIA to improve food safety capacity—establishing guidelines for product of Canada/made in Canada labelling; funding the Canadian integrated food safety initiative to the tune of \$47.16 million under Growing Forward to support the development of food safety and traceability systems by national organizations.

Highlights of this initiative include up to \$7 million for the Canadian Pork Council to strengthen the national swine traceability system; up to \$2 million in funding for the Canadian Animal Health Coalition for the West Hawk Lake zoning initiative, which will help to monitor the movement of animals and agricultural products between eastern and western Canada; and up to \$4.45 million to help the Canadian Cattle Identification Agency to strengthen livestock traceability.

There are so many things that our government has invested in for food safety, and with this new legislation that is about to come to this place, I feel our government is getting it done with regard to food safety. However that said, we also understand that there are three pillars of food safety in this country. There are three different groups that play active roles in this. Consumers have a role, industry has a

role and so does government. When we look at industry's roles, we see that all federal government inspected meat and fish processing facilities must follow strict guidelines and rules for food safety. This involves identifying what can go wrong, planning to prevent a problem and taking action where a problem is identified.

Industry must not only ensure a culture of food safety and consumer protection from the top leadership through to employees, but it must adopt a science-based risk management practice to minimize food safety risks.

To that end, industry works to identify potential sources of food contamination, update production practices to reduce risk, comply with inspection and testing protocols and pull unsafe products from the market.

Again, going back to the government's role on this, it begins with effective laws and then CFIA delivers all federally mandated programs for food inspection, plant and animal health products and production systems.

As Canada's largest science-based regulator, the CFIA holds industry to account for the safety of its products, responds to food safety emergencies, carries out food recalls and prevents the spread of animal disease to humans.

Given the complexity of this mandate, as we were saying earlier, the CFIA works with a variety of partners including Health Canada and the Public Health Agency of Canada.

● (1540)

One of CFIA's key jobs is to inspect both domestic and imported food. It also inspects audits and tests products to verify that industry is complying with food safety regulations, and it enforces those regulations in federally regulated food processing facilities.

Once the food safety system has identified a contaminated food product in the marketplace, an investigation takes place that can lead to a food recall. More often than not, under the CFIA's direction, industry itself takes charge and carries out the recall of its food product.

In fact, it is extremely rare for a firm to be found unwilling to remove an affected product. In these cases, the CFIA can issue a mandatory recall letter. The agency can also seize affected products and prosecute any firms that do not comply with recall orders. Again, this is an example of Canada's very safe, very effective food safety regulations.

Business of Supply

When dealing with potentially unsafe food, the CFIA's investigations are driven by three imperatives in ensuring the safety of the food supply: accuracy, thoroughness and timeliness. As one can imagine, the gathering of facts is critical to a science-based thorough investigation.

Thus, the CFIA must achieve two objectives in such a situation. It must undertake a robust review process that produces accurate and reliable information, because there is an impact on the outcome of this investigation both to consumers and industry, while ensuring that the public is informed as soon as possible about potential risks.

To achieve this balance, the CFIA issues regular alerts for recalled products even while an investigation is ongoing. As a result, it may issue several public alerts for the same recall. Once a product is known to pose a health risk, it is recalled immediately.

This is an important point: the series of expanded alerts issued over the past few weeks related to the XL Foods recall reflect the new information obtained during the course of a continuing science-based investigation. The timing of these notices is a normal part of the recall process.

It is important to note that the XL Foods plant will not be allowed to reopen until the Canadian Food Inspection Agency has certified it is safe. At the moment, XL Foods continues to work with the CFIA to identify and trace contaminated food products that might be in the market.

At the plant right now, the CFIA's immediate focus is to verify that XL Foods has put measures in place and follows those measures to effectively control E. coli contamination at all stages of production.

As an Albertan and someone who is also concerned about food safety, I know this is a delicate balance. We want to make sure the plant is producing food that meets our stringent food safety guidelines but is also cognizant of the workers and cattle ranchers in this country who depend on that plant to get their product to market.

I want to emphasize that, first and foremost, we need to make sure the food is safe. Our agents and inspectors who are there right now are working with the company to make sure that the stringent food safety standards that we all expect are in place before the plant reopens. I want to make sure, for my constituents and those across the country, that everyone realizes that this is something that everyone in this House, including our government, is committed to. We certainly hope it takes place as soon as possible.

To conclude, this is why the passage in this House of Bill S-11, the bill we were talking about earlier, is so important. The amalgamation and streamlining of food safety regulations, which are currently set up under separate umbrellas, is accounted for in the bill. It is something that needs to happen quickly. I certainly hope my colleagues opposite will take the opportunity to expedite the passage of this bill.

As my colleague before me did, I would like to ask for unanimous consent in the House for the following motion:

That notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House, Bill S-11, an Act respecting food commodities, including their inspection, their safety,

their labelling and advertising, their import, export and interprovincial trade, the establishment of standards for them, the registration or licensing of persons who perform certain activities related to them, the establishment of standards governing establishments where those activities are performed and the registration of establishments where those activities are performed, be deemed read a second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food.

• (1545)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Does the parliamentary secretary have unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): There is no consent.

The hon. member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Robert Chisholm: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order to make a suggestion in response to what the government has offered.

I believe if you seek it you will find unanimous consent for a motion that is similar if not the same as the one that was just voted down. It says: That notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House, this House move immediately to debate second reading of Bill S-11, that today's order for supply be deemed to have not been called and that the order for the putting of the question on the supply motion and the deferral of the vote be deemed to have been withdrawn.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Does the hon. member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour have the unanimous consent of the House to propose this motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I think that shows the sincerity in bringing forward their motion.

When one of our fellow colleagues from Alberta spoke in the House, he made the suggestion that perhaps it was the workers' fault and that they had the option of bringing to the attention of the company issues they found on the floor.

I wonder if the member would like to respond to the information provided to me by the United Food and Commercial Workers Union who has said that it had tried to reach out to the workers, particularly temporary foreign workers who may be struggling, but that it had been denied that information by the company and, therefore, could not reach out to the workers. It also called for whistleblower protection legislation, which is not found in this bill, so workers could feel free to reveal these issues.

Does the member agree that this law should be amended to provide whistleblower protection to all workers in food operations?

Business of Supply

•(1550)

Ms. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, to characterize my comments as saying that it was the workers' fault is both insensitive and inaccurate. I cannot believe the member opposite is making politics with workers who are caught in this situation when we are trying to fix it, and when the CFIA is there working to ensure that the plant opens up with safety and rigour so it can continue to operate for the long-term safety of workers.

Moreover, as a member from Alberta, I cannot believe she would have the audacity to stand and constantly argue against Canada's energy sector, pit eastern workers against western workers and talk about workers' rights in Alberta.

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member keeps perpetuating this ruse that started this morning that Bill S-11 is the panacea for food safety. Interestingly, it was in the Senate and the Senate could have passed it last spring. The Senate does not have a school term schedule. It stays at the will of Parliament. The Prime Minister could have asked the Senate to stay and pass the bill and then return it to the House but he chose not to.

I want to inform the member that section 13 of the Meat Inspection Act provides the CFIA with all the authority it needs to impose regulations and require compliance by the industry with all the rules. It was repeated in "A Processor's Guide to Inspection" sent by her government to the processors in February of this year. That is why Cargill is running well and why all the other abattoirs are running well.

I would encourage the member to be a little dissuaded, to stop with the talking points and to understand that Bill S-11 is not the answer.

Ms. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, I find it interesting that my colleague opposite is talking about talking points from a sheet of talking points.

The Senate bill review took 22 sitting days. That is what we are looking at. This bill moved quite quickly through the Senate with, I believe, verbal support from some of his colleagues in the Liberal Party in the Senate. I think there is a recognition of how timely and important this legislation is to Canada, especially given the situation in Alberta. I certainly hope that I have agreement from all of my colleagues to proceed with this in a timely manner in this place.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I wish the opposition would act for food safety rather than just follow through with partisan politics like it is doing today.

Demanding the resignation of the minister is right out of opposition playbook 101. We actually have a bill in front of Parliament today, Bill S-11. There was discussion among House leaders this morning to move that bill to committee for an in-depth review and not have it sit in the House for debate but opposition members keep saying no. They have been asked time and time again.

I would like to know what my colleague thinks about the cheap partisan politics that the opposition is playing with Canadians' food safety and with an important bill that is in front of Parliament now.

Ms. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, I take this opportunity to personally thank my colleague for all the excellent work that he has

done on this file. He has done a lot of good work in communicating the facts on this case to Canadians.

With regard to his point, this legislation is vital. It is something that addresses an issue of concern to Canadians. I agree with him that this needs to transcend partisanship and that all parties should agree to move this to committee as quickly as possible.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Claude Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, before I begin, I would like to say that I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Edmonton—Strathcona.

I will get right to the heart of the matter. In my riding of Saint-Hyacinthe, doctors and nurses at the Honoré-Mercier hospital witnessed first-hand the Conservatives' failure with regard to food safety. In early October, they had to care for the first victims of the tainted meat scandal in Quebec.

After eating ground beef from Alberta's XL Foods, the victims, a man and a woman from the Montérégie area, had to go to the hospital urgently. They were both infected with E. coli and suffered terribly.

The couple, who are originally from Beloeil, had labour-like cramps, intense diarrhea and a fever. The man was affected more severely and had to be hospitalized for several days. He was in such agony that he needed morphine every two hours to control the pain. The only thing they could do was wait. This man, like his wife before him, had to get rid of the bacteria naturally. The only things that eased the pain were morphine and water. But the worst was yet to come. Over the course of his treatment, his condition worsened. He experienced intestinal paralysis and had difficulty breathing. The doctors even considered removing his large intestine. Believe me: having your large intestine removed changes your life.

His battle lasted five days. Five days of pain, but he made it through, even though he never thought he would. The worst part is that this couple has two young boys, aged 18 months and three years. Can anyone imagine what an E. coli infection could have done to these two little ones? I cannot, and I do not want to know.

Doctors at the Honoré-Mercier hospital can speak to the failure of the Minister of Agriculture. They saw the horror. And, I repeat, this horror was avoidable. The Minister of Agriculture said too early that his government had fixed the problem. That had tragic consequences across the country.

I will remind members of the facts. Canada is currently experiencing the largest beef recall in its history. Fifteen cases of people infected with E. coli were linked to the XL Foods plant in Brooks, Alberta, and more than 1,800 products were recalled by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency because they were contaminated with the bacteria.

Business of Supply

The XL Foods plant produces over 40% of the beef in Canada. This has even more tragic consequences for Canadian beef producers and for the 2,900 employees who work at the plant. All of this could have been avoided if the Minister of Agriculture had acted when he was supposed to.

Two weeks passed before the government issued a recall of the tainted meat, even though a problem was identified on September 3. If a recall had been ordered immediately, the couple from Belloil may not have been infected. I would even go so far as to say that they probably would not have been.

Canadians and food workers are demanding better protection from this government by means of a better monitoring system. Must I remind members that the beef industry is just getting back on its feet in the aftermath of the mad cow crisis? It needs clear, reliable rules, and so do consumers.

The NDP understands that, which is why we are demanding three things of the government. First, the Minister of Agriculture must resign and be replaced by someone who can restore public trust. The facts support that. On September 26, the minister said that no contaminated meat had made it to the shelves. In the meantime, Canadians were getting sick. This is the same minister who made jokes while more than 22 Canadians died from the listeriosis crisis. He has truly lost public trust and must be replaced immediately.

Next, the NDP is calling on the government to cancel the budget cuts to the CFIA. The agency must be given the resources it needs to carry out its mandate on behalf of all Canadians. Its mandate is simple: ensure food safety in the food industry.

• (1555)

Recent events demonstrated the importance of making sure the CFIA is able to do a good job.

The CFIA is extremely important both in Canada and in my riding. The region of Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot has always been proud of having a regional office. The CFIA operations centre in Saint-Hyacinthe is affiliated with the University of Montreal's faculty of veterinary medicine. The two organizations work on common issues in both research and development.

My riding is also proud to be the home of the Centre d'insémination artificielle du Québec, the CIAQ. It accounts for 45% of the Canadian insemination market. Cutbacks to our CFIA operations centre could significantly compromise the quality of the product the CIAQ offers.

Saint-Hyacinthe is one of Quebec's most important regions in terms of agricultural production. The CFIA's services are, therefore, crucial to the region, which relies heavily on economic activity tied to agriculture.

It is a simple equation. Cutbacks to the CFIA mean job losses in my riding and economic losses in my region. Moreover, cutbacks open the door to less rigorous inspections and a greater likelihood that Canadians will fall ill and die. This is not what Canadians want.

The Conservatives must, therefore, take responsibility for slashing the resources allocated to food safety. The cutbacks were not

insignificant: the budget was slashed by \$56.1 million, and hundreds of jobs at the Canadian Food Inspection Agency were culled.

Everybody knows that the Conservatives were fighting for greater self-regulation, but the inspectors are now poring over paperwork rather than inspecting meat. The problems that we are currently facing in terms of food safety are the direct result of the Conservatives' incompetence, and particularly that of the Minister of Agriculture.

Once again, Canadians are paying the price. This is why, third, we are calling on the auditor general to immediately carry out an audit of food safety procedures and submit a report to Parliament.

It is high time that Canadians be once again able to trust in the food safety system. The health of Canadian families is at stake. These families should be able to trust Canadian products. Food safety is also crucial to producers who want to be able to sell top-quality products.

We are therefore calling for an immediate review of the compliance verification system, as suggested by the Weatherill report on the listeriosis crisis, which cost the lives of 22 Canadians in 2008.

After the events of last month, we can no longer afford to wait years before improving the system. It is a matter of urgency. The doctors and nurses at Honoré-Mercier hospital do not want to have to deal with any more cases of E. coli bacteria contamination. Now is the time to act.

• (1600)

[English]

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I listened to the opposition speeches, I could not help but note the many inaccuracies communicated by the opposition. The member made one in her speech when she said that the minister said that no products made it to the store shelves and yet Canadians are sick.

If the member had done even the smallest amount of research she would have known that when the minister made that remark he was talking about the batch that was sampled on September 4 and tested positive on September 4. I invite her to check *Hansard* and take a moment to actually read what the minister said. It is important, because if the member knows what days of production were affected by the recall she will know that September 4 was not one of them. I would like to know how she responds to this promulgating of inaccurate statements.

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Claude Morin: Mr. Speaker, I am not prepared to correct the so-called inaccuracies of my speech because my team and I did our research. We did our jobs. I have a team behind me and that team assisted me greatly. My colleagues also did their research. So, I do not really see what the problem is. The minister made a statement and he has to deal with the consequences. Period. People got sick. The minister must resign. The buck stops with him, period.

Business of Supply

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, back in the mid-1990s former prime minister Jean Chrétien made a great effort to bring in something that would ultimately provide assurances with respect to safeguarding our food products. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency was created by Mr. Chrétien in recognition of how important it is to ensure that we have safe food. All in all, the agency has done a phenomenal job, given the resources that it has.

The concern is that the agency needs to have the resources necessary to assure Canadians that a food product is of good quality so that we can prevent things of this nature from taking place in the first place. When it does occur, the government has an obligation to be forthright and transparent with Canadians, thereby protecting their health and also protecting stakeholders and industries, such as our cattlemen in the Prairies.

• (1605)

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Claude Morin: Mr. Speaker, I did not hear a question in the remarks my colleague just made. We need an effective system to protect Canadians. We do not want any more people to get sick because of the negligence of an incompetent minister, whose resignation we have been calling for for weeks. Quite frankly, I do not know what he is still doing here.

I am calling on the government to act. This is 2012, and it is important to make sure that people do not continue to get sick. This is an industrialized country; something needs to be done!

Mr. Alain Giguère (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to join all the members who have offered their condolences to the victims of this food poisoning crisis, the many workers in Alberta who lost their jobs and, of course, the ranchers who have now lost an important source of income.

John Fitzgerald Kennedy, after his defeat in the Bay of Pigs said, “Victory has a thousand fathers, but defeat is an orphan.” John Fitzgerald Kennedy took political responsibility for that defeat. Unfortunately, we no longer have men of that ilk in government.

Right now we have a resource problem. Legislation is all well and good, but if the legislation is not backed up by the resources to implement it, it is useless. Can the member tell us how to support legislation with adequate resources?

Ms. Marie-Claude Morin: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleagues for his excellent question.

Supporting legislation with adequate resources means making sensible investments. The government must stop cutting funding for programs that are crucial to the health of Canadians and the quality of our food. In order for legislation to be properly enforced, Canadian Food Inspection Agency inspectors need resources.

Getting rid of inspectors is not the answer. There have been cutbacks to the tune of \$56 million. That is not the way to guarantee a decent food safety system and to prevent infections like those that just occurred. People are still sick.

[English]

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am rising in support of the motion tabled by my colleague, our official opposition critic on agriculture. I fully support the call for the removal of the minister and the reassignment of the food safety portfolio, which I will speak to a bit more; the reversing of the cuts and the deregulation of the food safety regime; and the independent assessment by the Auditor General of whether or not we are proceeding in a way that will ensure food safety for Canadians.

I would like to start with a quote from a former Progressive Conservative Minister of the Environment, Tom McMillan, when he tabled the first version of the Canadian Environmental Protection Act in this place.

He also made a historic decision to table an enforcement and compliance policy, and in making that decision he transformed the way of doing business for governments across this country: federal, provincial and territorial. When he tabled this enforcement and compliance policy, he said:

A good law, however, is not enough. It must be enforced—ruthlessly if need be.

In no place is that more significant than in the case of food safety.

Those in the House may not be aware, but back in 1997 the decision was made by a Liberal government to transfer responsibility for food safety from the health department to agriculture, so that the then-created Canadian Food Inspection Agency was designated to report to the Minister of Agriculture.

Very clearly, if we look at the legislation, the Minister of Agriculture is the highest authority in all decisions on food safety. The Minister of Health, though, did retain responsibility to assess the effectiveness of the CFIA in food safety. I think it would be fair to suggest that there was some controversy at the time in that transfer.

It is because of this issue, which a number of people have raised in the House previously, that regrettably the Minister of Agriculture retains a conflicting portfolio where he is to promote the food industry of Canada, including its export, and that includes the beef industry. At the same time, he has this other hat that he is supposed to put on from time to time or at exactly the same time to protect food safety for Canadians.

Interestingly, the government made the decision to remove the regulation of pesticides, the oversight of the use of pesticides by farmers, from agriculture at the same time as it put food safety into agriculture.

That may have been the beginning of the problem and that is why we are sincerely raising the motion today. We are calling on the government to look at this again to see if it is meeting the needs of Canadians in terms of the safety of their food as well as protecting the interests of food producers so that their industry is not put at risk.

Has this crisis in XL triggered a review? So far it appears not. There is a lot of denial of any kind of problem whatsoever. Previously the government, in the listeriosis crisis, called in health expert Sheila Weatherill to review problems and she made a number of recommendations.

Business of Supply

Interestingly, when we look at Dr. Weatherill's report, she said that coincidental to the events that led to the 2008 outbreak of listeriosis, a new federal meat inspection system, the compliance verification system, was introduced. The compliance verification system, which we have talked a lot about in this place, was brought about, as I understand, because of this crisis that occurred previously in the food safety industry. Dr. Weatherill added:

—we were told of gaps in [the compliance verification system's] design and implementation as well as in the on-going management and delivery of the CVS. These deficiencies are noteworthy because inspection requirements can only be as strong as the regulatory policies and standards against which compliance is verified.

She then goes on to raise a number of concerns, including a number of sources that said that the lack of staff was a major constraint, as was the pressure of time. I think those are certainly two factors that we have seen raised repeatedly during the time of this crisis with food safety in XL Foods.

The Minister of Agriculture has a duty to identify potential conflicts in his portfolio, as does the Prime Minister. It is the prerogative of the Prime Minister from time to time to reconsider the portfolios within his cabinet and where they are assigned. The minister has been clear in his mandate to promote Canada's beef industry. There is no doubt about that. However, in failing in his parallel mandate to ensure food safety, surely he has put that very beef industry at risk.

●(1610)

Why is there a need for an independent review? The government saw the need to bring in Dr. Weatherill, as has been mentioned, on listeriosis. Why then is there not this need now, when this is the largest food recall in the history of this country? Why does it not appear logical to the government?

One would have thought the government would just stand up and say, "My goodness, there is an even greater problem this time. Perhaps we should take a second look at our system and take another look at the Weatherill report to see if we acted appropriately. Let us talk to the food industry, to the public, to the union and the workers."

It is important to remind this place of the name of the agency. It is the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. Why do I point that out? It is because the government has chosen to replace its enforcement and compliance regime, which is common in all the other agencies at the federal level and across the provinces and territories of this country and frankly, from my experience, across nations of the world.

It has replaced the enforcement and compliance policy, which would normally direct the role of the government agency, with what is called a compliance verification system. Generally speaking, a compliance verification system is a system that is applied by the industry being regulated. In other words, industry's role is to comply with the law, therefore it put in place a compliance verification system.

Let us be clear, the government's job is to establish the food safety rules and to enforce them and the government's job is also to ensure that it protects the public. The industry's job is to comply with the law, including training all its workers to ensure the capacity to comply and taking timely action to prevent harm.

As I mentioned, beginning in the mid-1980s, previous federal governments moved to improve the way that they actually enforced the law. They put into place enforcement and compliance policies and from time to time improved them.

I am pleased to say that back in the late-1980s, I actually developed the enforcement and compliance policy for the Department of Agriculture. I further developed enforcement and compliance policies for the federal Department of Environment, for the Yukon and around the world.

I fully credit those governments for having taken that measure. It is very important to have a concise, credible system to show the public that one is sincere about enforcement.

What is the role of an enforcement and compliance policy? It is very clear and simple. It clarifies the roles and responsibilities for inspections, investigations, analysts. It clearly delineates the criteria for response to violations or non-compliance. It identifies the priorities for targeted inspections. It also identifies the needed enforcement staff, resources and training plans so that the government, at the moment that the law comes into effect, is ready to properly enforce that law. These are very important measures.

As the previous Minister of Environment said, the law enacted is hollow, unless there is a sincere, effective enforcement and compliance plan.

The CVS, as we said, is not an enforcement and compliance policy. What does it say? It says that inspectors shall divide their time between assessing establishments' safety assurance programs and conducting on-site inspections. It also says that compliance is normally achieved through co-operation with the plant operator.

Already we are getting an idea of the direction the government is going in. No longer does it believe that the role of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency is to inspect and enforce the law.

The enforcement and compliance policy actually had criteria set out for what enforcement action to bring. It was based on harm, the history of that operation and the intent. If we look at the situation here, and we look at the past record of that operation, surely that warranted some kind of strict enforcement action.

To date, we do not have any knowledge of any enforcement action taken whatsoever. They did finally, eventually, withdraw the licence but we are waiting to hear what kind of enforcement action will be taken. Will it be a monetary penalty, the maximum of which is \$15,000, for a serious significant violation or will they be referred for prosecution?

●(1615)

Again, I wish to reiterate that it is just as important. The government is saying that it solved all the problems. It is tabling a new improved law in this place. We have waited a long time for that law to come. I would encourage the government to table an enforcement compliance policy in the House for review by this place and the public.

Business of Supply

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to comment on the fact that the member said the government had not done much. We have Bill S-11 in Parliament. The opposition has the opportunity to move that bill to committee, where it can be studied thoroughly by the agriculture committee. If the opposition wants to propose amendments, it can do so clause-by-clause at the agriculture committee, yet it is holding it in Parliament.

I have two questions. Has she read Bill S-11 to see what the important measures are regarding food safety and the CFIA regulatory powers within that act? Why will she not allow it to go to committee in the shortest time possible so we can move it through Parliament?

• (1620)

Ms. Linda Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I do not think the public is seeing any credibility in this move. It knows that this problem has been going on for quite some time. The government has been in power for six years and now it has brought forward a supposedly improved safety law. I have taken a look at that law and I cannot see a lot except for an increase in the potential penalty if someone is prosecuted.

What I put to the government is this. We do not even see any basic enforcement action let alone moving toward prosecution. A law which proposes higher penalties is hollow unless there is sincerity and commitment from the government to support its enforcement agency by allowing it to be pulled away and separated from this relationship tie to the industry. It should separate it out, make it independent and allow it to enforce the law no matter where it is placed.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we need to put it into the perspective that this is indeed the largest single most significant size of food product recall in the history of Canada. There is no doubt that the government has not been forthright and transparent in reporting it to the public and its actions have been questioned to date.

I appreciate the member's comments with respect to the history back in the nineties of bringing forward the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. Does she believe the government is adequately resourcing the Canadian Food Inspection Agency so it has the hands-on to ensure the quality of the product that our consumers will consume and to protect the integrity of our industries, in particular in the Prairies regarding beef?

Ms. Linda Duncan: Mr. Speaker, in all sincerity, I regrettably cannot give the hon. member an easy answer. That is precisely why we called for an independent review by the Auditor General. We have asked repeatedly where exactly these supposed new inspectors have been assigned. It becomes increasingly apparent that these so-called 600 or 700 new inspectors are simply replacing the 600 or 700 that were there before and are assigned to other duties.

As I mentioned, for effective enforcement of a critical law such as food safety, we need a whole framework. Therefore, we need the government to give us that framework. How many inspectors are needed to ensure food safety in these operations? What kind of resources do they need? What kind of training have they been provided? Will the government amend the act to include whistle-

blower protection for the workers so they can bring those issues to the attention of the inspectors?

[Translation]

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my distinguished colleague for his excellent speech.

What we are doing here today is quite rare: we are asking a minister to step down. We do not do this every day, and we are only doing so because this is a very serious matter. Indeed, the Conservatives have slashed some \$56 million from the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, or CFIA, which ensures food safety. What did they think would happen? They are endangering the health of Canadians. The Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food acted poorly and failed to show leadership or take responsibility. Even now, he is still refusing to take any responsibility for this crisis.

Does my distinguished colleague believe that the minister should step down for failing to fulfill his duty?

[English]

Ms. Linda Duncan: Mr. Speaker, as a number of the members in the House have said, the request for the minister to resign is not taken lightly and it is not expressed frequently by this party. Many times, this side of the House requested that the Prime Minister intervene and replace the minister. Why did we do that? Because the minister was clearly not accepting his responsibility for this matter to move more expeditiously. He simply was not admitting that there was a problem with the system in place.

Therefore, the minister has the power to resign. He could take on another portfolio. We are simply asking him to do the right thing.

• (1625)

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, they say that those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it. Never did I think that the government would fail to learn from the frightening lessons from the listeriosis crisis in 2008 that killed 23 people and made hundreds others ill, or from the Walkerton tragedy, which a number of members of the Conservative government's front bench actually presided over, that killed 7 people in 2000.

Yet here we are, three years on from the report of the independent investigator, Sheila Weatherill, into the listeria outbreak of 2008, in the midst of the largest beef recall in Canadian history, with 15 people sick and consumer confidence once again rattled, unjustly punishing Canadian cattle farmers who are producing good, safe beef.

The manner in which the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food handled his file is an embarrassment, trivializing the listeria outbreak, as he did, claiming it was contained. His mismanagement of the recall and communications around the E. coli contamination are directly to blame for the negative impact on our cattle ranchers and exporters.

However, he is not alone in the blame. Every Conservative member who stood and supported cuts to the budget and a number of inspectors at the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, before he or she had an idea of what resources were necessary to successfully protect our food safety system, should take a long, hard look in the mirror.

Business of Supply

As we stand here to debate this issue today, we are 45 days removed from when American food inspectors found *E. coli* in a shipment of beef destined for the U.S. and stopped it at the border a day before Canadian officials first became aware of an *E. coli* contamination at the Brooks, Alberta, XL Foods meat processing plant.

Had the minister learned the lessons from past failures of food safety, this is where our story would end. In fact, had the minister treated food safety on at least an equal footing as trade, the contaminated meat would not have left the plant at all.

Two weeks after becoming aware of a contamination of *E. coli* 0157, the same pathogen that killed seven in Walkerton in 2000, did the CFIA first issued a recall on XL Foods beef. The minister attempted to have Canadians believe this was standard. However, he neglected at the time to mention that beef only started being recalled three full days after the Americans had delisted the plant, shutting their doors to any more product from Brooks.

On September 25, even as the recall was expanding daily, the minister informed the House:

I reiterate that none of the product made it to store shelves and no illnesses have been linked back to this particular strain of *E. coli*. We have actually done a tremendous job.

Two days later, the XL Foods plant was closed. Surely, the minister knew the closure was coming when he misled Canadians.

Had the minister waited as long to gloat as he had to initiate a recall, he would have known that 15 Canadians would fall ill due to this strain of *E. coli*, including a four-year-old girl who suffered kidney failure as a result of coming into contact with contaminated meat.

Now, just the other day, the minister dismissed our concerns by stating that all 15 had recovered and had gone on with their lives, but as I am sure a doctor could tell the minister, one does not just walk away from kidney failure.

We were extremely fortunate that no one died, but that is no consolation, not enough for the victims of this contamination, and it is certainly does not reassure the vulnerable Canadians who might fall victim to the next possible contamination should the Conservative government not correct its course on food safety.

Of course, it is important to note that it was XL Foods that failed Canadians first by not tracking *E. coli* trends or maintaining adequate sanitation standards, which would have prevented such a widespread contamination, but it was the minister who compounded that failure by refusing to provide adequate resources to inspectors at the front line to investigate and enforce our food safety standards. Senior management of the CFIA, following last spring's budget cuts, acknowledged that we could not cut 10% of the budget without affecting the front line.

The government failed to properly communicate with Canadians. If we learned anything from the listeria crisis in 2008, it is that clear, open communications are necessary to address concerns and reassure Canadians. People want to be told the truth, but the Conservatives do not believe Canadians deserve the truth.

● (1630)

We still have so many unanswered questions. When did the minister become aware of the *E. coli* contamination? Why did it only take the United States days to initially confirm *E. coli* contamination, but it took Canadian officials two weeks? How did the sanitation situation get so bad at the Brooks facility to warrant being shut down now for three weeks?

This kind of food safety decay does not happen overnight. A facility does not get shut down for three weeks for a faulty nozzle. It gets shut down for three weeks because there are major compliance problems from the top to bottom.

The minister was clear that the Brooks facility boasted 40 inspectors and 6 veterinarians. How many of those inspectors are fully trained on the compliance verification system? Is he aware that the level of training should be 100% of inspectors and that they are not fully trained because there are not enough inspectors to go around and replace inspectors in training? How about this one, were the 46 CFIA staff on the ground in Brooks enough for the 4,400 head of cattle every day?

Canadians need answers. Simply put, consumers will not trust their food supply until the government opens up about what went wrong and what is being done to fix it. However, as we know, Conservatives do not believe Canadians deserve to know the truth.

There is no trust when the government insists everything is under control and yet the recall continues to expand daily, over a month after initially being put into force. That uncertainty is hurting ranchers across Canada. It is one thing that a facility that processes nearly 40% of our beef is out of commission because of its health and safety lapses and farmers are scrambling to find other processors for their livestock; it is entirely another that because the government does not trust Canadians with the truth about food safety, consumer confidence is shot.

We have given the government every opportunity to explain itself. Earlier this month, I called for and was granted an emergency debate on the XL issue, except the minister could not be bothered to participate and left behind his talking points to act as cold comfort to Canadians. He has since shown his true colours and called the debate, which was an effort to get to the truth, "silly", an emergency of a nature that the Speaker of the House agreed was worthy of a debate granted only sparingly. What is truly silly is that the minister will not take his responsibilities for food safety seriously and he continues to trivialize it.

Business of Supply

I also put a motion on notice for the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food to call before our committee all the relevant witnesses and experts from the CFIA, to XL Foods, to inspectors on the ground to discover what really happened.

Hon. members will note that my motion is no longer on notice and the committee will not be dealing with it further. They can draw necessary assumptions as to what happened while in camera on a Conservative dominated committee.

Perhaps some of those members elected from Alberta should reconsider the position of their government in the face of appeals from both the Progressive Conservative government in Alberta and its Wildrose opposition along with Liberals and New Democrats who all agree there is a definite need for a public inquiry. However, we already know Conservatives believe we cannot be trusted with the truth.

Just last week, I sent a request to the minister's office to reinstate a technical briefing for the members and senators on the respective agricultural committees that the minister's office cancelled and while the minister feels comfortable enough making comments about its cancellation, his office has yet to reschedule the meeting or even give me the dignity of a response. The Conservatives simply do not trust Canadians with the truth.

That could be why they have refused to call for a comprehensive third party resource audit of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, which we have requested as early as October 3. I thank the member for Welland for including it in his motion today.

In fact, the audit was first called for by the independent investigator into the listeria outbreak, Sheila Weatherill, who said:

Due to the lack of detailed information and differing views heard, the investigation was not able to determine the current level of resources as well as the resources needed to conduct the CVS activities effectively. For the same reason, we were also unable to come to a conclusion concerning the adequacy of the program design, implementation plan, training and supervision of inspectors, as well as oversight and performance monitoring.

● (1635)

Accordingly Ms. Weatherill recommended:

To accurately determine the demand on its inspection resources and the number of required inspectors, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency should retain third-party experts to conduct a resources audit. The experts should also recommend required changes and implementation strategies. The audit should include analysis as to how many plants an inspector should be responsible for and the appropriateness of rotation of inspectors.

To this day that has not yet been done. A mere survey was undertaken. The former president of the CFIA, Carole Swan, stated that the review was not the same as a comprehensive audit. The government cannot answer who its inspectors are, what their roles are or where they are located. The Conservatives obviously cannot answer the question of whether there are enough inspectors or if we might need more. Yet this spring Conservative MPs stood up en masse to slash the CFIA's budget and lay off food safety workers. On that, the Parliamentary Budget Officer has already confirmed that there were \$16 million in cuts and 308 jobs lost.

Accordingly, the hon. member for Toronto Centre, the interim leader of the Liberal Party, wrote to the Auditor General at the beginning of October asking him to begin an immediate audit of all

Government of Canada resources supporting food safety in Canada, as well as to issue recommendations for changes and improvements.

While the government's new food safety legislation, Bill S-11, was before the Senate, we asked that the bill be amended to require a comprehensive audit at least once every five years. Sadly, that amendment was defeated both at committee and at third reading yesterday by a Conservative dominated Senate.

What possible reason could the government have for voting against our amendment except that it remains afraid of the truth? Even more than it being beneficial to ensuring that further outbreaks would be minimized or avoided, a regular audit would simply be good for any institution. A review is not effective if it is internal either. We need outside auditors without an agenda to make sure that we are getting things right. That is the healthy way to find efficiencies. It is common sense for fresh eyes to see what is missing, and we are fortunate in Canada to have an officer of Parliament who specializes in that, the Auditor General.

One would think that food safety, if it were such a priority for the government, would be at the top of the list for areas under review and scrutiny.

The truth is that the government made a mistake by cutting those resources in the last budget, but even more startling is that the Conservatives have not devoted the appropriate resources all along, and they know it. More concerned with communication victories than public safety, Conservatives are now caught empty-handed as Canadian consumers and Canadian cattle ranchers come looking for answers.

They are not even ashamed that Canadian facilities are now in line for audits by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food Safety Inspection Service. The organization that found the contamination in the first place and was first to shut down shipments from the plant after finding subsequent positive tests is now coming to audit us. That is a standard move by one country importing from another, but how are they supposed to have confidence in our system if we will not open the books up for them to look at? Are we really going to start relying on American food inspectors to catch our mistakes and then clean up after us too? None of that would restore consumer confidence and it would not help our ranchers sell their livestock.

We need some solutions.

First, the government should order a third-party comprehensive audit of all resources, including the human resources of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. The minister has shown that outside of lacking the will to act on this file, he is too close to the industry and has proven that he cannot be trusted to do it objectively.

Business of Supply

I agree that we need to be opening doors to trade, but to save the government from itself we should make sure that we are working not just to open new trade doors but also that we can guarantee food safety standards that keep those doors open, doors that take years to open and only days to slam shut.

Second, the government should have open communication with the Canadian people. Here is where it should start: “Our beef is safe”. Full stop. “XL Foods went out of control because we did not have the resources in place to ensure it was properly policing itself”. Full stop. “We will have an independent auditor to determine the resources they need and give them what they require”. Full stop.

• (1640)

Canadians need to know that it is not uncommon for E. coli to be present in raw meat and that through safe cooking, proper sanitation and cleanliness, meat is perfectly safe to eat. When it gets into muscle cuts and is as widespread as this, it is a result of a lapse in food security. Canadians need to know that from coast to coast Canadian cattle ranchers are raising healthy, safe beef. They should not be punished for XL's lapses or for the CFIA's lack of resources.

In her report, Ms. Weatherill said, “Until the system is remedied, events like those of the summer of 2008 remain a real risk”. Despite that being three years ago, here we are again and her initial concerns still ring true. When these events recur there is collateral damage. Getting out in front of the situation would have eliminated or minimized it. It is just another example of how poorly the minister handled this.

The Conservatives argue that all of these issues would be resolved by Bill S-11. They have created a myth that Bill S-11 is key to ensuring that inspectors have all the resources they need. It is not true. I will grant that it is an important step toward modernizing; however, it is one thing to build a new car and yet another to ensure there are the resources for a driver and gas.

The authority highlighted by the Prime Minister, his Minister of Agriculture and the Parliamentary Secretary is one that inspectors already have. The Meat Inspection Act already gives powers compelling:

—any person to produce for inspection, or for the purpose of obtaining copies or extracts, any book, shipping bill, bill of lading or other document or record that the inspector believes on reasonable grounds contains any information relevant to the administration or enforcement of this Act or the regulations.

Additionally, current regulations state:

The owner or person in charge of a place...and every person found in that place... shall give the inspector all reasonable assistance to enable the inspector to carry out his duties and functions under this Act and shall furnish the inspector with any information the inspector may reasonably require with respect to the administration or enforcement of this Act and the regulations.

That is why beef is safe in other abattoirs in this country, because they have the authority. They do not need Bill S-11. For those who remain unconvinced, I would invite interested members to visit the CFIA website and read one of the six new guides for inspection from February of this year and peruse “A Processor's Guide to Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) Inspections”. The bottom line of that guide is that “You are legally required to provide information to, and assist, an inspector, when requested”.

As we discuss Bill S-11 further, I sincerely hope that none of that is lost in translation and that the members opposite will be more open to constructive amendments than their colleagues in the other place. What remains clear is that this minister and the Conservative government did not learn their lessons from the listeriosis outbreak. Until they do, food safety will remain a question and consumers and producers will be left wondering when the next crisis will arise. For all our sakes, even though it has taken more than a month to do so, I urge decisive action to restore consumer confidence now.

[Translation]

Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is very important for people listening to us today, or watching us on television, to know that when the government talks about its budget and its measures, we feel like it is trying to sell us a car.

The facts are the facts, and I am going to go over them. On September 13, the meat was no longer good enough to export to the United States. On September 13, the company's permit was revoked and it could no longer export beef to the United States. When was the permit to sell this same meat to Canada revoked? Two weeks later.

Was the government telling us that the meat was good enough for Canadians but not for Americans? Are there two different standards?

The facts speak for themselves. Today, we are not talking about selling a car. We are talking about Canadians' food safety and their lives. Why did two weeks pass before it was no longer safe to sell the meat to Canadians?

[English]

Mr. Frank Valeriote: Mr. Speaker, I cannot explain why it took the minister two weeks, and I suffer from the same lack of information from the Conservative government that my hon. friend does. That is why we need the audit. That is why we need funds restored to the CFIA. I quite agree with the member. Therein lies the lapse in our food safety system. Therein lies the responsibility that should have been undertaken by this minister much soon than he did. The Americans beat us at every single point, from finding the E. coli to closing the plant down. We did not even exercise a recall until fully three days after the Americans shut the plant down.

• (1645)

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened very attentively to my colleague's comments, and once again his speech is full of inaccuracies. I will give two examples. The first is that he says we are presenting Bill S-11 as the panacea for all food safety. No one has said that but him. We are saying that this bill has important measures to improve the regulatory powers of the CFIA and that it is an opportunity to modernize the system, taking a good system and making it better. No one has used the word “panacea” except him. That is an inaccuracy.

Business of Supply

The second one I would like him to correct. He mentioned that a four-year-old girl had suffered kidney failure because of an XL Foods product. That is false. Our hearts go out to the girl and her family, but she was not sick from an XL product. This was thoroughly investigated. I would ask the member to please tell the House that he was wrong on that point and withdraw his comment.

Mr. Frank Valeriote: Mr. Speaker, five or six times today Conservative members have stood and asked for the consent of the House to push Bill S-11 through right away. Why did they do that? They did that as a ruse. They did it so that the people watching this debate will think that Bill S-11 is the panacea for food safety. Had Bill S-11 been in effect, does anyone think this problem would not have arisen at XL Foods? Of course, it would have arisen. The government had all the time in the world to get Bill S-11 through the Senate last spring. It did not have to adjourn the Senate but could have asked the Senate to complete the bill and send it back to the House quickly.

Again, he trivializes the issue. There are 15 people across this country who are suffering from illness related to E. coli contamination and he should be apologizing to every single one of those people.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to pick up on the comments of my colleague, who has spoken so well on this critically important issue. Canadians are in fact very concerned about this issue. They want to know that their food products are of good quality and that they do not have to run the risk of having health issues from the consumption of beef, pork or any other food produced in Canada.

The government continuously says that it has hired hundreds of food inspectors and is trying to give the impression that it is an issue unrelated to the resourcing of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. In fact that is not the case and there is a need to look at the resourcing of the agency to ensure that it is able to maintain the high-quality standards of this great agency.

Mr. Frank Valeriote: Mr. Speaker, as was suggested by the Minister of Finance, I did read the budget. Page 168 indicates that the government will give \$51.2 million over the next two years to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, the Public Health Agency of Canada and Health Canada. If we divide that amount by the three agencies, that is \$16 million each. If we divide that amount by two years, that is \$8 million each. Great. However, what the government did not say is that on page 261 of the budget it tore out \$56.1 million from where? The CFIA. Therefore, that agency does not have adequate resources.

[Translation]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, our colleagues opposite, the Conservatives, are telling us that they have the solution and that they want to move forward to solve this problem. However, interestingly enough, I have difficulty trusting people who do not recognize the crux of the problem and their own mistakes. I am a little doubtful about the sincerity and the pertinence of their measures.

I have two small examples. The minister said that no contaminated meat had reached stores because of ongoing recalls. It seems to me that this small, basic error could have been pointed out. The government also does not want to acknowledge the impact of cuts to

the CFIA. And I could mention other similar discrepancies that were not raised in my colleagues' comments, questions or speeches.

Could my colleague elaborate on that?

• (1650)

[English]

Mr. Frank Valeriote: Mr. Speaker, the recall was so large that people in British Columbia, Alberta, Quebec and Newfoundland and Labrador suffered from illnesses related to E. coli contamination. There was a recall in over 40 states in the United States, as well as in Japan and Hong Kong. That is how pervasive this is.

The Minister of Agriculture trivialized this by saying, I think on October 3, that nobody was falling ill. It just does not make common sense. Intuitively, we know that he was absolutely wrong. He should have been on this file. He should have been out there filling the gap where the CFIA had failed and providing it with the proper resources it needed. Instead, he just pushed the blame off to the CFIA and to XL Foods and avoided taking any responsibility whatsoever, responsibility that he should have assumed.

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have been here all day listening to this debate and to my colleagues from the opposition talk about this serious event. There is no question that this is a very serious event and that we are very concerned about the people who got sick from this, but I think this needs to be put into proper context.

We need to be cognizant of the fact that opposition members keep blowing this out of proportion. It is not taking this out of context, but they are blowing this out of proportion. They also keep highlighting things that are not true, making statements that are not true, adding questions to the safety of the food and they keep undermining the CFIA.

My question is for the member for Guelph who actually has a packing plant in his riding. When employees are laid off because the opposition members have undermined the industry so badly, will he tell those employees why he did what he did because this has been—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The hon. member for Guelph.

Mr. Frank Valeriote: Mr. Speaker, I am proud of the plant in Guelph. It complies with the rules. It has a functioning relationship with the CFIA and the inspectors who are employees of the industry. It actually knows how to do it right.

I feel bad for the beef ranchers. People should know that if they cook beef to 70°C or 170°F, beef is safe to eat. However, they still need to check for beef that came from XL Foods.

My point is that this could have all been avoided had the minister exercised his responsibility and ensured that the CFIA was doing its job and that it was provided with the proper resources it needed to do its job at the XL Foods plant.

Business of Supply

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order. 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 Alfred-Pellan, Justice; the hon. member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, Employment Insurance; the hon. member for Thunder Bay—Superior North, Foreign Takeovers.

[English]

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour today.

It is very rare in the House that we would debate a motion all day that, in effect, calls for the resignation of a minister. However, that is exactly what we are doing. We are doing that because we are faced with an incredibly serious issue in the country around food safety and the lack of accountability at the ministerial level, which is a fundamental tenet of our parliamentary system.

The motion before us calls on the House to restore Canadians' confidence in Canada's food safety system by removing the current minister from office, by reversing budget cuts, halting the deregulation of Canada's food safety system and directing the Auditor General to conduct an immediate assessment of food safety procedures and report to the agriculture committee. That is the motion that the NDP has brought before the House. It has been a very thorough debate today on an incredibly serious matter.

We need to look at the context of what is going on. This is the largest food recall in Canadian history. That, in and of itself, should ring a whole bunch of alarm bells about what is going on. We now have, I believe, 15 cases of E. coli that have been specifically traced to the XL Foods plant in Brooks, Alberta, and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency has now recalled more than 1,800 beef products due to possible contamination.

This issue is extensive. The recall extends to every province and territory, 40 states in the U.S. and 20 other countries. It is something of incredible magnitude and yet the minister rushed out the door too soon saying that the problem had been resolved, that there really was not a problem and that action was being taken. However, we know that the seriousness of what has taken place is still unfolding as more information finally gets into the public realm.

One of the key questions in this tragic situation that has unfolded in the lack of safety in our food system is the fact that, on September 13, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency yanked XL Foods' exporter licence at the request of U.S. officials. Even though the Minister of Agriculture and his department determined that the meat was not safe enough to be sold to American consumers, they did not pull XL Foods' Canadian licence for another 14 days.

From the very beginning, we have asked the minister why it took two weeks from the initial action that took place in terms of the American market and a willingness to protect American families from possible contaminated products to take the same action here in Canada. We still have not received an answer. To me, that is a very significant issue that strikes right at the heart of ministerial responsibility, which is why the motion is here before us today.

It is incumbent upon us as parliamentarians to look at this issue in a holistic and systemic way as to what is going on. The XL Foods plant is, I believe, the third largest in Canada. It processes, some people say, up to 5,000 cows a day. It is a major operation, employing thousands of workers. However, we need to look at what is going on underneath and whether we are also dealing with a systemic failure of our food safety system.

For all of us in the NDP, by bringing forward the motion today, we are alerting the Canadian public that this is more than just one plant, that this is about the overall system. It is about a lack of proper inspection and regulation and the failure of a self-policing system that is now thrown into question as a result of what happened.

• (1655)

I have not been to this plant, which I imagine most of us have not and therefore have no direct experience, but everything I have read, like many other Canadians, causes me to be very disturbed and alarmed.

I recently read an article in *The Globe and Mail* and I will quote from it because it gave me some glimmer of understanding of what these megaplants, these mega-operations, are all about. The headline read, "Can meat factories be safe, at 4,000 cows a day, 3,000 steaks a minute?". The article reads:

You have 35 seconds: Gut the cow without damaging its organs, and be sure not to drop the stomach on the floor. Do not cut yourself with the swift-moving blade; do not touch the scalding sanitary surfaces. Then, walk in hot water to clean your white rubber boots. Swap your knife out and start over again. Again and again.

This is life on the production line at the Lakeside slaughterhouse in Brooks, Alta., one of the three largest such facilities in Canada that, together, dominate the market. Owned by XL Foods, Lakeside slaughters 4,000 cows on a full day, cutting them into about two million pounds of beef. That's the equivalent of 3,000 steaks a minute. Plants like this are the reality of modern mass food production....

The article goes on much longer but I do not have time to go into other issues that it brings forward. However, when I read that article and when I see films, like *Food, Inc.*, for example, that tell us about the food production industry and how it is now controlled by massive corporations and how its operation is so concentrated in these megaslaughterhouse plants, it does raise incredibly serious questions about the safety of our food and food security. It raises questions about inspection, how it is done and what kind of oversight there is.

I hate to say it but the situation in Brooks, Alberta, at the XL Foods site has brought this now to the front of public attention, which is actually a good thing. If anything that has happened has been positive, it is that it has alerted a public consciousness about the seriousness of the situation that we face.

I am sure we have all had many emails from people expressing their concern about the situation at XL Foods and wondering what the heck Parliament will do about it. I had one email from someone who pointed out to me that the Canadian Food Inspection Agency was originally part of the Department of National Health and Welfare, not the Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food.

Business of Supply

When the change was made and it was moved over to agriculture, there were many criticisms that the Department of Agriculture would have an inherent conflict of interest in administering the CFIA. The question that still remains today is how a department, whose primary role is to promote and develop agriculture and agri-business, also serve and safeguard the health and well-being of consumers. I do not think that question has been answered either in the days that we have now spent on this issue in the House of Commons. That is also very much a part of the question that we are examining here.

I would also like to draw attention to the situation of the workers at the XL Foods plant. We know there are close to 3,000 workers. We also know that the UFCW, their union local 401, has clearly come out and expressed the concerns of the workers themselves that the speed lines are way too fast, that there is sewage backup, dirty washrooms, inconsistent temperatures, a lack of proper training and the list goes on and on. I feel very badly for these workers who have now been laid off. Some of them are having problems with EI. Working in a plant like this, where high-speed production, as we heard, 35 seconds again and again, places stress on workers, particularly if the rules and the procedures are not being followed. This is something that is very serious.

For example, we know that the workers are trained and want to sterilize knives between cuts but they are discouraged from doing so because it would mean falling behind their very stressful schedule of 35 seconds.

• (1700)

We can see again another dramatic consequence of what is going on with the food safety system.

This motion today is very important. It is about ministerial responsibility. It is about good public policy and ensuring that our food system is safe in Canada. I hope members will support this motion.

• (1705)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague sits with me on the Standing Committee on Health and she does an excellent job there as NDP health critic.

In light of her experience, does she think it is right that two weeks passed before the Canadian public was informed of the health risk?

[*English*]

Ms. Libby Davies: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member who also sits on the health committee and does a great job. We are a good team on the health committee and we take our work very seriously.

One of the underpinnings of our work is the notion of public health, so it is very disturbing, from a public health point of view, that there was such a dramatic time lag of two weeks until Canadians were fully alerted to what was going on.

The Public Health Agency of Canada has had information on its website, but we have not heard directly from the chief officer, who surely should be communicating directly with Canadians about the health issues involved here.

I do feel that the whole public health side of this, in a broader way, has been really underplayed. We have a Public Health Agency of Canada. Its mandate is to protect the health of Canadians, but one gets the sense that all the Conservatives are interested in is political damage control. They are interested in saving their own necks and not dealing with some of the deeply systemic issues that are involved here, which are posing risks to food safety in Canada.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again the opposition, rather than taking a serious look at food safety and looking at a bill that is before Parliament, are playing partisan politics with the motion before the House today. If Canadians could see the motion and refresh their memories about what the motion is actually about and what it actually says, it would be evident, it would be apparent that it is simply partisan politics.

However, even in this milieu of partisan politics from the opposition, I really would stress that it is essential that members opposite are accurate in what they say.

Once again the member said that the Americans uncovered it first and they told us. It is simply not true. That is not the case. The Americans discovered it when CFIA discovered it, and they were communicating at the same time.

I would ask the member if she is aware of this. If she is aware of it, would she please correct the record for the House and for Canadians? It think it is the fair thing to do.

Ms. Libby Davies: Mr. Speaker, I am so surprised to hear this member say that we are not taking this issue seriously. Really? Come on. We have been raising this issue day after day in question period, in committee, in the public forums and through this motion today. This is why we have this motion today, because we are so concerned, we are so serious.

We have done our homework. We have the timeline of what happened. Come on. The reason we are debating this today is that there has been a complete lack of accountability from the minister on this issue. That is where the blame lies, not with the opposition.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her excellent speech. The excellent job she does in her riding is appreciated by many people.

[*English*]

Specifically on this responsibility question, the government seems to have a serious problem with accountability, especially that it took almost two weeks for the government to start a recall procedure.

I am wondering how risking the Canadian public in any way helps Canadian citizens to have any degree of belief in the credibility of the CFIA.

Ms. Libby Davies: Mr. Speaker, really at the end of the day it does come down to ministerial responsibility. Our system of governance, our parliamentary system, is based on that very foundation. We cannot pass the buck. We cannot blame the officials. At the end of the day, the minister is responsible.

Private Members' Business

As I pointed out, still to this day the minister has not answered the key question as to why it took him two weeks to take the action he needed to take. Because we have never had an answer to that question and we have not had answers to many other questions, the only recourse we have left is to say that this minister should not be allowed to be in his job.

• (1710)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Before we resume debate, I will just let the member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour know that the period allowed for business of supply today comes to an end at 5:15 p.m., so I will have to interrupt him at that time, partway into his remarks, I am sure.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour.

Mr. Robert Chisholm (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Vancouver East for sharing her time with me, even though it is limited to, I believe, four and a half minutes.

I want to say we have had a very interesting debate. It was suggested earlier from a member opposite that we are not taking this matter seriously. I would suggest there is nothing further from the truth. It has been at the forefront of our questions in question period since this information came to our attention. We are continuing to seek answers and accountability from the government, to the point where we have introduced this motion by our agriculture critic to call for that accountability by the resignation of the minister and for some specific recommendations to make sure we finally address a very complex system.

I am not going to take time to go through all the reasons why this is so important. I do not have the time to do it anyway. Suffice it to say we know that the government has not responded quickly and we believe it has not responded appropriately. It initially shut off the export of beef from XL Foods to the U.S. It was two weeks before it contained the distribution of beef throughout this country. That is two weeks that contaminated beef was allowed to be distributed throughout the country.

We are now looking at a recall, the largest in the history of this country. Over three million pounds are under recall in every province and territory of this country and yet we continue to have a minister and, I would suggest, members of government who are downplaying this. They defend. They try to blame others. Never once have we seen the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, in light of this catastrophe, stand in this House to apologize to the 15 people and their families who suffered as a result of contracting E. coli. Never have we heard him say to Canadians, “The system failed in this instance and we are going to do everything in our power to make sure this never happens again”. Never once has he recognized or acknowledged the fact that there was a failure, that the massive budget cuts in his department, the cuts to CFIA and the reduction in inspectors on the floor have led to this problem.

We hear him say, now, that there are more inspectors in the plant, that more effort has been made to try to clean up the mess. I think that is very much an indication of the fact that the government cut too far. It cut back on inspectors, it cut back on dollars to CFIA and it

has led, largely, to this problem. We have to move forward to make sure it does not happen again.

What does the official opposition say needs to be done? Let me list some of the things.

Other than the fact that we need the current minister to be replaced by somebody who can handle this important situation, we want to see, for example, a complete audit, a comprehensive audit of the compliance verification system adopted immediately; adequate resources, authority and independence given to the CFIA so it can do its job; better traceability requirements for meat, fish and fresh produce, in the case of a recall; better and more transparent surveillance of outbreaks of food-borne illnesses and deaths, serious illnesses caused by nutrition and food safety-related illnesses; a public interest intervener mechanism to represent consumers and public health; and more extensive oversight of nutrition labelling, with actual enforcement of penalties.

These are some of the things that need to be done to restore some credibility to this industry. For the sake of this industry, for the health and safety of Canadians, for the integrity and the restoration of confidence in our beef industry in this country, the government needs to move now, get rid of the minister and start bringing in some measures that would finally restore confidence in the meat industry in this country.

• (1715)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): It being 5:15 p.m., pursuant to an order made earlier today, all questions necessary to dispose of the opposition motion are deemed put and a recorded division deemed requested and deferred until Tuesday, October 23, 2012, at the expiry of the time provided for government orders.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Speaker, I ask that you see the clock as 5:30 p.m.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): It being 5:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

INDIAN ACT AMENDMENT AND REPLACEMENT ACT

Mr. Rob Clarke (Desnethé—Missinipi—Churchill River, CPC) moved that Bill C-428, An Act to amend the Indian Act (publication of by-laws) and to provide for its replacement, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Private Members' Business

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is with great pleasure today that I open the debate on my private member's bill, Bill C-428, Indian Act Amendment and Replacement Act. I am proud to be first nations and as a former member of the RCMP for over 18 years, just as proud to have achieved the rank of sergeant. During that time I was in charge of two detachments. All of my service involved policing on and off first nation reserves.

In 2008, I was elected to represent Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, a constituency containing over 23 first nation communities and the second largest first nation population in Canada.

Having had to enforce the Indian Act across Saskatchewan, I am keenly aware of the challenges posed by the outdated, racist, colonial statute referred to as the Indian Act. The problems created by this archaic piece of legislation are far-reaching, extending to every aspect of the lives of every first nations person and the root cause of the Attawapiskats of our country.

During the Assembly of First Nations election speeches in July of this year, all the candidates stated that the Indian Act must go. Clearly, everyone agrees that changes must be made to the Indian Act in order to start a process of consultation, in order to start a dialogue and in order to amend the Indian Act. I hope in my lifetime to see the complete repeal of the Indian Act and see it replaced by a more modern set of laws that reflect today's values, but also respect the past.

I hope one day the amendments proposed in my private member's bill will help lead us to build a more modern, respectful relationship between federal government and first nations, and finally kick-start this larger process to repeal and replace the entire Indian Act. These amendments to the Indian Act can be an important stepping stone on the path of achieving self-sufficiency and prosperity in first nation communities. The acronym for this path would be ARRC: amend, repeal, replace, and most importantly, consult.

The bill would amend the bylaw section of the act; repeal and replace several outdated, unused and patronizing sections of the act; and create a process that would enable collaborative consultation with first nations. The goal is to replace the Indian Act with laws which would both describe and enshrine a more respectful and modern relationship between first nations and the Crown.

I would like to expand on the content of Bill C-428. The bill would enable first nations and band councils to publish their own bylaws without having to seek the permission of the Aboriginal Affairs or the signature of the minister. Empowering first nation communities to take control of their lives and the environment in which they live is a crucial step toward autonomy and self-reliance.

Under this amendment, a band would also be required to publish bylaws created by their council on one of a variety of forms of media, such as the band website, the *First Nations Gazette*, or in local newspapers or newsletters that have general circulation in their first nation communities and to their band membership.

By making plain the bylaws of each first nation, we create greater transparency and accountability for first nation residents and for those enforcing the bylaws. This will take the minister out of the equation and put the responsibility for the bylaws squarely where it

belongs: with the band council and band members. It will provide first nations with the same rights and responsibilities that rural and urban municipalities have today.

I would like to stop here for a moment and talk about the everyday challenges that are faced by first nation governments. We are all aware of the crisis of alcohol, drug and solvent abuse that has led to the high rate of suicide in many of these first nation communities. It is with this in mind that I want to see first nations able to act on these problems expediently and to create legislation that would reflect their culture and communal standards without having to seek the permission of the minister to act.

• (1720)

The bill would replace section 85.1, which prohibits the sale of alcohol on first nations land and will place that option back into the hands of the band council. In fact, the decision to allow the sale of alcohol on reserve has been in the hands of some bands for some time, but the Indian Act is not up-to-date with the current policy.

First nations people also do not have the same rights as other Canadians in regard to wills and estates. The Indian Act gives extraordinary powers to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, including the ability to appoint executors of wills for first nations people and to appoint administrators.

What most Canadians and first nations do not know is that the minister also holds the ability to declare the will of a first nations person not valid. No will pertaining to a first nations resident is valid unless approved by the minister as dictated by the Indian Act. I call this a paternalistic approach. This does not belong in a free and democratic society. My bill would repeal the sections of the Indian Act that grant the minister these exceptional powers in the administration of the wills of all first nations residents.

Bill C-428 would also remove impediments to trade in the form of the repeal of section 92, which restricts certain members of society from engaging in trade with first nations individuals.

It is important to note that the bill would at last remove the archaic educational element of the Indian Act, which led to the formation of residential schools, and remove the term "residential school" from the act.

I am proud of the accomplishments of this government in regard to recognizing the tragedy of and apologizing for residential schools. I am proud as a first nations man, whose grandparents attended residential schools in Duck Lake, Saskatchewan, to be privileged to be a member of the House of Commons and to repeal this particularly shameful section and wording of the Indian Act. I fear that having this remain in the Indian Act will enable future governments to create residential schools on first nations reserves.

Private Members' Business

I am proud that our Prime Minister has apologized for the travesty of the residential schools, for the pain and destruction they brought to all first nations and for the shame they have brought to Canada.

I sat only two seats from the Prime Minister as he delivered this apology and personally witnessed the emotion with which he delivered the speech. The Prime Minister deservedly received praise not only for the sentiment of the statement but also for the eloquence and sincerity with which he expressed his remarks.

However, for me the most important part of the bill is the mandate that would be given to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs to report annually on the progress being made toward the repeal and replacement of the Indian Act. This report would be specifically on the collaborative work being done by first nations and the Crown to get out of the Indian Act. This section of my bill requires a collaborative consultation process between first nations and the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs specifically on the Indian Act. A report must be published to the House of Commons committee on aboriginal affairs by January 31 of each year. This will ensure that first nations can hold the government accountable for moving forward toward the complete removal of the Indian Act in a meaningful and respectful way.

It should be clear to all that the substance of the bill provides no cause for alarm among first nations people. Nor is there any cause for false alarms to be raised by first nation leaders.

I have arrived at the current set of changes through consultation with other first nation members within my constituency as well as around the country. I have had four drafts in the past and I am open to the amendments that may come forward through this important dialogue.

There is no larger agenda at play. The repeal of sections of the Indian Act represent a step toward a modernized relationship between our government and the first nations of Canada, nothing more. It is plain for all to see that there is no suggestion that the Indian Act be repealed in its entirety with nothing left in its stead. Rather, my bill simply seeks to remove outdated concepts and language from the existing act.

I hope that individuals will be inspired to reflect upon and review the Indian Act and my private member's bill in this light. It is my hope that this debate will start a larger process to look at outdated language in the act.

• (1725)

When I started this journey four and a half years ago, I hoped this bill would open a discussion and meaningful dialogue and debate. I hoped that with the passage of this bill we could look forward to a better relationship and a true partnership between first nations and all Canadians, and I mean all Canadians.

Today as I stand here, I feel strong emotions about what I am doing. This is not a partisan effort. I am doing this as a proud Canadian who has served my country and also as a first nations man who wants to see a better life for first nations and all Canadians.

I am hoping that the opposition will support this bill because it is not a partisan issue. I encourage all members of the House to support

my bill to modernize this outdated and colonial paternalistic legislation called the Indian Act.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for outlining his intention behind the bill. My question for him has to do with consultation. Vice Chief Watson from the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations states that his organization “has a consultation policy and the federal government needs to recognize our Inherent, Sovereign and Treaty Rights”.

Since this could have a wide impact, and under the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples it is well recognized that there needs to be free, prior and informed consent, would the member tell the House exactly which nations he consulted with and what their approach was to this particular piece of legislation?

Mr. Rob Clarke: Mr. Speaker, I have 23 first nations in my constituency. One of them is Pelican Lake First Nation. That is a start.

First of all, I am a first nations person. There are 633 first nations across Canada and in the process all 633, on four separate occasions, have received communications from me, asking for their input and their recommendations to amend my act if they saw anything that they would like to improve.

I stand here in bewilderment of the parliamentary process, of my being a first nations person and not being given the opportunity to bring a bill forward as a first nations person in the House of Commons, as every other member in the House has that right.

First nation leaders also have a responsibility to consult with their membership and make decisions. On many occasions, as a first nations leader, I am not consulted.

To reply, many first nations chiefs are afraid to come forward right now in fear of reprisal. They also have to face elections in the near future. It is a peer-pressure system that the Indian Act has created.

• (1730)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we all, as individual members, have the right to bring forward legislative ideas. We within the Liberal Party are disappointed in the fact that the current Prime Minister has not recognized how critically important it is to work with aboriginal and first nations leadership, in particular, from coast to coast to coast. When dealing with the many different issues, it is important to sit across the table in a comprehensive way, much like what Paul Martin did and ultimately came up with the Kelowna accord, which was something that would have had a very positive impact on our first nations.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: I can see the Conservatives are a little sensitive, given that it was their government that ultimately burnt that particular accord.

Does the member not see that the Prime Minister of Canada needs to start talking with the stakeholders, in particular our first nations? He must sit at the table and treat the first nations as strong partners and try to come up with ways to resolve the many outstanding issues that exist.

Private Members' Business

Mr. Rob Clarke: Mr. Speaker, I recall the Prime Minister standing up at the first nations gathering in the January of this year. However, we also heard first nations come forward and ask government to remove the barriers or handcuffs of the Indian Act.

What I have heard in years past from the Liberal Party are all of these false promises. We have heard the Kelowna accord. We heard Robert Nault stand up to introduce a government bill to get rid of the Indian Act. We have heard about the white paper.

The Liberal members are over there squawking and a little upset because they did not get it done over 13 years. They had 13 years during which they introduced the Kelowna accord and the implementation act, but they did not get it done. They had the opportunity.

In talking to my colleague here on the consultation process, our government is working hard in consultation towards a new modern relationship to address the needs and crisis that is facing first nations today.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am rising today to address Bill C-428, an act to amend the Indian Act (publication of by-laws) and to provide for its replacement.

I want to begin by saying that New Democrats will be opposing the bill for a number of very good reasons.

The bill seeks to amend the Indian Act by deleting sections dealing with wills and estates, sale of produce, trade with certain people and the sections on residential schools. It also calls on the government to make an annual report to Parliament on its progress in dismantling the Indian Act.

New Democrats do not support the bill because the member did not consult with first nations before presenting the bill.

Although the bill would delete some archaic provisions, like the sale of produce, other deleted sections, like the provisions for wills and estates, could put first nation citizens living on reserve in legal limbo because there is no guarantee that provincial legislation would cover their situations.

Tribal councils may have to provide advice regarding the proposed new provisions on wills and estates, which would be increasingly difficult due to the funding cuts to tribal councils and aboriginal representative organizations announced on September 4, 2012 by the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development.

Also, the deletion of the provisions on residential schools was supposed to be government legislation, not hidden in a private member's bill. New Democrats would like to see those provisions dealt with by the minister, as promised to first nations at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's national ceremony.

I heard the member opposite actually not answer my question about consultation. However, there have been a number of court cases that talked about what consultation involves. I can say that consultation does not entail receiving emails from people. It does not entail posting some information on one's website. That does not constitute consultation, nor is consultation constituted by having witnesses appear before a committee.

If the Conservatives are serious about a new relationship with first nations, they would withdraw the bill, go back to the drawing board and talk to first nations from coast to coast to coast with meaningful consultation. They have a duty to consult.

This piece of legislation could have very serious—

• (1735)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The hon. member for Edmonton—Strathcona is rising on a point of order.

Ms. Linda Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I regret intervening, but I am right beside the hon. member and I cannot hear her because there is so much noise on the other side heckling her.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): I agree with the member for Edmonton—Strathcona that there is a lot of noise in the chamber. I would ask all hon. members to give their colleagues the respect they received when they were speaking.

The hon. member for Nanaimo—Cowichan has the floor.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that. When the member was giving his speech, we allowed him the time and space to deliver it without the heckling and the noise.

I want to point out how serious this is. We have a private member's bill that is attempting to dismantle the Indian Act. I think there is agreement that the Indian Act is an archaic piece of legislation that needs to go, but the question is how it should go. Should it be through a private member's bill? Absolutely not. That does not recognize the nation-to-nation relationship that exists in this country.

There have been two other major attempts that ended in dismal failure, I might point out, and they were government bills, not private members' bills. There have been two major attempts at removing the Indian Act in the past. The first was a white paper authorized by Jean Chrétien in 1969 that sought to assimilate first nations into mainstream Canadian society by scrapping the Indian Act and reserves. We can see from the kinds of legislation that have been tabled in the House in the past that it is no wonder that first nations from coast to coast to coast are nervous about any attempt that does not involve meaningful consultation. People do not know what the end result of this is going to be because they are not involved and not at the table.

Harold Cardinal, another first nations leader, in response to the 1969 white paper, published a red paper titled "Citizens Plus" that outlined in reply:

It is neither possible nor desirable to eliminate the Indian Act. It is essential to review it, but not before the question of treaties is settled. Some sections can be altered, amended, or deleted readily. Other sections need more careful study, because the Indian Act provided for Indian people, the legal framework that is provided in many federal and provincial statutes for other Canadians. Thus the Indian Act is very complicated and cannot simply be burned.

Private Members' Business

In 2003, the Liberals introduced Bill C-7, the first nations governance act, which was widely panned by first nations who questioned if it was consistent with the rights, needs and priorities of Canadian first nations. Sadly, there was a news release on October 18 that indicates that the government would be supporting Bill C-428. The question then, of course, comes back to the new relationship that was promised at the Crown-first nations gathering back in January and how unilaterally introducing a private member's bill on some serious matters constitutes a new relationship in this country.

If the government were serious about a new relationship, it would go back to reports like that of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. A couple of years ago, the Assembly of First Nations issued a report card and, essentially, it almost gave an F across the board for what had been implemented. The royal commission process was a comprehensive one that many people had some faith in, but most of the recommendations have been completely disregarded by various governments since 1996. If it were serious, the government would go back to that, and if it were serious about consultation, it would go back to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and that very important clause about free, prior and informed consent. This bill does nothing to address any of that.

I want to go back to a paper that was published back in 1987 entitled, "Aboriginal People: History of Discriminatory Laws". This paper states:

It is generally accepted that the often conflicting goals of "civilization," assimilation, and protection of Indian peoples that have been pursued throughout the history of federal Indian legislation have their origin in (primarily British) colonialism. Throughout the colonial and post-Confederation periods, governments vacillated between two policies. The isolationist policy held that assimilation could be best achieved by isolating Indians on reserves, with Indian agents gradually preparing them for integration with the dominant society. (Alternatively, isolation was viewed by some simply as a protective measure until the Indian people should become extinct). The policy of immediate assimilation, on the other hand, favoured immediate placement of Indians among non-native people and removal of special protective measures and legal status. The isolationist policy has predominated but, as some observers have noted, it has had the unintended result of preserving Indian cultures and providing a means for the Indian people to resist assimilative pressures. Accordingly, Indians have fought to retain their reserves, treaty rights and special legal status as a way of maintaining distinct cultural or national identities.

While Indian people view reserve and treaty rights as a quid pro quo for giving up a good part of their traditional lands, federal and provincial governments have frequently taken the view that the Indians' refusal to abandon their distinctive cultures, government and identities is a refusal to take up the ways of a more "advanced civilization" and accordingly, a refusal to take up the "responsibilities" of full citizenship. In the result, the history of native policy, particularly Indian policy, in Canada is replete with examples of legal bars to the exercise of fundamental civil, political and cultural rights.

That continues to this day and this bill does nothing to address the problems that first nations across this country are facing, whether it is human rights or the ridiculous number of aboriginal women who are in prison.

● (1740)

One-third of women in federal prison are aboriginal. We had the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which talks about the dismal failure of aboriginal policy to keep children out of prisons. We have the current government still fighting at the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal on child welfare.

If the Conservatives are serious about a new relationship they will withdraw this bill, go back to the drawing board and work with first

nations to fully implement a consultative approach to eliminating the Indian Act.

I want to add that there was a man named Leo Baskatawang, who—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order. The hon. member for Westlock—St. Paul is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Mr. Speaker, I would just like to direct your attention to the issue of relevance. The hon. member is calling upon the government to withdraw a bill that is a private member's bill and a private member has the right to put his or her own legislation forward.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): That is not a point of order. The member is speaking in debate and is certainly speaking about the matter before the House.

The hon. member for Nanaimo—Cowichan has one minute remaining.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, I just want to mention that Leo Baskatawang marched to highlight indigenous rights and the Indian Act. I will not have time to do talk about all of the things he did, but he brought to the fore the point that most indigenous leaders agree that it is essential that legislation written by indigenous people for indigenous people is the way to go. There was a consensus on that. The government may choose to disregard it, but the reality is that if it plans to overhaul the Indian Act and change the provisions for wills, which could actually download more responsibilities onto the provinces, it needs to involve the people who would be directly affected by it. It cannot do it unilaterally as it is proposing to do.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the debate tonight is about a very serious matter. In January, the Prime Minister stated:

Our government has no grand scheme to repeal or to unilaterally rewrite the Indian Act: After 136 years, that tree has deep roots; blowing up the stump would just leave a big hole. However, there are ways, creative ways, collaborative ways, ways that involve consultation between our government, the provinces and First Nations leadership and communities, ways that provide options within the act, or outside of it, for practical, incremental and real change.

At that same meeting the National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, Shawn Atleo, said this with respect to the Indian Act:

Like a rock that sits in the middle of the road, a boulder that blocks the path of collaboration, remains

—as we have been saying here—

the Indian Act, along with the age-old structures and policies that administer it and steadfastly resist change.

Private Members' Business

I am sorry that we have to raise this here tonight because it means that the government has not taken this solemn promise of the Prime Minister seriously. He said in January that the government would not repeal or unilaterally rewrite the Indian Act and indicated that any future changes would be developed in consultation with the government, the provinces and first nations communities. I am afraid that a backbencher's private member's bill is not an appropriate consultation for this very serious relationship with first nations in this country.

This kind of change must be undertaken by the Prime Minister in a government-to-government way. Now we have a member of Parliament moving legislation to unilaterally change the Indian Act with no prior consultation.

All private member's bills should include consultation before they are tabled, and when they are drafted and afterwards. None of this happened, which extremely egregious when dealing with an issue concerning first nations.

If the member had consulted, he would have heard loudly—

• (1745)

Mr. Rob Clarke: You used the first nations for your own benefit.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order. I would ask all hon. members who do not have the floor and wish to remain in the chamber to control themselves. If they cannot control themselves, maybe they should leave the chamber.

The hon. member for St. Paul's has the floor. I would ask that all hon. members listen to what she has to say.

The hon. member for St. Paul's.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Mr. Speaker, if the member had consulted, he would have heard very loudly that first nations were not finding this appropriate. They want a formal discussion with the Prime Minister and the cabinet as to how to change the Indian Act. Even for the Kelowna accord, the Prime Minister and the cabinet met with first nations leadership and Inuit and Métis for 18 months before that accord was tabled.

[*Translation*]

First nations groups have clearly stated that the current bill is paternalistic and was not the subject of consultations.

[*English*]

If he had consulted, he would have been persuaded, I believe, to put his energies into something else that would have improved the quality of life of Canadians, especially first nations, if that was his choosing. Tinkering with the bill is not appropriate.

Let me be clear. The Indian Act is the embodiment of failed colonial and paternalistic policies that have denied first nations their rights and a fair share in resources, fostered mistrust and created systemic barriers to the self-determination and success of first nations.

However, the elimination of these barriers requires the government to initiate a formal process of direct engagement with first nations, on a nation-to-nation basis, which focuses on replacing the Indian Act with new agreements. These agreements must be based

on the constitutional treaty and inherent rights of all first nations, the historical and fiduciary responsibility of the Crown to first nations.

The standards established in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples include the principle of free, prior and informed consent, respect, recognition, reconciliation and support for first nations, a partnership and mutual accountability for the Crown and first nations and the stability and safety of first nations.

The member for Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River spoke at a Federation of Saskatchewan Nations Assembly this summer, but did not even allow questions or seek input from the assembled leaders. This would have been an ideal time for him to consult and hopefully listen to what the people thought.

If the member had done even a basic consultation, he would understand that the issues he is dealing with in this bill are not what first nations leadership is calling for across the country.

[*Translation*]

These leaders are demanding the adoption of a process that would go beyond the Indian Act, a process rooted in nation-to-nation relationships and based on consultations and collaboration that respect historic and legal rights, a process that would require the federal government to respect its historic and fiduciary responsibilities towards the first nations.

[*English*]

The member has seriously missed the mark with this private member's bill, and I was extraordinarily surprised, like my colleague from the New Democratic party, today in question period to hear that the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development agreed. For him to say that the Conservatives will support the bill in principle and hope to see it pass into law is exactly the opposite of what the Prime Minister promised in January to the assembled leadership of the first nations.

I encourage the member to read carefully the motion put forward by the leader of our party, the member for Toronto Centre, whose motion will be debated on Monday. It puts in place a proper formal process to work with first nations to actually make this egregious wrong right. It says:

Private Members' Business

That, in the opinion of the House, the Indian Act is the embodiment of failed colonial and paternalistic policies which have denied First Nations their rights, fair share in resources; fostered mistrust and created systemic barriers to the self-determination and success of First Nations, and that elimination of these barriers requires the government to initiate a formal process of direct engagement with First Nations within three months of passage of this motion, on a nation-to-nation basis, which focuses on replacing the Indian Act with new agreements based on: (a) the constitutional, treaty, and inherent rights of all First Nations; (b) the historical and fiduciary responsibilities of the Crown to First Nations; (c) the standards established in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, including the principle of free, prior, and informed consent; (d) respect, recognition, reconciliation and support for First Nations; (e) partnership and mutual accountability between the Crown and First Nations; and (f) stability and safety of First Nations; and that this process be completed within two years before reporting with a series of concrete deliverables for the government to act upon.

• (1750)

This has to be a step toward self-government. This is a process that has to be taken at the highest level of our government and its cabinet with the leaders of first nations and must be developed bottom up. This is about self-government. It is about allowing first nations to develop the process and then develop the concrete deliverables to which they will ask the Government of Canada to agree.

I am pleased the member presenting the bill has decided to be quiet now. The way the Conservatives heckled the member for Nanaimo—Cowichan was completely disrespectful. This is a very serious issue. We on this side of the House take it very seriously. I hope the member will be here for the debate on Monday night as a formal process will be described. I hope they will support the member for Toronto Centre's motion.

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege for me to rise today to speak in support of this private member's bill brought forward by my friend and colleague from the Conservative Party.

The member who brought this forward is the right person to bring it forward. So far in this debate, he is the only one who has ever lived under the Indian Act. I and my colleagues from the other parties who have spoken do not know the life that is lived under the Indian Act like that member.

In fact, I did not agree with much that my friend from Nanaimo—Cowichan said in her speech today, but one quote she did give, which I fully agree with, was, "A bill wrote by indigenous people for indigenous people is the way to go". That is exactly what we have happening in the House tonight. We have a bill that has been written by a person who has lived under this act, a bill that would rectify some of the most egregious portions of that act.

My colleague just recently suggested that my friend and colleague who brought the bill forward should be silent. I would suggest it is no longer appropriate for my friend to be silent. He has worked to become elected to the House of Commons. He has overcome the travesty that is this act and overcome past injustices to reach the House. He has every right to bring forward a private member's bill and to be heard in the House. I will defend every member's right to do the same thing, to bring legislation forward to change other legislation. I will continue to advocate for that right for my colleague.

Today we have before us this legislation. At the core of this proposed legislation is the acknowledgement that the Indian Act is

holding first nations back from achieving their whole social and economic potential.

Bill C-428 is the Indian Act amendment and replacement act. It proposes a series of amendments to the Indian Act that will lead to healthier, more self-sufficient first nations across the country.

At the same time, the bill recognizes the change that must be made in a systematic and thoughtful manner that provides first nations with the tools and the time that they need to eventually transition completely out of the Indian Act. That is consistent with the government's approach, providing first nations with practical, incremental and real alternatives to the Indian Act.

I quote the Prime Minister's speech at the historical First Nations Gathering last January when he said:

The Indian Act cannot be replaced overnight, but through the use of existing tools and the development of new mechanisms, both parties can create the conditions to enable sustainable and successful First Nations.

The bill proposes concrete action that will provide greater autonomy for first nations, lessen the role of the ministerial involvement in the day-to-day lives of first nation citizens and give back the responsibility for several key areas, such as bylaw-making powers and the administration of wills and estates, to first nations where it rightfully belongs.

As my colleague as so appropriately described, quite simply, the bill proposes to do a number of things. First, it will require the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development to report annually to a parliamentary committee on the action taken in partnership with first nations and other interested parties to develop new legislation to replace the Indian Act. Second, it will remove the minister's role in the administration of wills and estates and the approval in voiding wills. Third, it will remove the minister's bylaw disallowance powers. Fourth, it will remove many of the outdated and archaic provisions of the act. Finally, it will repeal all references to residential schools and the removal of the outdated schools-related provisions.

These changes are consistent with the direction that our government has taken over the last six years. It is focused on bringing forward initiatives that will unlock the economic development potential by removing certain barriers to first nation governance that currently exist under the Indian Act.

• (1755)

Ultimately, this would lead to the development of strong, accountable and prosperous first nation communities, where first nation citizens would have access to the same rights as other Canadians.

The proposed amendment to repeal all provisions relating to residential schools is particularly symbolic and important for first nations people.

Private Members' Business

On June 11, 2008, the Prime Minister of Canada, in this House, made an impassioned and heartfelt apology to the first nations people of Canada for the treatment of children in residential schools, a sad and shameful chapter of our nation's history. Following this momentous apology, the government also announced its intent to repeal these sections of the Indian Act that allowed for the establishment of Indian residential schools and the removal of children from their homes and communities.

I believe, by removing this antiquated language and references to residential schools, we could take another step further down the path toward healing.

The bill would contribute to the larger effort underway to create these tools and mechanisms.

The government is proud to support this private member's bill. I urge my hon. colleagues from the other side to reconsider their position, to speak to first nations people within their own communities, as I have, as my colleagues have who have heard the devastating stories and the hope they find in this bill.

The government looks forward to studying this bill in committee, hearing from witnesses and always exploring opportunities to improve the bill, as may be required.

• (1800)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain (Manicouagan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my speech in this House is consistent with my previously expressed positions on the Conservatives' thinly veiled attempts to offload the Canadian government's responsibility toward the First Nations communities. When I use the term responsibility, I am referring to its social responsibility, but there is also an economic responsibility, one that is easily quantifiable.

Last year, I met the Toronto Six Nations. At the time I was meeting with them, they were demanding that the Canadian government pay a claim amounting to several billion dollars. In some ways, it is quantifiable.

My focus will be on creep in the spirit of the legislation rather than the actual letter of the amendments and modifications to the Indian Act being considered here.

My experience in this House, over the past year and a half, and the countless sessions of the aboriginal affairs committee, make it possible for me to say today that, all too often, the Conservatives' legislative initiatives and actions are meant to shift the burden and enable them to shirk their obligations toward the first nations peoples and communities throughout the country, to distance themselves from the fiduciary burden that the Canadian government has to the first nations.

I would not be able to comment on whether past governments have shown the same tendency, but this is a tendency that I have observed to date. They are trying to distance themselves and take a step back from the first nations.

Now I have some very bad news for them: these matters are entrenched in the Constitution and they are not going to be able to distance themselves and dissociate themselves from their obligations merely by passing a private member's bill.

There is no doubt that the numerous international reports exposing the disparities in the government's treatment of aboriginal peoples in Canada contribute greatly to the malaise underlying the drafting of such unilateral legislative initiatives.

That international exposure is part of the reason we know that the government is stepping back and trying to distance itself.

Over the past year, I have met two United Nations representatives who were especially interested in the status of the first nations people and communities here in Canada because, even though the Conservatives keep hammering away about the economic boom and Canada's enviable economic situation, benefits have not trickled down to first nations communities, which are getting poorer as the rest of Canada gets richer. We know that, more often than not, resource development initiatives target these communities' traditional territories. Communities here in the north are typically remote. The Canadian government has now been unmasked on the international stage. On two occasions, two UN rapporteurs have come to Canada in order to shed light on the living conditions in first nations communities and to find out why these communities live in third-world conditions even though Canada is experiencing an economic boom and we are cited as an example of economic development and progress.

This is probably the reason why the Canadian government is doing its best to create this gap between the communities and to distance itself from its obligations, but its efforts will be in vain.

It should be noted that the proposed innovation is overdue, particularly in sensitive areas, such as trade relations. When I refer to sensitive areas, I mean, for example, indianness. Such areas are also entrenched in the Constitution.

Now, I have noticed another trend here in the House of Commons. The Conservatives frequently try to use private members' bills in order to test the waters with the Canadian public, and to introduce policies that enjoy scant support among Canadians. These bills are intended, therefore, to take the pulse of Canadian public opinion. In my opinion, the objective of the bill before us today is, first and foremost, to assess and gauge how the communities will respond to this legislation. The Conservatives are checking to see whether the members of the first nations communities across Canada are going to look favourably upon this legislation, or be unsympathetic to the idea.

• (1805)

It is highly likely that the Conservatives are trying to see whether the first nations will be able to come up with legal arguments to oppose the proposed measures. The Conservatives are trying to test the waters and determine whether there will, in fact, be a court challenge.

As a lawyer, I can safely say that the matters relating to first nations funds that the bill addresses will be the subject of a court challenge and that there is a very strong likelihood that any such court challenge would be won by the communities since this is an attempt to substantially alter the fiduciary relationship between the communities and the Crown. I repeat that it is entrenched in the Constitution and, consequently, it is impossible to remove one brick, or the whole thing will come tumbling down.

Private Members' Business

It should be noted that the unilateral manner in which the proposed measures were introduced violates the spirit of the state's commitment to the self-determination of the first nations. I am of course referring to commitments made internationally to recognize the self-determination of the first nations. I am also referring to undertakings given and promises made.

Last January, a supposedly historic meeting took place here in Ottawa. The meeting was intended to be inclusive, but I was escorted to the exit. I was not able to attend because I was an outcast. I ended up on the sidewalk with other aboriginals who were also treated as outcasts. So, inclusive was perhaps not the best way to describe the meeting.

At the meeting, billed as historic, the focus was on the need to work closely, as a team, and show a real willingness to co-operate with the communities. It was all for show, if I may say so. It was a big media extravaganza. There is evidence of this today: there was no real desire to have the first nations contribute.

As my colleague stated earlier, what happened is none too clear since it is uncertain how many communities were actually consulted before the private member's bill was drafted. The bill smacks of other private members' bills that have been introduced in the past. Bills are being systematically foisted upon us.

Paternalistic is an adjective that comes to mind. There are copycats on the other side of the House. My colleagues opposite are being rather paternalistic to these communities by unilaterally foisting legislation on them. There is a problem here, and my colleague opposite mentioned it earlier. There has been little transparency regarding the authenticity of any efforts to consult the communities to determine whether the legislation was relevant to them and whether the communities wanted it.

[English]

Mr. Brian Storseth (Westlock—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River for the opportunity to have a discussion and participate in this debate today. I also congratulate him for not only having the vision but the courage to put the bill forward.

I have had the opportunity to move a private member's bill through this hallowed place and it is not something that is easy to do, especially when one is not talking about national tree day or something that everyone agrees with, but talking about something that is somewhat contentious. It actually takes courage and strength of character to be able to even put the motion forward.

At the end of the day, I sit back and wonder what gives the member this strength. We need to look at his history and the fact that he is a member of Parliament who grew up on a first nation reserve, who raised his children in a first nations community, who has lived under this act and who understands what it does to individuals.

I have first nations communities in my riding. I have taken the opportunity not only to talk to some of the leadership of those communities, but to average people on the ball diamond, people who are affected by this act day-in and day-out and do not get some of the benefits that the leadership gets when they deal with the act. I must say that this is troubling. There is no one on either side of the House that has not called the Indian Act a paternalistic piece of legislation

that is a failed opportunity for us to move forward. I do not think anyone disagrees that this is a failed piece of legislation. I do not think Canadians as a whole disagree with that.

We as Canadians are sitting on the precipice waiting for direction from the leaders who are voted into this place and who should help guide us in that direction. I believe there is a role for private members in this place. I believe that the private members who have lived their life under a piece of legislation, which we all agree has failed, should have the ability to stand in this place and say that we need to go forward in a different direction, that we should have these discussions in the House of Commons, in the Canadian Parliament, and that no one on any side of this House should be attacking people for simply putting forward the discussion.

I would direct members to the summary of the legislation that we are talking about. It reads:

This enactment amends the Indian Act to require band councils to publish their by-laws and repeals certain outdated provisions of the Act.

It also requires the Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs to report annually to the House of Commons committee responsible for Aboriginal affairs on the work undertaken by his or her department in collaboration with First Nations organizations and other interested parties....

That is each and every year. If that is not starting a dialogue, I do not know what is. That is what this legislation is about. We all agree that this is a paternalistic piece of legislation that has been a failure and that is rooted in 200-year-old language.

What the member for Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River is saying is that we need to start having the conversation about how we will take this to the next level. I would remind members of the history of our government. We did not come into this place six and a half years ago with a national strategy to deal with it. We came with a plan, a plan that included amending the Canadian Human Rights Act to ensure first nation communities would be represented under the Canadian Human Rights Act.

I sat on the aboriginal affairs committee when that came forward and listened to the NDP members fight for two years for the ability to bring first nations communities under the Human Rights Act. They would much rather run to the United Nations and look for condemnation of Canadians as a whole than sit down, roll up their sleeves and work with this side of the House to make positive changes. Who here does not think, including every person in Canada, having first nations communities under the Human Rights Act is not a positive change?

The family homes on reserves and matrimonial property act sounds like a positive to me. What about the first nations financial transparency act? I am not sure what the opposition members have against transparency, but when I talk members of first nations communities, as I will be doing tomorrow in my riding, they demand transparency of their leadership just as they demand transparency of the Prime Minister, his cabinet and every member of Parliament.

We have the safe drinking water for first nations act. Those are just examples of things that our government did. We did not come in with a national strategy. We came in with a plan to actually make a difference in people's lives on reserve. I think that is much more important than taking another five years to develop another strategy that no one ever actually looks at implementing.

• (1810)

I sit here and wonder why they would not be in favour of things for first nations communities. Why would they not be in favour of bringing human rights to these communities?

An hon. member: Politics.

Mr. Brian Storseth: The member is right, it has to be politics. They like the system because they benefit from it. They would rather stick first nations communities in neutral and never see actual action taken. They would rather have another white paper to discuss racist comments from 30 years ago than actually look forward into the future, as my hon. colleague from Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River would have us do, and start having the discussion and debate. That is how we make changes in this great country. It is through rigorous debate. It is okay to bring positions forward and have first nations communities bring their positions forward and have this reported back to Parliament every year. I could not think of a more democratic, collaborative approach than what the member is actually proposing and I congratulate him for that.

I will make one other comment, a plea actually. I would like the members of the New Democratic Party of Canada to stand up for once and throw off the shackles of their whip. On this side of the House, we have proven that we have the courage to stand up for our constituents and vote their conscience. I would ask the New Democrats to do the same. We are talking about having a conversation with first nations communities and Canadians with political parties reporting it back to Parliament. The New Democrats will still get a chance to have their input but I urge them to vote their conscience for a change.

• (1815)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper. The hon. member for Westlock—St. Paul will have three minutes when this matter returns before the House.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[*Translation*]

JUSTICE

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to rise in the House to speak about an issue that I have been working on a lot lately, particularly in my capacity as deputy critic for public safety and as a member of Parliament for a riding that houses three federal penitentiaries.

Adjournment Proceedings

On May 15, the Minister of Justice completely rejected the calculations of Quebec authorities that said that 1,000 people are imprisoned each day in Quebec alone. Yet, these calculations are based on fact and come from a reliable source. In fact, Quebec's public safety department estimates that the government's Bill C-10 will increase the prison population by 20%. That means an additional 1,000 people in the prison system, which is already 96% full.

The current facilities already do not have enough room for inmates, and now this government has decided to close two prisons and a treatment centre, including the Leclerc medium-security facility, which is located in my riding. Once again, the Minister of Public Safety is making ill-considered, ad hoc decisions without thinking about the consequences. Then, he is telling us that it will not cost a penny more. It does not make any sense.

Prison populations are being moved, other prisons are being expanded, and employees are being moved. These things cost money. The Minister of Public Safety also said that he did not see any problem with double-bunking in prisons. Double-bunking jeopardizes the safety of both correctional officers and inmates. This summer, I had the opportunity to participate in a symposium on overcrowding in Canadian prisons organized by the John Howard Society of Canada.

Experts agree that double-bunking is not a solution. When we take the time to think it over, it is clear that putting two individuals with two completely different profiles in the same cell designed for just one inmate increases the risk of confrontation. Confrontation between inmates also puts the safety of correctional officers in danger since these men and women have to manage these prisoners and juggle their different profiles.

Members of the Union of Canadian Correctional Officers are concerned about the repercussions Bill C-10 will have for the institutions. Their working environment will change completely. This will make their jobs even more stressful. It also means that they will be risking their lives every day with a significantly larger prison population. They feel that the penitentiaries are already overcrowded as a result of prison closures, budget cuts to the Correctional Service of Canada and the longer sentences imposed on new inmates.

I work with the union on a regular basis, especially regarding the closure of the Leclerc institution in my riding, and I have had the opportunity to visit the institution many times. I also had the opportunity to visit the other penitentiary that is closing its doors, the Kingston penitentiary, and Kingston's regional treatment centre.

These decisions do not make any sense. How can the government close institutions, cut CSC's budgets, impose longer sentences on inmates and think that it will not cost a penny more? How does this government plan to manage this disaster caused by its lack of judgment without compromising public safety and without spending a penny? Did the minister or the parliamentary secretary at least visit these institutions or consult experts in the field or the employees before applying these draconian measures?

Adjournment Proceedings

• (1820)

[*English*]

Mr. Robert Goguen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC): Mr. Speaker, one of the greatest responsibilities that we have as a government is to protect Canadians and ensure that those who commit crimes are held to account. Canadians deserve to feel safe in their homes and that means criminals need to be off our streets.

By moving quickly to introduce the Safe Streets and Communities Act, our government fulfilled its commitment to hold criminals fully accountable, protect families and stand up for victims of crime. As the hon. member may know, after lengthy debate and study, Bill C-10 was passed by Parliament and received royal assent on March 13, 2012.

I would like to remind my hon. colleagues exactly what Bill C-10 was.

Bill C-10, the Safe Streets and Communities Act, was a very targeted and specific legislation. Our experience shows that toughening sentences does not create new criminals, it just keeps the existing ones in jail for more appropriate periods of time.

A major component of the Safe Streets and Communities Act went after the source of the illicit trade, the drug traffickers.

Another major component of the Safe Streets and Communities Act went after child predators. No parent wants their child to fall prey to a pedophile. In fact, parents list abduction and sexual exploitation as two of the three concerns facing Canadian children.

The Safe Streets and Communities Act introduced two new amendments to the Criminal Code. It created new mandatory minimum penalties and increased existing ones to ensure that child sexual predators are off our streets.

The Safe Streets and Communities Act also went after criminals who were getting an easier ride by serving their sentences within the luxury of their own home by further restricting the use of conditional sentencing.

Lastly, the Safe Streets and Communities Act better protected Canadians from violent and repeat young offenders by proposing fair and appropriate measures to better handle youth crime. These measures were balanced, effective and responsible.

Canadians can be happy that the measures I have described have been adopted by Parliament. They can also rest assured that our government will continue to ensure that our streets and communities are safe and that victims receive the attention and support they rightly deserve.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre: Mr. Speaker, it is sad that I have only one minute to respond to my colleague, especially when he did not listen to a single word of my speech. All he did was reiterate the wonderful measures his party has taken.

I love hearing about this government, which claims to be tough on crime and committed to a balanced justice agenda. We all think it is a good idea to lock up child pornographers, as my colleague across the way says, and put criminals behind bars. However, the government

must not close prisons or put inmates two to a cell. Most importantly, it must not put correctional officers' lives at risk, as I just said in my speech.

There are some serious inconsistencies in what my colleague is saying. It is quite a stretch to say that they have a balanced approach. What does my colleague think about that?

Mr. Robert Goguen: Mr. Speaker, the member said “inconsistencies”. Coming from the NDP, that is remarkable because they are so well versed in them.

[*English*]

Considering the fact that the member opposite is a member of the soft-on-crime New Democratic Party, I find it ironic that she has attempted to criticize or give advice to the Government of Canada on how to protect Canadians. If we follow the member's and her party's voting records, it would seem they think drug traffickers, child sexual predators and repeat violent offenders should be on our streets and in our communities.

Canadians can be assured that this government will never side with criminals and will continue to fight and better protect our communities.

[*Translation*]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, several weeks ago, I asked the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development to explain why her government is so determined to attack unemployed workers.

Since their infamous mammoth budget bill was implemented, the Conservatives have continued their attacks on workers who have lost their jobs by introducing a misguided and ill-conceived EI reform. In the weeks that followed the passing of the budget, Canadians were left in the dark because the minister would not say anything about many of the important points of her reform. In particular, she would not clearly define what her government meant by the terms “suitable employment” and “reasonable job search”. The opposition and civil society put so much pressure on this government to get a clear definition that the minister finally gave in last May and explained the details of her reform, details that were previously unknown.

One had to wonder whether her deliberate silence was due to the fact that the Conservatives were keen to maintain strict control of the information—which is typical of their management style, even regarding public affairs—or if the government simply did not know what it was doing when it hastily threw together the EI reform at the last minute.

Furthermore, the more we learned about the reform, the more it became obvious that it was riddled with flaws that will eventually make the system inaccessible and inefficient. This recently became very obvious when the minister had to backpedal on the working while on claim pilot project. In that case, even after being pestered for weeks by the opposition, the minister provided a complex solution that is virtually impossible to implement. It was just a smokescreen for unemployed workers who receive little money while looking for work.

Adjournment Proceedings

In short, what we now know is that the system will no longer fulfill its main purpose, which is to provide temporary financial assistance to those who need it and who pay into the employment insurance fund.

It is evident from all the information about changes to employment insurance that despite the bogus financial justifications that have no sound basis, the Conservatives are directly attacking workers who lose their jobs and pay their premiums in good faith in order to be sheltered in bad times.

Unfortunately, the Conservatives are imposing a conservative, right-wing reform and are using their propaganda to attack our social programs such as employment insurance. However, Canadians are not fools and can see right through their ideological games. Reducing the size of government too much affects the social programs and safety nets that are vital to Canadians and so closely aligned with their values.

I would like to know what the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development has to say to Canadians who have been desperately telling her since last March that the reform is bad, punishing, degrading, ill-conceived and counter to Canadian values of solidarity.

•(1825)

Hon. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a lot of assumptions have been made as to what constitutes suitable employment in the changes made to employment insurance.

[*English*]

The current legislation lacks clarity with respect to what constitutes “suitable employment” and what is meant by “reasonable job search”.

Right now, the Employment Insurance Act merely states the claimants are obligated to search for and accept suitable employment but does not say what this means. The act only defines what is not suitable employment.

This spring, the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development outlined several points that would be contained in the upcoming regulations on this matter.

Suitable employment would be based upon six points, two of which would vary according to the claimant's EI history and duration of the claim.

The first point is personal circumstances. People receiving EI would not have to accept work if they have health problems that would prevent them from taking a specific job; if they have family obligations that would prevent them from working at certain times of the day; if they have limited transportation options, in terms of commuting to and from work; or if they are not physically capable of performing the work.

The second point is working conditions. The job offered must not be vacant due to a strike, lockout or other labour dispute.

The third point is based upon hours worked and the type of work to be done, including responsibilities, tasks, wages and experience.

The fourth point is commuting time. The workplace must be within a one-hour commute or a standard commuting time for the region.

The fifth point is based upon the type of work. The sixth point would focus on hourly wages. These last two criteria would vary, based upon the claimant's EI history and the duration of the claim.

In determining the criteria, claimants would be placed in one of three categories: long-tenured workers who, after 18 weeks, would be required to expand their job search to jobs similar to the one they normally perform and accept wages starting at 80% of their previously hourly wage; frequent claimants who, after 7 weeks, would be required to accept wages starting at 70% of their previous hourly wage; and occasional claimants who, after 18 weeks, would be required to expand their job search to include any work they are qualified to perform, with wages starting at 70% of their previous salary but not below the prevailing minimum wage.

It is important to know that these changes would provide clarity for Canadians as to what would constitute suitable employment.

As we face unprecedented labour and skills shortages, it is important that the employment insurance program work most effectively for Canadians.

Our government's top priority is the economy, and we are proud to have seen more than 820,000 net new jobs created since the end of the economic recession.

At the same time, we recognize there are Canadians who are having difficulty finding work, particularly in the off-season in parts of the country where much of the economy is based upon seasonal industries. Our government is working to help these Canadians find jobs in their local area, appropriate to their qualifications. For those who are unable to find employment, employment insurance would be there for them, as it always has been.

•(1830)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day: Mr. Speaker, when will the government admit that even more people will be denied access to employment insurance as a result of this change? I want to remind the parliamentary secretary that only 40% of people have access to it now, when it is the workers and the employers who pay into the fund. It is absolutely not a government tax that pays into the EI fund.

The change will lower salaries, as the hon. member was saying. It will impoverish and stigmatize the unemployed. It will devalue the skills of our workforce and make appeal mechanisms stricter. It will impoverish thousands of unemployed people who work part time while receiving benefits and looking for full-time employment. It will weaken the economies of our regions that rely on seasonal industries such as the fishery, agriculture, forestry, construction and tourism.

Next week is national unemployment week. Workers, employers and the unemployed everywhere will raise their voice loud and clear to express how senseless this change is and that it only serves to further reduce access to the employment insurance system to which people are entitled. It is a way of driving our constituents into poverty.

Adjournment Proceedings

[English]

Hon. Mike Lake: Mr. Speaker, the member asked when the government would admit something. What I want to know is when the NDP will admit that this government has created more than 800,000 net new jobs through the actions we have taken over the past several years. When will the NDP actually stand up and support those actions?

The member talks about undermining the economy. The question I have for the hon. member is: What does she think \$21.5 billion in carbon taxes would do to the Canadian economy? Of course, that \$21.5 billion was clearly outlined in the NDP platform, in its costing document, as a means to pay for some of the extravagant promises the NDP was making.

That type of step, that type of policy plan would absolutely be a disaster for the Canadian economy. We will oppose that every step of the way.

FOREIGN TAKEOVERS

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to follow up a question that I asked during question period a few days ago about the government's foreign takeover policy. This is especially timely now because the Conservative members of the House, less than a fortnight ago, voted down an opposition motion that would have made the review process for foreign takeovers more transparent. They voted against the motion to hold public hearings on the proposed \$15 billion takeover of Nexen by the Communist Chinese state-owned China National Offshore Oil Company. They voted against all of this barely two years after the same Conservative members voted unanimously in favour of a similar motion introduced in this House by Jack Layton, which called for those same public hearings and transparency on foreign takeovers.

I asked the members on the other side of the House what had changed in the last two years. In just a couple of years the Prime Minister has shifted from accusing China of industrial espionage and a deplorable human rights records. In fact, he refused to attend the Beijing Olympics as a result. Now he is trying to bulldoze northern British Columbia's pristine forests so that we can ship raw, unprocessed bitumen by tankers to Communist China as fast as possible.

As I mentioned earlier in the chamber, this fire sale of western Canadian national resources comes at a time when eastern Canadians, like my constituents, are importing much more expensive foreign oil to heat their homes and put gas in their tanks. Mark Carney has been raising this issue repeatedly, asking why we sell low in the west and buy high in the east. Instead of shipping raw resources abroad, having a pipeline from western Canada to eastern Canada would help stem the loss of \$19 billion a year from the Canadian economy. Will this strategic interest be helped in any way by selling Nexen to China's CNOOC?

There is even an existing natural gas pipeline route from west to east, going through Thunder Bay—Superior North. There is no reason that we could not lay another pipeline along the same route to bring petroleum and value added processing jobs, perhaps to a Thunder Bay refinery, for example.

Even the former Bank of Canada governor, David Dodge, is calling on Ottawa to prioritize a west to east oil pipeline to mitigate Canada's growing energy fuelled economic imbalance.

Most Canadians would likely think that our own energy security interests would be part of any foreign takeover review, but they would be wrong. The net benefit criteria in the Investment Canada Act are so fuzzy that national security is not even defined in it, and energy security is not mentioned at all.

The industry minister's answer to my question can basically be summed up with two words: "Trust us". How can Canadians trust an opaque backroom review process based on criteria that are poorly defined, or where key considerations like our energy security are missing altogether? How can Canadians trust a government that seems to make energy policy decisions more on the basis of political ideology than practical strategic interests?

Instead of hiding behind the Investment Canada Act, which even the government has admitted needs updating, I am hoping to hear tonight and henceforth more substantial answers.

• (1835)

Hon. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to respond to a question posed earlier regarding the proposed investment by the China National Offshore Oil Corporation, CNOOC, in a Canadian oil company.

First of all, I would like to reaffirm this government's commitment to welcoming foreign investment that benefits Canada. The fact is that foreign investment is crucial to the Canadian economy and to prosperity in Canada. It introduces new technologies and practices that promote growth, employment and innovation here at home. Foreign investment brings some of the most productive and specialized firms in the world to Canada and results in some of the highest paying jobs for Canadians. It also connects Canadian businesses with new markets and offers them a place in global supply chains.

This government also recognizes that Canadian businesses must compete in a globalized economy and we are committed to creating the right conditions for Canadian businesses to succeed internationally.

Canada has signed foreign investment promotion and protection agreements, or FIPAs, with numerous countries, including a recent agreement with the People's Republic of China, which help connect our firms to the rest of the world and create a stable, secure environment for two-way investment between Canada and other countries.

FIPAs accomplish their objectives by setting out the respective rights and obligations of the countries that are signatories to the treaty with respect to the treatment of foreign investment.

FIPAs seek to ensure that foreign investors will not be treated worse than similarly situated domestic investors or other foreign investors. They will not have their investments expropriated without prompt and adequate compensation, and in any case, they will not be subject to treatment lower than the minimum standard established in customary international law. As well, in most circumstances, investors should be free to invest capital and repatriate their investments and returns.

We will continue our work to secure access to foreign markets in order to ensure the success of our own Canadian businesses abroad.

With respect to foreign investments, our government has a sound process in place to ensure they benefit Canadians. We have made targeted amendments to the Investment Canada Act to provide greater transparency to the public, more flexibility in enforcement and an alternative to costly and time-consuming litigation. Our government's review process will be used to conduct a careful review of the proposed acquisition that the hon. member mentions.

Mr. Bruce Hyer: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his comments but a lot of questions about the government's position on this takeover still remain.

Will there be reciprocity? Will Canadian resource companies be able to buy Chinese ones or will they stay shut out?

Then there is Iran. In 2008 CNOOC signed a \$16 billion investment deal with Iran. CNOOC's extensive business there becomes very relevant now that the government has just suspended diplomatic ties, a bold move. This follows the trade sanctions that the government has also imposed against Iran.

Adjournment Proceedings

If companies operating in Canada must abide by Canadian law, including trade restrictions on them from these sanctions, will a CNOOC-owned Nexen be exempt?

Can the member explain the Canada-China foreign investment protection agreement, which apparently grants more investor-state protections to foreign companies operating in Canada than Canadian companies currently have. This includes the ability to sue the Canadian government if it introduces new safety, health, labour or environment laws that threaten the Chinese company's profits.

• (1840)

Hon. Mike Lake: Mr. Speaker, under this government Canada has been and will continue to be open for business. We welcome foreign investment that provides a net benefit for Canadians and helps grow the economy. We will continue to provide an economic climate that allows Canadian firms to prosper. We will not go down the path of protectionism. Canada cannot afford to fall behind and that is exactly where protectionist policies will land us.

Instead, this government takes a responsible approach to foreign investment. To that end, the proposed transaction will be scrutinized very closely to ensure that it represents a net benefit to Canada.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:41 p.m.)

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