



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

# House of Commons Debates

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OFFICIAL REPORT  
(HANSARD)

**Thursday, February 14, 2013**

—

**Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer**

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# HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, February 14, 2013

The House met at 10 a.m.

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*Prayers*

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## ROUTINES PROCEEDINGS

•(1005)

[*English*]

### COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

TRANSPORT, INFRASTRUCTURE AND COMMUNITIES

**Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 109, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the sixth report of the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities in relation to its study of innovative transportation technologies.

The committee has requested, on behalf of the government, that I table the comprehensive response to this report.

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

**Mr. Merv Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the sixth report of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food in relation to the motion adopted on Tuesday, February 12, 2013, regarding the Canadian Grain Commission's proposal to Parliament for user fees and service standards.

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### PETITIONS

SEX SELECTION

**Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to present a petition on behalf of constituents who note that CBC revealed ultrasounds are being used in Canada to determine the gender of a child so that unborn female children can be aborted.

The petitioners call on the House to support Motion No. 408 and condemn the discrimination against females occurring through sex-selective pregnancy termination.

41ST GENERAL ELECTION

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

The first petition is from the residents of Windsor and Vancouver calling for an investigation and full inquiry into the robocall efforts to defraud voters back in the 2011 election.

FOREIGN INVESTMENT

**Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP):** Mr. Speaker, my second petition is from residents of Kelowna and the Toronto area calling on the Prime Minister and his cabinet to refuse to ratify the Canada-China investment treaty.

It is not yet ratified and will not come back before the House. The petitioners are appealing directly to the Prime Minister and the Privy Council.

[*Translation*]

HOUSING

**Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to rise in the House to present a petition calling on the federal government to develop an affordable housing strategy.

CANADA POST CORPORATION

**Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, today I rise to present a petition signed by more than 3,000 people from my riding of Louis-Saint-Laurent who object to the closing of a Canada Post office.

For the past few years, access to postal services in my riding has been declining steadily, and people are worried. The post office in L'Ancienne-Lorette closed last year despite fierce opposition from the people who live there. Now Canada Post wants to close the post office in the largest shopping centre, Les Galeries de la capitale, despite clear opposition from the merchants.

In response, some 3,000 people have joined those merchants in calling for postal services to be maintained in Les Galeries de la capitale. The people in my riding and the surrounding area treasure that post office and do not understand why their local service, which is located in such a strategic place, should be closed so abruptly. It is clear to these people that Canada Post must reverse its decision.

[*English*]

IMPAIRED DRIVING

**Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to present a petition from a number of constituents and also a number of people from Surrey, British Columbia.

*Business of Supply*

Last year, 22-year-old Kassandra Kaulius was killed by a drunk driver. A group of people who have also lost loved ones to impaired drivers, called Families for Justice, want to see tougher laws in the implementation of new mandatory minimum sentencing for those persons convicted of impaired driving causing death. They want to see the Criminal Code of Canada changed to redefine the offence of impaired driving causing death to vehicular manslaughter.

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**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.

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**GOVERNMENT ORDERS**

• (1010)

[English]

**BUSINESS OF SUPPLY**

OPPOSITION MOTION—MISSING ABORIGINAL WOMEN

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.)** moved:

That the House recognize that a disproportionate number of Indigenous women and girls have suffered violence, gone missing, or been murdered over the past three decades; and that the government has a responsibility to provide justice for the victims, healing for the families, and to work with partners to put an end to the violence; and that a special committee be appointed, with the mandate to conduct hearings on the critical matter of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls in Canada, and to propose solutions to address the root causes of violence against Indigenous women across the country; that the committee consist of twelve members which shall include seven members from the government party, four members from the Official Opposition and one member from the Liberal Party, provided that the Chair is from the government party; that in addition to the Chair, there be one Vice-Chair from each of the opposition parties; that the committee have all of the powers of a Standing Committee as provided in the Standing Orders, as well as the power to travel, accompanied by the necessary staff, inside and outside of Canada, subject to the usual authorization from the House; that the members to serve on the said committee be appointed by the Whip of each party depositing with the Clerk of the House a list of his or her party's members of the committee no later than March 28, 2013; that the quorum of the special committee be seven members for any proceedings, provided that at least a member of the opposition and of the government party be present; that membership substitutions be permitted to be made from time to time, if required, in the manner provided for in Standing Order 114(2); and that the committee report its recommendations to the House no later than February 14, 2014.

She said: Mr. Speaker, it is with a great deal of emotion that we address today the motion of the Liberal Party to strike a special parliamentary committee with the mandate to conduct hearings on the critical issue of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls in Canada.

It is not a coincidence that families of Sisters in Spirit and Cindy Blackstock of the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society have chosen February 14 to come here to Parliament Hill to plead their case. Cindy's Have a Heart rally is at the Centennial Flame this morning, and today at noon the families of Sisters in Spirit will meet at the Langevin Block and march to Parliament Hill on their day of justice.

Today, the UN is part of a campaign called One Billion Rising. It is the largest day of action on the issue of violence against women and girls. It is a global movement to end violence against women and girls. Unfortunately, we in Canada are not just supporting a movement about violence against women and girls in post-conflict zones or in other parts of the world. Unfortunately, it is here at home that we have to deal with this systemic violence against indigenous women and girls in Canada.

Tragically, more than 600 aboriginal women and girls have disappeared or been murdered in Canada since 1970. Moreover, aboriginal women in Canada experience rates of violence more than three times that of non-aboriginal women. Young aboriginal women are five times more likely to die of violence.

However, it is important that the rallies today make it clear that this is not just about appalling unfairness and injustice. It is about missing daughters, mothers, aunts, cousins, nieces, real people who have now left a real hole in the hearts of their families and their friends. It is so overwhelming to see the pictures of the missing and murdered women clutched by their bereaved family members, who have been clear with us in meeting after meeting that they will never heal, but they need support on their healing journey. They want justice. They want prevention. They want the violence to stop. They know it needs a systemic solution.

I have heard the stories from Prince George to downtown Winnipeg. I slipped into the back of the hearing room at the Oppal inquiry in Vancouver on the Pickton murders to hear from the families and I can tell members, we are not doing enough.

From 30 years ago when Helen Betty Osborne, who was clearly killed because she was an aboriginal woman, we have continued in this country to not do enough. Look at the names on the Sisters in Spirit website of Lorna Blacksmith, Daleen Kay Bosse, Claudette Osborne, Pamela Holopainen, Hilary Bonnell. Yesterday in the Human Rights Watch poignant paper, we saw the Highway of Tears sign with the names of Tamara and Cecilia and Delphine, and the people who are no longer with us because of this systemic violence.

The sign at these rallies that always touches me the most is, "To the world, she was one person. To us she was the world". It means that we cannot deal with this in only the horrific statistics. We have to deal with this as a very human problem of human families and communities. It is also the systemic problem of the effects of residential schools, of colonization. The fact is that we have to address this head-on. We need the 96% of Canadians who are not from an aboriginal background to understand and work with us in this serious injustice.

We need a public and national inquiry. There is no question that our motion today is not to say that this will be instead of a public inquiry. We want a national inquiry, but the government has been so reticent to actually do what is necessary, to deal head-on and analyze the root causes, to seek justice and to prevent and end the violence. We are asking, in the absence of a public inquiry, that our motion today would establish a special committee that would be able to hear evidence and propose recommendations to address the root causes of violence against indigenous women across the country, to seek justice and to identify a real action plan to stop the violence.

•(1015)

These were things that were asked of the Government of Canada yesterday in the Human Rights Watch report. The issue of missing and murdered aboriginal women and girls must never be just an issue for first nations, Métis and Inuit in Canada. It is a matter of critical importance to all Canadians. This is, quite simply, a source of national and international embarrassment.

[Translation]

Canada has been regularly criticized by organizations like Amnesty International, in 2004 and 2011, and the United Nations, in 2008, for neglecting to investigate and address the issues of violence against aboriginal women and girls.

[English]

This is not a partisan issue. The motion is not about politics.

[Translation]

All of the parties need to rally together and join forces to do everything they can to provide justice for the victims, provide healing for the families and put an end to this epidemic.

[English]

Many members of Parliament, on all sides, have expressed a desire to deal with the issue. The Conservative member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo has said:

—I have to share a sense of shame to know that my province and my country are identified as one of the worst in terms of missing aboriginal women and children. No one can feel anything but shame over those circumstances.

In March, 2010, then Conservative Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs, Chuck Strahl, stated that the government “will take...action to address the disturbing number of unsolved cases of murdered and missing Aboriginal women”. As well, the current Minister of Justice committed:

We will work with provinces, territories, aboriginal people and other stakeholders for effective solutions. After all, we all have a stake in finding a solution....

However, it is time for the government to match its words with action. It is time for the all ministers of the Crown to put their resources together to ensure that a parliamentary committee is able to hear the witnesses it needs to hear and for each minister to commit to act on the recommendations of this special committee.

Recently, the Government of Manitoba hosted a meeting to discuss the problem of missing and murdered aboriginal women in Canada. All provincial, territorial and federal ministers of aboriginal affairs, justice and the status of women were invited. The federal ministers were the only ones who did not attend. Instead, they sent their bureaucrats. This is not good enough. If this had been

### *Business of Supply*

happening to non-aboriginal Canadian women at the same rate, over 20,000 women would be murdered by now.

[Translation]

If hundreds of women and girls were disappearing or were being murdered in our communities and our ridings, it would be considered a crisis and people would demand immediate action.

•(1020)

[English]

It is as if two 747s fell out of the sky and nothing was done to figure out why.

I invite all members to join in solidarity with families of Sisters in Spirit at noon to mark this day of justice for families of Sisters in Spirit and to remember and honour the lives of missing and murdered women and girls. This deplorable pattern of violence and indifference experienced by aboriginal women and girls clearly requires a more comprehensive response from the government and Parliament.

I believe we can work together across party lines to confront this unabated violence. A non-partisan study was begun by Parliament in 2010 to gather information about the extent of the violence against aboriginal women, programs in place to address it, the root causes and what steps could be taken to break the cycle.

[Translation]

Although very important, the work of that committee failed to specifically address the problem of the missing and murdered aboriginal women and girls.

[English]

Further, that work was, unfortunately, interrupted by the 2011 election and the mandate of the committee was subsequently shifted to the aftermath of the violence and to empowering women and girls. This appalling situation is, unfortunately, not a recent revelation. Now it is time to come together to provide justice for the victims and healing for the families and to put an end to this tragic injustice.

Back in 2004, Amnesty International released its Stolen Sisters report, which showed that indigenous women in Canada faced gender- and race-based discrimination and a heightened and unacceptable risk of violence. Among other recommendations, Amnesty International called on the government to ensure adequate funding for comprehensive national research on violence against indigenous women, including the creation of a national registry to collect and analyze statistical information from all jurisdictions. In 2005, in response to mounting evidence that hundreds of aboriginal women in Canada were going missing or had been murdered, the previous Liberal government invested \$5 million, through the Native Women's Association and Sisters in Spirit, to create a national database of missing and murdered aboriginal women and girls. Unfortunately, in 2010, the Conservatives cut the funding and mandated that any future funding for the Native Women's Association could not be used for Sisters in Spirit.

*Business of Supply*

The information uncovered by this comprehensive research project was truly heartbreaking. NWAC had gathered information about 582 cases of missing and murdered aboriginal women and girls. Of these, 67% were murder cases; 20% were cases of missing women and girls; and 4% were cases of suspicious deaths, deaths regarded as natural or accidental by police but considered suspicious by family or community members.

NWAC's research indicates that between 2000 and 2008, aboriginal women and girls represented approximately 10% of all female homicides in Canada. However, aboriginal women make up only 3% of the female population. This is nothing short of shocking. Further, in terms of justice for the victims, it is important to point out that although the national clearance rate for homicides in Canada is 84%, according to the NWAC statistics, almost half of the homicides involving aboriginal women and girls remain unsolved. This requires a systemic approach. A complaints commission for the RCMP will not fix the systemic inability of our justice system to seek justice for these missing and murdered aboriginal women. Half the cases are unsolved. There is no explanation other than discrimination and a two-tiered justice system. We know how to fix this, and we have to fix it now.

In 2010, as the government cancelled the Sisters in Spirit funding, the Conservatives provided \$10 million in funding for a series of initiatives that they argued were directed at missing and murdered aboriginal women and girls. However, most of the money went to police initiatives that track missing persons in general, without any particular focus on the specific patterns of violence against indigenous women.

The Prime Minister's answers yesterday on a related matter in question period showed a true lack of compassion and a lack of understanding of the scope of this issue. How on earth can we fix the unbelievable difference between violence against aboriginal and non-aboriginal women without the capacity to track disaggregated data? As Claudette Dumont-Smith, the executive director of NWAC, said yesterday at the Human Rights Watch press conference, these programs may well be positive criminal justice initiatives. However, there are still important gaps in the available data that must be filled to ensure that the policy directed at this specific issue is based on sound information and facts rather than on ideology. Recent reports from the Oppal Missing Women Commission of Inquiry and from Human Rights Watch have made clear that there are serious shortcomings in our policing and justice systems, which too often have failed to protect indigenous women and girls, and this must change.

The Saskatchewan Association of Chiefs of Police is one of the few law enforcement organizations to keep comprehensive statistics on missing and murdered aboriginal women and girls. According to its website, in 2012 there were 30 missing women in Saskatchewan, and 17, or 57%, of these were aboriginal. Yet only 14% of the population of Saskatchewan is aboriginal. These sorts of data should be available for the entire country, but police in many jurisdictions do not even report whether the victims of crime are indigenous. This is why it was so disappointing that in 2010, the Conservative government cut the funding for the NWAC Sisters in Spirit database.

I want to repeat and address again the need for a full national public inquiry. Yesterday, Human Rights Watch's report, "Those

Who Take Us Away", was crystal clear. Among other things, it called on the Government of Canada to establish a national commission of inquiry into the murders and disappearances of indigenous women and girls before the end of 2013 and to develop and implement a national action plan to address violence against indigenous women and girls, the structural roots of the violence, and the accountability and coordination of government bodies charged with preventing and responding to the violence.

•(1025)

Liberals first raised the need for a federal public inquiry and investigation of missing and murdered aboriginal women and girls in the House of Commons in May 2009 and subsequently called for a national public inquiry into the issue in 2010, 2011 and 2012. During the 2011 federal election campaign, Liberals committed to initiating a national task force to examine the systemic causes of this problem, with an emphasis on preventing its continuation in the future.

Our call today for a parliamentary committee in no way means that we are backing away from that commitment. On October 12, 2012, the national day of remembrance, I put my Motion No. 411 on the order paper. It calls on the government to take immediate action to deal with this systemic problem and to call a public inquiry. Liberals have joined the AFN, the Native Women's Association of Canada and all of Canadian society in calling for a national public inquiry on this issue.

[*Translation*]

Every time we make this request, the government refuses.

[*English*]

We need to work together to begin the process of collecting the necessary data and information and of finding solutions now.

This motion offers parliamentarians the opportunity to extend our support to those families that have been touched by the loss of a loved one to violence and to seek justice for all who have been touched by this continuing tragedy. The Conservatives claim that they stand up for victims of crime. Unfortunately, many people in Canada say, that is unless the victim of crime happens to be an aboriginal woman or girl. We are asking them to join us, to stand up for missing and murdered aboriginal women—the mothers, daughters, grandmothers, aunts and cousins and the families who loved and cherished them—and support this motion.

Today the UN is calling, with its End Violence Against Women Campaign, for the V-Day pledge:

*Business of Supply*

One Billion Rising is the beginning of the new world ignited by a new energy. It is not the end of a struggle but the escalation of it, so V-Day is asking those who are rising around the globe to take a simple pledge this Thursday, to do one thing in the next year to end violence against women. It can be a simple action, or a monumental one; it can be personal, or political, it can be quiet or loud, but these actions—taken together—will create change.

I encourage all members of the House to support this motion. It may be simple, but it will be loud and it will create change.

**Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I share my colleague's disappointment. For many years, the NDP has been raising the issue of a public inquiry. This is a small step today toward the establishment of a parliamentary committee.

Just to state my perspective, I live along Highway 16, the so-called Highway of Tears. I have walked this highway with the families of the victims we are talking about today. Oftentimes, those walks have been with two, three or four people as they tried, in the very early stages, to draw some basic community attention to and public awareness of what it was they were facing. For most Canadians to understand the true depth of the tragedy is to know that these folks have been victimized twice: once when their daughters, sisters or mothers went missing and a second time when the justice system utterly failed them in the pursuit of the justice they so rightly deserve.

The reason a public inquiry has been so important to New Democrats, Liberals and the families is that there can be no solutions until we get to the truth and the heart of the matter. This is a complex issue. The sources of this violence against aboriginal women and girls are complex, but there is no possibility of finding solutions unless we actually have the truth on the table. The resistance of the government, time and time again, to having the courage and leadership to approach this conversation and find that truth is yet a third victimization of the families.

After the Prime Minister's efforts on the apology and his contradiction in cancelling the Aboriginal Healing Foundation program and all of the other injustices done to first nations by the government, is there truly any understanding by the government of the depth and true tragedy of this issue?

• (1030)

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his comments. I could not agree more. Yesterday's Human Rights Watch report is really only a small biopsy of a much greater problem. There were 50 families interviewed about that one unfortunate epicentre of the problem. We know, from the Pickton trial to what might have been a serial killer in Winnipeg, that these murdered and missing women are not getting justice. Fewer than 50% of these homicides have been solved.

"I do not know" means talking points. Let there be no more talking points about what the RCMP complaints committee can do. We need a systemic analysis of the root causes. We need to find ways to heal. The study can develop an action plan and recommendations to prevent the violence and to close the gap, which is unacceptable.

**Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the tragedy is absolutely appalling. What is equally appalling is the lack of intentional response by the Conservative government, except to offer hollow and half-true talking points.

The member spoke of a national inquiry. Could she enlighten the House as to the depth of that inquiry, how it might enlighten us as parliamentarians and Canadians, and what it might bring, should we have the benefit of a national inquiry?

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** Mr. Speaker, it is essential that there be a safe place for people to tell their stories. We know from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that some people are prepared to tell their stories in public.

Yesterday the Prime Minister and the parliamentary secretary to the Minister of Labour said that people could bring their complaints to the RCMP commission. Even female members of the RCMP are denigrated and blamed as victims, and, as the NDP House leader has said, are re-victimized by the system. We need a safe place where we can call witnesses, where we can find a way to hear their stories and hear from the people who have been looking at this for a very long time in order to present the solutions that would reach across all government departments and all jurisdictions so that we would no longer have to face this embarrassment and this tragedy within Canada.

[Translation]

**Ms. Laurin Liu (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, there were a number of protests on the Hill last year. Aboriginal women are demanding a national public inquiry, and the NDP has been calling for one for years.

The request to strike a special committee is not enough for aboriginal groups such as the Native Women's Association of Canada, which has been demanding a national inquiry to put an end to the violence against aboriginal women.

Would the hon. member support that demand? Why are the Liberals not calling for a national public inquiry?

• (1035)

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** Mr. Speaker, it is absolutely crucial that we have a national inquiry. However, since the Conservative government has refused to do that, today's motion fills that void until we get a new government that can do better.

**Mrs. Djaouida Sellah (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I listened closely to the Liberal member's speech. I would like to ask her the following question.

The critical issue of missing and murdered aboriginal women and girls in Canada has been an ongoing problem, just as it was when the Liberals were in power. In 1996, official statistics showed that aboriginal women were five times more likely to die from violence than other Canadian women.

What does the member have to say about the federal government's inaction?

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** Mr. Speaker, in response to my colleague's question, I would like to remind the House that following the Amnesty International report, the former Liberal government provided funding for the NWAC to set up a database on missing and murdered aboriginal women in Canada. Unfortunately, the Conservative government cancelled that funding.

*Business of Supply*

I hope that the Conservative government will support our motion and recommend that a system be restored to manage the real numbers.

[*English*]

**Ms. Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity today to discuss what is a very serious concern of the Government of Canada and certainly one of its priorities.

Despite comments from the opposition members, we have been doing a great deal on the front lines to try to address this very concerning issue.

As this House knows, this government is committed to community safety, not just for some Canadians but for all Canadians across the country. I will not go through the list of criminal law measures taken by this government at this time, but the list is long and quite impressive.

Today, I want to focus first on some of the human aspects of this tragedy. I agree with the first paragraph of the motion. This House should recognize, and I believe our government has recognized on many occasions, that aboriginal women and girls in Canada today still, unfortunately, face a significantly greater risk of violence and of suffering more serious and severe violence than other Canadians. A disturbingly high number of aboriginal women and girls have also gone missing or been murdered in Canada.

We have all heard the expressions of pain and suffering from family members who do not have answers for what has happened. This is something no Canadian should believe is someone else's problem.

The government has a responsibility to provide justice for the victims and for their families, and I believe our government has taken this responsibility very seriously, with important action. We must all speak out against this unacceptable violence toward sisters, mothers, daughters, aunts and nieces. Their lives matter, and their deaths must not be ignored.

This government has worked with many aboriginal organizations for many years now to address this complex issue. We have provided \$5 million to the Sisters in Spirit initiative of the Native Women's Association of Canada. We did this through Status of Women Canada for the original research.

When that research showed a disturbingly high number of missing and murdered aboriginal women across Canada, we made a further commitment of \$25 million in 2010 to take immediate action to improve the response of law enforcement and the justice system so they can better meet the needs of aboriginal women and their families. In budget 2010 and again in budget 2012, along with many other individual announcements, that commitment has continued with other related initiatives.

I am also pleased to agree with the second portion of this motion: to appoint a special committee to look at and propose solutions; although there are already a large number of studies, including one recently done by the House of Commons status of women committee, and much action has been taken by aboriginal

communities together with this government to change this unacceptable situation.

The government welcomes this opportunity to review what has been done and to look for more solutions. A special committee appointed to study this complex and urgent issue could focus on practical solutions for the future, so that generations to come will no longer have to face the risks faced by those of the past and, unfortunately, still of today.

Our government has recognized the need to work closely with aboriginal organizations and communities and with provincial and territorial partners to develop more effective, appropriate and collaborative solutions and responses to help ensure the safety of women in Canada, and that is exactly what we have done. This takes concerted effort and lasting change, and this can be gained only community by community.

Canada's more than 600 first nations, as well as urban aboriginal communities, have different histories, needs and solutions. This is why the government has focused on funding community safety planning, as communities are in the best position to identify what change is needed and to establish priorities. It is my hope that a special committee can continue that work toward real and lasting change, community by community.

● (1040)

A special committee would provide a further means to build on what has already been done to address the broader underlying causes that contribute to the vulnerability to violence of aboriginal women and girls, in areas such as family violence prevention, economic security and prosperity, education, health, policing and urban living.

I would like to take a minute to review some of the highlights of other actions the Government of Canada is already taking to reduce the violence and the vulnerability to violence of aboriginal women and girls.

In 2010 the Government of Canada announced \$25 million over five years for a seven-point strategy to improve responses of law enforcement and the justice system to cases of missing and murdered aboriginal women and girls and to increase community safety.

My colleague, the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, will expand on the work of the new National Centre for Missing Persons and Unidentified Remains, but I want to assure the House that its staff includes an experienced aboriginal police officer linked to the RCMP's National Aboriginal Policing Services in order to ensure a continuing focus on the issue of missing aboriginal women and children.

The new national public website containing information on some 715 cases—those are cases of missing children, missing persons and unidentified remains—was launched in January 2013 and can be found at [www.canadasmissing.ca](http://www.canadasmissing.ca). It provides the public with the opportunity to submit tips on specific cases. I understand that the first tip was received within hours of this site going live.



The new national centre will launch the first national police database specifically for missing persons and unidentified remains cases later this year. It is designed to provide Canadian police, medical examiners and chief coroners with comprehensive information on cases across jurisdictions.

In addition, the centre continues to work with the Canadian Police Information Centre and the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police to make numerous enhancements to the main Canadian police data system to capture more specific descriptions of missing persons and unidentified remains.

The new centre has worked within the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police to gather best practices and to compile them into a single document for investigators. The centre is currently developing training for investigators and, with the Canadian Police College, last year piloted an advanced course for investigators of missing persons and unidentified remains.

As I mentioned, the government has emphasized the development of community safety plans by aboriginal communities to reduce violence and improve the safety of aboriginal women within their communities. Public Safety Canada, through its new aboriginal community safety development contribution program, is enabling communities to take greater responsibility for identifying their own needs and building on their existing assets, leading to an integrated safety response with existing federal, provincial and community partners.

In Canada, the provincial and territorial governments provide victim services, and many victim services are taking a proactive, responsive approach to adapt existing services and/or develop new services to respond to the unique needs of aboriginal victims of crime.

The Department of Justice works closely with the provincial and territorial governments to increase their capacity to support aboriginal victims of crime as well as the families of missing or murdered aboriginal women.

●(1045)

In 2010, the Government of Canada took concrete action by dedicating an \$1 million annually to the victims' fund to help the provinces and territories adapt or develop culturally appropriate victim services for aboriginal victims of crime, and to enhance support for families of missing or murdered aboriginal women.

The Department of Justice has also provided a substantial amount of funding directly to community organizations as part of its overall efforts. Those efforts are designed to reduce violence and improve safety for aboriginal women and girls. Approximately \$2 million has gone directly to about 30 organizations for activities aimed at reducing violence against aboriginal women. Aboriginal organizations can also apply for funding to support the development or distribution of awareness materials and activities that contribute to breaking intergenerational cycles of violence and abuse in aboriginal communities, which result in aboriginal women and children facing higher risks of violence.

As another response to the disturbing number of missing and murdered aboriginal women, Justice Canada worked with a number of aboriginal contractors, including the Aboriginal Research

### *Business of Supply*

Institute, to prepare a compendium of promising practices to reduce violence and increase the safety of aboriginal women in Canada. That is now available online. The compendium presents key information on promising practices in aboriginal communities so that community groups can build on the experience of other aboriginal communities as they address similar challenges in their own communities.

Justice Canada also has a number of programs directed at reducing rates of victimization, crime and incarceration among aboriginal people, such as the aboriginal justice strategy, which works on a cost-shared basis with Canada's provincial and territorial governments and in partnership with aboriginal communities. The programs serve over 600 communities, helping the mainstream justice system to become more responsive and sensitive to the needs and culture of aboriginal communities. Over the last six years, the federal government has made a total investment of nearly \$100 million.

Justice Canada has also worked with the Public Prosecution Service of Canada to prepare mandatory Inuit awareness training for crown prosecutors in the Nunavut regional office and has worked to update a publication on family violence entitled, "Abuse Is Wrong In Any Culture: Inuit", which is also now available online.

Since March 2010, Status of Women Canada has approved funding of over \$2.3 million for the Native Women's Association of Canada, NWAC, to support the two phases of its current project, called Evidence to Action. Building on previous work, the project aims to reduce levels of violence experienced by aboriginal women and girls by strengthening the ability of communities, governments, educators and service providers to respond to issues that relate to the root causes of violence against aboriginal women and girls.

As I mentioned, the government is also working to address the broader underlying factors that contribute to the vulnerability of aboriginal women and girls to violence. We do this through partnerships with aboriginal organizations and communities on economic development, education, labour market participation, housing, health, family violence programming, policing and other relevant areas.

The Government of Canada believes that the remaining outstanding cases of missing and murdered aboriginal women must be a focus, as the families do deserve answers. The RCMP is working with other Canadian police services, provincial and territorial governments, aboriginal organizations and the public to investigate and resolve the outstanding cases of missing or murdered women.

●(1050)

In looking for answers on the outstanding cases, a number of police task forces and projects have been established in areas of the country where these disappearances and crimes are clustered. Those with information that might help in any way in resolving these crimes must share that information with police. Indeed, more needs to be done.

We must not lose sight of the commitment and accomplishments that the government, and aboriginal and non-aboriginal groups, communities and individuals have achieved, as we move together toward necessary and lasting change.

*Business of Supply*

Finally, I want to highlight that in addition to collaborating with aboriginal groups and other stakeholders, the federal government continues to work in partnership with the provinces and territories to coordinate its response. Such a coordinated effort is needed to address this issue of missing and murdered aboriginal women and girls. The federal, provincial and territorial ministers responsible for justice approved an implementation plan at their November 2012 meeting for the final report of the missing women working group, and reiterated their commitment to continue to coordinate their efforts on this important issue.

At the request of the ministers, the federal, provincial, territorial working group on aboriginal justice is now working on a national justice framework to coordinate federal, provincial and territorial actions and response across the law enforcement and justice spectrum to address violence against aboriginal women and girls.

The government feels strongly that the emphasis must be on action, and it fully intends to continue working in partnership with aboriginal organizations and groups, and with provincial and territorial governments to do its part to develop more effective and appropriate solutions. These solutions are needed to prevent any further disappearances or deaths of aboriginal women and girls. The contribution of a special committee would be most valuable in identifying additional solutions to end the violence.

I welcome the opportunity for greater collaboration as we strive to achieve that goal.

•(1055)

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I believe the member mentioned that the Conservative government had funded Sisters in Spirit for \$5 million.

My understanding was that it funded the Native Women's Association of Canada, specifically telling it to cease and desist using Sisters in Spirit. The government wanted that project stopped, and the Native Women's Association of Canada was not allowed to use that phrase any more, which was stunning to us after its good work.

The \$10 million was then given to policing instead of toward actually keeping the accurate database.

**Ms. Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay:** Mr. Speaker, given my remarks and the motion put forward by the hon. member, I had hoped that she would welcome our statements on collaborating in creating the special committee that she calls for in her motion.

As far as her question is concerned, that Sisters in Spirit initiative was successful. It was funded by the government. It was because of the results it obtained that further funding was given to move forward on further initiatives.

**Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I will say to the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice that I listened very carefully to her speech. I think it is a very good step and signal by the government that it will support this motion to set up a special committee. We will all be responsible for making sure that the committee is meaningful and that the recommendations it may make will be followed up.

As I am sure the parliamentary secretary is aware, the Oppal commission in British Columbia just finished its public inquiry and

came out with its report in December. Although the process was criticized and many groups were not heard, the fact is that the recommendations in Mr. Oppal's report are very important.

Is the parliamentary secretary aware of its recommendations, because many of them do pertain to the federal government? Is her government considering these recommendations, and how does it intend to follow them up?

This is a very important matter to those of us from Vancouver who have gone through the grief and the tragedy of the missing women in the downtown east side.

**Ms. Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay:** Mr. Speaker, I do not think there is a member of Parliament from British Columbia, such as she and I, who is not keenly aware of how that inquiry unfolded. The results of that have come out. Although, as she correctly said, there were some criticisms made, the fact is that it attempted to dig deeper into the root causes of this tragic issue as well as to recognize where it sits today.

I would think that the special committee we are talking about, which would be a bipartisan committee, would have an opportunity to look at those recommendations in more depth. Of course, the mandate will be to come up with a game plan and recommendations moving forward.

We want lasting change. There has been a lot of effort already put in by the government on front-line funding both to identify the problem and to come up with strategies to address it. However, the government recognizes that more needs to be done. We are looking forward to participating in that committee.

•(1100)

**Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP):** Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for St. Paul's for bringing this important motion to the House, and the hon. Parliamentary Secretary for her remarks.

This is obviously an issue that touches us all. We are deeply concerned about the failure to respond to crimes and our seeming inability and lack of political will to prevent them from occurring.

There is a very specific proposal that I think has real promise. It is not the whole solution but one small piece. I would be grateful to hear the Parliamentary Secretary's view on it. My understanding is that the only barrier to implementing this idea is money, yet it would cost much less than we spent last year on celebrating the War of 1812.

The idea is a DNA databank. It has been studied in committee. The idea is that at a crime scene of a murder where we have what is called a Jane or a John Doe, the information could be cross-referenced back to missing persons' information. It is a sensible thing. It is known as Lindsey's law in honour of a young woman named Lindsey from my riding who went missing when she was 14-years-old. It is coming up to 20 years ago that it occurred.

What is my hon. colleague's view on the importance of bringing in a DNA databank?

**Ms. Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for supporting the creation of the special committee, as it would appear from her remarks.

*Business of Supply*

Many initiatives have already been undertaken and many others are under review. This is a complex issue and I think it is unfortunate that in the rhetoric from the opposition, we hear extreme language such that we have done nothing and that we never pay attention. That is simply not true.

Among our many initiatives has been establishing the new National Centre for Missing Persons; enhancing the Canadian Police Information Centre's database; creating a national website to help match older missing persons cases and unidentified human remains; supporting the development of school and community pilot projects aimed at reducing vulnerability to violence among young aboriginal women; supporting the development and adaptation of victims' services so that they are culturally appropriate for aboriginal people; developing a comprehensive list of best practices to help communities, law enforcement and justice partners in future work; working with aboriginal communities to develop their own adapted community safety plans; and supporting the development and distribution of public awareness materials. The list is extensive.

However, it is obviously a crisis and a tragic issue, and we agree that we should all be part of ongoing work and solutions. If there are innovative ideas to bring forward, I would hope they would be brought to the committee.

**Mr. David Wilks (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, certainly the Oppal inquiry in British Columbia showed that police forces could have done a better job in communicating some of the unfortunate incidents regarding first nation people in the past.

I wonder if the Parliamentary Secretary could tell the House how our government is working with police forces and first nation people across Canada to ensure that they co-operate and work together to have something positive in the future moving forward?

**Ms. Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay:** Mr. Speaker, I know before coming here to join us, my colleague had extensive background in law enforcement so he brings a particular expertise to all these issues, and I appreciate his ongoing interest.

This is a very complex issue, a tragic issue and one that we continue to work on with partners. Those partners include law enforcement agencies. I mentioned before that we have specific aboriginal justice strategies that we pursue. We also work with our provincial and territorial counterparts because in a lot of circumstances it is the provinces and territories that are closer in terms of administering justice than the federal government. It is something about which all Canadians need to be concerned, and all Canadians should be working toward solutions. I believe there is a commitment among the Canadian population to see us working on this issue and hopefully, as I said before, to work toward lasting change.

We do that in part through helping law enforcement agencies have better and more modern tools to do their job. However, we also need the public's help. We need the members of the public to come forward and let law enforcement agencies know what they know, so we can all work together to put this tragic chapter behind us.

• (1105)

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the sensitivity in the sense that the government has recognized the value of the opposition motion that has been put forward by my colleague.

My question for the member regards the ability of the committee to reach out to the different communities that have been so profoundly impacted. To what degree does she feel it is important that this committee go beyond the borders of Ottawa to solicit the important information that should be gathered, and provide others the opportunity to participate in some fashion or another, ideally through presentation, and so forth? I would appreciate her thoughts on that.

**Ms. Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay:** Mr. Speaker, as my colleague knows, all parliamentary committees have their own rules and procedures, including special committees. I certainly hope that, as part of the mandate of this committee, we will have the opportunity to reach out to aboriginal communities. Whether that means bringing some people here or physically going there is yet to be determined.

However, there is no doubt that we need to engage aboriginal communities and organizations in the solutions, along with government. We cannot do it alone and that is part of what I am hoping to convey here today: we need public support; we need the support of Parliament; we need the support of our federal organizations and our provincial and territorial counterparts. We need to come together on an issue that we now recognize and, unfortunately, have recognized for many years as something we need to address both with front-line action, which we have been doing, and with a further look through the special committee as to solutions.

**Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with my colleague, the member for Vancouver East.

Our message for Parliament today is that enough is enough; that no other woman, no other aboriginal woman, should go missing or be murdered in Canada.

Aboriginal women in this country, in 2013, are five to seven times more likely to die from violence than any other woman. What is wrong with this story? What is wrong with this picture? What are people doing wrong? Where is the federal government. Why is it not listening to the voices of the families of those who have lost their sisters, their daughters, their mothers, their friends; to the voices of aboriginal organizations such as the Native Women's Association, such as the Assembly of First Nations; to aboriginal leaders such as chiefs, grand chiefs, the National Chief; to civil society, organizations like Human Rights Watch from the United States that came out and spent time in northern British Columbia and sat down with women who were abused and sat down with families of women who were taken away? Why is the Conservative federal government unwilling to listen to all of these voices and unwilling to call a national public inquiry into missing and murdered aboriginal women?

[*Translation*]

In Canada, aboriginal women are seven times more likely to die from violence than other women.

*Business of Supply*

I will repeat that there are more than 600 cases of missing or murdered aboriginal women in Canada. The initiative of the Native Women's Association of Canada shows that 55% of these women disappeared in the last 10 years. Two-thirds of these cases were in western Canada. The majority of the women attacked were under 31 years old, and 80% of them left children behind.

The cases that have occurred in the last 10 years account for 10% of Canada's murdered women, and yet aboriginal women make up only 3% of Canada's female population.

Yesterday, Human Rights Watch, a renowned international organization, released a report concerning allegations of abuse of aboriginal women in British Columbia. Members of this organization interviewed women and their families about abuse or the loss of a female family member. They talked about the highway of tears, which is a national disgrace.

Whether it was on the Highway of Tears, in downtown Vancouver, Regina, Edmonton, Winnipeg, Toronto, Montreal, Halifax, Quebec City or Saint John's, at the far reaches of our country, in communities like Manto Sipi Cree Nation, God's River, Pimicikamak First Nation, Norway House Cree Nation or Opaskwayak Cree Nation, in cities and towns like Thompson and The Pas or any other place that has a story to tell about aboriginal women taken from our homes, buildings, streets or forests, these women disappeared without justice for them or their families.

• (1110)

[*English*]

They disappeared without the most basic sentiment of justice. These women have disappeared and have been murdered without the answers we need to have to make this stop.

What are we all here to do other than to build a better today and tomorrow for the people of Canada?

What is the government here to do other than to answer the demands of families that have gone through the biggest tragedy of losing their loved one?

How many times does this have to take place before the federal government will act and call a national public inquiry?

We need a national inquiry, as many people say, so we can find the answers and look at the factors behind this national tragedy and the fact that aboriginal women go missing at a rate much higher than anyone else, because they are aboriginal. We need to look at the extreme marginalization and extreme poverty. I do not know how much time government members have spent in some of these communities from which women go missing or if they have sat down with the families of those who have been lost. I have sat down with the families of Lorna Blacksmith and Sunshine Wood and met the family of Helen Betty Osborne, women who were taken from their communities in northern Manitoba and are never coming back.

I and my colleagues and others have seen the pain first hand and heard the cry for justice. The question is why the federal government is unwilling to listen to these voices, to say yes to seeking that justice together, to finding the answers, committing to action and putting a stop to the third world living conditions and extreme poverty that aboriginal women in communities across this country face. Let us

realize that we do not fund education properly. Look at the protests on Parliament Hill today. There are children protesting and appealing to their own federal government for equal education. What country are we in? This is Canada and it is unacceptable. Why are the first peoples of this land still living in abject poverty and paying the highest price by losing family members, the women and life-givers, of their nations?

Not only has the federal government failed to act until this point in calling for a national inquiry, but we have seen some of the most severe cuts in these last few years to funds that go directly to both finding the answers and alleviating the situations that aboriginal women in Canada face. The list is long, but I will mention a few. Most important is Sisters in Spirit, an organization that did nothing more than bring families together and that began the arduous task of finding data and connecting stories, whether they are from northern B.C., the Northwest Territories or the east coast, and putting those stories into numbers: 600-plus women, the average age 31 and many younger, more than 80% leaving children behind. That organization is gone.

The Native Women's Association, the primary national organization that advocates for aboriginal women, was cut. The First Nations Statistical Institute is gone. The National Aboriginal Health Organization is gone. The Prairie Women's Health Centre of Excellence and its sister organizations are gone. The basic funding for organizations at the local level is gone.

Our message to Parliament is that enough is enough; assez c'est assez. It is time to act. This is an issue of life and death, and it is up to us to take the leadership, up to the government to take the leadership and commit to bringing justice to these families, these women, these communities and our country. Only will it do that when it begins by committing to a national public inquiry and a commitment to action. We in the NDP stand in solidarity and are proud to do so. We will not rest until a national inquiry is called and no other aboriginal woman dies in Canada.

• (1115)

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member for Churchill's passion. We need to recognize that Ottawa needs to play a leading role.

I posed this question to the government member in regard to the opposition motion. As a political party, we feel it is important to gather the unanimous support of the House in moving this issue forward. However, it is also important that the committee look beyond Ottawa.

Would the member for Churchill support the Liberal Party's suggestion that the committee go beyond the city of Ottawa. I realize parliamentary committees make decisions as a committee. However, what about the idea of taking this outside of Ottawa to some of the communities in British Columbia and in my province of Manitoba to solicit that representation? Would she and her party support that?

*Business of Supply*

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** Mr. Speaker, we have expressed our support for this opposition motion. We need to see action. We need a national public inquiry. That would be something that would truly capture the scope of this national tragedy. That means going out to communities and cities all across the country, from coast to coast to coast, to listen to the families and the members of these communities. It also means a commitment to something that they also want, which is a national public inquiry. Now is the time.

• (1120)

**Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP):** Mr. Speaker, I want to share with the hon. member for Churchill how deeply moving and how clear her passion is for this issue. She personally has spent time, as have I, talking to the families of missing and murdered aboriginal women. I absolutely share the commitment of her party and my party to a full national inquiry that would meet the demands of Sisters in Spirit and the organizations that are gathered outside today.

In that light, I also support this motion. Certainly a parliamentary inquiry and the ability for it to travel would be useful, but it is not in itself sufficient to deal with the legacy issues and how we go forward together.

How can we build from the parliamentary committee process to a national inquiry, with the resources necessary to really deal with this crisis?

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the shared sentiment.

This is about leadership. It is a test of leadership, the leadership of the government, of the Prime Minister and of the commitment and apology he made to residential school survivors for a new day and a new chapter.

Unfortunately, aboriginal women in Canada have continued to die at the same rate they did before the apology. Organizations and voices that were there to support them and prevent these deaths from happening in some ways are now gone.

Therefore, my question to the government is this. Will it realize that enough is enough, that now is the time to act and that leadership means calling a national public inquiry into missing and murdered aboriginal women?

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I sincerely thank my colleague from Thompson for her passion and her dedication to aboriginal communities. I would also like to commend her for her clear explanation of this situation.

What results would she like to see from the inquiry she is proposing? How will this help aboriginal women and the entire community?

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her support on this very serious issue that is extremely important to us as MPs.

An inquiry is needed to answer the questions of families, communities, aboriginal people and Canadians, as well as to find answers, end the violence against aboriginal women and all women, and really make progress.

Without a national public inquiry, we will be unable to meet the demands of these families.

The Prime Minister must take action immediately.

[*English*]

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, there have been consultations among the parties and if you seek it, I believe you would find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That, at the conclusion of today's debate on the opposition motion in the name of the member for St. Paul's, all questions necessary to dispose of the motion be deemed put and a recorded division deemed requested and deferred to Tuesday, February 26 at the expiry of the time provided for government orders.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Deputy 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)

**Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, first, I am very pleased to follow the NDP member for Churchill, after her very powerful and passionate speech on this issue. I know this is an issue that we all care very deeply about.

I want to begin my remarks by reflecting on a very important event that will take place today in the downtown east side at Main and Hastings. Today will be the 22nd annual women's memorial march that has taken place in that community.

I attended the first march in 1991 when I was still a city councillor. It was really the first time that the community came together in an outpouring and recognition of the terrible violence that was taking place in the community where aboriginal women were missing, or were murdered, or were presumed murdered or were sex workers.

I remember the march along Powell Street and we began next to a dumpster where earlier the body parts of a murdered woman had been found. I will not use her name because her family has asked that it not be used. As we walked down Powell Street, Dundas Street, down to Main and Hastings to the Carnegie Centre, there was a smudge ceremony and her family was there. It was the first time in the downtown east side that there was a public coming together in recognition of what was taking place in that community. Many women had been disappearing prior to that. It was at that point the community started calling for a public inquiry in B.C. into the missing and murdered women. We all knew and believed that a serial killer was likely responsible.

Here we are two decades later and much has happened. There have been criminal trials, the largest mass murder trial in Canada, the Pickton trial. We have had the Oppal Commission. We have had the United Nations begin its own inquiry into the status and the missing and murdered aboriginal women.

*Business of Supply*

Today we are debating this motion, and it is an important step. It looks like the motion will be passed, which is good. However, I want to remember the women in the downtown east side and thank the organizers for what they are doing today, Marlene George, who is the chair of the committee, and many other women who have been involved in this issue. Even though they were grieving for the loss of family members, they refused to be silenced and placated.

What I have learned from this issue is it is probably the greatest tragedy that we have seen in the downtown east side and the community is still feeling the grief of what has taken place. However, I have also learned that the huge systemic issues that are involved are something we simply cannot ignore. I believe we all have a responsibility. Primarily governments have a responsibility, but whether it is municipal, provincial or federal, we all have a responsibility to come to terms with what has taken place. In coming to terms, we have to face the grievous injustices facing aboriginal people, especially women, and we have to respond in a way that acknowledges and understands the historic racism, inequality, poverty and discrimination that has resulted from a long history of colonialism in Canada.

Unless we can begin from that place of understanding, I worry and fear that we will not have learned what we need in order to move forward. That is one very important principle to me, the understanding of the root causes.

The second thing is to understand that society has failed these women at every level, whether it is judicial, political, cultural, no matter what way we look at it, society has failed these women.

● (1125)

These women were marginalized. I am speaking primarily about the downtown east side, but as we know, there are 600 women who are also missing and may be murdered across the country. These women became so marginalized, they became like non-people, and so their disappearances were never taken seriously. Now we have the reports and the analysis of what went wrong, and still there is some finger pointing: the RCMP, the Vancouver Police and other police forces in other parts of the country.

The second most important thing is to understand how everything failed. We expect our governments, our society, the programs we have and the values we have as Canadians to take care of people when they are hurting. Yet in this instance, especially in the downtown east side because most of the women were sex workers, they were just dismissed. It was not taken seriously when they disappeared and when their family members made complaints. We have a lot to learn.

I attended the Oppal commission when it released its report on December 17, not very long ago. Although there were many criticisms about the Oppal commission process, the inquiry and the fact that many community organizations did not have the legal standing and resources they needed to participate in the inquiry, nevertheless, that report is there. It compels all of us to ensure these recommendations are followed up.

When I spoke to Justice Oppal before the commission actually began its formal work, what I said to him and what I still believe today is that the most important aspect of his work was finding a

way to ensure that whatever recommendations he came up with would not be forgotten, that they would not just sit somewhere. We have seen that with many reports, unfortunately. We could go back to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples in 1996. It was a three-volume document. Most of those recommendations have never been followed up.

I say today that if we have the unanimous will of the House, and it looks like we do and that is good, to set up a special committee, then we have to make a commitment to the community, to those families, that we will actually make it meaningful and that it will not be a special committee that does the routine stuff. It must actually be a process that will look at the other reports and recommendations.

We heard the parliamentary secretary say earlier that she believes the Oppal commission recommendations should be looked at as they pertain to the federal government. That is certainly very important, but we have to make a commitment to look at real outcomes in terms of the judicial system, in terms of poverty, income inequality, racism, discrimination, the standing of women in our society and particularly the standing of aboriginal women. That is something we have the power to do, individually and collectively and through our political parties.

I am glad the motion is being debated today. It is a step. As we have heard from the member for Churchill, we too believe there should be a national public inquiry, and we will not give up on that. I am sure people in the community will not let us forget that.

We have an immediate task, it appears, to set up this special committee. In the memory of the women in the downtown east side and to all of the activists, the family members and people who are there today at the Main and Hastings gathering at noon, and there will probably be more than 5,000 people, I want to say for myself and for my colleagues that we give that commitment. We will not let go of this issue. We will press for justice. We will work in a genuine and meaningful way and we will make sure that the community voices are heard, because they know the truth. They know what needs to be done. In a way, we have to give our leadership, but we also have to understand their leadership and work in co-operation to make sure those changes do come about.

● (1130)

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Lise St-Denis (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Vancouver East for her speech and her comments. She is very familiar with the issue.

I would like to ask her how she interprets the fact that there was no outcome to the inquiry. At one point, she said that society has abandoned these women. In light of all the studies, research and reports that are out there, why does she think that society has abandoned these women and that nothing happened in the end?

*Business of Supply*

•(1135)

[*English*]

**Ms. Libby Davies:** Mr. Speaker, that is a very important question. I think it speaks to power in our society, and who is heard and who is not. For a sex worker in the downtown east side or a poor aboriginal woman in a northern community, the system does not respond. Politicians do not respond.

I think we have a conscience in that we have to reflect upon what has taken place. I would ask my hon. colleagues why it is that the Liberals waited until the Conservatives were in power to call for this special committee, when they themselves in the motion say that it has gone on for three decades. This is something that we all have to reflect upon.

It is never too late to do something, but I think we have to find answers to the questions the member raises and make sure that a special committee, and hopefully at some point a national, public inquiry, can bring justice and answers.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Vancouver East for her speech and for the work she does to help her constituents.

I lived in Vancouver in the 1980s and her speech reminded me of how I often walked down Main Street and East Hastings Street on Vancouver's east side. She provided a very apt description of how our society no longer sees these first nations men and women.

The hon. member for Churchill is calling for a public inquiry into the disappearance of these women to ensure that they never disappear from our minds and, especially, our hearts. It is very important.

I would like my colleague to elaborate on how we can make people remember these men and women, particularly, these aboriginal women.

[*English*]

**Ms. Libby Davies:** Mr. Speaker, I spoke earlier about how this tragedy has been an incredible grief in the community, and we are talking about a whole community. It is hard to understand that. However, people do not always know that while that grief is happening, the community has also in many ways been very resilient.

There is a very strong community in the downtown east side. Literally, people refused to be silent. They refused to stop raising this issue. They have compelled all of us, whether it was a public inquiry, provincially or nationally, or dealing with police departments and how they respond to marginalized communities. I find that very inspiring.

It is one of those interesting ironies of life where on the one hand there is grief and tragedy, but out of that has come a tremendous strength that is compelling us to this moment where we all feel, "Wow, can we get above the partisan politics here and actually do something?" I hope this is one of those moments where that will happen in the Canadian Parliament.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Lise St-Denis (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to participate in this debate on violence against aboriginal women on this Liberal opposition day.

For decades, we have been watching helplessly as far too many aboriginal women in Canada have been subjected to violence. Violence in all forms is perpetrated against these women who have little or no recourse to put a stop to these heinous crimes. Physical and psychological violence, disappearances, murders, rapes and assault are common occurrences for women in many communities in this country. We know these victims' faces, but we do not know what they go through every day. They are mothers, teenagers, seniors, young girls, women from all walks of life, who are victims of assault by violent men.

The perpetrators of these crimes may come from their communities or from institutional settings. They may also come from neighbouring communities—cities or towns in our provinces. They are brothers, fathers, friends, authority figures or perfect strangers. The victims also live in urban areas, where they end up falling prey to pimps and criminals of all kinds.

All of these horrors committed against aboriginal women are a disgrace to all of Canada, our justice system and our institutions.

•(1140)

Human Rights Watch is decrying the fact that police are responsible for some of this violence. The media is giving wide coverage to this topic and human rights organizations are speaking out about it.

But how can we really know the truth about these allegations? What can we do about this seemingly institutionalized violence? How can we understand the scope of this violence, which just keeps increasing despite the efforts of many aboriginal communities?

The number of victims is staggering in light of the proportion of the population they represent. Why are aboriginal women subject to repeated abuse while public authorities do nothing to intervene?

We all know that Canada is not free from violence against women. However, for women in our country's other communities, our streets, parks, towns and cities are relatively safe.

Every day, violence against aboriginal women underscores their economic and political impotence in a world where their pain goes unheeded. As of late, our debates in the House have focused on the aboriginal reality, because we see the fragility of certain communities as a historic injustice that continues unabated.

But these women, who are among the poorest of the poor, are even more alone. They are fighting for their lives, yet their plight is still on the periphery of our nation's worldly hurts. From west to east, first nations women are the social glue that hold these admirable, resilient people together. They are often the guardians of language and traditions. However, as in all world conflicts, they are the ones most often forgotten in treaties, conventions and armistices.

*Business of Supply*

We have yet to integrate the history of first nations into our national history. Imagine what it is like for these women, who have been stripped of their rights by invaders. We are perpetuating the colonial cynicism about these women and girls, who leave elected representatives indifferent to their plight, to say the least.

If these women were from our communities, we would have acted with 10, 100, 1,000 times more urgency, but we feel they are far away and out of our reach. But our collective history is made up of these inequitable relationships that still exist today.

We should take a few moments to think about these battered women. Our thoughts must lead to actions, and those actions must repair the effects of past stigmas and give meaning to justice and equality.

Statistics on this type of violence have been compiled by many Canadian researchers, and it is important to recognize the enormous gap that separates aboriginal communities from other communities in Canada.

A 2009 study by the Public Health Agency of Canada found that aboriginal women were three times more likely to be victims of violence than non-aboriginal women in Canada. According to Statistics Canada, aboriginal women are also seven times more likely to be murdered than non-aboriginal women in Canada.

Clearly, these are the cases of violence that are reported to the police; however, it seems that, given the circumstances, many of these crimes are not reported. Many of these victims live in isolated areas, even within cities. The lack of social services and medical care in many communities seems to indicate that, through no fault of their own, victims of such violence are caught in the vicious circle of victimization, which inevitably leads to recurrent mental and physical health problems and poverty.

The same study shows that this problem often affects young aboriginal women, who are overrepresented in the 15 to 34 age group.

The violence against these women slowly came to light in the Canadian media as a result of the high number of unsolved cases of missing women from these communities.

Since the summer of 2012, the Assembly of First Nations and other groups have been calling for a national inquiry on missing and murdered aboriginal women. The Assembly of First Nations estimates that 600 aboriginal women have gone missing or been murdered in Canada over the past two decades. There is a link to be made between the high number of disappearances and our decision-makers' disinterest in this regard.

Ignorance of the reality of these women continues as a result of the paternalistic system that the federal government uses in dealing with first nations. The endemic violence that these women are experiencing is no longer confined to remote communities; it concerns all of us. The violence against Métis, Inuit and first nations women goes hand in hand with the pervasive racism and sexism that continue to plague our relationship with first nations.

We could reference countless criminal investigations that would reveal another aspect of the public's indifference to the fate of these women, but we must work diligently to find the causes of and

solutions to this violence by showing our support for a commission of inquiry that will no doubt expose our lack of expediency in administering justice for these aboriginal women.

Like the Native Women's Association of Canada, we believe that a national public inquiry and a committee, as my colleague has proposed, are crucial in order to document the disparities that exist in our justice system regarding these women. We are very concerned about the lack of judicial resources available for these abused women.

We are outraged that many criminal investigations have gone nowhere and that the list of missing women continues to grow, while we still have not been able to find any solutions.

These disappearances and all this violence will only get worse if we cannot come up with any ways to achieve social justice and defend the rights of these women. We must give aboriginal women the means to express their grievances in a public forum and provide them with legal and police services tailored specifically to them. The lack of lawyers, social workers and police officers trained to deal with the reality facing aboriginal women helps perpetuate this cycle of systemic violence.

• (1145)

We cannot help the cause of aboriginal women without providing them with the services they need to file complaints and, more importantly, without protecting them from potential abusers.

A public inquiry with no assurance of support from the political forces across the floor would be doomed to failure. Documenting the reality facing aboriginal women is one thing; following through with meaningful proposals on how to provide justice is another.

• (1150)

**Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech.

In Canada, the disappearance and murder of aboriginal women and girls was already a known problem when the Liberals were in power.

In 1996, official statistics indicated that aboriginal women were five times more likely to die as a result of violence than any other group of Canadian women.

What does the member have to say about the Liberal government's failure to take action?

**Ms. Lise St-Denis:** Mr. Speaker, I was not here at that time.

I do not believe that the Liberal party did nothing on this issue. Things happen over time. We have never considered the problems of aboriginal women in our history. No one knows the history of aboriginal peoples. Things are changing slowly at present. Dealing with the problems of aboriginal women is something new. We have started addressing the problem, and we must get on with it.

We have to determine what we can do now. There have been many inquiries and proposals. We have to see where we are in all of this. It is no use asking why nothing was done, and I am not sure that it is true. In any event, if the Liberals did nothing, the time has come to do something. We must get to work.



*Business of Supply*

That is the second time that the Liberal Party has been asked that question this morning. I can list everything that has been done, but that is not what we are talking about.

[*English*]

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, one of the most highlighted cases in the history of the province of Manitoba was that of Helen Betty Osborne. When I get the opportunity to address the House I plan to talk about Helen. That tragic incident in the 1970s showed the important role that provincial governments also need to play. Yes, we do need strong national leadership on this issue, but part of that national leadership should also look at what the provinces could do. It was a provincial inquiry that ultimately led to many of the answers and recommendations. The NDP put the inquiry off for years and it took a change in government to get that inquiry into place.

Does the member believe it is time that we look at having a larger strategy? Would a public inquiry be the real answer to resolving this issue? Hopefully our resolution will pass today and the committee can go across the country to different communities so that people would be afforded the opportunity to participate.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Lise St-Denis:** Mr. Speaker, yes, we need a national public inquiry, but I would go further than that.

What we need is an attitude shift, starting with the House of Commons, and then in the general public. Let us be honest: aboriginal peoples have always been disrespected. They have never been taken into account. In the beginning, there were three countries in Canada, but everyone studied Canada's history with two countries.

So as part of this public inquiry, people would have to start paying attention to aboriginal peoples, consider what they contribute and consider our own attitude. Aboriginal people have always been ignored. So if the inquiry does not lead to an overall shift in culture, starting with the members of the House, nothing will ever be resolved. That is how I see it. There needs to be a profound cultural and attitude shift towards abused aboriginal women and aboriginal culture in general.

• (1155)

**Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, since 2001, for more than a decade now, the member for Vancouver East has been talking about women who have disappeared from the Main and East Hastings neighbourhoods.

I looked back to see what the member for St. Paul's did on this subject when the Liberals were in power. On May 13, 2003, she said she was embarrassed by their performance in aboriginal health. Even the member for St. Paul's was embarrassed by the Liberal government's performance during those years.

This is a problem that has been going on for over 30 years. It is completely untrue for the member to claim that no one was aware of the violence against aboriginal women. We were aware of the problem.

I want to ask the member again how she explains the Liberal government's inaction on this issue during the 1990s, 1980s and 1970s? We have known about this issue for more than 30 years. Why did the Liberals stand idly by for all those years?

**Ms. Lise St-Denis:** Mr. Speaker, to begin with, I did not say that the problem of violence against aboriginal women did not exist before. I lived in Vancouver in 2000, and there was most certainly a problem. That is not what I said.

I said that we have to look at the problem from a different angle. Pointing fingers at the Liberal Party for what it did or failed to do will not solve the problem now. It is an easy question to ask. People will blame the Conservatives for not doing some things, the Liberals for not doing others, and even the NDP. That is not the problem.

The real question is whether a national committee should be struck so that we can finally find a solution to this problem. It is now 2013, and as the member said, the problem has been around for 30 years. It is time to sit down and think about the problem, not time to ask why nobody did this sooner. Ask that question about any issue, and everyone would have their reasons.

**Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, my colleague is the member for the riding of the former Prime Minister of Canada, who was also the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development for part of his career.

As the motion states, this problem has persisted for three decades. So why create the committee now? Why was this not done earlier? This is a crucial question. We are not against creating a committee. We actually want to go further still and launch a special inquiry. The NDP wants to move forward.

What does the member think this committee will accomplish? What tangible results will ensue from the committee's work? And why was this not done earlier?

**Ms. Lise St-Denis:** Mr. Speaker, the member is absolutely right. There are dozens of committee studies and reports about this issue. Can we look forward to actual progress and a shift in attitude? The government has been producing reports on aboriginals for a long time. My colleagues may be interested to note that the Kelowna accord was signed by the Liberal government.

Still, we never did enough to help abused women. We reported what was going on, but we never seriously considered how to solve this particular problem. We talked about all of the people who were responsible for the violence. So how can we reduce the level of violence and come up with a solution?

I mentioned providing legal support to help these women talk about their experiences. They have never really had an opportunity to express themselves. They were not given a way to say what they were feeling, which might have led them to figure out solutions to the problem themselves.

• (1200)

[*English*]

**Ms. Candice Bergen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate very much this opportunity to rise in support of the motion before us today.

*Business of Supply*

Canadians know that our government is committed to making sure that our streets and communities are safer places for everyone, and we have taken a number of specific steps to help protect aboriginal women from violence in particular. The murder and abduction of women in this country is completely unacceptable. We will continue to move forward with a vigorous criminal justice agenda to address these issues. These initiatives are numerous and multifaceted. I would like to speak briefly about some of them related to public safety, as well as some of the steps we have taken to enhance and strengthen the tools that law enforcement officials have to respond to cases of missing and murdered women.

Budget 2010 allocated significant funding to address the high number of missing and murdered aboriginal women. This will improve law enforcement and justice system responses to cases of missing and murdered women and also support victims. This commitment was in addition to significant investments we have made in a number of areas to address the root cause of violence among aboriginal girls and women in particular.

Budget 2010 allocated \$5 million for aboriginal community safety action plans alone. Our government is certainly taking strong action in this area. Our government is also working with first nation, Métis, Inuit and urban aboriginal communities to enhance their capacity to utilize existing resources and to develop safety plans that respond to the unique situations in each one of the communities.

We have also allocated significant resources to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police to ensure that concrete steps are in place to address the issue of missing aboriginal women. The RCMP has established the National Centre for Missing Persons and Unidentified Remains, including a dedicated officer linked to the National Aboriginal Policing Services branch. This centre is designed to assist all Canadian police agencies in dealing with missing persons cases.

Funding from our government has allowed the force to enhance the Canadian Police Information Centre in order to capture additional missing persons data, such as biological and cultural affinity. The RCMP is also now developing the very first national missing children, persons and unidentified remains database in order to provide law enforcement, medical examiners and chief coroners with enhanced analysis across jurisdictions. The RCMP National Centre for Missing Persons and Unidentified Remains website at [Canadasmising.ca](http://Canadasmising.ca) will allow members of the public to report tips for ongoing cases so that some level of closure may be found for families of victims.

These initiatives are on top of RCMP training that specifically advances an understanding of aboriginal issues within the force. Such training helps law enforcement personnel provide more culturally appropriate policing services, thereby contributing to safer and healthier aboriginal communities. In fact, just moments ago the RCMP released “Gender and Respect—The RCMP Action”, which includes specific measures to recruit more aboriginal members.

The RCMP investigates all cases of missing and murdered people in its jurisdiction, regardless of sex, ethnicity, background or lifestyle. Resources and investigational tools are assigned by the circumstances of each case and not by the victim's background, heritage or lifestyle. Missing persons complaints are given investigative priority by the RCMP and national policy and

investigative procedures exist to ensure that every measure is taken to locate people who are missing and reported missing.

The RCMP works in collaboration with a number of partners to address the health and safety of aboriginal women, including other law enforcement agencies, provincial and territorial governments, as well as aboriginal and non-aboriginal agencies within the public. The RCMP is also leading task forces across the country dedicated to actively reviewing files of missing and murdered women, including aboriginal women. These task forces will spread across the country and work collaboratively to address this important issue by focusing on, among other things, information sharing, file management, file coordination and disclosure that can be shared with other investigative units. Additionally, RCMP criminal operations officers from each province and territory regularly meet face to face to discuss operational issues of national significance, including missing and murdered aboriginal women.

● (1205)

Over the past number of months, Canadians have heard some extremely disturbing reports about the conduct of just some RCMP officers. That is why our government has made it clear that we will work closely with the Commissioner of the RCMP to take action to restore pride and confidence in Canada's national police force. That is why we introduced the enhancing RCMP accountability act to strengthen the review and complaints body for the RCMP, establish a process for handling serious criminal issues involving RCMP officers, as well as streamline the management of RCMP human resources.

Disciplinary matters, even for relatively minor breaches of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Act, have become extremely drawn out and ineffective because all formal sanctions must currently go through a time- and resource-consuming three-person adjudication board, rather than being dealt with, in many cases, by front-line managers like other workplaces.

The legislation our government has introduced would also address these issues by providing front-line managers with the authority to impose a broad range of sanctions, ranging from remedial measures, such as training, to corrective actions, such as forfeited pay, without having to resort to a formal board process.

The discipline board process would also be much speedier and less adversarial. In addition, the new grievance scheme would result in a single grievance and appeal process to replace the host of different ones that exist today, and again, it would provide front-line managers with the opportunity to be involved in the resolution of a grievance early on and directly.

*Business of Supply*

The end result would be that trained professionals would manage and assist in resolving cases, with the focus on early resolution, before a matter is brought before a decision-maker. Front-line managers would have the opportunity to focus on the early resolution of issues, with much-needed support.

The commissioner would be able to designate any person employed by the RCMP as a decision-maker, providing an opportunity to address workplace disputes in a timely fashion, and to draw on the expertise offered by all categories of employees in the RCMP.

Our government has made it a point of pride to always give police the tools they need to do their job. On that front, the new legislation proposed in Bill C-42 would provide the Commissioner of the RCMP with the authority that he currently lacks to make certain fundamental human resource decisions to effectively manage the organization. At the present time, the commissioner lacks the authority to establish and maintain processes for the demotion or discharge of members for administrative reasons, such as loss of security clearance or performance issues. Under the changes proposed by Bill C-42, the commissioner would be given new authority, including the power to demote and discharge members for reason other than conduct. He or she would also have the authority to establish a process for the investigation and resolution of disputes related to harassment in the workplace where the respondent is a member.

We certainly appreciate the report that was issued today by the chair of the commission, and the RCMP is looking forward to Bill C-42 being implemented so that it can also move forward with its constructive plan to end harassment within the workplace. As part of that, it is very important that members of Parliament pass Bill C-42 quickly so that the RCMP can move ahead and put processes in place to deal with some of these very disturbing matters.

Bill C-42 would empower the commissioner for the full exercise of these authorities. That is why it is so vital and why we call upon the NDP specifically to support Bill C-42.

The commissioner would also be given the authority to appoint most commissioned officers, thereby improving the timelines of succession planning.

All of these changes would help to further strengthen and modernize the RCMP, while increasing accountability and improving public perception and confidence in the force.

Another very important set of amendments in Bill C-42 would establish a new independent civilian review and complaints commission. The new commission would have significantly enhanced investigative powers compared to those of the existing body, and the authority to work hand in hand with other review bodies. The new commission would bring civilian review of the RCMP in line with other modern review bodies.

● (1210)

The existing civilian review body can and does investigate complaints about RCMP conduct, but it has no authority to compel witnesses to appear or to testify under oath when it does so, unless it holds a public hearing or inquiry. That needs to change. We need to give it more powers, and that is what we would do under Bill C-42.

At this time it does not have broad access to RCMP information, and that is a problem. It cannot share information or conduct joint investigations with other review bodies, and that is a problem. Bill C-42 would move to change that.

The changes our government is proposing in this bill would provide the new complaints body with broad access to relevant and necessary information that is relevant to an investigation. It would give the complaints body the authority to summon and enforce the appearance of persons and compel them to give evidence for all complaint investigations and policy reviews.

It would give the chair of the new body the authority to initiate police review of RCMP activities; and it would allow the complaints body to share information with other review bodies, as well as conduct joint complaint investigations where the complaint arises from integrated policy operations.

The changes our government is proposing would make it easier for the public to access the complaints process by allowing them to file a complaint either with the RCMP, a provincial police force review body, as well as the new civilian review and complaints body. Very importantly, the legislation would increase the transparency of investigation into serious incidents involving a member of the RCMP.

In cases where there is death or serious injury, the RCMP must refer the investigation to an existing provincial body responsible for investigating incidents involving police. Where no such body exists, the RCMP would be required to refer the investigation to another police force.

Only where neither of these options is available would the RCMP conduct the investigation. In these cases it would need to inform the new commission of the measures it has taken to ensure the impartiality of the investigation. These new rules also permit the appointment of an independent observer to assess the impartiality of these investigations when they are led by the RCMP or another police force.

All of these things would help to further transform the RCMP into a modern, efficient, transparent and accountable police force, a very important aspect of looking into the issue of murdered and missing aboriginal women. I certainly urge the NDP to stop disagreeing and to work with us to reform the RCMP.

In addition to the other comprehensive steps our government has taken, a modern transparent and fully accountable national police force would go a long way to enhancing the safety of all Canadians. Again, I urge all members to support that bill because it goes a long way to helping find and rectify the issue of murdered and missing aboriginal women and girls.

There is no question that the friends, families and loved ones of these women have experienced and continue to experience great pain and great sorrow. They need and they deserve justice, as do all victims of violence.

*Business of Supply*

Our government has always been committed to standing up for victims and to ensuring that all offenders are held to account for their actions. In fact, as the Prime Minister recently announced, we will be bringing forward a victims' bill of rights. This would enshrine in law the principle that we can no longer go down the failed Liberal road of putting the rights of convicted criminals ahead of victims'. That is why we have taken the steps we have.

Ours is a government of action. Action can and will achieve the results all of us want for aboriginal people, as well as for all Canadians. Our government is committed to moving forward together.

• (1215)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, apparently my Conservative colleague does not think that the NDP has done enough to support the cause of missing and murdered aboriginal women. I would like to ask her the same question.

The Conservative government funded Sisters in Spirit, an initiative to compile a list of missing and murdered aboriginal women across Canada. One Conservative member even said that it was federal money well spent. But then the government stopped funding the initiative, as though the problem had been solved, as though all of the women had been counted and the problem of missing and murdered women could be swept under the rug.

I am glad that my Conservative colleague brought this issue to the forefront because I do not think that the Conservative government has done enough. It is all well and good to talk about Bill C-42, which is a bit too broad, but this is about a serious problem facing aboriginal women.

Will the Conservative government reinstate funding for the Sisters in Spirit initiative, which was playing a crucial role in Canadian history?

[*English*]

**Ms. Candice Bergen:** Mr. Speaker, in response to my hon. colleague's question, I did not say that the NDP members were not supporting the cause of ending the incidence of murdered and missing aboriginal women. However, they are clearly not supporting Bill C-42, which would give the RCMP the much-needed tools it needs to be more accountable and transparent. As well, it would stop harassment within its workplace. Therefore, they need to take ownership of that.

I am very proud of what our government has done with respect to funding. It has allocated \$25 million over five years to give new tools to law enforcement, as well as \$2.3 million to the Native Women's Association and to the work that Sisters in Spirit is doing. Therefore, we are putting action behind our words.

I do want to ask the NDP and the Liberals this. When we are talking about murdered and missing aboriginal women, one of the greatest detriments is that aboriginal women do not have access to the real matrimonial property they have acquired, which puts them in poverty. If the opposition members are concerned about murdered and missing aboriginal women, which I know they are, why will they not support our initiative to give aboriginal women real

matrimonial property rights on reserve? That is an answer they have to give.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Djaouida Sellah (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to the speech given by the member opposite. I can assure her right away that I will support the motion.

However, this problem has been around for three decades. None of the previous governments, whether Conservative or Liberal, have done anything but gather statistics. That does not eliminate violence against aboriginal women and girls, stop them from going missing or keep them from being expelled from reserves.

I had the chance to meet with the group Sisters in Spirit and see their documentary on the Highway of Tears. I was in tears. I think that we are taking a step in the right direction today, but it is not enough.

Will the Conservative government agree to hold a national inquiry to determine the causes of the violence against and murders of aboriginal women? Will it put real and practical measures in place to stop the violence against aboriginal women?

[*English*]

**Ms. Candice Bergen:** Mr. Speaker, obviously that is why we are all supporting this motion. We are concerned with the high level of missing and murdered aboriginal women. That is why our government has invested substantial funds.

In addition to that, the RCMP is leading task forces across the country that are dedicated to actively reviewing these files. It is working together with its partners across the provinces.

We have introduced legislation that would crack down on violence of all kinds and toward all Canadians. Therefore, we are putting action behind our words. We are not just talking.

We think action is what is required, and it is certainly a complex and multi-level action plan. However, I would challenge the opposition by saying that part of that is giving aboriginal women the right to real matrimonial property rights on reserve. I have a real problem when women on reserve get divorced and they have absolutely no access to the assets. That is a basic right that empowers women and allows them to move forward and get out of a bad situation.

I think we are all on the same page. However, if the opposition members are putting forward this motion today, they need to give an answer today as to why they will not allow aboriginal women on reserve access to the property they have acquired so that they have the power and ability to move out.

• (1220)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alain Giguère (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, a government's first duty is to defend its citizens.

For 30 years now, nothing has been done. These women's murderers have not been brought to justice. That is a major problem.

*Business of Supply*

It is all well and good for the government to say that it is going to restructure or give new names to old structures under Bill C-42, but that does not bring these murderers to justice.

When will this government finally recognize that there are 800 unsolved cases out there? When will it order police forces to conduct serious investigations to find those who are guilty of crimes against these people?

[English]

**Ms. Candice Bergen:** Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to hear the member talk about putting the bad guys in jail. I hope that means the next time we introduce and put forward legislation to crack down on criminals, including mandatory minimum sentences for serious crimes, that he and his party will support it, because that is exactly it: when violent people are behind bars, they are not out committing murder and hurting women, men and children in our country. I look forward to the member supporting that.

We provide real substantive measures including legislation as well as things like the establishment of a new centre for missing persons. We have enhanced the Canadian Police Information Centre database. We have created a national website to help match older missing persons cases and unidentified human remains. We support the development of school and community pilot projects aimed at reducing vulnerability to violence among young aboriginal women. The list goes on. We continue to do the work. We continue to work with our partners.

We ask the opposition to support our initiatives to keep the bad guys behind bars. We agree with the member on that. In the meantime, let us give women real matrimonial property rights on reserve.

**Mr. David Wilks (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, certainly I take exception to the opposition always saying that everything that happens is the fault of the police. The police in this country examine every murder that comes along to the best of their ability, all the time. There is not one police officer who would not want to do that.

I wonder if the parliamentary secretary could explain some of the good things that the police have done for the aboriginal communities throughout the last 30 years.

**Ms. Candice Bergen:** Mr. Speaker, my colleague is a former RCMP officer. My colleague sitting beside me is an RCMP officer. We have 13 active and off-duty police officers in our caucus. Clearly the work police officers do across this country is stellar, and to put the blame for this issue on police officers is a travesty and avoids the real issue.

Police officers put their lives on the line every day. Anyone who has lived in a northern community, for example, or in a first nation community or reserve will know that there are very specific challenges. We recognize the challenge for individuals like RCMP officers, police, who choose to go there, to serve, to get involved in the community and to care about these people. We thank police for the work they do.

The RCMP accountability act is something for which police themselves are asking. It would strengthen their processes whereby they could deal with different issues within the force. It would give

them more confidence. It would create a better culture. It would even make them better police than they are right now, and we appreciate so much the work they do.

We are very proud of our police force. This is not their fault, and putting blame on one specific organization certainly misses out on what this issue is. Again, there are so many facets to it, but giving women on reserve the ability to be strong and to empower them is one part of helping this issue.

• (1225)

**Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Kingston and the Islands.

I will begin by expressing my sincere condolences to the family and friends who have lost daughters, sisters, cousins, aunts and family. I cannot imagine the depth of their pain and I am profoundly sorry.

Despite their impossible suffering, they walk across Canada for justice. They come to the House of Commons, the people's House, and to the United Nations to ask for help. The chiefs of the Assembly of First Nations pass resolution after resolution demanding that the government establish a public inquiry into the disappearances and killings. Time and again, when they have appeared in front of the House, they have been left disappointed and wanting, and again, I must apologize.

Where is the outrage and the horror of each member of the House when we learn that 50% of the violent deaths of indigenous women and girls result in homicide charges compared with 76% for the general population? Where is the government that supposedly stands up for all victims' rights and ensures our communities and streets are safe? Where is the government's courage to act on the 2011 report of the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, which acknowledged the concerns about inadequate police response to reports of missing women, the underfunding of services for indigenous women and the need to support families of missing and murdered women?

How can the government state that the number of murdered and vanished women is "disturbingly high" and yet repeatedly ignore calls for an inquiry, let alone refuse to take concrete steps to stop the killing? Why does the government refuse to give people who have lost a female relative or friend to violence a chance to tell their stories? Is it the government's fear that a public inquiry would raise questions about broader socio-economic problems in first nation communities and the extent to which those are the result of failed government policies, or perhaps it is the government's fear of revealing unpleasant truths about its own justice agenda?

*Business of Supply*

Where is the compassion and the caring? Where is the fundamental human instinct to reach out to those who are hurting and try to reduce the hurt? Where is the attention to the many first nation women who are killed every year with guns and knives? Where is the Canada that 20 years ago, in 1993, backed the campaign that led to the recognition that women's rights were an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights? Where is the Canada that demands the end of the abomination that is violence against women and girls and works tirelessly to achieve this goal in all its communities?

At least 600 aboriginal women and girls have been murdered or gone missing over the past decades: Maisy, Shannon, Summer Star. We must know their names, their stories and the lives they touched. We must never reduce their contributions to their families and communities to mere statistics. We must honour their memories with real and meaningful action.

Today we call for the establishment of a special committee to conduct hearings and propose solutions to address the root causes of violence against indigenous women across the country.

In 2004 Amnesty International released a report entitled, "Stolen Sisters", which documented the violence.

In 2005 the Canadian government announced \$10 million to fund a national database on missing and murdered aboriginal women. About half the funds went to a project called Sisters in Spirit, run by the Native Women's Association of Canada, NWAC.

In 2006 the Conservative government was elected and in 2007 Canada was one of only four countries in the world to vote against the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

In 2008, out of sheer frustration by the government's inaction, aboriginal organizations, citizen groups and rights groups brought their concerns to the United Nations and the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. The committee then called upon Canada to urgently carry out thorough investigations of the cases to determine whether there was a racialized pattern to the disappearances and to take measures to address the problem.

• (1230)

In 2010 the funding for the Sisters in Spirit database was terminated and funds redirected.

By the time government funding for data collection on missing and murdered indigenous women and girls ended, NWAC had documented 582 cases nationally. If women and girls in the general Canadian population had gone missing or been murdered at the same rate, the organization estimates the country would have lost 18,000 Canadian women and girls since the late 1970s. It is impossible to imagine that such numbers would not have resulted in a hue and cry across the country, followed by immediate action by the government.

Yesterday, Human Rights Watch released the report, "Those Who Take Us Away: Abusive Policing and Failures in Protection of Indigenous Women and Girls in Northern British Columbia, Canada". The report shows that the persistence of the violence indicates, at the very minimum, a need for a national public commission of inquiry.

Meghan Rhoad, a women's rights researcher at Human Rights Watch, said:

The high rate of violence against indigenous women and girls has caused widespread alarm for many years...The eyes of the world are on Canada to see how many more victims it takes before the government addresses this issue in a comprehensive and coordinated way.

NWAC president Michèle Audette, who has been fighting for years for a public forum to examine the deaths and disappearances of indigenous women, said:

My dream, and the dream of NWAC, of course, is that it will change legislation, policy, programs...and it will give an overview of the root cause of this systemic discrimination and how come women are ending like this with no answers and no justice.

The Human Rights Watch report calls for: a national commission of inquiry into the murders and disappearances of indigenous women and girls before the end of 2013; the development of the inquiry's terms of reference with leadership from affected communities, including the examination of the current and historical relationship between the police and indigenous women and girls, including incidents of serious police misconduct and the systemic socio-economic marginalization of indigenous women and girls that predispose them to high levels of violence; the development and implementation of a national action plan to address violence against indigenous women and girls with leadership from indigenous communities, that addresses the structural roots of the violence as well as the accountability and coordination of government bodies charged with preventing and responding to violence; the establishment of independent civilian investigations of reported incidents of serious police misconduct; and co-operation with the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women inquiry into the issue of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls.

The government must at last do the right thing. It must investigate the deaths of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls and it must act to stop the killing. The government must stop denying the anguish, hurt, pain of the families and communities of the 600 lost souls. It must hear their stories and respond with caring, compassion and necessary support.

The neglect, contempt and tears must end. This means the government must not only investigate these horrific losses, but also implement real measures that would improve the quality of life for first nations.

The basics of life, such as adequate housing, child welfare, clean drinking water, education, are persistently and dramatically substandard. As Ms. Fraser said in her parting words to Parliament:

—a disproportionate number of First Nations people still lack the most basic services that other Canadians take for granted....In a country as rich as Canada, this disparity is unacceptable.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for her speech. Since this motion was moved on her party's opposition day, I would like to ask her whether she thinks the motion goes far enough.

*Business of Supply*

The official opposition thinks that this is a step in the right direction, but does the hon. member think that this motion goes far enough? Given the seriousness of the situation, are there not grounds for a public inquiry into missing aboriginal women?

• (1235)

[*English*]

**Ms. Kirsty Duncan:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for her support of the motion. We have been calling for an inquiry for years.

I would like to draw the attention of hon. members and Canadians to the documentary *Third World Canada*, on K.I., a remote indigenous community in the north of Ontario. The nation dates back 7,000 years, where bones of their ancestors were discovered on the shores of Big Trout Lake. Today, this proud nation is deeply impoverished in third world conditions, bound by treaty laws. The documentary explores the impact of third world conditions on the children left behind after the suicides of three parents and the community's courage in looking after them.

In another community, a doctor said "death permeates the entire society". People are in a constant state of trying to recover from tragedy. In other words, one death begets the next death, which begets the next death.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for her speech and for moving such a worthwhile motion in the House today.

I would like to talk about a report from Canada's Auditor General, which exposed the situation in our country's aboriginal communities. It showed that, despite the goodwill of successive governments, despite the money and the programs put in place by the Government of Canada over the past 10 years, there is no proof that the situation in these communities has improved, for a number of different reasons.

For one, there is the fact that first nations must be more involved in the solutions brought forward and put into place. This involvement must be at the root of the solution. People living in these communities are aware of their own realities. They have wisdom and knowledge. Not only do first nations have the right to be involved, but their input should be the basis for any action the government takes concerning them. First nations are not a file; they are peoples, they are nations.

How does my colleague feel that first nations should be involved in the proposals being put forward today? How is this proposal any different from everything that has been done in the past 10 years? How can we believe that it will really make a difference?

[*English*]

**Ms. Kirsty Duncan:** Mr. Speaker, Canadians have so much to learn from first nations. One of the greatest honours of my life was serving on a first nations board. Board meetings would be five days. For the first three days, people would get know one another. They did not do business until they became friends. Then we would smudge so we came to negotiations with a clean heart. Then we would ask the grandfathers for help, because we did not go to the

table with all the answers. We have much to learn from first nations and we need to learn from their leadership.

I would like to address one of the challenges, which is certainly health. It needs to be brought forth. Compared to the general Canadian population, heart disease is one and a half times higher. Type 2 diabetes is three to five times higher. Tuberculosis infection rates are eight to ten times higher. In some Inuit communities is it 185 times higher. In one community the suicide rate was 36 times the national average. Canada must do better.

**Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity today to speak to the motion. I will start with a review of some numbers and facts. It is very important to feel the force of these facts.

However, before I talk about numbers, I want to acknowledge that these numbers are made up of individual lives. My colleague from St. Paul's, who presented the motion, said something very important. She said that in this world, each victim may be just one woman, but to the family and loved ones of each of these victims, each woman means the world. We must remember the value of each person who lives on the margins of our society. It is with this in mind that I bring up some numbers.

The Native Women's Association of Canada estimates that 10% of female homicides are of native women, whereas they represent only 3% of the female population of Canada. Over 600 cases of missing or murdered aboriginal women and girls have been documented by NWAC. If we apply that rate to the general population, it would result in something like 20,000 murdered or missing women. We must wonder what the outcry would be if we had that statistic for the general population. Would people with the means, resources, education and time come to a place like this to talk to policy-makers and influence government? If this rate occurred in the general population, we wonder whether something would have been done already. That is one of the reasons we are here today.

Another thing that strikes me is that most of the cases involve young women and girls. I noted here that 17% of the cases involve women and girls 18 years of age or younger. The other reason we are here is that a lot of these cases are unresolved. Nationally, the average number of homicide cases cleared is something like 84%, whereas only half of cases involving aboriginal women and girls are solved.

I am happy to stand here today not only to speak to the motion but to respond to what the government members have said today. They support this motion, and I want to thank them for their support. I am very glad that this Liberal motion has won the support of Conservative members of Parliament. It is a sensible thing to do. I am appreciative of the all-party support and am therefore hopeful that good work comes out of the special committee that would be set up after the vote takes place in a couple of weeks.

We still believe that a public inquiry is necessary, but we look forward to the committee from this House of Commons travelling across the country to hear testimony from witnesses and to hear them tell us what the government needs to do.

*Business of Supply*

We should also summarize some of the deficiencies that have been pointed out. We had a report this week from Human Rights Watch. It heard testimony from indigenous women and girls about deficiencies in our policing system that prevent the overwhelming number of good men and women, who work in the RCMP and other police forces to protect us, from adequately protecting aboriginal women and girls.

We also know that United Nations human rights bodies have criticized Canada for an inadequate government response. We had an announcement in December 2011 from the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women that it was going to open an inquiry into what was happening in Canada. In 2008, that committee called on the Canadian government to examine the reasons for the failure to adequately protect aboriginal women that has resulted in this unacceptable number of cases of missing and murdered aboriginal women and girls.

● (1240)

We have heard today about some of the measures the government has taken, such as the RCMP's National Centre for Missing Persons and Unidentified Remains, which launched a national website at the end of January. That is a good thing, but that tool does not focus on the problem at issue today, which is missing and murdered aboriginal women and girls.

My hon. colleague from Portage—Lisgar talked about all sorts of initiatives to improve essentially all the things that can be done after a crime has been committed. We have to think more about problems with the system. Maybe there are problems with the policing system that prevent the good men and women who work in our police forces from doing the best they can. Maybe it is poverty or racism or sexism. If we realize that poverty, racism or sexism have contributed to the murder, abduction or disappearance of an aboriginal woman or girl, do we go to the police and tell them that the real cause of the case is poverty? No, we do not. Poverty is not something for the police to take care of. That is something that must be addressed by policy-makers, legislators, and government. That is another reason we are here today. It is to establish the special committee. We need to study the root causes in addition to all the things we could do after a crime is committed.

I am glad that the first government member to rise today to speak to the motion acknowledged the importance of working on prevention. We have to ask if there is something in our system of policing that results in inadequate protection for aboriginal women and girls. We have to ask about the role of poverty, racism, sexism or a lack of awareness among the general population.

The motion today mentions a committee travelling across the country to consult with people. We must do our work in conjunction with aboriginal communities. We need leadership not only from the federal government but from indigenous communities across the country. We need to work together to develop and implement a national action plan on violence against indigenous women that would really address the structural roots and causes of violence. We also need accountability mechanisms to ensure that whatever plan we put in place is carried out and the results are measured.

Another reason for acting now is that there have been incomplete efforts. For example, the current government funds the Native Women's Association of Canada but says that it cannot use the money for Sisters in Spirit. The Sisters in Spirit project focused on violence against aboriginal women and girls. Committee work was started in this place in 2010 but it was interrupted by the 2011 election.

We are on the right path today. We are on the right path because the Liberal Party has won the government's support for the motion to set up a special committee. We are happy that we have been able to take at least this first step toward addressing the injustices and the inequities suffered by those living at the margins of our society. We are happy that we are going to be able to study and hear testimony about the root causes of the unacceptably high rates of violence against aboriginal women and girls. We look forward to the special committee travelling across our country to hear testimony.

● (1245)

**Mr. Ryan Leef (Yukon, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague mentioned in his speech that the parliamentary secretary largely talked about, in his opinion, things that happen after a crime has been committed. The parliamentary secretary was pretty clear in asking the opposition about real matrimonial property rights for first nations women and the impact it would have on reducing poverty. The parliamentary secretary asked the opposition why it would not support it, knowing that poverty is a root cause of social inequity and thus a root cause of victimization.

I would ask my hon. colleague to stand and please explain why his party would not support that kind of thing, knowing where it leads. Our government is bringing these kinds of initiatives forward to deal with these things before crime happens and before people are impacted.

● (1250)

**Mr. Ted Hsu:** Mr. Speaker, we have to be focused on what is at hand, which is murdered and missing aboriginal women and girls. My hon. colleague mentioned that it is a complicated issue. There is no magic bullet. That is why there needs to be a special committee to study this problem and go across the country to hear testimony. This is a bigger problem than what my hon. colleague on the government side is talking about.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Laurin Liu (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my Liberal Party colleagues for this small step forward. I hope that all members of the House will vote in favour of the motion. Nevertheless, we in the NDP believe that it does not go far enough.

We wish to ask our Liberal colleagues why they waited so long to act, why they waited until a Conservative government was in power. The motion even mentions the fact that this problem has gone on for 30 years.



*Business of Supply*

Does my colleague think that this special committee will be any different than the committee set up by the Standing Committee on the Status of Women in 2012? I would remind my hon. colleague that that Conservative-dominated committee was responsible for holding hearings. The committee presented a report on violence against aboriginal women and girls, a report that was criticized by the Conservative majority for being too weak and watered down.

So how will this committee be any different?

**Mr. Ted Hsu:** Mr. Speaker, if I understood the question correctly, my hon. colleague is worried about the fact that seven of the 12 members on the special committee will be Conservative members.

[*English*]

Maybe the work of this committee will be restricted or limited.

We have to have confidence in the positive things that have been said today on the government side, because we have to move forward in a multi-party fashion. If we give up and say that the Conservatives are going to dilute whatever work comes out of the committee, that is being pessimistic. We should take every opportunity to move forward. That is what I would tell my colleague.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, my colleague, the hon. member for Yukon, is trying to change the subject today by talking about Bill S-2.

Is my colleague from Yukon aware that most major aboriginal organizations in Canada and many first nations groups have spoken out against Bill S-2? Does he know why? In fact, I have an answer that ties in with today's debate. First nations need to be consulted and involved in any processes that concern them.

Perhaps my colleague can tell us how this was done in the case of the motion before us today.

[*English*]

**Mr. Ted Hsu:** Mr. Speaker, I understand that there has not been enough consultation with aboriginal groups on that particular bill. It is a complicated issue, and there is no silver bullet that is going to advance a solution to the problem at hand today, which is the unacceptably high rate of murdered and missing aboriginal women and girls.

**Mr. Greg Rickford (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, for the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to stand in my place today on behalf of the constituents of the great Kenora riding and to have the opportunity to speak to this motion brought forward by the hon. member for St. Paul's on the matter of missing and murdered aboriginal women.

This is a matter that should concern all members in the House. As the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development and a member of Parliament for the great Kenora riding, which includes over 40 first nations communities, many of which I have had the opportunity to work in as a nurse, and thereafter in my capacity as legal counsel specializing in areas such

as health and wellness, I can say that this is an important issue. It is one that affects me, personally, and my constituents very deeply.

The government has been taking significant, concrete steps to ensure that women, children and families on reserve have access to the services they need to protect their safety and security since 2006. The Prime Minister also reiterated our commitment to addressing problems of violence against women and girls in the June 3, 2011 Speech from the Throne. More importantly, we introduced legislation for the fourth time, in 2011, to provide fairer treatment of marital property on reserve upon the dissolution of a marriage so that women living on reserve would have the same matrimonial property rights held by all other women living in Canada.

• (1255)

[*Translation*]

As Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, I would like to take this opportunity to talk about the steps we have taken to support aboriginal women, girls and families through the programs and services delivered through the department, such as the family violence prevention program at Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, the first nation child and family services program, the first nation on-reserve housing program, economic security and prosperity, as well as education.

We know that many first nations communities continue to experience family violence that threatens the ability to safely raise a family.

Ensuring that shelter services and violence prevention programming are available to on-reserve communities is an important element of addressing these serious security concerns. That is why economic action plan 2012 invested significant funds to the ongoing delivery of these important services for aboriginal women and children.

[*English*]

We currently support a network of over 40 shelters serving aboriginal women and children living on reserve across Canada, including five new shelters in British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario and Quebec. These shelters are funded through the family violence program. In addition to the 41 shelters, this program funds proposal-based family violence prevention projects, which I might add have had some measurable success in communities throughout the great Kenora riding. They include counselling, public awareness, education campaigns, workshops and community needs assessments. It also reimburses some provincial and territorial costs for services provided to women, children and families considered ordinarily resident on reserve, who are accessing shelters off reserve.

We believe that the best way to address the problem of violence for aboriginal women and children is through prevention. Prevention programs and services in first nation communities must be responsive to the specific needs of the first nation member at that time. We believe that our investments in these shelters and our prevention-based approach help contribute to the enhanced safety and security of on-reserve residents, particularly aboriginal women and children.

*Business of Supply*

Aboriginal Affairs also works with first nations, the National Aboriginal Circle Against Family Violence, the provinces and the territories, and other government departments, such as the Department of Justice and Status of Women Canada to coordinate family violence prevention programming. We will continue to support these programs and services because they make a real difference, a tangible difference, to the lives of aboriginal women and children who through unfortunate circumstances need them. We will continue to do this important work with our partners to ensure adequate support for the shelters and the workers providing these services.

[Translation]

Our government has also introduced a new, enhanced prevention-focused approach for the delivery of first nations child and family services. This new prevention-based approach will give more flexibility to the service providers to implement culturally appropriate prevention programs and protection services, such as kinship care, that are helping improve the safety and well-being of aboriginal children and their families.

These measures mean that government funding can now be used for kinship care, post-adoption subsidies and supports to better ensure permanent placements for children.

Not surprisingly, this new approach was immediately welcomed by child and family service providers, since it allows them to make programming choices for first nations children, youth and families living on reserve.

Through this approach, the Government of Canada works with ready and willing partners on a province-by-province basis. This approach is now being implemented to benefit first nations families and children on reserve across Canada.

● (1300)

[English]

Early indications from across the country show an increase in families accessing prevention-focused services. We have seen a rise in permanent placements of children and an increase in the use of kinship care. Clearly, these programs and investments are helping make life more safe and secure for women and children on reserve. We will continue to work in partnership with provinces to implement the enhanced prevention-focused approach to improve outcomes for first nation children and their families.

Finally, I cannot emphasize enough the importance of passing into law Bill S-2, the family homes on reserves and matrimonial interests or rights act, in order to protect the rights of women and children living on reserve. More than 25 years ago, the Supreme Court of Canada issued a landmark ruling on two cases: *Derrickson v. Derrickson* and *Paul v. Paul*. In both cases, the court ruled that the legal protections provided in provincial family law for the rights relating to real property and real property interests of spouses do not apply to people living on reserve. Since the Indian Act was silent on this issue and there were no comparable federal laws, the result is a legislative gap.

As a result, in the event of a relationship breakdown or in the death of a spouse or common-law partner, people living on reserve currently have no basic legal rights and protections when it comes to the possession of the family home or any other matrimonial real

property interests or rights. Spouses do not have an equal entitlement to occupy the family home until such time as they cease to be spouses and they do not have the option of applying to the courts for emergency protection orders in situations of domestic violence.

While laws are in place to protect Canadians who live off reserve, there is no equivalent for most Canadians who live on reserves in this country. Women and children living on first nation reserve lands are already among the most vulnerable of Canadians. They have been directly affected by this legislative gap and will continue to be until a legal regime is put in place to protect them.

The Supreme Court of Canada's ruling sparked a dialogue and an increased effort to identify, develop and implement an effective solution. Over the years, a number of respected institutions, both in Canada and abroad, completed studies and analyses of relevant issues. The overwhelming conclusion of these reports was that legislation is the only effective course of action.

Bill S-2 would provide rights to matrimonial real property on reserve, the family home and, more important, would ensure that people living on the reserve have the same rights and protections as other Canadians. All Canadians should expect fairness, equity and protection of their rights under the law when it comes to matrimonial real property, regardless of where they live in Canada. The bill would finally eliminate a long-standing legislative gap that discriminates against a specific group of Canadians and has led to the suffering of many women, men and families who live on reserve.

● (1305)

[Translation]

Our government believes that this legislation is long overdue. For more than 25 years, women living on-reserve have been without access to the same basic legal rights or protections that are currently available to all other Canadian women.

This is the fourth time that we have introduced this bill since we came to government in 2006. Our government first introduced the proposed legislation in 2008, and then subsequently in 2009 and again in 2010.

However, in each case, the opposition opposed this legislation and the bill died on the order paper.

Each delay in its passage results in the continued denial of protections and rights for individuals living on-reserve, particularly for aboriginal women and children.

If the opposition truly takes the protection and safety of aboriginal women and children seriously, the very first thing they should do is support our legislation to protect the rights of women and children on-reserve. It is absolutely shameful that the opposition continues to oppose Bill S-2 on matrimonial property rights.

*Business of Supply*

[English]

I want to acknowledge that there have been some other efforts to address the issues around matrimonial real property. For example, the First Nations Land Management Act requires first nations to develop laws related to matrimonial rights and interests as part of their land codes. However, while these solutions have helped those now fully operational under the first nations land management regime, Bill S-2 would ensure that all people living on first nation reserve lands have access to matrimonial real property rights on reserve.

In 2006, our government announced a national consultation process to find a solution to this legislative gap. It was conducted in collaboration with first nation partners and in total 103 consultation sessions were held at 76 different sites across Canada. Hundreds of people participated and expressed a wide range of opinions. To prepare a report and make recommendations for a legislative solution, the government also engaged a ministerial representative to report back to the minister. There was clear consensus emerging from these consultations on key elements of a legislative solution. These elements have been part of all of the legislation introduced in Parliament.

The following elements are in this two-part solution, which is both practical and sensible. First, the bill would provide first nations with the ability to develop and implement their own laws to protect the matrimonial real property rights and interests of members in their community. These laws could be based on the community's customs and traditions. The content of the laws are entirely up to the members and the first nation government, and must be approved by a community ratification process. There is no oversight role considered for the federal government.

Second, a provisional federal regime would apply once the bill was in force until such time as a first nation develops its own law. I want to emphasize the point that these provisional rules only apply to a first nation unless or until it enacts its own matrimonial real property laws under the legislation. This would ensure that laws exist to protect the rights and interests of all Canadians regardless of where they live in Canada.

[Translation]

Parliamentary committees have also reviewed this bill and have considered the testimony of a long list of witnesses and proposed a series of improvements—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** Order, please.

The hon. member for LaSalle—Émard on a point of order.

**Ms. Hélène LeBlanc:** Mr. Speaker, I was listening carefully to the speech by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development.

At the beginning of his speech, he was talking about the motion we are debating. However, in the past few minutes, he has been talking instead about a bill extraneous to the motion. Would it be possible for him to talk about the motion we are currently debating?

[English]

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** The hon. member has raised a question of relevance. It has been made clear from the Chair

many times in the past that the Chair takes a broad view of relevance and that although members need to address the matter that is before the House, it is well within their right to refer to other matters they feel are related. As such, the member herself said that the member has spent a significant amount of time speaking directly to the motion. Therefore, I would encourage the hon. parliamentary secretary and all members to speak to the business that is before the House, but at the same time I would remind all hon. members that members have significant discretion in terms of how they wish to do so.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

● (1310)

**Mr. Greg Rickford:** Mr. Speaker, thank you for that ruling.

These are foundational pieces that raise consciousness around a host of structural elements to address the broader issue that is being debated here today. As someone who has spent a professional lifetime dealing with these kinds of matters directly or indirectly, I take the position that this piece of legislation, to which I have devoted a couple of minutes, relates to this issue more directly than perhaps the member opposite feels.

However, I will continue by saying this.

[Translation]

Bill S-2 is informed by many years of study, consultation and debate. It is clear that this bill has been strengthened by consultation to facilitate the development of first nation laws in this area.

I believe it is our duty to adopt Bill S-2 and finally put in place a legislative solution that is long overdue. I urge the opposition parties to support us in expediting its passage.

[English]

When speaking to the committee during its review of Bill S-2, Betty Ann Lavallée, National Chief of the Congress of Aboriginal People, stated:

The bill is addressing the real human issue of an Aboriginal person, sometimes often taken for granted by other Canadians. A spouse within an Aboriginal relationship should not be denied or put out on the street alone and without any recourse because of a family or marital breakdown. That has been happening for far too long in Canada.

Given the legislative gap that exists, we do not want to be involved in a process that would make these particular folks we are discussing any more vulnerable than they may be. National Chief Lavallée recognized that Bill S-2 was ultimately about preventing abuse and discrimination, and violence against aboriginal women and children. Her words are informed by her knowledge and the often harsh realities of day-to-day life faced by some residents in first nation communities and across Canada.

I would like to highlight the testimony of two other witnesses at the Standing Committee on Human Rights, including Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond, a child advocate, who said:

—the bill is a promising step to protect victims of domestic violence on-reserve and permits some form of asset division when relationships break down.

*Business of Supply*

The following excerpt is from the testimony of Rolanda Manitoiwabi, a first nation woman living on reserve:

If this bill were in place, I think there would have been an option. If you are in a situation where there is domestic violence or abusive behaviour, you have no choices. When I was thrown out of my home, I had no place to go. That was my home. To this day, I continue to pay for that home. If this bill were in place, it would have given me an option or some place to go.

[Translation]

For more than 25 years, residents of most first nation communities have had to live with this legislative gap. For most Canadians, provincial laws exist to protect matrimonial real property rights and interests. Residents of most first nation communities, however, have no such protections. The family of an abusive spouse has no legal recourse if forced out of their family home. I believe Bill S-2 provides a solution.

[English]

That is a fundamental part of this debate and the actions that we will be taking in moving forward. We will continue to support and develop effective and appropriate solutions to end violence against aboriginal women and children. If the parties opposite also want to support aboriginal women and children, I hope they will stand with us and support measures like Bill S-2 so we can take those important steps against violence against aboriginal women.

• (1315)

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the member has focused a lot of attention on Bill S-2. Here I think it is important to recognize that the minister's own representative noted a very important issue:

The viability and effectiveness of any legislative framework will also depend on necessary financial resources being made available for implementation of non-legislative measures.... Without these kinds of supports from the federal government, matrimonial real property protections will simply not be accessible to the vast majority of First Nation people.

The government has not provided any additional resources to help first nation governments to build the capacity needed to address the underlying issues and to meet the new obligations under the bill, including allowing their citizens to have access to the legal system and to develop new community-specific laws regarding matrimonial real property.

Given that the member wants to debate Bill S-2, would he comment on this particular issue?

**Mr. Greg Rickford:** Mr. Speaker, Bill S-2 is just one part of the actions the government has taken.

Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada takes the issue of violence against aboriginal women very seriously. We will continue to work in partnership with provincial and territorial governments and first nation people, their leaders and other stakeholders to develop effective and appropriate solutions. We continue to work to renew the family violence prevention program and policy authorities for April 1, 2013, and we consider minimizing the disruption to shelter services a key priority, as an example.

**Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, as my neighbour in an adjacent riding, I know the member is genuinely concerned about the plight of aboriginal people in Canada. In his speech he talked about foundational items for dealing with the issue at hand today. As he knows, one of the main

foundational items is the Indian Act. I wonder if he would stand and let us know a couple of things: how he feels about the Indian Act, what he thinks should be done and, in particular, its relevance to the issue we are talking about today. How would changes to the Indian Act look going forward?

**Mr. Greg Rickford:** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my “neighbour's” question, if I could speak in nomenclature of neighbourhoods and the great northwest Ontario. I appreciate as well my colleague commitment to these kinds of issues in the first nation communities he has in his own riding right next door.

With respect to the Indian Act, Bill S-2 would address an issue that the Indian Act is silent on. We know that we will be debating, probably in the not too distant future, some important first steps to deal with the provisions in the Indian Act, for example, removing any reference to the Indian residential school, a dark legacy of our country that we have taken great strides to move forward from.

As well, for the purposes of this debate, the emphasis or priority ought to be on the welfare of first nation women and children living on reserve. Oftentimes they are already identified as being more vulnerable than the average Canadian. Therefore, we want to focus on the communities and certainly the towns and cities close to first nation communities, or important places where they might go for one reason or another. Enhanced preventative approaches will lead to increased flexibility, including for service providers to implement culturally appropriate and sensitive programs and protection services, which would help improve outcomes for children, youth and their families.

**Mr. David Wilks (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, could the Parliamentary Secretary further expound on Bill S-2 and the importance of giving an opportunity to women on reserve to have property rights, because that seems to be an impetus for moving forward on this? I would like him to explain that a little further.

• (1320)

**Mr. Greg Rickford:** Mr. Speaker, perhaps this will give me a moment to respond to any sense across the way that Bill S-2 is a part of this debate. There will be a number of speeches by members on this throughout the day. Indeed, there have already been some. We need to talk about the fundamental elements that are involved in the protection of aboriginal women and children and the steps that we need to take as members of Parliament to end violence against them. I mentioned earlier that as a nurse, I had a ringside seat to some very unfortunate situations on reserve in particular.

With respect to Bill S-2, it is unacceptable as a starting point for this debate that people living on reserve are deprived of their rights and protections because of where they live. Shelters, while another essential element of the issue and one on which I could deliver a whole speech on how they fit into this debate, are only a temporary solution.

*Business of Supply*

We need to look at the platform from which a strong and principled policy can and will evolve for a host of essential elements with respect to ending violence against aboriginal women, their children and families.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs. As my colleague mentioned, I know that he has worked in the community for many years and he continues to do so as the member for his riding.

I already pointed out that much of his speech was about a bill. But if this bill is a priority for the government, why is it coming from the Senate and not from the government itself? From what I understand, this bill is very important to him and his colleagues. That was my preamble.

Today, we are also talking about the high number of missing and murdered women in Canada. Does he feel this is an urgent public safety issue? If not, can he tell me why not?

[*English*]

**Mr. Greg Rickford:** Mr. Speaker, while I appreciate the hon. member's preamble and her question, I think it is important at this point to turn to the language of the motion we are debating today.

This issue has been, by the acknowledgement of the Liberal member who brought it forward, a rather unfortunate part, statistic-wise, of Canada for 30 years, and maybe longer. However, the issue for the government of the day is to demonstrate that it is taking appropriate steps both on reserve and off reserve with respect to this issue and in providing the kind of support services that first nation women need at the time and could benefit from going forward.

I have been involved in my own community with program support for the de-escalation of violence. It is something that citizens of the great city of Kenora were involved in, including first nations, and raised consciousness and awareness.

To the extent that we are having this debate today, we are taking another step forward in raising the prominence of this issue by way of the motion, which says that the issue has been around for 30 years. I would agree with that and say that it is very unfortunate.

When it comes to Bill S-2, obviously we want to look comprehensively at all the instruments available and not just in law, but also in terms of policy measures and the steps that we need to take to get there to address and end violence against aboriginal women.

**Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I too am very pleased to rise today to speak to this. I acknowledge the previous speaker, who clearly understands the issues and whose heart is in the right place. He is determined to see that this committee gets established. As he is someone who has a clear understanding of these kinds of pressures, I hope that he would also be in that group and bring his expertise to bear, and that we truly can find some answers to these unfortunate and horrific issues that have been going on for such a long time.

A few weeks ago, I also stood on the front steps of Parliament in solidarity with hundreds of men and women who were calling on the

government to take action on more than 600 cases involving missing or murdered aboriginal women and girls. Today, I want those people I met outside to know that my support and commitment that day continue on this issue and have only strengthened since we last met. I believe Sisters in Spirit is holding a rally again today to keep this issue going forward and hoping and praying that somehow we can actually get to the bottom of this and do the true investigation that is required. Possibly the success of this motion today, with the help of the government members and the official opposition, would ensure that it is a start and that it would eventually evolve, with the reason that we need a truly independent inquiry to find out exactly what has happened. Everything has to get started somewhere and if today's motion is the beginning, then let that be it.

I am here to add my voice to that of my colleague who has done an enormous amount of work on this issue, the Liberal member for St. Paul's who has sponsored this opposition day motion today for the Liberals.

We know that more than 600 native women have been murdered or have disappeared in the past few years and little has been done to solve these cases. That has to be of huge interest and concern to all of us. This number represents 10% of all homicides in Canada, despite the fact that the native population, native women in particular, accounts for just 3% of the Canadian population. Let us look at it another way. I hate to say this, but when we look at the background over the 30 years that this has been ongoing, we see that if this had been happening to non-native Canadian women at the same rate, more than 20,000 women would have been murdered by now. As parliamentarians, would we stand back and say it is unfortunate, too bad, but we cannot do anything about it? No, we would not. We would all be in an outrage, every one of us in here demanding action and more thorough investigations to get the answers to this. We would not just be asking for an inquiry. We would be doing far more.

This qualifies in my mind as an epidemic, and the response from the government, up until today, has been nothing short of shameful, which is why it is hopeful to hear such positive comments coming from the government in response to our motion today. The victims and families deserve better than to be forgotten. Most of us have met, in some of the rallies here on the Hill, the families of some of these victims. They have daughters just as we do, and they want answers. They cannot bring their daughters back, but they want to at least know that justice is done.

Earlier today, the parliamentary secretary took offence at the opposition MP saying that government had done nothing to respond to the crisis. She went on to say that the government has built a new database, launched school pilot projects and created a website to help us deal with this, and that is very positive. However, that is not dealing with the 600 women who have never had an answer and never had justice. Creating a website is not enough. Creating a database is for the future. We still need to do an inquiry or at least establish a committee today to see that we look into exactly what was happening. If it helps, there is a website, which is a start, but I do hope it goes further and that we move forward on these issues.

*Business of Supply*

•(1325)

This is not a partisan issue. It is an issue that has been talked about for the 13-plus years that I have been in the House. It is an issue I believe we all care about, but no one seems to take any action to really look into the fact that 600 aboriginal women are missing or murdered, and little has been done to bring justice to them or to find out exactly what has happened.

It is not about politics. It is about mobilizing all of us to come together and to work with the appropriate authorities to do a thorough investigation so that we can provide justice and healing for all of these families and put an end to an epidemic, because it has not stopped. It continues along the Highway of Tears.

For the sake of clarity today, the Liberals are asking that a special committee be struck to look into the issue of missing and murdered aboriginal women and girls. We have asked for an inquiry many times. We have committed that, if we were the government, we would strike one. Nothing has happened. There has been no action from the government. We are hoping today that the striking of a special committee of all parties will actually start moving that whole issue forward.

We are simply looking for ways that the federal government can act to address the root cause of this intolerable violence, something that the Conservatives, including the Prime Minister and the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, have said is a priority for the government. Let us practise what we preach and let us have the government start to move forward in that direction.

I fear most people in Canada do not fully appreciate the seriousness of the crimes, of 600 documented cases of missing and murdered aboriginal women and girls. I will give the breakdown: 67% of those 600 cases are clearly murder cases; 20% of the cases are of missing women and girls; the nature of 9% of the cases is unknown, and that is to say it is unclear whether the woman was murdered, is missing or died under suspicious circumstances; 55% of those cases involve women and girls under the age of 31, with 17% of the women and girls under the age of 18.

Many of these young women were 14 and 15 years old. Most of them disappeared in or around the Highway of Tears that was referred to earlier. It is a sad thing to have in any province a highway that is referred to as the Highway of Tears. It is a constant reminder of these missing aboriginal women and girls.

The national clearance rate for homicides in Canada is 84%, which means that there is an answer to 84% of those cases, so at least we know what happened. Yet almost half of the homicides that involve aboriginal women and girls remain unsolved. They are missing, presumed murdered. Nobody knows how, nobody knows at whose hands and how it happened. That is an unacceptable rate for our country. We have to be embarrassed about that.

The 84% rate for the national clearance should be the same rate for the aboriginals. It clearly shows a lack of respect and concern for many of the individual women and girls out there. It makes us wonder if anybody really cares, other than the parents, about these young women.

If hundreds of women and girls went missing or were murdered in our communities and our ridings, there would be outrage, and immediate action would be demanded. It is just completely unacceptable for anyone in this House to accept that this kind of inaction continues.

The time for real action is now, because this collective tragedy has already impacted on many of our communities. It has impacted on Canada's reputation. The United Nations has created a committee of its own to look into the issue of the missing aboriginal women and girls. It is pretty significant when the United Nations, not Canada, has to create a committee to look into something that our own country refuses to look into for our own citizens' sake.

Let us remember that Highway 16 is a very long and winding road that runs through dozens of small communities in western Canada. For example, the communities in and around Prince George on Highway 16 and Williams Lake on Highway 97 have all lost daughters in the past 20 years. I would expect that the Conservative member for Prince George—Peace River, as the MP representing these areas, would have a deep and personal interest in seeing action.

•(1330)

I am quite confident that member will be very supportive of this motion today, to start seeing some sort of action and bring closure for the families, but most importantly, to identify the people responsible for this so that the families can have closure and justice can be seen to be done. I would also hope to lead the charge to ensure that a committee is created and that the police have the resources required to finally resolve the cases.

We continue to hear from people in many small, isolated communities, which rely on the RCMP and others, that they require additional support because they do not have enough support to do things in these communities that are spread out over huge geographic areas that are difficult to patrol. They have tremendous difficulty doing that.

If that is the issue, then let us find ways to solve it. Those are the kinds of recommendations that would come out of an independent inquiry or parliamentary committee. Necessary recommendations would be made so that this issue can move forward and further cases can be prevented from emerging. This will continue until somebody stops it and it is not going to stop until we fully understand how 600 aboriginal women and girls could disappear or be murdered with no one knowing what happened to them. It is pretty insulting in a country like ours that brags so much about its crime agenda. Let us pay a little more attention to the victims.

Inasmuch as this debate is about creating a special committee to look into the issue of missing and murdered aboriginal women and girls, it is also about so much more. Eradicating the problem of violence against aboriginal women and girls involves addressing the root causes of the violence, notably sexism, racism and poverty, causes that are very predominant in many communities. Aboriginal women and girls are far more likely than any other Canadian women or girls to experience violence and die as a result. This has to be addressed once and for all. It cannot continue on and on, with nobody asking what has happened.

*Business of Supply*

The status of women committee did some fabulous work on a report looking into this prior to the 2011 election. It came up with some concrete recommendations based on the work it was able to do. It went out to various areas and interviewed many women and young girls about the kinds of challenges they were experiencing and what needed to be done. Unfortunately, after the election, that study did not continue because there was a different agenda at play for the committee.

In 2005 the Liberal government of the day invested \$10 million through the Native Women's Association of Canada to identify those root causes. Things like trends and circumstances of violence that led to the disappearance and death of aboriginal women and girls were to be explored. That was the whole intent of that \$10 million investment by the Liberals in 2005. As members here will know, part of that funding went to Sisters in Spirit, the organization that is conducting the rally on the Hill today, whose research initiative was responsible for tracking and collecting the names of over 600 missing and murdered women and girls. Without the work of Sisters in Spirit, we might not even know the full gravity of the number of young women and girls who went missing.

As members will also know, in 2010 the current government cut that funding and mandated that any future funding for the Native Women's Association could not be used for the Sisters in Spirit initiative. It was very shortsighted, but that was the decision made by the government and we have to deal with the repercussions of that decision. All of this was despite the fact that the O'Pal commission on missing women and Human Rights Watch make it very clear that there are serious shortcomings in our policing and justice systems, which too often have failed to protect native women and girls.

• (1335)

A report was released yesterday by Human Rights Watch. It is very concerning to read the recommendations in that report about the activity that appears to go on in British Columbia, with no one caring a whole lot and with women being raped and being too intimidated to file a report, too frightened to put their name forward because they are afraid of the repercussions.

These women talk about what has happened to people who have complained about how they have been treated when they have reached out and have asked for help. They continue to raise the kinds of issues that Parliament and the RCMP need to deal with, similar to what the Status of Women is doing.

Why is there so little interest? Despite knowing that there is a serious problem impacting hundreds of young women, why has the government dug in and until today refused to act proactively?

The global community is asking the same questions. Canada has been criticized by bodies like Amnesty International and even by the United Nations. As I mentioned earlier, in 2011 the United Nations established its own committee to look into this. Now we have the United Nations looking into an issue that is on our plate. It is expected for us to be dealing with it.

The United Nations is looking at why we have failed to investigate and address the violence against indigenous women and girls. It is pretty insulting for a country as proud as Canada.

Unfortunately, it took the tragic loss of Nicole Hoar in 2002 to finally bring the Highway of Tears debate to the national stage. How many other women are going to have to be murdered or go missing before we actually provide the resources needed to turn this issue around?

Nicole was a non-native who disappeared after setting out from Prince George. Her disappearance caused a huge media and public uproar and it finally drew a line in the sand. Why did all the other women who went missing and who were native not get any of that attention, not in Parliament nor the media?

People have to understand that when we talk about racism, it is still very much alive and present. I wish it had not taken her disappearance to prompt action, but today we have a chance to help ensure that others in the area do not meet the same fate.

Conservatives claim that they stand up for the victims of crime. Today they have an opportunity to show that. We are asking the Conservatives to join with us and to stand up for missing and murdered women. These people are our mothers, daughters, grandmothers, aunts and cousins and are the families that loved and cherished them and are looking for justice.

We owe it to all of them to honour their memory and to support the motion before us today.

• (1340)

[Translation]

**Mr. Mathieu Ravignat (Pontiac, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, a few years ago two girls, Maisy and Shannon, disappeared from the community of Kitigan Zibi, in my riding. The government has not delivered justice for these two girls.

I would also like to point out that in response to the high number of missing aboriginal women, aboriginal communities organized the Highway of Tears Symposium. They made several recommendations and identified poverty as a key contributing factor. The UN report also includes many recommendations, which I think is good.

We have good recommendations, and they are important. Why is the government not taking action?

[English]

**Hon. Judy Sgro:** Mr. Speaker, I do not speak for the government so I do not know why it has been so inactive.

The whole issue of poverty is at the base of a huge amount of problems. Eradicating poverty is very difficult. It does not matter who is in government. I think we all want to eradicate poverty.

If we are going to look at the whole issue of living in poverty, violence and a lot of the issues that all of us in the House care about, it means we have to get serious about ensuring that from the time children are born, they have the kind support network, from proper nutrition, to advice, to help with parenting, whatever else may be needed, so they get to grow up to be successful and contributing adults in our country.

I would hope with the committee getting established we can start to put more focus on pushing some of those recommendations. I am quite happy to work with the hon. member on pushing those recommendations forward.

*Business of Supply*

• (1345)

**Mr. Ryan Leef (Yukon, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I will be pleased to stand in the House and support the motion when that time comes.

Could the member comment on some of the work that I know is happening in Yukon territory with the “Sharing Common Ground” police report that came out and the progress of that report? I am encouraged to see the progress report demonstrating that women's organizations have been getting together to ensure they are able to meet some of the needs of the “Sharing Common Ground” recommendations, including coalition member organizations like the Women's Transition Home Society, Victoria Faulkner Women's Centre, Whitehorse Aboriginal Women's Circle, Yukon Aboriginal Women's Council, the Liard Aboriginal Women's Society, Les EssentiElles and Yukon Status of Women Council. These are a few examples of the groups that are getting together to meet the needs of that report. The Government of Canada has had a significant role in that. It is a good news story and a good news model in the territory that is being followed.

Could my hon. colleague comment on some of those things?

**Hon. Judy Sgro:** Mr. Speaker, work is being done in those areas by many committed volunteers who are working hard to try to make a difference throughout our country and especially in that area.

If we move forward, are we supposed to forget about the 600 missing aboriginal women and girls? Are we supposed to forget about the fact that they had lives just like everyone else?

We need to adopt the motion today and at least get the committee going. However, what we really need is an independent inquiry to see exactly what happened, how 600 young women and girls could be murdered or disappear and no one was able to resolve those crimes. Fifteen of them have now been worked on and declared murdered. What happened to all of the rest? We cannot allow citizens of our country to disappear or go missing as if nothing ever happened.

A lot of good work is being done today to move these issues forward, but we cannot forget about those 600 women. Their parents deserve an answer. We as a country have an obligation to find out exactly what happened to those women and to move forward with recommendations so this does not happen again.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the fact that the government recognizes the value of the motion the Liberals have put forward today. I look forward to that committee being set up and hopefully we will hear relatively quickly who will be sitting on it.

Could the member provide some comment with respect to the importance of the committee and the importance of its decisions being made on a consensus basis as opposed to whatever party has the most members sitting on it? The three parties in the House should take the unanimous support that seems to be here to see the motion pass and carry that support over to committee so there is a sense that all three political parties are prepared to work on solutions at that stage.

**Hon. Judy Sgro:** Mr. Speaker, we are all being very positive and that is terrific. It is about time we did a few things in a more positive nature around here. However, this issue is far too important to have

the committee stacked one way or the other. The right people need to be appointed and there needs to be timelines. They have to agree to move forward on a consensus. It cannot be one party against another. This is not a political issue and it should not be made a political issue by anybody because it is far too important. We welcome an opportunity to sit down and discuss this issue. The community will be very grateful.

However, I am still calling for an independent inquiry. I do have concerns that at the end of the process, unless we put a timeline on this, it will be just more recommendations that go nowhere. That would be a real insult.

I am taking everything the government is saying in good faith. I hope the committee has enough people on it who understand that it has to work in a consensus fashion on behalf of all Canadians.

• (1350)

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Djaouida Sellah (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I listened closely to my Liberal colleague's speech. This may be a baby step forward, but the problem has been around for 30 years, and everyone knows that the Liberals and the Conservatives have not done anything to solve it.

Everyone has produced reports on the problem, from the royal commission to Amnesty International, from the United Nations to Human Rights Watch. Even so, nobody has ever implemented measures to try to put an end to the violence even though the problem persists.

Given that this latest special committee will include a majority of Conservative members and is supposed to hold hearings, how will its approach differ from that of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women in 2011?

[*English*]

**Hon. Judy Sgro:** Mr. Speaker, if the member does not think so, she has a choice to vote for it or not vote for it. I, frankly, view it as a small step forward. We have to do something. The government has shown no indication to date that it is interested in calling an independent inquiry, which needs to happen. We do not have 600 women and girls murdered and just sweep it under the rug and blame it on this, that and the rest of it, when we know there are a lot of core issues of racism and so on behind all of those issues.

I hope this is a consensus moving forward committee, that it is not stacked by any particular party, one side or the other, and that we bring all of those recommendations forward and decide to take some real action on them.

**Mrs. Susan Truppe (Parliamentary Secretary for Status of Women, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I rise to participate in the debate on the motion before the House today, which addresses an issue that our government takes very seriously: violence against aboriginal women and girls. I will be supporting the motion.



*Business of Supply*

Ending violence against aboriginal women and girls is and will remain a priority for this government. We know that all violence against women and girls takes an enormous toll, and not just on the individual woman or girl who is the victim. It also inflicts tremendous damage on their families, their communities and ultimately on our society and economy. It is up to each of us, those in public life and all Canadians, to remain ever mindful of how often women and girls, including aboriginal women and girls, are tragically denied the peace, safety and comfort of a day without violence or the threat of violence. They are the reason we are here to participate in this debate today.

Let me now share some of the concrete actions our government has taken to address the issue of violence against aboriginal women and girls. The Government of Canada's approach is a comprehensive one. In addition to the work being undertaken by Status of Women Canada, a range of measures are also under way by my colleagues at the Department of Justice, Department of Public Safety, and Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada. These efforts involve initiatives that are intended to address the causes of violence against aboriginal women and girls. We are also focused on empowering aboriginal women and girls to increase the chance that they will be able to live violence-free lives.

I will now take a few moments to discuss the efforts of our Status of Women programs to address violence against women and girls, particularly aboriginal women and girls. Since 2007, the government has approved over \$18 million in funding to Canadian organizations for projects that help aboriginal women and girls build economic security, gain leadership skills and address gender-based violence in their communities. We focus our efforts this way because we know that supporting the economic security and leadership skills of women and girls can help them lead a violence-free life. Of these funds, more than \$11 million has been committed to projects that specifically address violence against aboriginal women and girls.

Let me describe several examples. The YWCA Agvvik Nunavut is responding to the needs of women who have assessed shelter services in Iqaluit by working with community agencies. The project will facilitate improvements in services for women who have left situations of violence.

Almost one year ago the Government of Canada announced support for new projects to address the issue of violence and economic security affecting women and girls living in rural and remote communities in Canada. We brought these two goals together because we believe that women's safety goes hand in hand with their economic security. Many of these projects involve community organizations that directly support the needs of aboriginal women and girls.

One of these projects is now under way with the La Loche Friendship Centre in Saskatchewan. This project addresses the issue of violence against aboriginal women and girls living in a number of northern Saskatchewan communities. By involving women, men, youth and elders the project will examine the current issues of domestic violence in the La Loche and Clearwater Dene Nation and lead to a community action plan to address violence faced by aboriginal women and girls. It is examining the existing situation and causes of domestic violence in these communities. Focus groups and other consultations with partners will be used to develop and

implement a community action plan that addresses violence faced by aboriginal women and girls so that we may one day end such violence.

We have also provided support to the Nova Scotia Native Women's Association in Truro and the Newfoundland Aboriginal Women's Network in Stephenville.

Through Status of Women programs, we are funding projects in communities throughout Canada that focus on ending violence against women and girls, especially those in remote and aboriginal communities, improving the economic security and prosperity of women and girls, and encouraging them in leadership and decision-making roles.

Through these funds we are supporting projects such as Corporation Wapikoni Mobile, which is raising awareness of violence in remote aboriginal communities among young girls in Quebec. This project will help teenage girls in remote regions of Quebec, Côte-Nord, Abitibi and Mauricie. This program will help these girls raise awareness of violence as they grow into adulthood. Each session will target 20 girls and help raise awareness about violence against women and how to address and prevent it. These girls will grow to become a key part of their community's local support network for victims of violence and their families.

● (1355)

Status of Women Canada also recently launched a call for proposals, "Working Together: Engaging communities to end violence against women and girls". These projects will address violence against women and girls, and more specifically, violence against aboriginal women and girls. These projects help promote equality for women and girls, and reduce violence against women and girls in Canada. Two key areas of this call were high-risk communities as well as engaging men and boys in preventing violence, which is something Status of Women is addressing directly for the very first time.

In all of these actions by our government, we are maintaining a clear focus on eliminating violence against women and girls, including violence against aboriginal women and girls. We do so not just because it is the right thing to do, but because it is part of our broader commitment to achieving equality between women and men in Canada.

Speaking to women's issues in general, our government has taken significant steps to improve the economic security of women, which is an action that helps improve the lives of women in general. Over the past seven years, our Conservative government has taken significant action to help and empower women throughout Canada. We started by showing support for working women with the introduction of the universal child care benefit, which helps parents balance work and family life through direct financial support for child care. More recently, we have taken action to allow self-employed Canadians to gain access to maternity benefits and to improve access for military families to employment insurance, parental and sick benefits.

*Statements by Members*

I am proud that our government has increased funding for women's programs here in Canada to its highest level ever, more than any other government. These include programs that help aboriginal women and children—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** I hate to interrupt the parliamentary secretary, but the time for this portion of government orders has expired. The hon. parliamentary secretary will have 13 minutes remaining when this matter returns before the chamber.

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## STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

### MEDAL OF BRAVERY

**Mr. Gordon Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, in late July 2010, Drew Bertrend was resting on his couch in Brockville, Ontario, in my riding of Leeds—Grenville, when a neighbour pounded on his door and said there were three boys in trouble on the St. Lawrence River. Their canoe had flipped. Calling on his military rescue training, Drew ran down a nearby dock and swam out to help them. The eldest, an 18-year-old, was able to get himself to shore while Drew physically hauled the others, a 16-year-old and a panicked 13-year-old, to safety. Although he had heard horror stories of people being drowned while trying to rescue others, Drew pushed his own fear aside as he pulled the struggling youngsters to safety.

Last Friday, for his heroic efforts Drew received the Medal of Bravery from the Governor General at a ceremony at Rideau Hall. Last weekend, I had the pleasure to attend an event held in his honour in Brockville. On behalf of all Canadians, I wish to acknowledge and congratulate Drew Bertrend for his selfless act that saved the lives of two others.

\* \* \*

●(1400)

### THE ENVIRONMENT

**Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, recently I had the opportunity and privilege to both witness and speak at a celebration in Kitsumkalum, B.C., of people gathered together to honour the efforts of all northwesterners to stop a very bad idea.

When Shell first proposed to drill and frack for gas at the headwaters of the Stikine, the Skeena and the Nass Rivers, we had two choices: we could stand idly by or we could stand up. Stand up, we did. Community to community, first nations and non-first nations, environmental groups, hunters, fishermen and average everyday ordinary people stood together to say that we will defend what must be defended.

The Conservative government, from time to time, has taken to bullying and harassing those who happen to disagree with its view of the world, and there is a better answer to this. I offer to the Conservatives that there can be no progress without dialogue. When they include people in the conversation rather than shutting them out, people will unite. There is no greater value, as Canadians, than

to stand up as citizens, shoulder to shoulder, and defend what must be defended.

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### GANG VIOLENCE

**Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, my constituents and the people of B.C.'s Lower Mainland are deeply concerned about the growth of gangs and the number of young people who are murdered and become victims of their crimes. It is our collective duty to raise the question of how we can best protect our citizens. While crime continues to decline across the nation, in part because of this government's strong criminal justice program, people still live in fear of gang violence or of their children being lured into the activities of gangs.

We must work to address this issue, and we must work with educators, police and community leaders and families to create a culture that does not take gang crime lying down. We must ensure that gangsters and criminals are brought to justice, not gunned down in execution-style killings by rival gangs. We must ensure that our children never go down that path. As parliamentarians, we have waited too long to act. One youth killed is far too many.

\* \* \*

### ST. AUBYN RODNEY

**Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to tell the tragic story of two young lives: one lost and one shattered. Earlier this week, the people of Toronto's Jane and Finch neighbourhood, my neighbourhood, were rocked when St. Aubyn Rodney, a 15-year-old who was known to his friends as "Tubby", was fatally shot in a community housing building. Following the shooting, police charged a 17-year-old with manslaughter for his role in the terrible accident.

Last night, area residents held a candlelight vigil to remind the family that we stand together as a community. Their loss is the community's loss. We all share in mourning for Tubby and for all young people caught up in the violence on our streets. Today, the community mourns the loss of young potential, two lives destroyed by events that could have been prevented.

I know that every member of the House joins with me in offering our deepest condolences to Tubby's family and friends. Today, we stand in solidarity with those who have lost so much in the wake of violence in our country, and I truly hope we can work together to prevent this kind of tragedy from happening again.

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### HOWARD CAMERON

**Mr. Rob Clarke (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize a very special Canadian, Mr. Howard Cameron. Mr. Cameron sadly passed away at 7:15 a.m. on February 12, but his legacy will continue to live on. I wish to extend my sincerest condolences to Mr. Cameron's family. My thoughts and prayers are with them at this time.

*Statements by Members*

Mr. Cameron was a member of the Beardy's & Okemasis First Nation in Saskatchewan. He proudly served in the RCMP and sat on two national RCMP advisory boards for two years. He is the father of Robin Cameron, an RCMP officer who was shot on July 7, 2006, in Spiritwood, Saskatchewan. They both honourably served our great nation and we owe them our deepest gratitude.

Guided in part by his profound sense of spirituality, Mr. Cameron devoted his life to enhancing the lives of first nation children and youth in Canada, and was recognized with the Centennial Award of Merit from the Province of Saskatchewan in 2005. First nations and all Canadians are better off because of Mr. Cameron's enduring legacy. He will be sadly missed.

\* \* \*

• (1405)

[Translation]

#### QUEBEC CITY HOMELESS SHELTER

**Ms. Annick Papillon (Québec, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, 30 years ago today, La Maison de Lauberivière opened its doors and began helping people in need.

Located in Quebec City's lower town, this shelter welcomes men and women who have nowhere else to turn during difficult times, and provides them with some comfort.

The shelter's mission has evolved over the years in order to adapt to the needs of its clients. Today it offers many services including a shelter, a soup kitchen, drop-in centres, social reintegration, education, detox, and help to become financially independent.

I would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank the religious communities and the archdiocese of Quebec City for supporting this organization from the very beginning.

Thank you to its donors and the many volunteers for their support and their dedication to this cause. I wish to sincerely thank the executive director, Éric Boulay, and his entire team who open their hearts every morning when they open the shelter's doors.

On this Valentine's Day, I thank you for this 30-year-old love story in Quebec City.

\* \* \*

[English]

#### RENFREW SOUTH DISTRICT WOMEN'S INSTITUTE

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, celebrating their 100th anniversary are the members of Renfrew South District Women's Institute, with branches in Burnstown, Horton, Castleford, Calabogie, Glasgow, Lockwinnoch and White Lake. Members of these seven branches actively work together for family, home, community and country.

The objective of the first Women's Institute branch, formed February 19, 1897, was to improve women's skills in the art of homemaking and child care. Through high-quality education and support programs and services, Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario's original focus expanded to include personal growth opportunities, government lobbying and health and community wellness initiatives.

I am pleased to recognize this year's anniversary executive: Margie MacKenzie, Irene Robillard, Joanne McDonald, Jo-Anne Camelon, Ellen Martin, Jane Flain, Sara MacKenzie, Lynn Clelland, Marlene Schaly, Lillian Collins and Anita Schubrink. Congratulations to the Renfrew South Districts Women's Institute for its century of service.

\* \* \*

#### TIBET

**Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Canadian-Tibetan community celebrated the 100th anniversary of the proclamation of Tibetan independence yesterday. This recognized a key moment in Tibetan history. In 1913, the 13th Dalai Lama re-declared Tibet's sovereignty after the fall of the Manchu empire. He successfully maintained the sovereignty of the nation until the Chinese invasion of 1949-1950.

Notwithstanding this centennial anniversary, Tibetans today live under such oppressive conditions that so threaten their culture, environment, religious freedom and human rights that we have seen, shockingly, over 100 Tibetans lighting themselves on fire in protest. We call on the leaders of China to meet in earnest with the leaders of the Tibetan government in exile to discuss the Dalai Lama's third way for human rights and democratic, regional, cultural and environmental autonomy for Tibetans within China.

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#### SHARK FINNING

**Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, an estimated 73 million sharks are killed each year for their fins, often by a brutal practice called shark finning. Fins are removed and the bodies dumped into the ocean, causing a rapid decline in shark populations and serious impacts on our marine ecosystems.

My colleague, the NDP deputy fisheries and oceans critic, has provided remarkable leadership on this issue by introducing Bill C-380, a law that would stop the import of shark fins into Canada once and for all.

People across Canada have been working incredibly hard in support of this bill. Groups like Fin Free Victoria, a group that includes students from Glenlyon Northfolk School, and other schools in my riding, have been a real force for change, campaigning online and in the community. Let us listen to their voices. I am urging every member of the House to do the right thing and vote for the bill and stop the barbaric import of shark fins.

\* \* \*

#### WINNIPEG POLICE CHIEF

**Ms. Joyce Bateman (Winnipeg South Centre, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Black History Month this year is recognizing past and present achievements of black Canadians in law enforcement. That is why I am proud to commend the work of Winnipeg Police Chief Devon Clunis.

*Statements by Members*

Born in Jamaica, he served with the Winnipeg Police Service for 25 years before being sworn in as Canada's first black police chief in November 2012.

• (1410)

[*Translation*]

Since his appointment, Chief Clunis has been working closely with community groups in Winnipeg in order to keep our streets safe.

He is a source of inspiration for our young people. His pride in our country and his dedicated service are great examples for all Canadians to follow.

[*English*]

On behalf of our government, I want to thank Chief Clunis and commend him for his exemplary service to Winnipeggers and Canadians. He helps keep our streets and communities safe.

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**ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS**

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, today is Valentine's Day, and hundreds of young people marched on Parliament Hill calling on the government to have a heart for first nations children. These young leaders are carrying on the work of civil rights activist Shannen Koostachin. Shannen had a dream that every child in this country was entitled to a safe and comfy school that would give them hope and pride, but these basic rights have been systematically denied children on reserve.

We are coming now to the third anniversary of the tragic death of young Shannen and the one-year anniversary since the House unanimously voted for the Shannen's Dream motion to ensure equality for first nations children. Rather than coming through with this promise, the government is spending millions in the courts to try to stop basic rights for first nations children. Thankfully, the children are carrying on the spirit of Shannen. Through them, we will realize the meaning of the treaties, and we will realize the value of equality for all children in this country.

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**MARCH TO THE TOP**

**Mr. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it was my honour last night to attend the world premier of the documentary *March to the Top*, a film that documents the personal stories of service and sacrifice of 12 injured Canadian veterans as they form an expedition team to climb the gruelling 20,305-foot summit of Island Peak, a mountain south of Mount Everest. Despite serious physical and emotional challenges, these veterans served one more mission for Canada, a mission to inspire other wounded veterans and a mission that reminds all of us that the values of courage, duty and valour are not confined to the battlefield.

I want to salute these outstanding Canadians: Roseanna Mandy, Matthew Nilson, Chris Drewes, David MacDonald, Michelle Hickey, Brian Hyland, Neal Carman, Craig Tourangeau, Corey Hatt, Peter Burcew, François Dupéré, and Carl Keenan. I also want to thank the True Patriot Love Foundation: team leader, Ray Joseph, expedition leader, Ben Webster and also Bruce Cowley for seeing

the value of this inspiring Canadian story. All Canadians should watch *March to the Top* on CBC-TV on Monday, February 18.

\* \* \*

**BLACK HISTORY MONTH**

**Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, Black History Month engages us in a celebration of our rich African-Canadian heritage and history, including Mathieu Da Costa, who accompanied Samuel de Champlain in the 16th century; Dr. Anderson Ruffin Abbott, Canada's first black licensed surgeon, who stood vigil at the deathbed of Abraham Lincoln; my own childhood hero, the legendary Jackie Robinson, the first ball player to break the colour line with the Montreal Royals before joining the Brooklyn Dodgers; my fellow Quebecker, pianist Oscar Peterson and the Right Hon. Michaëlle Jean, let alone all those black Canadians whose struggles and successes have helped build community and country.

In Quebec, the theme of this year's festivities is "Now is the Time".

[*Translation*]

This call to action urges us to honour our Afro-Canadian history by building vibrant, prosperous communities that stick together, and to develop even stronger ties among the various communities that make Canada such a diverse country, and proud to be so.

\* \* \*

[*English*]

**TAXATION**

**Mrs. Kelly Block (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, one of the core values in Canadian society is freedom. Freedom of speech, religion and association are examples of pillars that this country rests on, pillars that Canadians are proud to defend and stand up for.

Another of such freedoms is economic freedom, which is the right, as hard-working Canadians, to choose how, when and where their income is spent. This government knows that Canadians know best where their money is spent. How do we maximize this kind of freedom? The answer is simple: low taxes. By keeping taxes low, as this government has and will continue to do, all Canadians, including families and seniors, will have a greater degree of freedom.

However, the NDP members are patently against this kind of economic freedom. They have proposed both a new \$20-billion carbon tax and an increase in GST. They think they know better than Canadians where they should spend their money.

*Oral Questions*

●(1415)

**TAXATION**

**Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, in just three short years, Senator Pamela Wallin has claimed well over \$300,000 for “other travel”. According to one senior Conservative senator, this spending is very unusual.

Let us put the spending of these tax dollars into perspective. This could have paid for one year of old age security for 57 seniors. It took the combined taxes of 28 hard-working Canadian families to pay for this person’s “other travel”. Think about it: Every single dime in taxes for 28 Canadian families just to cover this senator’s “other travel”.

Instead of hanging their heads in shame, Conservatives have defended it. The good news for Canadians is that the New Democrats are here fighting for them. While Conservatives choose to defend their unelected and unaccountable senators, the NDP is proudly defending Canadian taxpayers.

\* \* \*

**THE NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF CANADA**

**Mrs. Stella Ambler (Mississauga South, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, love is in the air. Today thousands of Canadian couples will celebrate their love. They will take the time to tell one another how special the love they share truly is.

Sadly, Canadians must be made aware that the proposed \$20-billion job-killing carbon tax the NDP wants to impose on Canadians would increase the price of dining at a restaurant. It would increase the price of cards, flowers and chocolates. It would even increase the price of a flight to Paris, the city of love. The NDP’s dangerous and reckless \$20-billion carbon tax would tax love.

We understand that the Leader of the Opposition loves the idea of imposing a job-killing carbon tax on Canadians. However, we think that Canadians will end up breaking his heart.

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**ORAL QUESTIONS***[Translation]***ETHICS**

**Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the instances of abuse by Conservative senators are going from bad to worse.

Yesterday, the Prime Minister defended the exorbitant expenses claimed by Conservative Senator Pamela Wallin.

Today, we learned that Senator Wallin was spending taxpayer money at an even more alarming rate than we ever imagined: more than \$350,000 in 27 months—or \$13,000 a month—in travel expenses alone.

Will the Prime Minister continue to support these abuses, or will he finally demand accountability from his senators?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as I said yesterday, the senator’s travel expenses are identical to the amounts spent by other parliamentarians.

*[English]*

Just to give an example of that, for instance, over the past three years the average amount spent on travel to and from provinces by western members of the New Democratic Party has been \$350,000. These are the costs that parliamentarians incur when they travel back and forth from Ottawa to their provinces. That is what the senator has done. Of course, all senators and members are committed to ensuring that these expenses are appropriate.

**Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, \$13,000 a month in travel expenses even when the Senate is not sitting is certainly not comparable to other senators.

Conservative Senator Pamela Wallin has spent more money on travel outside her supposed home province than any other senator. Even the Conservative committee chairman charged with investigating corruption in the Senate has questioned her travel expenses, calling them very unusual. In fact, maybe Pamela Wallin is just a typical Conservative senator after all: unelected, unaccountable and under investigation.

Will the Prime Minister continue to defend this blatant abuse of public funds or stand up for taxpayers?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, once again, the senator spends almost half of her time in the province she represents in the upper house. Her travel costs on Senate business are, in fact, comparable to others’. The senator and all other senators and members of the House are fully prepared and committed to have an examination of expenses to ensure that they are appropriate. That is the commitment the government has made in both chambers, a commitment we will keep.

\* \* \*

●(1420)

**ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS**

**Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, a year ago the Prime Minister voted for an NDP motion to close the funding gap for first nation schools. A year later, first nation schools are still receiving nearly one-third less funding than other Canadian schools, yet another broken promise by the Prime Minister.

The idea that in Canada one group of children would be singled out and denied an equal opportunity in life is a moral outrage. He promised to close the gap, not just narrow it. When is the Prime Minister going to keep his promise?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I simply do not accept the numbers that the leader of the NDP is throwing around. This government is committed to ensuring that aboriginal children have full access and full opportunities for education as other children do. That is why we have made substantial investments, which, by the way, the NDP has consistently voted against. That is why we have made substantial investments in aboriginal communities and why we are consulting right now on legislation to improve aboriginal education across this country.

*Oral Questions*

I would urge the NDP, if it is serious about these matters, to actually get on board and start working for these investments.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is simply not doing enough to provide education or to shed light on murdered and missing aboriginal women.

If he were doing enough, today would not have marked the 22nd march—

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**The Speaker:** Order, please.

The hon. member for Churchill.

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** Mr. Speaker, if the Prime Minister were doing enough, today would not have marked the 22nd march for missing and murdered aboriginal women. That is 22 marches and still no action.

Why are families forced to march? How many other women must disappear before this government takes action?

[*English*]

**Ms. Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the fact is that this government is taking concrete action to address the tragic issue of missing and murdered aboriginal women. Also, we support a special committee to look into the public policy issues. We are providing significant resources to law enforcement and victims' services, and we are working with all levels of government to ensure there is a coordinated response.

The murder and abduction of women in this country is completely unacceptable. We will continue to move forward with a vigorous criminal justice agenda to address these issues. We encourage all opposition parties to support all of our efforts.

**Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the families of the victims, those who have lost a sister, a daughter, a grandmother, have said they want a national public inquiry. That is what they are here on Parliament Hill to tell us.

A Human Rights Watch report this week documented that governments and authorities have failed aboriginal women.

An independent investigation is needed to get these answers. Will the government, the Prime Minister himself, take the question from the families themselves? Will the government say that enough is enough and call a national public inquiry into missing and murdered aboriginal women?

**Ms. Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our government has been a leader when it comes to working with the provinces and responding to the needs of victims in aboriginal communities.

Provincial and territorial governments acknowledged this when they noted that our government had taken significant action to respond to the 52 recommendations in last year's comprehensive missing women report.

We have also strengthened sentencing for all violent offenders, something that the opposition parties consistently vote against. We

provided funding for the Thunderchild First Nation's awareness project and the Treaty 8 awareness campaign. We are getting it done.

**Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the relationship between aboriginal women and the police is sadly broken. The government cannot pretend it is just business as usual. We cannot tell terrified and traumatized women to go report themselves to the same people who made them victims.

Serious allegations of criminality have been made. Will the Prime Minister appoint a special prosecutor or some other civilian authority with the power and resources to receive and investigate these allegations in ways that ensure the safety of the victims?

• (1425)

**Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, while we have no information regarding these allegations, I have asked the independent Commission for Public Complaints Against the RCMP to look into this matter.

If that member has specific information on these allegations, he should contact the appropriate authorities, including the provincial prosecutors who would be responsible for that type of prosecution.

**Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, again it is business as usual.

If non-aboriginal women were disappearing at the same rate as aboriginal women in Canada, there would be 20,000 missing or murdered victims. The police solve 84% of all homicides in Canada, but when the victims are aboriginal women and girls, the solution rate drops to just 50%.

Allegations of police misconduct are mounting. To save the victims who can still be saved, will the government appoint a special independent civilian authority to take charge of this situation, because the present authorities do not have the—

**The Speaker:** The Hon. Minister of Public Safety.

**Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I think the member is somewhat unclear about what the process is.

In fact, when there are allegations made against a police force such as the RCMP, there is an independent civilian commission that handles it. It is the Commission for Public Complaints Against the RCMP. I have asked them to look into this.

If that member has any specific information in respect of any particular case, that information should either go to the police or the member should go to his provincial prosecutors.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, if non-aboriginal women went missing at the same rate as aboriginal women in Canada, there would be 20,000 missing or murdered women. The police find the culprit in 84% of murder cases in Canada, but when the victim is aboriginal, this rate drops to 50%.

Serious allegations have been made against the police, but the government still refuses to take action. Why not hold a judicial inquiry immediately?

[English]

**Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I can reply to that question, again with the same answer.

We have no information regarding these allegations, but I have asked the independent Commission for Public Complaints Against the RCMP to look into this matter. That member can approach that independent commission to look at this matter.

If the member has specific information in respect of any specific criminal act, he should go to the appropriate authorities.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

#### CANADA BORDER SERVICES AGENCY

**Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the Global Television network has revealed that the level of co-operation between Canadian border officials and their Chinese counterparts is much higher than we thought.

It seems that the CBSA invites Chinese government representatives to meetings behind closed doors, during which Canada approves requests to deport dissidents who are wanted by the Chinese government.

We are well aware of all the concerns expressed by the international community and Canada with regard to the treatment of dissidents in China. How can the government allow this co-operation?

[English]

**Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to removing foreign criminals who have no right to be in Canada, something that the member opposes.

Individuals who are in Canada illegally are removed only after officials have determined that they can be removed without undue risk. Our government has never shied away from raising human rights issues with China, and we will conduct ourselves lawfully in every respect.

**Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, why are the Conservatives still being so careless with Canada's international reputation?

There are important reasons why Canadian law requires due process for extradition, not the least of which is the rule of law. The Chinese government's legal system, on the other hand, has been criticized for allowing things like coerced confessions and closed trials.

Canadian officials must respect Canadian laws and not serve at the beck and call of the Chinese regime. When will the minister act to put an end to these special order deportations? When will he ensure the rule of law in Canada?

**Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to removing foreign criminals who

have no right to be in Canada. That is something the member voted against. He voted to keep foreign criminals in Canada.

Individuals who are in Canada illegally are removed only after officials have determined that they can be removed without undue risk. Our government has never shied away from raising human rights concerns with the Chinese government. We will continue in that vein.

\* \* \*

● (1430)

#### THE ENVIRONMENT

**Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, perhaps the Conservatives should spend just a little less time trying to please the Chinese government and a little more time working with our U.S. neighbours.

[Translation]

President Obama has issued a challenge—

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**The Speaker:** Order. The hon. member for Halifax.

**Ms. Megan Leslie:** Mr. Speaker, President Obama has issued a challenge to elected officials in both the United States and Canada to act quickly to combat climate change.

He knows that economic growth and reducing greenhouse gas emissions go hand in hand.

This raises the question: what will the Conservatives do when our neighbours and economic partners impose penalties on businesses that pollute too much?

[English]

**Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of the Environment, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we look forward to continuing our bilateral work with the United States to create jobs and economic growth in both countries. However, I sense in my colleague's question another attempt to find a hook on which to hang the NDP's proposed carbon tax.

Our government's economic action plan does not include a carbon tax or new schemes to raise revenue on the backs of hard-working Canadians. We have a regulatory plan to meet our Copenhagen reduction targets, and it is working.

**Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, President Obama's challenge was not just to Americans. It was also a call to action on climate change for Canada. Ambassador Jacobson was very clear about that.

While the Conservatives continue to delay their long promised regulations for the oil and gas sector, their failure to act is hurting our most important trading relationship. The minister admitted this week that we “could be doing more” to protect the environment.

Here is his chance. The president has advised Canada to take action to fight climate change. What is the minister going to do?

**Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of the Environment, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, again I would remind my colleague that we have a sector-by-sector regulatory plan.

*Oral Questions*

We first treated and addressed the emissions from the transportation sector, the largest emitting sector in Canada. We then generated regulations for the coal-fired electricity sector. We are now well into, and very close to finalizing, regulations for the oil and gas sector.

As I said, we have a plan. It is working.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**ETHICS**

**Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, in two years, Senator Wallin, an unelected senator who is not accountable to anyone, racked up over \$350,000 in travel expenses. She criss-crossed the country, mostly doing partisan work for the Conservatives. Your taxes, ladies and gentlemen, are being used to fill the Conservative Party coffers.

In the hall of shame that is the Senate, Wallin ranks fourth on the spending charts. That is hardly the kind of housecleaning the Prime Minister promised seven years ago.

Do the Conservatives condone the use of public money for partisan purposes, yes or no?

**Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I reject the premise of the question.

Conservative Senator Wallin spent 168 days in Saskatchewan last year. She spent as much on travel between Ottawa and Saskatchewan as an average MP from the region, including NDP MPs.

**Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives did not defend Senator Duffy the way they are now defending Senator Wallin. If I were him, I would be worried. Sooner or later, they will have to stop taking us for fools.

For the quarter in which the 2011 federal election was held, Senator Wallin spent over \$25,000 on “other” taxpayer-funded travel during which she campaigned with Conservative candidates. She is the guest of honour at party fundraising dinners and makes the rounds of TV studios to spin the Prime Minister's message.

Do the Conservatives think it is okay to spend taxpayers' money spreading the word about their campaign platform?

[English]

**Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I do not think it is surprising that Pamela Wallin supports the Conservative Party. I think most members of our caucus do. That is certainly not an unusual thing to do.

However, senators are expected to maintain residences in both Ottawa and their home region. Senator Wallin spent 168 days in the past year in Saskatchewan proudly supporting our government, proudly supporting our party and advancing the causes that Canadians believe in: jobs, growth and a stronger economy, which is something she fights for every day as do all of us on this side.

• (1435)

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, while the Conservatives are defending the entitlements of the senators, the New Democrats will be defending the taxpayer.

The Prime Minister claims that he examined Pamela Wallin's expenses and said that he approved, but a senior Conservative senator said otherwise. They say that they are investigating her because her expenses were very unusual.

Senator Wallin had the highest unexplained other travel expenses of any senator, but the Senate tried to keep this investigation secret. Where is the accountability to the taxpayer?

Will the government stop defending its cronies in the Senate and start standing up for the taxpayer and ensure these investigations are made fully public?

**Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as has been indicated, Senator Wallin's spending on travel is comparable to that of other parliamentarians from the same region, including western NDP parliamentarians. Apparently it is all right for them to spend that money, but when a Conservative senator spends it, travels and represents her community and is there for 168 days for the people of Saskatchewan, it is somehow inappropriate.

The NDP members' real concern is that Conservatives are representing their communities. Their problem is that they do not have anyone in Saskatchewan to represent the NDP.

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, this is fascinating. Her expenses go to her riding in the West Annex and not to western Canada, which is the question. She is unelected, unaccountable and she is under investigation.

Let us bring a few more things forward.

During the last election, she was charging \$25,000 to the taxpayer for other travel. She was showing up at party fundraisers in places like Moose Jaw and Collingwood.

We had all these Conservative bagmen and party guys travelling the country stumping for the election machine. Why were they charging that money to the Senate and what are you going to do to get our money back?

**The Speaker:** The member knows he needs to address his question through the Chair and not directly at other members.

The hon. government House leader.

**Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, again, Senator Wallin's expenses are comparable to those of parliamentarians from that region. There is nothing out of the ordinary and those expenses do relate to her travel from Ottawa to Saskatchewan, where she was 168 days last year.

\* \* \*

**EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE**

**Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, while the Conservatives defend the Senate, the NDP defends taxpayers.



*Oral Questions*

Last October, the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development launched made-up attacks on a fictional 45-day work year, bombastically chiding this as “unacceptable”. Yet, now she and her party are actually defending senators who work only three days a week, while collecting over \$130,000 in salary plus perks.

How can Conservatives be so judgemental about out-of-work Canadians, while defending such largesse for their unelected, unaccountable senators?

**Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is entirely true. Just a few years ago a lot of work was done because both the NDP and the Liberals were saying that Canadians should only have to work for 45 days a year before they qualified for employment insurance, a 360-hour entry limit.

We have a shortage of workers and skills right across our great country. That is why our government is helping those people identify the jobs in their areas so they can be working and earning money to help their families and their communities.

\* \* \*

**ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS**

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, today Parliament is debating the Liberal motion to create a special parliamentary committee to address the terrible tragedy of missing and murdered aboriginal women and girls. For years, the Liberal Party has been calling for a full national public inquiry on this issue and the Conservatives have steadfastly refused. A parliamentary committee, as proposed today, is a small first step until the government is replaced.

Will the Conservatives commit in the House to the creation of a special committee and allow it to do its serious work, without the interference and sabotage of the PMO?

● (1440)

**Ms. Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I rose in a speech before the House earlier today and said that we welcomed a special committee to deal with the policy issues on this. The hon. member was in the House when I said that. Her question belies her presence.

Successful projects that this government has funded include: the Thunderchild First Nation awareness project, delivering workshops and information sessions; the Canadian Centre for Child Protection in collaboration with the Assembly of First Nations and the RCMP; the Treaty 8 awareness campaign; the Canadian Red Cross that has successful prevention programs; the Ka Ni Kanichihk Inc. Medicine Bear Counselling, Support and Elder Services in Winnipeg; the tree of life program for youth—

**The Speaker:** Order, please. The hon. member for York West.

**Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, for more than five years, we have called for an independent inquiry to examine cases involving hundreds of missing aboriginal women and for five years the Conservatives have sat on their hands. Despite their empty talk about their so-called support for victims agenda, the Conservatives have yet to show an ounce of compassion for these victims and their families. It is time to give aboriginal women the respect they deserve without worry of re-victimization.

Will the government provide a safe and secure way for these victims to tell their stories and finally get justice at last?

**Ms. Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our hearts go out to the grieving families of these missing and murdered aboriginal women. This is a tragic and compelling issue and one that we have been on the front lines trying to address.

The Aboriginal Friendship Centres of Saskatchewan supports families of missing and murdered aboriginal women. Justice Canada is collaborating with the Manitoba justice to enhance victims' services. The Saskatchewan ministry of justice has created three specialized missing persons liaison positions.

We have federal project funding on an ongoing basis. We are working collaboratively with aboriginals and non-aboriginals.

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**NATIONAL DEFENCE**

**Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the minister appears not to understand the enormity of her \$14 billion cost overrun on ships because of inflation compared with the phoney \$16 billion total cost estimate for the F-35s.

With a 56% cost overrun, does the minister understand that she can now build only 10 destroyers and frigates rather than the original 15? Will she come back to Canadians with a new and financially credible plan on the number of ships and their cost?

**Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as the member knows, the government has allocated a budget of \$33 billion for the procurement of new ships to be built in Halifax and Vancouver.

In terms of cost estimates, those come from military planners with the involvement of auditors, cost estimators, oversight by the shipbuilding secretariat, the treasury board secretariat and the chief financial officer of the Department of National Defence.

Industry analysts say that this will create 15,000 jobs across the country and \$2 billion in additional economic spinoff in the next 30 years.

*Oral Questions*

[Translation]

**TRANSPORTATION**

**Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, traffic congestion is a problem that can no longer be ignored. Every day in Montreal, Toronto, Vancouver and many other cities, people have trouble getting to work, which means billions of dollars' worth of lost productivity. To help our economy, we must invest in effective solutions, and the best solution, hands down, is public transit.

Has the minister included funding for public transit in the next infrastructure program in order to reduce traffic congestion?

**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, as I mentioned before, never in the history of this country has a government invested so much in public transit across the country.

We did it by respecting something that the NDP does not understand: provincial and municipal jurisdictions. The NDP wants every decision to be made in Ottawa. We respect the cities' jurisdictions. No one is in a better position to make such decisions than the mayor and the city council.

We will see whether or not there will be other mayors in the House in the future. That said, we work very hard to respect jurisdictions and to find money for public transit.

[English]

**Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, Torontonians are fed up with gridlock and the \$6 billion it is costing the economy. Thousands of commuters are speaking out in public forums, demanding federal public funding for transit.

The minister does not seem to understand how bad the situation is, so I am formally inviting him to join with me during rush hour to ride the overcrowded subway in Toronto. Will he come?

• (1445)

**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, since 2006, we have invested \$5 billion in public transit. The government has done the job. We will continue to respect provincial and municipal jurisdictions and we will continue to support them. Never has a government invested so much as ours.

\* \* \*

**CANADA POST CORPORATION**

**Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are at it again. Post offices around the country have been closed. Now we have learned there are even more cutbacks on the way. They are talking about reducing the number of home deliveries per week and closing more post offices. These types of closures hit people in rural and remote areas even harder because they are farther away from service centres of all types. People rely upon our postal services to get their pay and their benefits.

Why are the Conservatives continuing with their reckless Canada Post cuts?

**Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Transport), CPC):**

Mr. Speaker, I reject everything that member just said. It is this government that brought in the rural moratorium on post office closures.

It is known that there has been a decline by up to 20% in mail volume since 2007. There have been losses in the past year of \$253 million between Canada Post and its subsidiaries.

However, our government will work with Canada Post to ensure that it will be able to continue to provide services to Canadians in a way that is sustainable in the long term.

[Translation]

**Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives' lack of consistency has reached new heights.

In June 2011, the Conservatives said that our economy would be devastated if we did not force Canada Post employees back to work. They said that businesses and Canadians would pay dearly for the reduced services.

Yesterday CTV news was reporting that the Conservatives might reduce mail delivery from five to three days a week.

If a simple rotating strike presented such a serious threat to our economy, what sort of impact would a permanent reduction have? Would it be the apocalypse?

[English]

**Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Transport), CPC):**

Mr. Speaker, that is an extraordinary question from the NDP, the same NDP that blocked our government's efforts to restore postal service in 2011. The NDP tried to prolong the mail service disruption by blocking our legislation to restore mail service. In fact, the big union bosses thanked the NDP for delaying our legislation to restore mail service.

If the member has any other questions, I would be happy to email him the answers.

\* \* \*

**TRANSPORTATION**

**Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, ensuring the safety of Canadian families is very important to our Conservative government. Today our government introduced new safety regulations that would require new vehicles in Canada to have shoulder belts in the rear centre seat. These regulations would also strengthen safety testing and further align our standards with those of the United States.

Would the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities update the House on these new regulations that would both enhance the safety of Canadians and boost cross-border trade?

*Oral Questions*

**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, our government is standing up for Canadians by making shoulder belts mandatory in the rear middle seat. This will reduce the number of deaths and injuries on our roads. We are also delivering on our commitment to further align our standards with those of the United States, which will contribute to long-term economic growth.

The president of the Association of International Automobile Manufacturers of Canada said the government is to be commended for ensuring that Canada's regulatory framework keeps pace with industry safety practices. We are doing the job.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE**

**Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, who am I? My lifestyle is very lucrative. I only work a few days a year, no more than three days a week and only if I want to.

The Minister of Human Resources would say—

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh.

• (1450)

**The Speaker:** Order, please. The hon. member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles.

**Mrs. Anne-Marie Day:** Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Human Resources would probably say unemployed workers, the people who are looking for work and who she singles out as bad guys. But, no, the answer is a senator who works 56 days a year for \$132,000.

How can the minister justify the waste in the Senate while cutting employment insurance?

**Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our government has expanded the range of services provided to unemployed workers to help them return to work.

We have enhanced the job alert service and our job bank to help workers find available jobs in their field, in their region. They will be better connected to available jobs, and they and their families will be better off. We are here to help Canadians.

**Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday, my colleague from Acadie—Bathurst informed the Minister of Human Resources that the Conservative Government of New Brunswick opposes the employment insurance reform. Had the minister consulted the provinces, there may not have been such a wave of protest.

New Brunswick's deputy premier said, "We oppose the reform introduced by the federal government last spring." The minister gave a ridiculous response that had to do with Newfoundland and Labrador.

Of what use are the Conservative members for New Brunswick and Quebec if they have no clout in cabinet?

**Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to quote a New Brunswick professor:

[English]

EI has hurt Atlantic Canada.... We need to encourage workers to work. I've heard too many business people tell me they can't find workers.

[Translation]

That is exactly what we are doing. We are connecting unemployed workers to available jobs in their region so they are better off. That is a good thing for Canadians and New Brunswickers.

\* \* \*

[English]

**FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

**Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, from families going to Disney World to snowbirds getting away for the winter, two million Canadians travel to Florida every single year, but our driver's licences suddenly have become invalid in the sunshine state.

Why did Canadians have to learn about this through the media, and why did they have to rely on the Geneva convention to be protected? We have not heard a peep yet from the Conservatives. Has it come to the point where the cuts to the Department of Foreign Affairs have become so drastic that it cannot even phone Florida?

**Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I do not understand what the cuts have to do with this whole thing. It is a law made by the State of Florida.

We have concerns with this change. That is why earlier today, at the request of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Doer made representations to the governor's office to express our concerns with the impact this would have on Canadian travel. I am pleased to inform the House that the Florida Highway Patrol will defer enforcement of this change.

[Translation]

**Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier-Sainte-Marie, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, today we learned, thanks to the media yet again, that it has been illegal to drive in Florida with a driver's licence from Quebec or any other province since January 1 of this year.

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

[English]

**The Speaker:** Order. There are far too many cross-conversations going on.

[Translation]

Order, please.

The hon. member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie.

**Ms. Hélène Laverdière:** Mr. Speaker, I would not have to speak so loudly if the other side were not so noisy.

Thankfully, the American authorities have backtracked because this measure may be in violation of the Geneva Convention on Road Traffic.

*Oral Questions*

Why did the Conservative government not warn travellers when the measure was put in place?

● (1455)

[English]

**Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, let me just repeat what I told her colleague on the other side.

As I said, we have concerns with this change. That is why earlier today, and I will say it very slowly, at the request of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Doer made representation to the governor's office to express our concern with the impact this would have on Canadian travellers. I am happy to report to the House that the Florida Highway Patrol will defer enforcement—

**The Speaker:** Order. The hon. member for Charlottetown.

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**VETERANS AFFAIRS**

**Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday's phony performance by the Minister of National Defence was farcical. Bravely answering a planted question, he pretended to be outraged by the legal costs resulting from the government's class action settlement with veterans.

Does he really believe that Canadians forget that it was the Conservative government that dragged disabled veterans through the courts for five long years in the first place?

How much of the legal costs, all caused by the government, will it agree to pay, or will it stick the veterans with the whole bill?

**Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as I indicated very clearly yesterday, we have voiced our concerns about the costs associated with the legal fees that are being sought by those who were defending the veterans at this class action. We have acted quickly to settle this class action upon the court's decision being rendered.

We have made our views very clear that we feel the lawyers are seeking excessive costs. This settlement was intended then, as now, to respond to the needs of veterans and their families.

If the member wants to stand up for lawyers, he is welcome to do so. We will stand up for veterans.

**Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am here to stand up for veterans. I am here to stand up for the veterans who the government fought for five years in court. If it is not bad enough that it fought this group of disabled veterans for five years, there are two more class action lawsuits that it will not negotiate. It will not sit down. It is waiting for these guys to also rack up a great big bill that would either have to be paid by the veterans or the taxpayers.

What will it be? Will the government sit down with this group of disabled veterans or treat them like the ones in the Manuge case?

**Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, putting aside his feigned indignation, I have already indicated we have in fact acted quickly to ensure that this settlement benefits veterans and their families. That is the responsible thing to do.

We have also indicated to the judge who was adjudicating that we feel the lawyers' fees that are being claimed and applied in this case are excessive.

We hope, though we will not interfere in that decision, that the judge will do the right thing and ensure that these funds are going to veterans in a way that will help them and their families.

**Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, those kinds of comments also make us reverse our lunch when we hear stuff like that, because it was the government and the Prime Minister that forced 7,500 disabled heroes and their families through the courts when they were advised repeatedly in 2006 and 2007 to stop the legal proceedings because not one plug nickel should go to any legal fees. This should have been settled out of court many, many years ago.

Will the Prime Minister of Canada please stand on his feet and apologize to those 7,500 heroes and their families for dragging them through the courts in the first place?

**Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, again that is a bit rich coming from this member in particular and his party.

In addition to settling this particular lawsuit, which has amounted to hundreds of millions of dollars, I would point to the billions of dollars that have been added to the benefits for veterans and their families and for members of the Canadian armed forces through new programs, new equipment, new support, new infrastructure across the country and new protective equipment, all of which has been consistently opposed and voted against by that member and the hypocrisy of his party.

**Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, what we oppose and New Democrats will oppose every single time is closure of Veterans Affairs offices, \$250 million cut from the DVA, and now we oppose the Conservative government's action against the 1,000 disabled RCMP veterans who it is now dragging through the courts once again.

It is bad enough that it drags disabled military veterans through the courts; now it is dragging disabled RCMP veterans and their families through the courts.

Will the government now do the right thing for these veterans and the taxpayers: stop these legal proceedings, sit down with the RCMP veterans and negotiate a fair settlement so they can get on with their lives?

● (1500)

**Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, of course we are a fair and reasonable government. If there is a way to avoid expensive legal proceedings, we would seek to do that. The matter is before the courts.

*Oral Questions*

I would ask that the hon. member ponder that, if he is so in favour of veterans and disabled RCMP officers, maybe he should disown the \$21 billion carbon tax his party is—

**The Speaker:** Order, please. The hon. member for Ottawa—Orléans.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**AEROSPACE INDUSTRY**

**Mr. Royal Galipeau (Ottawa—Orléans, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Canada has earned its reputation as a leader in space exploration.

[English]

In a report commissioned by our government, the Hon. David Emerson confirmed that the Canadian industry is well positioned to take advantage of emerging opportunities, succeed commercially and contribute to the public good. Our government plays a crucial role in the Canadian space sector, of which all Canadians are immensely proud.

[Translation]

Could the Minister of Industry update the House on the latest developments in the aerospace industry?

**Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his excellent question and for his involvement in this file over the past 30 years.

I am proud to inform the House that we are bringing back a piece of Canada's technological history, the first Canadarm, which was part of the Endeavour mission.

[English]

It is now on its way to the Canadian Aviation and Space Museum in Ottawa, where it will soon be on display for all Canadians to see. Canada's highly competitive aerospace and space industries are major contributors to our economy, and the Canadarm is just one example of our world-class Canadian companies' capabilities.

\* \* \*

**THE ENVIRONMENT**

**Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the Environment Commissioner stated last week that the Conservative government does not know if securities placed on deposit are enough to cover the final decommissioning and reclamation costs of mines north of 60. Not knowing if they have money to pay what they owe and having taxpayers bear the risks is not sound economic management.

When will this incompetence end, and will the Conservatives follow the foundation of their environmental liability regime, the polluter pay principle?

**Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of the Environment, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our government recognizes that the current liability limits for accidents in offshore oil and gas developments need to be reviewed. In Canada, the fundamental principle of our government today is that the polluter pay. Our government is committed to periodically assessing financial liability to make certain that

Canada's polluter pay system remains among the strongest in the world, and that is exactly what we are doing.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**PENSIONS**

**Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, last week, I met with the National Pensioners and Senior Citizens Federation. It is calling on the Conservatives to reverse their plan to increase the eligibility age for old age security from 65 to 67. It also wants the government to create a national pharmacare plan. And it is urging the government to better protect pensions, combat poverty and invest in affordable housing.

The NDP supports these demands.

Will the minister follow up on these demands?

**Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our government is doing a lot to help Canada's seniors, because they are the ones who built this country.

We have done many things.

[English]

We have increased the GIS eligibility and raised the deduction by \$3,500. We have brought in the age exemption, increased that by twice. We have also brought in pension income sharing and a whole lot of other things, including expanding the new horizons for seniors program. Sadly, the NDP voted against every one of those things for our seniors.

\* \* \*

**JUSTICE**

**Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, since this government was first elected, we passed more than 30 measures to improve the confidence of Canadians in our justice system. In order for Canadians to have confidence in the justice system, they must know that police officers are who they say they are. Personating a peace officer is a serious offence, which must be condemned by this House and all members.

Can the Minister of Justice please inform this House about the government's position regarding my private member's bill, Bill C-444, on personating a police officer or public officers?

● (1505)

**Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I think I can, but first I want to thank the hon. member for Red Deer for introducing this important legislation.

The bill addresses a crime that has serious negative consequences for the public. There have been a number of incidents over the years where Canadians were victimized because offenders were personating a police officer. The bill sends a message that criminals should not be allowed to exploit the public's trust.

*Business of the House*

I am pleased to inform the House that the government is in fact going to completely support this. For once, I would like the opposition to do the same.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**EMPLOYMENT**

**Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, in Saguenay, the needs of the Canada summer jobs program increase every year, but the budget has been frozen since 2009. This has a very negative impact on the organizations, small municipalities and young people who depend on this program every summer.

What is more, I have found out that applications will no longer be processed in Saguenay, but rather, they will be processed hundreds of kilometres away, near Montreal, by public servants who are not familiar with Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean's reality.

I demand that this government stop centralizing our resources in major centres and give the responsibility for processing applications for the Canada summer jobs program back to a Service Canada employee in Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean.

**Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we are very proud of the Canada summer jobs program because it creates over 36,000 jobs for our students. This program provides them with the opportunity to earn money, while acquiring skills that will help them in their future jobs.

We are very proud to have provided an additional \$50 million in funding for the Young Canada Works program, which helps young people overcome the challenge of finding a job. Of course, the NDP voted against this.

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**EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE**

**Mr. Jean-François Fortin (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matapédia, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the minister says that she has analyses of the impact of labour shortages, but there is nothing available to the public.

However, the public is aware of the many consequences of the EI reform and its adverse effects including making workers poorer, breaking up families, weakening communities in the regions, and the rigamarole that workers and pregnant women have to go through, at the behest of Service Canada, when filling out their declarations in order to avoid being deemed to have “refused employment”.

Ignoring these consequences shows a lack of compassion. Could the minister show some love and cancel the reform?

**Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we want to help Canadians find other jobs. It is better for them, their families, employees and their communities.

We have helped them by enhancing the job alert and the job bank systems. We are teaching them how to apply for jobs. We are there for Canadians because we love them.

[English]

**The Speaker:** That concludes question period for today. I understand that the hon. opposition House leader has the usual Thursday question.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**

**Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I rise here today to ask the hon. Leader of the Government in the House of Commons what his government plans to debate for the rest of the week and when we return after the constituency week.

Although we continue to debate a variety of bills that the government has included on the calendar and we continue to debate opposition motions, it is not always easy to really understand what the government is planning—unless of course it does not have a clear plan.

[English]

One thing that is clear from dealing with the government is that it does not seem to be much about action but all about talk.

I remember their introduction, with great fanfare, of Bill C-12, An Act to amend the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act, which would be quite useful to those who have potentially had their identity exposed to theft. It was introduced September 29, 2011, 493 days ago and has yet to be debated.

Then there is the infamous Bill C-7, Senate Reform Act, which the government claims to all who will listen that it cannot get it through Parliament. It has been 358 days since we have had an opportunity to debate that.

Who cannot forget Bill C-32, Civil Marriage of Non-residents Act, which the government refuses to bring forward for debate and a free and fair democratic vote in the House.

I wonder if all of these are going the way of the infamous Bill C-30, the Internet snooping bill, which the Minister of Public Safety so infamously torpedoed with his comments. It was left to die on the order paper.

Can the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons tell me what his plans are for the remainder of this week as well as the next? Does the government have anything representing an agenda whatsoever?

● (1510)

**Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I welcome the implicit offer of assistance from the House Leader of the Official Opposition.

I look forward to discussions with him later on the possibility of moving forward both Senate reform and Bill C-12 on a unanimous consent basis straight to committee. I would be happy to do that with him.

*Business of Supply*

This afternoon we will continue debating the Liberal opposition day motion. Tomorrow we will hopefully finish second reading of Bill C-48, the Technical Tax Amendments Act, 2012, a measure supported by all three parties. After that we will turn to third reading of Bill C-42, the Enhancing Royal Canadian Mounted Police Accountability Act; third reading of Bill S-7, the Combating Terrorism Act; and second reading of Bill S-12, the Incorporation by Reference in Regulations Act.

When we return from our constituency week on Monday, February 25, we will start second reading of Bill C-55, the Response to the Supreme Court of Canada Decision in *R. v. Tse* Act. This bill needs to be passed by mid-April before the Supreme Court ruling takes effect, which would render the important powers available to police ineffective.

After Bill C-55, we will consider Friday's unfinished business.

[*Translation*]

Tuesday, February 26, shall be the fifth allotted day, which will go to the Official Opposition, and it will therefore choose the subject of debate.

On Wednesday and Thursday, we will continue debating the bills I have already listed.

Additionally, Bill C-47, Northern Jobs and Growth Act, was reported back from committee yesterday, and I anticipate Bill S-9, Nuclear Terrorism Act, will be reported back soon. So we could also call these bills at report stage and third reading, if we have extra time next week.

Finally, on Friday, March 1, the House will start the second reading debate on Bill C-54, Not Criminally Responsible Reform Act. The Prime Minister announced this bill last week as part of our efforts to ensure we have a justice system that puts the rights of victims first.

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## GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

### BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

#### OPPOSITION MOTION—MISSING ABORIGINAL WOMEN

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

**The Speaker:** Resuming debate. The hon. Parliamentary Secretary for Status of Women has 13 minutes left for her speech.

**Mrs. Susan Truppe (Parliamentary Secretary for Status of Women, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would first reiterate my earlier statement that I do support the motion.

We have provided great support for projects to help eliminate violence against women and girls. Our government is addressing the large number of missing and murdered aboriginal women. The strategy's wide scope includes improving and better integrating law enforcement and police tools that will help to solve cases and track missing persons, and to support better victims' services and awareness programs for aboriginal communities.

Sue O'Sullivan, Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime, commended these actions, saying:

—what we need is more government action of this breadth and initiatives that address all aspects of the issue, from prevention and prosecution to victim support. These are the kinds of initiatives that have the most impact and that we can all support.

Our government also remains steadfast in moving forward its legislation to give aboriginal women equal property rights. Our government continues to strive to pass Bill S-2, legislation that the parties opposite have consistently opposed. If the opposition is so concerned about protecting the rights and safety of aboriginal women and children, they should join us and support this legislation.

The murder and abduction of women in this country is completely unacceptable. We will continue to move forward with a vigorous criminal justice agenda to address these issues. We encourage the opposition to support our efforts. Our government has taken several key steps to date. We have established the new National Centre for Missing Persons; improved law enforcement databases to investigate missing and murdered aboriginal women; created a national website to help identify and find missing persons; supported the development and adaptation of victims' services so they are culturally appropriate for aboriginal people; supported the development of school and community pilot projects aimed at reducing the vulnerability of young aboriginal women to violence; worked alongside aboriginal communities to develop community safety plans and developed a comprehensive list of best practices to help communities, law enforcement and justice partners in future work; and supported the development of public awareness materials to help end cycles of violence affecting aboriginal people.

All of these actions, plus many more, demonstrate that over the past seven years our Conservative government has been taking concrete steps to help all women in Canada. Through our government's actions we are striving to ensure that one day soon, violence against aboriginal women and girls, and all women and girls, is a thing of the past.

• (1515)

**Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, as someone who represents an area right along the corridor and highway often referred to as the Highway of Tears, I find the sources of this tragedy often complex and multi-tiered, and the solutions equally so. One of the struggles we have with the Conservatives' approach to this point is that while they have established commissions and inquiries into other things, in particular the missing salmon inquiry in British Columbia on what happened on the Fraser River, there is an inordinate reluctance on their part to get at the truth of the situation here. That is what is needed before progress can be made. They make great fanfare about spending some \$10 million or \$11 million over four or five years on programs addressing violence against aboriginal women, and they know full well that is a drop in the bucket, considering the needs of 650 aboriginal reserves across the country, to just name one group.

*Business of Supply*

I find it confusing and somewhat perplexing that the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, the Minister of Health and the Minister of Justice were all present for the debate earlier today, yet the aboriginal affairs minister in particular chose not to speak at all. The responsibility would at least fall to him to make some comment to the families of these missing women and girls, and yet he sat in the House and listened to a few things and left.

I do not think it is too much to say that the pattern of the government's language is that silence will be met with more silence. It should simply address the issue, face to face, with those communities and those families. The government cannot simply say that a crime and order agenda is enough. It needs to do more, and a full public inquiry would be what families are calling for.

**Mrs. Susan Truppe:** Mr. Speaker, our government attaches great importance to the issue of missing and murdered aboriginal women and has put forward a plan to address this issue. We have invested \$25 million over five years to give new tools to law enforcement agencies and to improve the justice system and victims' services. Funding is being provided directly to aboriginal communities and organizations for awareness programs, community safety plans and to better support victims and their families.

As well, during this year's federal-provincial-territorial meeting on justice and public safety in Regina, the ministers directed officials to develop a justice framework to coordinate federal, provincial and territorial actions across the law enforcement and justice spectrum to address violence against aboriginal women and girls and to report back to ministers.

Some of the projects that we have funded are already producing results. For example, the Thunderchild First Nation's missing and murdered aboriginal women awareness project is delivering workshops and information sessions in aboriginal communities in Saskatchewan that will help aboriginal women be more aware of factors that can lead to victimization, including the migration of women to urban centres and the challenges they are likely to face there.

Moreover, the Canadian Centre for Child Protection, in collaboration with the Assembly of First Nations and the RCMP, is raising awareness about programs available for first nation and aboriginal families in their search for missing children through [missingkids.ca](http://missingkids.ca).

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, at the end of the day, the Liberal Party is actually pleased with the degree to which the government intends to support the motion or at least tells us it is going to be voting in favour of the motion. This is something that the Liberal Party has been advocating for a number of years in terms of the importance of the issue. In fact we called for a public inquiry. We want to get as much detail as possible on this issue. As much as we would have loved the government to have made that sort of an announcement, we recognize that it is supporting the motion.

Going into the committee meetings that the government is committing to if the motion passes, there is going to be a need to gather information. Other provincial jurisdictions have had everything from task forces to their own inquiries. Has the government compiled other works that have been done at the provincial level in order to facilitate these parliamentary committee discussions?

● (1520)

**Mrs. Susan Truppe:** Mr. Speaker, in regard to the missing and murdered aboriginal women, as I said, the total investment was \$25 million over five years for 2010 to 2015. Fulfilling this commitment so far included investments in establishing a new National Centre for Missing Persons; enhancing the Canadian Police Information Centre database; creating a national website to help match older missing persons cases and unidentified human remains; supporting the development of school and community pilot projects in reducing vulnerability to violence among young aboriginal women; supporting the development and adaptation of victim services so that they are culturally appropriate for aboriginal people; developing a comprehensive list of best practices to help communities, law enforcement and justice partner in future work; working with aboriginal communities to develop community safety plans; and supporting the development of public awareness materials to help end cycles of violence affecting aboriginal people.

**Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to my colleague's comments and certainly appreciate the work she is doing and the work that our government is doing to address violence against women. When I first arrived here on the Hill, I had the privilege of serving on the aboriginal affairs committee and I was aware of the government working with a number of aboriginal groups in addressing violence against women. However, I have not been on that committee for a number of years, so I have lost track of some of the examples of our government's work on that.

I wonder if my colleague could give us some examples of the work that is being done that shows the commitment of our government to address those who would perpetrate violence against women.

**Mrs. Susan Truppe:** Mr. Speaker, across Canada we are taking action on violence against aboriginal women and girls by recently launching a call for proposals for projects that address issues on violence and economic security affecting women and girls living in rural and remote communities and small urban centres.

In Quebec, for example, we are taking action on violence against aboriginal women and girls by supporting projects such as Wapikoni Mobile's girls' nights, which directly benefit girls in eight aboriginal communities in the region. In Manitoba, we are taking action on violence against aboriginal women and girls by supporting projects such as reclaiming our power, which decreases violence against aboriginal women by working with 150 young aboriginal women and girls aged 12 to 17, living in Winnipeg's inner city.

We will continue to make women and girls safer.



*Business of Supply*

**Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I want to say the motion is a small step forward but it does not address the urgent need for an independent national public inquiry on missing and murdered aboriginal women, nor is it a framework for action to end violence against women.

I am wondering if my colleague can comment on whether she supports the call for an independent inquiry.

**Mrs. Susan Truppe:** Mr. Speaker, if the opposition truly wants to stand up for aboriginal women, the very first thing they should do is support our legislation, Bill S-2, to protect the rights of women and children on reserve. It is shocking that the opposition continues to oppose matrimonial property rights. For more than 25 years, first nation women have been without the legal remedies that are available to other Canadians. Our government is deeply concerned about missing and murdered aboriginal women in Canada. That is why I am asking the opposition to support our efforts to stand up for first nation women and children on reserves and give them the same matrimonial rights that we have off reserves.

**Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, indeed we do recognize that this is a small step forward, but the 1996 report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples identified a number of factors that are linked to violence in aboriginal communities, among them systemic discrimination, economic and social deprivation, alcohol substance abuse, intergenerational cycles of violence and getting at the root of these.

The New Democrats have called on the federal government to implement the recommendations of this report. Both the Liberals in the past government and the Conservatives now failed to implement these recommendations. The Assembly of First Nations published a report card ten years after the report, citing that Canada has failed in terms of action on this report.

Where is the action on this report? Will the government take this seriously?

**Mrs. Susan Truppe:** Mr. Speaker, here are some things we do take seriously.

We believe strongly in our commitment to protect vulnerable women, including aboriginal women. The Native Women's Association of Canada received \$5 million from the federal government for the Sisters in Spirit initiative. After the conclusion of Sisters in Spirit, our government provided \$500,000 for the Native Women's Association of Canada for the evidence to action project, which builds on the Sisters in Spirit initiative.

Most recently, the Native Women's Association of Canada received funding approval for \$1.8 million over three years for a second evidence to action project. In fact, since fiscal year 2006-07, the Native Women's Association of Canada has received over \$26 million from our government.

• (1525)

**Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, may I begin by commending the member for Delta—Richmond East for her support of the establishment of a parliamentary committee. I think she appreciates, from her remarks, the need for such a committee to address the very concerns that she summarized before us, along with the proposals that she shared with us.

On December 5, 2012, the murdered body of 16-year-old Summer Star “CJ” Fowler was found in a ravine near the British Columbian town of Kamloops. The Gitanmaax teenager from Hazelton in northern British Columbia had been visiting friends a few days previously and was just hours away from taking a bus home when she disappeared and was ultimately found murdered in circumstances still under investigation by police. Speaking at a news conference, her father summed up, I would say, what many parents of other disappeared and murdered women have felt but have not always been able to express. He said:

We would just like to stop this violence.... We want some answers and we don't want this case to be another they stick under the rug.

Indeed, CJ Fowler is just one of more than 600 indigenous women and girls who have been murdered or gone missing across Canada over the last several decades.

Government funding for data collection on missing and murdered indigenous women and girls ended in 2010, and I regret noting that this funding was discontinued to a very important organization. In fact, the discontinuance of such funding and for such initiatives, however inadvertent, is itself a rebuke to the very commitment by the government with respect to protecting the rights and needs of victims.

The Native Women's Association of Canada, NWAC, before its funding was terminated, had documented 582 such cases nationally. It is fair to say that, tragically, an additional 40-some cases have happened since then. Many occurred between the 1960s and 1990s. Some 40% occurred after 2000, or about 20 a year. In fact, if women and girls in the general Canadian population had gone missing or had been murdered at the same rate as aboriginal women and girls, this country would have lost 20,000 Canadian women and girls since the late 1960s.

We should appreciate that when we are dealing with these statistics that statistics can sometimes have a numbing effect. We must never forget in speaking of murdered and disappeared aboriginal women that each one of them had a face and an identity, each one of them was part of a family, each one of them was part of a universe. We have to remember that whenever we address this issue.

Therefore, when I am citing the statistics, it is not to abstract the tragedy but simply to identify the human depth of that tragedy. As I said, if the same proportion of murder and disappearance had been happening to white women and girls, we would be speaking of 20,000 women and girls disappeared and murdered. I suspect that the national outrage would have already moved us into establishing what in fact is ultimately the only remedy that will comprehensively address this issue, and that is a national judicial commission of inquiry.

• (1530)

The Province of British Columbia, as we have noted in this debate, has been particularly affected and impacted by this pernicious phenomenon of violence against indigenous women and girls and by the seeming inability of Canadian law enforcement authorities to deal with this phenomenon.

*Business of Supply*

Cutting through the small communities policed by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in northern B.C. is the Highway of Tears, a 724-kilometre stretch of road that has become infamous for the dozens of women and girls who have gone missing or have been murdered in its vicinity, hence the name.

The high rate of violence against indigenous women and girls has drawn widespread expressions of concern, not only from national authorities here in Canada but indeed from international authorities, which have repeatedly called upon our country to address the problem. It does no good to our reputation to have international authorities, whether they be the international Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, CEDAW, or others, reminding us of the fact that this issue is still festering and has yet to be properly addressed and redressed.

The failure of law enforcement authorities to deal effectively with the problem of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls in Canada is regrettably just one element of a dysfunctional relationship between Canadian authorities, Canadian police and indigenous communities.

The report tabled yesterday by Human Rights Watch addresses the relationship between the RCMP and indigenous women and girls in northern B.C. It documents not only how indigenous women and girls are underprotected by the police but how some of the missing women and girls, and indigenous women and girls, generally speaking, were, regrettably, objects of instances of outright police abuse. We have to constantly appreciate that we have not only a national but an international obligation owing with respect to the protection of indigenous women and girls from violence.

The report further documents the shortcomings of available oversight mechanisms designed to provide accountability for police misconduct. The report documents how the prevailing mechanisms are part of the problem rather than part of the solution.

In ten towns across the north, Human Rights Watch documented RCMP violations of the rights of indigenous women and girls. These included young girls pepper-sprayed and tasered, a 12-year-old girl attacked by a police dog, a 70-year-old punched repeatedly by an officer who had been called to help her, women strip-searched by male officers and women injured due to excessive force used during arrest. The whole is set forth in the report.

Human Rights Watch also heard disturbing allegations of rape and sexual assault by RCMP officers. I use the term "allegations", because that is how it is so characterized. They include allegations by a woman who described how in July 2012, police officers took her outside of town, raped her and threatened to kill her if she told anyone.

Accordingly, Human Rights Watch strongly urges the establishment of an independent, civilian-led investigation of these allegations with the aim of achieving criminal accountability for the alleged crimes. Only an independent civilian investigation, with the proper oversight mechanism for accountability, can bring about the necessary application of the rule of law.

• (1535)

Regrettably, for many indigenous women and girls interviewed for the report by Human Rights Watch, abuses and other indignities

visited on them by police have come to be seen by them as defining their overall relationship with law enforcement authorities. At times, as the report documents, the physical abuse of these women was accompanied by verbal, racist or sexist abuse. Indeed, concerns about police harassment appear to have led some women, including respected community leaders, to limit their time in public places where they might come into contact with police officers.

The situations documented in this report, such as a girl restrained with handcuffs tight enough to break her skin, detainees who had food thrown at them in their cells and a detainee whose need for medical treatment was ignored, raise serious concerns about the tactics used by some police in the policing of indigenous communities in B.C. and about the regard police have for the well-being and dignity of indigenous women and girls. Moreover, incidents of police abuse of indigenous women and girls are compounded by the widely perceived failure of the police to protect women and girls from violence, generally speaking. Not surprisingly, indigenous women and girls report having little faith that police forces responsible for mistreatment and abuse can offer them protection when they face violence in the wider community. As a community service provider told Human Rights Watch and as set forth in the report:

The most apparent thing to me is the lack of safety women feel. A lot of women, especially First Nations women we see, never feel safe approaching the RCMP because of the injustices they've experienced...The system is really failing women.

One aspect of this is the apparent apathy of police toward the disappearance and murders of indigenous women and girls that has been such a persistent, and, regrettably, well-publicized stain on Canada's human rights record. Less well publicized, but equally pernicious, have been the shortcomings of the police in their response to domestic violence. Admittedly, the RCMP have instituted progressive policies addressing violence in domestic relationships, generally speaking, but it appears that the police do not apply these policies consistently when policing in indigenous communities.

According to survivors of domestic violence and the community service providers who work with them, indigenous women and girls often do not get the protection afforded by these policies afforded to women generally. Women who call the police for help may find themselves blamed for the abuse, are at times shamed for alcohol or substance use and risk arrest for actions taken in self-defence. Similarly, as the report again showed, despite policies requiring active investigation of all reports of missing persons, some family members and service providers who had made calls to police to report missing persons have said that the police failed to promptly investigate these reports. Accordingly, when indigenous women and girls experience abuse at the hands of the police or when the police fail to provide adequate protection, women and girls end up having limited recourse.

*Business of Supply*

The Minister of Public Safety and others have suggested that a complaint can be lodged with the Commission for Public Complaints Against the RCMP, but the process is time-consuming, and the investigation of the complaint will likely fall to the RCMP itself or to an external police force. What seems to have been ignored in the making of this recommendation, which I take it was made in good faith, and it leaps out of the report of Human Rights Watch throughout its reading, is the fear of retaliation by the police that runs high in the north and the apparent lack of genuine accountability for police abuse. This only adds to long-standing tensions between the police and indigenous communities.

● (1540)

The title of the report, “Those Who Take Us Away” is a literal translation of the word for “police” in Carrier, for example, the language of a number of indigenous communities in northern B.C.

The Independent Investigations Office also recommended as a mechanism a recently established provincial mechanism, in British Columbia, for civilian investigation of police misconduct. It does, admittedly, show some promise. However, most complaints will end up falling outside the office's mandate, which is limited to incidents involving death or certain serious bodily injuries. The exclusion of rape and sexual abuse from this definition represents an unacceptable omission on the part of the provincial legislature. It sends a message that somehow these sexual assaults of aboriginal women are not important enough to be investigated.

Canada has important responsibilities in this regard. Indeed, protections with respect to violence against women have been developed by federal and provincial governments, which have made attempts to address the murders and disappearances of indigenous women through studies, task forces and limited funding initiatives. Reference to these has been made by those on the government side speaking to this issue. However, and this is the important point, the persistence of the ongoing violence against murdered and disappeared aboriginal women indicates a need for a deeper, more comprehensive and more coordinated set of interventions to address what is, in effect, a systemic problem. Again, I quote from one of the researchers, as cited in the report. It states:

The lack of a reliable, independent mechanism to investigate allegations of police misconduct is unfair to everyone involved. It is unfair to the officers who serve honorably. It is unfair to the northern communities that deserve to have confidence in their police forces. And it is especially unfair to the indigenous women and girls, whose safety is at stake.

As well, the United Nations human rights bodies have criticized Canada for what they have characterized as an inadequate government response to the violence against indigenous women and girls.

The United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women announced in December 2011 that it was opening an inquiry into missing and murdered indigenous women in Canada. In 2008, the committee called on the government “to examine the reasons for the failure to investigate the cases of missing and murdered aboriginal women and to take the necessary steps to remedy the deficiencies in the system”.

While the government has taken some steps to address the murders and disappearances, and we have heard about those steps today, and those steps are welcomed by members in the House, the persistence and perniciousness of the violence indicates the need for a series of comprehensive responses.

What I propose to do at this point is close my remarks by referring to some of these comprehensive responses. The motion calls for, and all sides of the House are supporting, a parliamentary committee of inquiry. The optimal action would be for the government to establish a national judicial commission of inquiry into the murders and disappearances of indigenous women and girls, before the end of 2013. It should ensure that the terms of reference are developed with leadership from the affected communities. It should include an examination of the historical and current relationship between police and aboriginal women and girls, including the incidence of police misconduct, and the systemic socio-economic marginalization of indigenous women and girls that not only predisposes them to high levels of violence but that creates an alarming sense of fear on their behalf.

The creation of such a judicial commission of inquiry would address, importantly, on a symbolic and psychological level, as well as on a substantive level, the serious, pernicious and persistent violence and the fear that has developed over decades because of a failure to protect and a failure to deal with it.

● (1545)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it is always a pleasure to hear from the member for Mount Royal whom, I believe, is one of the great legal minds we have in the House today.

I would like to make a comment and ask him a very specific question about his speech and about this motion in particular. I know that he used to be the justice minister in a Liberal government. We also know that this has been an on-going problem for at least 10 years. The government could have already addressed this problem. Unfortunately, at this stage we are still just debating a motion.

Families are calling for a far-reaching, national, independent public inquiry into this matter. As a lawyer, can the member for Mount Royal explain the difference between this request for a national public inquiry, which is being called for almost unanimously from coast to coast, and the special parliamentary committee proposed by the motion?

**Hon. Irwin Cotler:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for his very important question concerning the difference between a parliamentary committee and a national judicial inquiry.

The first difference is very important and has to do with powers. A judicial inquiry would have powers that a parliamentary committee would not. That is the first difference.

Second, I believe that a judicial inquiry would also have more of the resources that are needed for this type of inquiry with respect to witnesses, research, recommendations and so on.

Third, as I said, a national judicial inquiry is symbolic. It would not only sound the alarm about the situation, but it would also show aboriginal communities that we are taking their request seriously and making it a priority.

*Business of Supply*

**Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I have a lot of respect for my colleague, who is a staunch defender of human rights. I would like to make use of his great legal mind, as my colleague pointed out.

Does he think that the fundamental problem with the situation regarding aboriginal women is primarily a matter of lack of understanding or profiling? There is a lack of understanding. In fact, law enforcement agencies do not use the same approach when dealing with aboriginal communities. There is a flagrant lack of resources in aboriginal communities. In some communities there is virtually no security, no resources.

I understand the need for a commission of inquiry, but the fundamental problem is the lack of resources. I support the creation of an inquiry committee. However, what kinds of resources does the government need to give the communities and law enforcement officers to ensure that these inquiries are held? It is not simply a matter of creating a commission of inquiry, since crimes are committed every day.

• (1550)

**Hon. Irwin Cotler:** Mr. Speaker, my colleague is correct. The issue of violence against aboriginal women and children is just part of a much larger issue, which is the issue of discrimination and how the discrimination manifests itself, on the part of not only police authorities, but also federal and provincial governments.

If we want to tackle this problem, we must first consider where this discrimination comes from, which is also related to the issue of resources.

[English]

**Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP):** Mr. Speaker, I want to underline the fact that it is very gratifying that the Conservative Party members have joined in on the motion from the Liberal Party, as well the official opposition, the Green Party and, I suspect, the Bloc, to move to a parliamentary inquiry. However, the larger issue, particularly in the context of the Human Rights Watch, which my hon. colleague outline so clearly, is deeply troubling. If the very women, young and old, who are most vulnerable in areas like northern British Columbia are afraid of the RCMP, then the response of the Prime Minister, “Tell those people who are afraid to report the crimes and we will deal with them”, is not only inadequate, it is insensitive to the challenge.

Could a parliamentary inquiry possible get to these issues, or must we move to an arm's-length citizen inquiry, such as Human Rights Watch has described?

**Hon. Irwin Cotler:** Mr. Speaker, I agree with my colleague, but I am not sure they are incompatible. We can have a parliamentary inquiry and we can have a civilian oversight mechanism with regard to the police practices, both as to the matter of protection and as to the matter of police abuse, because they are interconnected. That is what causes both the alarm among the aboriginal women and girls, not only the lack of protection but the abuse along with the lack of protection.

Therefore, it may be that, along with a parliamentary committee of inquiry or growing out of it, we will have to establish, nonetheless,

this independent civilian oversight mechanism, as Human Rights Watch has recommended.

**Ms. Mylène Freeman (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I understand that my colleague from Mount Royal really does understand this issue very well. He has clearly shown that and is demonstrating a need for this.

As my other colleagues have pointed out, he was the minister of justice. Back in 1996, government statistics showed that aboriginal women were five times more likely to die as a result of violence than any other group of women.

I have two questions for the member.

First, why did he not act earlier and take concrete steps in order to save the hundreds of women who have gone missing and been murdered since?

Second, I was on the status of women of committee when we studied violence against aboriginal women. Sadly, that report is completely ineffective. My fear is the committee that would be established would lead to nothing but another report exactly like that. Therefore, why are we not calling for an inquiry?

**Hon. Irwin Cotler:** On that last point, Mr. Speaker, I will just reiterate again. At the end of the day, what we really need is a national inquiry. I even said that not only is a commission required, but a judicial commission of inquiry is required.

The member properly asked what occurred during my stewardship as minister of justice and I am proud and happy to respond to that.

First, I stated throughout the time that I was minister of justice that aboriginal justice was a priority for me and it was on our justice agenda. It was also a priority at our federal, provincial, territorial annual meetings. The issue of murdered and missing aboriginal women was something I discussed then with representatives from the aboriginal community and recommended then that which I recommend now.

Second, and I do not want to take much time on this, I articulated then what I called the seven Rs of aboriginal justice, which began with recognition of aboriginal peoples as the original inhabitants of our country, respect for their distinctive constitutional and legal status and redress for past wrongs. I included these wrongs that needed to be redressed. I addressed the overrepresentation of aboriginal people in the criminal justice system, and we forget about this. It is an astonishing statistic. Whereas aboriginal people are some 4% of the population of our country, one of every three women inmates in the country is an aboriginal woman. We have to tackle both that overrepresentation and the under-representation of aboriginal people as judges, law enforcement authorities and the like.

*Business of Supply*

On that point, one of the Rs I mentioned was the need for responsiveness. We needed to be responsive to the concerns of aboriginal people, to their alarms, to their anxieties, including constitutionally responsive, so when we engaged in certain initiatives, we had to be responsive to the duty to consult, which was a constitutional duty, which we did not take into account as well. With respect to the government of which I was a part, we did not always take that duty to consult into account. Although if we look at the record during the two years that we were there, we did seek to make it a priority on the government's agenda, not just on the justice agenda, to make this the legacy issue, as former prime minister Paul Martin put it at the time for our government.

• (1555)

[Translation]

**Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to inform the House that I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Nanaimo—Cowichan.

The motion before us is an important one. I would like to thank the member for St. Paul's for moving it. I must point out that the issue it raises is not a new one for us. The fate of missing and murdered aboriginal women across Canada has been on the national agenda for over 10 years.

We had heard horror stories, and we have heard them again this morning. Yet the federal government stubbornly refuses to do anything to get to the bottom of this.

[English]

However, let us put that aside for just a moment and let us focus on one number, 600. That is the estimated number of missing and murdered aboriginal women in Canada. They are 600 daughters, sisters, mothers, nieces, cousins, friends and neighbours. These women are not faceless. These women are not nameless. They are part of us, part of our families and part of our communities. The thought that in Canada, a country that prides itself on being a fair, a loving and compassionate society, that we would see something like this happen, and continue to happen, is, quite frankly, disturbing.

That thought is even more striking when we are faced with a government that does not miss a chance to call itself the only party of law and order in this land. The Conservatives are the party of double-bunking and mandatory sentencing, the party of climbing aboriginal incarceration rates, the party of funding cuts to rehabilitation programs that work. The Conservatives never miss a chance to wag their fingers at the opposition, while crowing that they alone are on the side of victims. Yet it is the same government that eliminated funding to the Sisters In Spirit program in 2010.

• (1600)

[Translation]

Some of the members opposite will react to these facts by calling me biased, an enemy or even a socialist, as they often do, but I want everyone to know that I am the son of a Cree woman, the brother of five Cree sisters who raised me, and the father of two Quebec Cree daughters who make me proud every day.

What I have to say today does not come from my party or my opponents. It comes from my conviction that we must fight for justice in this country.

[English]

I want to be very clear on that point. I am the son of a Cree woman, the brother of five Cree sisters who raised me, and the father of two Cree and Québécoise daughters who make me proud every day.

When coming into this chamber today, it is not my party, my opponents or anything else that dictates my thoughts on this; it is my belief in standing up for what is right in this country.

[Translation]

All my life, I have been lucky enough to be surrounded by strong women, like the 600 women we are talking about today. I cannot imagine the pain it would cause me if one of the women who holds an important place in my life were to experience the same fate as the 600 missing and murdered women we are talking about today.

I know that I am not the only one in the House who feels this way. We are all parents, brothers, sisters or cousins, and we all have people we love in our lives. You do not have to be an aboriginal to understand the pain that these 600 families are feeling. I strongly believe that, despite our political differences, each and every one of us wants to put an end to this terrible situation in Canada.

Let us be clear. This terrible situation is still ongoing. The numbers are continuing to rise rather than drop. The danger is still there. An inquiry could help us to see how to make our cities safer for everyone.

[English]

The dangers we are seeing are also evolving. Over the past months we have seen the Idle No More movement activate more and more aboriginal people to speak out about their rights and their culture. It is a renaissance that has great potential to improve this land for the better. While this movement has seen great support from both aboriginals and the public at large, there are still some in our society who strongly oppose what Idle No More stands for. Sadly, some of those opponents have resorted to thuggish tactics that have no place in Canadian society today.

For instance, in late December, news broke about a case in Thunder Bay where an aboriginal woman who was simply walking down the street was abducted and sexually assaulted by two men. News reports on the case noted that while she was being assaulted by these two men, they said, "you Indians deserve to lose your treaty rights". They also reportedly said that they would strike again.

In response to the understandable fears that this case raised, students at the first nation Dennis Franklin Cromarty High School were all given personal safety alarms. Yes, I said personal safety alarms. Imagine having to carry an alarm just to go to school safely. Now imagine being the parents of those children sending their loved ones hundreds of kilometres away from home just to get a high school education, knowing that a measure like that is deemed necessary in a country like Canada. I do not think that any member in this House believes that is right, yet here we are debating whether we should be investigating the root causes of this phenomenon.

*Business of Supply*

There are other cases near Sault Ste. Marie of reports of an Idle No More organizer receiving death threats. The organizer received a package at the home of her sister with a letter inside saying, “You are a dead piece of...”, and I will not say the word in this honourable chamber, but it continued with, “A good Indian is a dead Indian. Stay away from the Sault”.

That was what she received for standing up for her rights.

•(1605)

[Translation]

These people that I just mentioned, much like many of the 600 victims we are speaking about today, were simply quietly going about their business. They are working hard to get an education and improve their community. However, they face many difficulties similar to those experienced by the 600 victims we are talking about here.

This proves that the problem has not yet been resolved and that something must be done. We owe it to them and to future generations to get to the bottom of this problem and to take the necessary steps to rid our society of it.

[English]

To conclude, I had the chance this morning to meet with some of the families of Sisters in Spirit. I stand here this afternoon deeply troubled, profoundly disturbed, and I must admit, emotionally challenged, but like the women I met this morning, this afternoon I will stand strong until we bring justice to them.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I truly appreciate the comments of the member. They bring a great deal to the debate we are having today, in many different ways. There is always a certain percentage who have the wrong attitude, but Canadians as a whole are very much a tolerant, loving society who, if they were to look at what we are debating today, would want to see all political parties come together to bring some justice to this issue and to be there for the many victims over the years.

To what degree does the member believe it is important that the parliamentary inquiry go outside of Ottawa, so that we could go to some of the many communities that have been so dramatically impacted over the years because of these missing women and young girls, so that they have an avenue to express their thoughts and feelings as to what is taking place?

[Translation]

**Mr. Romeo Saganash:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Winnipeg North for his question.

We need to get to the bottom of this issue. It has been going on for far too long.

I will respond to his question, but I want to first say that since we have the opportunity to debate this issue, it is important to remember how long it is has been going on. I could give many examples that go back a long way. For example, there was an incident in the early 1970s, in the James Bay territory, in northern Quebec.

Hydroelectric development in northern Quebec brought with it violence against aboriginal women. The country's first victims of violence against aboriginal women, in the early 1970s, were two

young Cree girls who were found dead at the side of the James Bay highway. They had been raped.

We need to go outside this place and listen to the people. Is the tool being proposed here the best, most comprehensive one? I do not know. It needs to be examined in detail. One thing is certain: we support the request for an independent judicial inquiry. That is what was proposed earlier, and that is what the families are asking for.

•(1610)

**Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I do not know if my colleague will consider this a question or a comment. The Conservative government is despicably hypocritical.

Three Conservative members are asking the RCMP to investigate three abortions as homicides, yet 600 women have been kidnapped, murdered and raped and not one of those three members dares to rise in the House today to ask questions. It is disgusting and unacceptable.

**Mr. Romeo Saganash:** Mr. Speaker, I heard that heartfelt appeal loud and clear.

It certainly is disturbing to see that they have one attitude in the case of some people and the opposite attitude in the case of others. That is too bad because that is not what justice means to me. That is not what it means to most people.

Justice means dealing with all injustices, whether perpetrated on blacks, Asians, whites or aboriginals.

[English]

**Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou for sharing his time with me, and also for reminding the House that we are not just talking about numbers or statistics. We are talking about something that has touched people's lives for decades now. We are talking about mothers, fathers, brothers, aunts, uncles and children. One of the things that the Native Women's Association of Canada has talked about is the intergenerational trauma that results due to losing a mother, an auntie or a daughter, and how that continues to play out in people's lives. It is very important for us in the House to put that human element, to put that face, on this issue.

I also want to acknowledge the member for St. Paul's for bringing forward the motion. It is timely in light of the report prepared by Human Rights Watch called, “Those Who Take Us Away”. I am going to touch on that report in a few moments.

*Business of Supply*

Before I begin to speak about some of my points, I want to refer to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, article 44, which states, "All the rights and freedoms recognized herein are equally guaranteed to male and female indigenous individuals". The article is not specifically referring to violence against aboriginal women, but it reminds us that in this country we have committed to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and one of those commitments is that indigenous women in this country will be treated equally, which means that they should have equal access to the justice system. Sometimes people have a misunderstanding of the disparity between how aboriginal women and children are treated versus how non-aboriginal women and children are treated, so we must look at that disparity and move toward equality.

In my early days I was the critic for Status of Women, back in 2004-05, and I have been the aboriginal critic for most of the time since 2006. I would like to be able to say that over the nine years I have been doing this job I have seen an improvement in how first nations, Inuit and Métis women and children are treated, but sadly that is not the case.

A couple of years ago I had the great privilege to meet with some parents from Saskatchewan, whose beautiful young daughter had gone missing. They were on the Hill because they wanted to talk to members of Parliament about the fact that they could not get the police to take seriously that their beautiful daughter had gone missing. She was a mother, a student and a hard worker, all of the things that make many of us very proud of our children. The response by police to the parents' plea was stereotypical, that she was running away from home, that there must have been some abuse and that there was a story involved. They did not pay the same kind of attention to this family's pain. Later they eventually discovered the body of the young woman, but what the parents had to go through in order to get the justice system to pay attention was painful to observe. They came here with a video of their beautiful daughter and asked people to look at who this beautiful young woman was.

There was a situation in my riding a couple of years ago. A 19-year-old first nation girl was murdered. Before the murderer was apprehended, everyone was fearful. All of the young girls in the community were afraid to go out without someone with them. Everyone could see the repercussions of that playing out throughout the community. I am proud to say that in Cowichan, where I live, the first nation and non-first nation communities came together. There were gatherings and marches to let the community know that they were going to stand with each other, but that does not happen in every community.

We only have to look at what happened with the Pickton farm and the subsequent Oppal inquiry. During the inquiry, it was highlighted over and over again that many of the Pickton victims were first nation or aboriginal women and that the justice system failed them time after time. Even in the Oppal inquiry the voices of families, friends and other organizations who supported the families and victims were shut out.

• (1615)

If we are going to move forward, if we are eventually going to have some sort of judicial inquiry, it is very important that those

terms of reference are set so that victims and their families are included and are provided resources to be able to engage. If we do not hear from victims and their families, and about that intergenerational trauma, I do not see how we will ever get to the heart of this problem.

Back in 2004-05, the status of women committee was hearing testimony, not into violence against aboriginal women but some other issues around women's organizations. One woman came before the committee and said that there has been report after report on some of these issues. She said that in her office because they cannot afford to get the furniture repaired, she has a broken table and uses a stack of reports to prop up the table. That is how much use and how much attention those reports were given by the governments of the day who commissioned them.

In that context, I am just going to talk briefly about the number of reports that have come forward in Canada that highlight the fact that aboriginal women and children are murdered at a higher rate. The violence is well-documented and yet successive governments have continuously failed to act.

In 1996, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples identified a number of factors that are linked to violence in aboriginal communities, including systemic discrimination against aboriginal peoples, economic and social deprivation, alcohol and substance abuse, the intergenerational cycle of violence, the breakdown of healthy family life resulting from residential school upbringing, racism against aboriginal peoples, the impact of colonization on traditional values and culture, and overcrowded and substandard housing.

In 2004 and again in 2008, Amnesty International released reports on the issue of missing and murdered aboriginal women. Amnesty called on Canada to form a national action plan to address violence against women. The 2004 report did result in some funding going to the Native Women's Association of Canada to start building a database to document the murdered and missing women because, of course, if we do not have the numbers, and these are more than numbers, then it is very difficult to develop a policy or an action plan.

Now what we are seeing is that the Native Women's Association of Canada no longer has the funding to continue on with that work, and the Department of Justice is not going to be collecting disaggregated data. Once again we will not have a good handle on exactly how many aboriginal women are murdered or missing every year.

In 2006, in response to the high number of aboriginal women who were murdered or who disappeared along B.C.'s Highway 16, dubbed the Highway of Tears, the aboriginal communities convened a symposium. Part of the task force asked for all levels of government to work together, and identified poverty as one of the leading contributors to the violence that was being experienced by aboriginal women and children.

*Business of Supply*

In 2004, and not for the first time, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women recognized the critical situation of aboriginal women in Canada, and recommended that Canada develop a specific and integrated plan for addressing the particular concerns affecting aboriginal women, both on and off reserve, including poverty, poor health, inadequate housing, low school completion rates, low employment rates and low income.

It goes on and on. There are so many different reports and documents that have demonstrated that there is a serious problem in this country, and yet the government's continuing indifference to working with families and other organizations, such as the Native Women's Association of Canada, is very troubling.

We have the motion before the House, and I understand that all parties are going to support the motion. I would hope that not only is the motion supported but that some of the recommendations in the report, "Those Who Take Us Away", would be implemented more quickly, for example, an independent civil oversight of the RCMP so that victims of violence are able to go to someone they can actually trust. They do not trust the RCMP. There are many good police officers out there, but there are too many cases where women and their children do not feel safe enough to take that information forward. They may come from small communities. They may feel they are too isolated. They may feel they are going to be targeted.

I encourage all members to support the motion, but I truly hope that we act before this committee comes to the end of its mandate.

• (1620)

[Translation]

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I listened to the speeches by the last two members. I sincerely thank the member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou for his comments, as well as the member for Nanaimo—Cowichan, for whom I have great respect.

[English]

I have been on two committees in this 41st Parliament, one of them that has basically done no good work and one that approved unanimously my recommendation on co-operatives and ended up doing good work. However, initially, the government wanted total control of the proceedings and the work of this committee.

I would hope that my colleagues who are going to support the motion when we vote on it will also carry that same spirit into the workings of the committee. I am wondering if the member for Nanaimo—Cowichan shares my concern. If she does, would she care to express that so that everyone here can take notice that this is a serious matter that we cannot play political games with?

**Ms. Jean Crowder:** Mr. Speaker, that is a very good question. A novel concept would be to work with the family members to develop the terms of reference for the committee. That would raise it above a partisan political level and would actually put the work that the committee needs to do front and centre. The family members of victims and organizations, such as the Native Women's Association, could perhaps help determine which communities would be useful for the committee to go and visit, what other kinds of reports it might want to look at and what kinds of witnesses it might want to hear

from. That would be a useful way to remove it from the partisan sphere.

**Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, this has been an afternoon of some very moving and heartfelt speeches on what can only be called a major crisis in this country. It is a crisis into which we on our side, along with many in first nation and aboriginal communities, have been calling for a public inquiry. As members have noted, the motion before the House today falls quite short of that.

Does my hon. colleague feel that this is not the step that would get us where we need to be in Canada? As she has rightly pointed out, we have the studies. It is time for action. I would like the member to comment on this reality, this time for action.

• (1625)

**Ms. Jean Crowder:** Mr. Speaker, over the last several years any number of native women's organizations have continued to call for other measures that would help address violence against aboriginal women and children, such as adequate housing and education, legal support when there is domestic violence, making sure that police are well-trained with respect to domestic violence and ensuring that women have safe houses. Most reserves do not have safe transitional housing when women are forced to leave their homes. There are a whole lot of other measures out there that should not wait for a national inquiry or committee. They are well-documented. We need to take some immediate steps to do the things that are going to make a difference for aboriginal women and children.

I just want to come back to the establishment of independent civilian investigations into reported incidents of serious police misconduct, including incidents of rape and other sexual assaults, in all jurisdictions. That would signal a true intent to take this problem seriously. It does not need to wait for any of these other measures to be in place. It would signal to aboriginal women and children that their concerns are being heard and that there is a serious desire to make a difference.

With respect to their concerns around safety in terms of reporting incidents, the other side has said they should just bring their complaints forward to the RCMP. If that is the response, nobody is listening. Women are saying they do not feel safe going to the police. Why would they go to the police if they do not feel safe? Civilian investigations would be a good way of signalling to people that there would be a change in how governments behave.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, shortly after I was elected to the Manitoba legislature in 1988, an inquiry was called of a similar nature. It was all about Helen Betty Osborne. A number of years later in the byelection of 2010, when I came to the House of Commons, one of the very first issues raised in the chamber by the former member for Winnipeg South Centre was the 600-plus aboriginal women who have gone missing or were murdered. Virtually from the beginning to today, this has been a very serious issue, which does pose the question of why it is taking so long to resolve.



*Business of Supply*

Listening to the debate, I have found it interesting that people are looking at and commenting on the bigger picture. I want to do something a little different and discuss this from an individual perspective, that of Helen Betty Osborne, on whose case an inquiry was called.

We have been calling for an independent national public inquiry for a number of years already. The motion we will vote on when returning from our break deals with establishing a parliamentary committee to come to grips with the issue. I do not want anyone to think for a moment that it takes away from the necessity of having a national independent public inquiry. That is really important. Whether it is the Liberal or New Democratic Party, that in essence is what we want to see happen. We also believe that many of the victims' families also want to see that happen.

I have had the opportunity over the years to meet with a wide variety of people who have been touched first-hand by this and others who have tried to follow the issue over the years. There are very hard opinions.

Here I would like to read something from the Manitoba aboriginal justice inquiry conducted back in the early 1990s. It was called shortly after the 1988 provincial election. It is from the Aboriginal Justice Implementation Commission, which can be found on a Government of Manitoba website, and deals with the death of Helen Betty Osborne.

I trust that after I have finished reading from it, members will get a sense of why I thought it was important to read it into the record here in Ottawa:

Helen Betty Osborne was abducted and brutally murdered near The Pas, Manitoba, early in the morning of November 13, 1971. The high school student, originally from the Norway House Indian Reserve, was 19 years old when she was killed.

Several months later Royal Canadian Mounted Police officers concluded that four young men, Dwayne Archie Johnston, James Robert Paul Houghton, Lee Scott Colgan and Norman Bernard Manger, were involved in the death. Yet it was not until December 1987, more than 16 years later, that one of them, Dwayne Johnston, was convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment for the murder of Betty Osborne. James Houghton was acquitted. Lee Colgan, having received immunity from prosecution in return for testifying against Houghton and Johnston, went free. Norman Manger was never charged.

These are the facts, as suggested by the evidence:

● (1630)

While walking along Third Street in The Pas on that cold Saturday morning, Betty Osborne was accosted by four men in a car. Houghton, who was driving, stopped the car and Johnston got out, attempting to convince Osborne to go with them to "party." She told them that she did not wish to accompany them. She then was forced into their car and driven away. In the car Osborne was assaulted by Colgan and Johnston as Houghton drove. Johnston ripped at her blouse and Colgan grabbed at her breasts. In spite of her screams and attempts to escape, Osborne was taken to a cabin belonging to Houghton's parents at Clearwater Lake.

At the cabin she was pulled from the car and beaten by Johnston while the others stood watching and drinking wine they had stolen earlier. Osborne continued to struggle and scream and, because her assailants were afraid they might be heard, she was forced back into the car and driven further from town to a pump house next to the lake. While there, some of her clothing was removed by her assailants in the car. At the pump house she was once more taken from the car by one or more of her assailants and the beating continued. Her remaining clothes, those which had not been removed earlier, were taken from her. Wearing only her winter boots, she was viciously beaten, and stabbed, apparently with a screwdriver, more than 50 times. Her face was smashed beyond recognition. The evidence suggests that two people then dragged her body into the bush. Her clothes were hidden. The four men then left, returned to The Pas and went their separate ways.

Her body was discovered the next morning and the RCMP commenced its investigation. Initial police efforts centred on the possibility that Osborne's murderer was one of her friends or was known to them. RCMP officers rounded up her friends and questioned them. They were all Aboriginal. Police had no success in identifying the assailants until they received an anonymous letter in May 1972, implicating Colgan, Houghton and Manger.

The letter was written by Catherine Dick who, it was later discovered, had been told the murder by Lee Colgan shortly after it took place. Police then seized the Colgan family car, which had been used in the abduction. Examination of the vehicle revealed traces of hair and blood as well as a piece of a brassiere strap.

Shortly after the seizure of the car, an informant told police the fourth man in the car that night was Dwayne Johnston. Attempts to question the suspects were frustrated when the men, on the advice of their lawyer, D'Arcy Bancroft, refused to speak with the police. Repeated attempts and a number of ruses were unsuccessful in breaking through their silence. The police found it impossible to gather sufficient evidence to support a charge of murder against any of the four men believed to have been involved in the murder. By the end of 1972, although rumours were circulating in The Pas as to the identity of those involved in the killing, the investigation had stalled.

...In July 1983 an extensive review of the file was begun by Const. Robert Urbanoski, of the Thompson RCMP detachment. Many of the original informants were reinterviewed. The suspects were contacted again. In June 1985 the RCMP placed an article in the local newspaper, requesting the assistance of the public in solving the murder. The result was that several people came forward to recount comments about the murder made over the years by Colgan and Johnston. It was the disclosure of those remarks that finally led to charges of murder being laid against the two in October 1986.

Again, we have to recall that this incident actually occurred on November 13, 1971. The commission continued:

Before the beginning of their preliminary hearing in March 1987, Lee Colgan was granted immunity from prosecution in return for his testimony. On the strength of Colgan's evidence, Houghton was arrested and charged on July 5, 1987. At the preliminary hearing later that month, both Houghton and Johnston were committed to stand trial. The Attorney General's department brought the case to trial in December 1987. Sixteen years after the murder, a jury found Johnston guilty of the murder of Betty Osborne. He was sentenced to life imprisonment without eligibility for parole for 10 years. Houghton was acquitted

● (1635)

Johnston's appeal of his conviction was dismissed by the Manitoba Court of Appeal on September 14, 1988 and his application for leave to appeal to the Supreme Court of Canada was denied on March 13, 1989.

I want to emphasize this particular point. The commission added:

Many Manitobans asked why it took 16 years to bring people to trial for this brutal murder. It was suggested that many people in the town of The Pas learned the identity of those responsible, some within a very short time after the murder, but chose to do nothing about it. It was suggested that because Osborne was an Aboriginal person, the townspeople considered the murder unimportant. Allegations of racism, neglect and indifference, on the part of the citizens of the town, the police and of the Attorney General's department, were made.

The trial and its outcome focused public attention on the Osborne case and led to widespread calls for a public inquiry

On April 13, 1988, by Order-in-Council, the provincial government established the Public Inquiry into the Administration of Justice and Aboriginal People. The order was confirmed subsequently by an act of the Legislature, entitled An Act to Establish and Validate the Public Inquiry into the Administration of Justice and Aboriginal People.

That was one of the very first pieces of legislation I had the opportunity to deal with when I was first elected back in 1988.

The commission continued:

### *Business of Supply*

The Act which established the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry specifically requires us to look into the circumstances surrounding the investigation into the murder of Helen Betty Osborne. Section 7(b) of the Act provides that the Inquiry and the Commissioners: [I]s and are declared to have the right to investigate into the death of Helen Betty Osborne and all aspects of the laying and prosecution of charges which followed, including whether the right persons were charged, whether the appropriate charges were laid, whether charges should have been laid earlier, whether immunity from prosecution should have been granted to Lee Colgan, whether there exists any evidence of racial prejudice with respect to the investigation of the death of Helen Betty Osborne, whether the acts or omissions of any persons outside the Police Department impaired the investigation and whether the prosecution was properly conducted.

.... We heard the majority of the testimony in The Pas between June 19 and August 10, 1989. In addition, we heard two days of testimony in Winnipeg, August 31 and September 18. Through the testimony we were able to examine the murder, the investigation....

Again I want to underline this, the attitudes prevailing in the community, the situation of aboriginal students in The Pas and the relationship between the police and the aboriginal community.

This is one of the primary reasons that I wanted to speak personally to the issue today. I am very grateful that the party has chosen this issue as its opposition day motion. We have selected a very specific motion that answers a cry that has been out there far too long.

I recognize, as I said at the very beginning of my comments, that what is really necessary is a full public and independent inquiry at the national level. If we really want to get a sense of the benefits of having that, all I would suggest we do is to look at the inquiry that took place in the province of Manitoba. Many government policies resulted from that inquiry that have assisted, albeit not resolved, all of the problems. The inquiry opened the eyes of many and influenced government policy.

• (1640)

As I said at the beginning, what the victims and all Canadians deserve is a full public inquiry. However, this is a step. I was encouraged to hear earlier today that the government would support the motion.

My colleague from Ottawa made reference to the importance that how a committee operated could make a difference. If a committee is too political, the outcome will be very disappointing. If the committee is prepared to put the victims, the many stakeholders, often referenced the sisters, mothers, brothers, fathers and children of victims, first, I would suggest that the government would do well by saying that it is committed not only voting in favour of the resolution, but also to striking the committee in a timely fashion.

One of the things I like about the motion is that it gives a timeline. We want something that is tangible, that comes before the House, before or no later than, February 14 of next year. That does not leave much time and that is why I appeal to the Prime Minister and the government House leader to work with the Liberal Party and New Democratic House leaders to see what we can do to get the committee established, up and running and possibly even do some outreach prior to the formal meetings taking place. There is so much interest and so many individuals who care deeply about this issue, that there is some value in looking at ways in which the committee might be able to function to maximize the results.

I have a fairly decent understanding in terms of the norm in which committees operate in the House of Commons. I am suggest that we think outside of the box on this issue and recognize there is a need to bring other individuals into the process. The first way to address that issue is to enable our House leaders and respective leaders of all three political parties to come up with a strategic time frame in which ultimately we can see the committee up and running and dealing with the issue before us.

If that happens, we will have a report that will have the support of all members of the House. Even in my short time here, I have seen where committees have been very effective and I have seen committees that have not been. That is the reason why I am encouraged by the government accepting the Liberal Party's motion. I am pleased with the support of the New Democrats. I anticipate that the Green Party is in favour of it and I even suspect that the Bloc is. Let us take it to the next level and try to put the victims, families and Canadians first on this issue in an attempt to get some justice that is long overdue.

• (1645)

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, Service Canada; the hon. member for Malpeque, Employment Insurance.

Questions and comments, the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance.

**Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I note that my colleague from the Liberal Party and I knew one another way back when all of this happened in this case. In fact, I was policing in Manitoba at the time and he was a politician.

I would ask the member to please help me understand this, and I think all Canadians want to understand it. The member has gone back to the 1970s and 1980s when all of this started, when there were already committees looking at this in the province of Manitoba. However, the Liberal Party was in power for 13 years. In the six years we have been here, the Conservative government has been able to put forward an RCMP National Centre for Missing Persons and Unidentified Remains, improved law enforcement databases, provided money to Sisters in Spirit, et cetera. Why on earth did the Liberal government do nothing? If it did do something, what was it?

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux:** Mr. Speaker, as one of my colleagues suggested, we had the Kelowna accord, which was a fairly significant achievement.

My speech focused a lot on the independent aboriginal inquiry in the province of Manitoba. I referenced when the incident occurred, which was 1971, yet the inquiry did not happen until 1987. During 12 of those years, the New Democrats were in government and 4 of those years, the Progressive Conservatives were in government.

At the end of the day, when we talk about the national perspective in Canada, we need to put it in the perspective that justice has been denied for many years, as with the province of Manitoba. Today we are seeing a much higher demand for a public inquiry.

If the member wants to illustrate that I am wrong on this, she could go back to 1990s and tell me how many questions on this issue were raised by the Reform Party or the New Democratic Party compared to the number of questions that have been raised on the issue in the last six or seven years. Things are at a point where there is a much higher expectation. We saw that at the provincial level and we see it at a national level.

The issue is whether we prepared to put partisan politics aside in order to finally bring justice to the issue.

• (1650)

**Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I have a very simple question for my colleague for Winnipeg North. How confident is he in this process through the motion before us?

This special committee would be in a setting where Conservative colleagues have a majority. This is a government that is literally dismantling the country in terms of the environment, natural resources, institutions of human rights and so on.

What is the member's response to the families of the victims that do not trust the institutions and the police anymore?

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux:** Mr. Speaker, that is why I said so much would depend on the House leaders of each respective political party and the leadership of each party. That group, with support from the appropriate ministers and critics, will provide the guidance going forward into this committee.

We know for sure that the government is going to be voting for the motion, meaning that there will a parliamentary group will be established and there will be a committee, if the government holds true on its statements and votes in favour of the motion. A lot will depend on the personalities who sit on the committee in the first number of days as they try to build those relationships.

My colleague, the critic for the environment from the Liberal Party, was talking about trying to build relationships before things got under way. That she experienced first hand in working on a special project within the aboriginal community, which I thought was wonderful.

The building of these relationships going into the committee are going to be very important. If it is too political and too partisan, then I suspect we will not necessarily get the type of results we hope to get.

[Translation]

**Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, can we trust the member for Winnipeg North's party on this issue?

I would like to share something that happened during the 2006 campaign in Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière. At the time, I met with a couple of public servants at the employment insurance office who described their working conditions to me. They worked six days a week, plus three nights, to deal with the backlog of applications. This is not a new problem. When the Liberal Party was in power, it could have looked into the issue and done something about it.

How can we trust the Liberal Party members who raised this issue?

### *Business of Supply*

That is a legitimate question. It is a very good initiative, but still, it comes a little late.

[English]

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux:** Mr. Speaker, again, it is all in the attitude. We need to recognize that the federal NDP has never been a national government. As a result, all we really can do to try to get a sense of where it is at is look at where it has been in government.

If you believe you are clean on that issue, you are wrong. It is not. The NDP has made a mess of things on different issues. This is one of the files which it was sloppy on in the province of Manitoba.

I do not believe the NDP is any cleaner than any other party. I am prepared to have faith that the NDP will be approaching this in an apolitical fashion and I would hope the NDP will have faith knowing the Liberal party will do likewise. After all, Liberals are the ones who brought the motion forward. We have made the first gesture that it has to be done, but we appreciate what appears to be unanimous support.

• (1655)

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** I want to remind all hon. members to direct their comments to the Chair. References to "you" are to the Chair, not to their colleagues.

The hon. member for Davenport.

**Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, thank you for that timely reminder.

I want to underline the word that my hon. colleague from Winnipeg used, which was "gesture". That party over in the corner is very good with gestures. One of the reason it is not in government anymore is because all it gave Canadians were gestures. It never backed those gestures up with actual action on the file.

Therefore, I want to ask the member how he squares the circle. Here we have a motion that falls short of calling for a full public inquiry, which all the speeches we hear from the corner suggest they also believe is necessary. However, that is not what the motion is about. Why are the Liberals calling for a committee to be struck and not a full public inquiry?

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux:** Mr. Speaker, I do not know if the member is in the NDP loop. My understanding is that the NDP is going to be supporting the motion. My understanding is that, like the Liberals, the NDP also wants to see a national independent public inquiry. I could be wrong but that is what I understood. I know the Liberals want that.

We want a national independent public inquiry. Other members have implied that this is what they want. I am also assuming the member is going to be voting for the Liberal motion at the same time. Therefore, if the members vote for the same motion and they want the same thing that we want in terms of a national independent public inquiry, he might be best to ask himself the very same question he asked me.

*Business of Supply*

**Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am not exactly pleased to be speaking to this issue, but it is an honour to speak to it because I know many of the families who have lost these young girls, and my heart absolutely breaks for them. I just hope that all members of Parliament will continue this fight toward justice for these families. I know our government is committed to it, and I will be voting to support the motion to have a special committee in the House look at it.

However, when it comes right down to brass tacks, what is required is to find these girls. We need to find the perpetrators of these crimes, and our best shot at that is to empower police officers, investigators and analysts to do the work they do so well.

If members would allow, I will speak a bit about those officers and the work they are doing. Some of them are working today on these very cases. They take this work home with them. Their hearts are in this work. They want to find solutions for these families, and some of them have a very tough time dealing with the graphic images and stories. They do it because they love what they do, and they have dedicated their lives to serving their communities and these families in an attempt to get justice.

Having said that, I will talk about the task forces that presently exist across this country, something we have not heard much about. I commend the officers and civilian analysts who are involved. I will talk about Project Devote in Manitoba, which is of course where I spent eighteen and a half years policing. The Manitoba Integrated Task Force for Missing and Murdered Women is what I am talking about. It is located in the RCMP D Division headquarters, and Project Devote consists of RCMP, Winnipeg Police Service officers and RCMP civilian analysts, who have brought together a team of approximately 24 individuals who have the necessary knowledge, skills and abilities for these types of investigations. The focus of Project Devote is investigative, based on the review and recommendations made by the task force. In addition to these investigations, a proactive team was established to further enhance the ongoing efforts of dealing with exploited and at-risk persons.

We have heard some quotes from commissioners. Assistant Commissioner Bill Robinson, for example, from the RCMP, made a tremendous plea to ensure our officers have the tools. He said:

The team's efforts will focus on the investigation and prosecution of the person or persons responsible for these crimes. We are fully committed to providing answers to families and loved ones.

The Winnipeg police chief at the time, Keith McCaskill, said:

Members of the Task Force have worked diligently in reviewing files and their efforts are to be applauded.

I do not want members of this House to forget that, although we are talking about what we as parliamentarians can do, the hard work is being done right now by police officers across this country and civilians in the RCMP, who will continue this fight. I applaud their efforts. I commend them and I wish them all of the success in the world.

When I was policing, I was involved in some of these cases, and I think today about Felicia Solomon's case and a media release I had to put out about finding her body parts. I think about Sunshine Wood today, a young girl who went missing under our watch, and yet we

have found no answers. I think about Nicolle Hands who was a single mother, and when I did that media release I thought, long and hard, about her children.

So I want Canadians to know that this government is very much committed to finding answers for those families, and I would implore Canadians who are watching today to please review the media releases and the articles that are out on the web. If anyone has any information that would lead to the successful resolution of these families' disappeared or murdered loved ones, they could contact the police tip line. In Manitoba specifically, it is 1-888-673-3316. Again, there are projects like this across the country, in Alberta, B.C. and Ontario, and they all have these task forces. I did not want to make this speech today without acknowledging all the hard work they do.

● (1700)

My colleagues from the NDP have repeatedly said today that no one trusts the police. I disagree with that wholeheartedly. I think that is disrespectful and they ought to be ashamed of themselves because 99% of police officers do a very good job. Not only do they do a very good job but they take their jobs to heart. They dismiss them in that way for political reasons, and I just do not think we are here for that. Let us talk about what the government is doing and has done and how we can work together to resolve this.

It is a serious issue, and the government has worked hard to make sure our streets are safer. That is why when this issue first arose, \$5 million was provided to Sisters in Spirit, through the Native Women's Association of Canada, for its original research that showed the disturbingly high number of missing and murdered aboriginal women across Canada. That is when the government committed \$25 million in 2010 to take some immediate action.

Before this commitment, the government had already been engaged in a series of specific initiatives to address the broader underlying causes that contribute to the greater vulnerability to violence of aboriginal women and girls in areas such as family violence prevention, economic security and prosperity, on-reserve housing, education, health and policing. As the reasons for the higher levels of vulnerability and violence are long standing, varied and interrelated, so must be the initiatives designed to address these very important issues.

The October 2010 announcement of \$25 million over five years was for a seven-step strategy to improve the law enforcement and justice system responses to this criminal justice priority. All Canadians deserve to be safe in their communities and homes. The seven-step strategy complemented other major initiatives by the government to improve community safety for aboriginal women and girls, including through prevention efforts and significant investments in improving the socio-economic conditions of aboriginal people.

*Business of Supply*

Two of the October 2010 initiatives fall within the mandate of Public Safety Canada. A new National Centre for Missing Persons and Unidentified Remains has been set up and will ultimately support and improve the investigation of missing persons cases across Canada. People listening should go to that website. I would encourage them to do what they can to review what is on that website. If anyone has information, I encourage them to contact their local authorities.

The centre's work will apply to all Canadian missing persons cases, but it includes a post for a dedicated, experienced aboriginal police officer from the National Aboriginal Policing Services to ensure a continuing focus on the specific issue of missing aboriginal women and girls. I hope the NDP member is not suggesting that aboriginal police officer is also not to be trusted, because I can assure everyone this aboriginal officer is working very diligently in his capacity on this issue.

The second initiative is supporting the development of community safety plans by aboriginal communities to reduce violence and improve the safety of aboriginal women within their communities.

Justice Canada is responsible for the remaining initiatives. A substantial amount of funding was provided directly to community organizations as part of their efforts to reduce violence and improve safety for aboriginal women and girls. Approximately \$2 million, in fact, has gone directly to about 30 organizations for activities aimed at reducing violence against aboriginal women. For example, Justice Canada provided approximately \$232,000 in funding to the Girls Action Foundation to support an aboriginal young women's leadership project aimed at increasing the confidence, skills and knowledge of young aboriginal women nationally so they are better equipped to implement community action plans that address violence and victimization.

Funding was also provided to the Canadian Red Cross to revise its highly regarded abuse prevention program directed specifically at aboriginal communities in Canada, which was entitled Walking the Prevention Circle, to adapt it into an online course and translate it into French. That program was developed by the Canadian Red Cross, as I said, over many years to raise awareness about the importance of breaking intergenerational cycles of violence and abuse. This tool is an important one in facilitating lasting change in aboriginal communities and has been used in a large number of aboriginal communities all across Canada.

Justice Canada also worked with the Aboriginal Research Institute and some 12 individual contractors across Canada to gather together best practices in the areas of violence reduction, aboriginal community development, victim services and law enforcement. The online national compendium produced from this work is designed to help aboriginal communities and groups improve the safety of aboriginal women within their own communities by building on what others have tried and found helpful.

• (1705)

The 2010 initiatives also included an additional \$1 million annually to the victims fund, to help the provinces and territories adapt or develop culturally appropriate victim services for aboriginal victims of crime and enhance support for families of missing or murdered aboriginal women.

Victim services across the country have received funding to deliver culturally appropriate services to aboriginal victims of crime, and in particular aboriginal women who have experienced violence. Several of these provinces are developing and delivering specific services to support family members of missing and murdered aboriginal women and girls.

The Canadian Centre for Child Protection Inc. is working in collaboration with the Assembly of First Nations and the RCMP to raise awareness about programs available for first nations and aboriginal families in their search for missing children. MissingKids.ca, which is the Canadian Centre for Child Protection's missing children resource and response centre, is a central place for critical tools for parents and communities, as well as resources to prevent children from going missing. More projects are in development.

As I said, these new initiatives are in addition to existing programs, such as the National Crime Prevention Centre, the aboriginal justice strategy and programs funded by Status of Women Canada and Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada. Again, let us not forget all I said about those hard-working police officers who are working on these projects to address these cases.

This government has acknowledged the seriousness of this issue and moved to action. All members would agree that we can continue to do more, and we welcome the contribution of a special committee of the House on what else should be done to end the violence and prevent future generations of aboriginal women and girls from experiencing this violence. No woman or child in Canada should have to face violence.

We encourage all parties, all governments and all Canadians to work toward a violence-free Canada. If I might finish on this, when I asked the Liberal member about what had been done during the 13 years of Liberal government reign here in this House, I was very disturbed to hear that member say it all depends on how many questions are asked; that is when they act.

It is not about questions being asked, it is about finding these girls. It is about helping these families. It is about doing our duty as Canadians to make sure that happens. The best way to do that is to make sure the police have the tools they need, make sure these communities have the tools they need to prevent further disappearances, and make sure we work together and leave aside all the political rhetoric. Right now it does not matter.

What matters are these victims and these victims' families.

• (1710)

**Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I will take my hon. colleague at her word and will leave some of the rhetoric aside.

It is a simple question that I have for her. Do the Conservatives believe that the high numbers of missing and murdered women in Canada constitute a public safety emergency? If not, why not?

*Private Members' Business*

**Mrs. Shelly Glover:** Mr. Speaker, our government has shown that this is a serious issue, and that is why we put \$25 million toward a number of initiatives to prevent further exposure and to try to solve these missing cases.

It is imperative that all members here support initiatives that actually might lead to resolution. It is important that all members here proceed in a manner that actually helps the victims and their families.

I am assured today by some of the members from the NDP and some of the members from the Liberal Party, and I am sure that the Green Party member who is listening intently would probably agree as well, that this is a serious issue. The government has taken action, and we intend to listen to the special committee in the House to see what more we can do. However, we are going to support the police officers who are busy doing the investigative part, which is the best solution.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, one of the things I acknowledged shortly after standing up and addressing the issue is the fact that I was really quite encouraged to hear the government was going to be supporting the motion.

I made it clear that we still want to see that full public national inquiry. We see the merit in that. At the very least, there is some movement forward and we do appreciate that.

The question I have for the member is: Can she provide some of her thoughts as to when she would like to see this committee up and running? Does she envision the committee up and running in the month of April, or May? Can the member give some sort of indication as to what her personal preference would be in terms of when the committee should be up and running?

**Mrs. Shelly Glover:** Mr. Speaker, as has been stated here, it sounds as if we have unanimous support from all parties with regard to setting up this special committee of the House. I am not an expert on how long that takes. That is something that I would leave to the whips and the House leaders to discuss between them, but I am encouraged by the support that I hear here today.

I would ask that when the members have an opportunity to stand following my brief intervention, if they could take a moment to thank the police officers for their work because there has been a lot of police bashing here in the last few days and they need our support. They are doing a heck of a job and I would encourage everyone here to take the time to thank them for their service.

**Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for her great remarks and for her service as a police officer and all the other police officers who I know, particularly on these files. It is pretty heartbreaking at times. I really want to salute her for that. She has more knowledge of these matters than probably anyone in the House and certainly more than I would ever want to have. I sincerely thank her for her service.

The parliamentary secretary talked about a long list of things that were being done, a lot of programs and so on. We have heard many good comments in the House. I would ask her what is missing? Is it attitude? Is it public awareness? Everyone says they care and I do not think there is any question about that, but what is missing?

**Mrs. Shelly Glover:** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for his kind comments. It was an absolute pleasure and an honour for me to serve the city of Winnipeg during my time as a police officer and I intend to go back there when I am done here. The member too has served his country proudly in the Canadian armed forces, so I know that he has had some difficult times throughout his career that I am sure have weighed heavily on his heart. I think him for his service as well.

While we are talking about my opinion about where we might find some advancement, one of the things that we need to do is to build relationships. It is through building relationships that people share secrets. I find we lack the building of relationships even in the House as we have political parties that try to jockey for one position or another and sometimes that is unfortunate. However, if we could come together and build relationships so that we can work toward the resolution together without pointing fingers, et cetera, that is something I think is missing. That applies also to our aboriginal communities. To build relations with them and thank them for what they do because they do a lot to solve these things as well and celebrate their successes because we have some tremendously successful aboriginal people who do not get recognition. I would like to see that happen.

• (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, February 26, 2013, at the expiry of the time provided for government orders.

I see the chief government whip is rising on a point of order.

**Hon. Gordon O'Connor:** Mr. Speaker, I ask that you see the clock at 5:30 p.m.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** Is it agreed to see the clock at 5:30 p.m.?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

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## PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

### CRIMINAL CODE

The House resumed from January 30 consideration of the motion that Bill C-444, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (personating peace officer or public officer), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** When we last had this question for debate in the House, the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice had six minutes remaining for her remarks.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

*Private Members' Business*

**Ms. Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, when I was speaking to this before, I commented on the problems that could arise with police personation because it offends a natural trust, which we would like to think is ordinarily well-founded, that could be exploited and abused by criminals for their own purposes. Every time someone pretends to be a peace officer or a public officer with the intent of deceiving the public or a particular person, damage is indeed done to society's overall ability to trust in the uniform and the other identifiable tools and equipment that such officers would normally carry.

This leads to the second conclusion about this offence. No matter what the purpose of the personation is, or even if there is no purpose at all, it is dangerous and criminal conduct. Public trust in the police and other public institutions is critical to public order and stability.

Returning to Bill C-444, the legislation addresses the most serious forms of the offence of personating a peace officer or a public officer. I would pause to note that the offence under section 130 applies to personation of both peace officers and public officers, both of which are defined in the Criminal Code.

Bill C-444 proposes an aggravating factor that also addresses the personation of a peace officer and a public officer. This is a reasonable approach when one takes into account the definitions of those terms. "Peace officer" is defined in section 2 of the Criminal Code and includes holders of particular offices, most important, police officers and corrections officers. The term "public officer" is also defined in section 2 of our Criminal Code and includes, for instance, customs officers and officers in the Canadian Forces. There is some overlap between the terms and therefore it is sensible to include both.

The personation of a peace officer or a public officer, and most especially the police, is the most troubling circumstance. Pretending to be a peace officer or a public officer is serious, regardless of the purpose for which it is done, as I said, or even if there is no purpose at all. However, when a person's trust in the police is exploited in order to make it easier to commit another crime, and in particular, a crime against the person who was made to believe they were dealing with a police officer in the first place, that is extremely blameworthy conduct. Bill C-444 aims to ensure that individuals who would do exactly this are punished accordingly.

We are fortunate in Canada to have a society in which citizens, on the whole, trust their law enforcement. This trust leads citizens to want to accept the authority of anyone who appears to be a police officer. A police personator can exploit this trust and use it to more easily approach, interact with and assert physical authority over others.

Peace officer or public officer personation is, in general, quite rare, and thankfully, this more blameworthy form of it is even rarer. Unfortunately, however, it does still take place. Bill C-444 aims to identify this situation as one that aggravates the crime and should lead to a harsher sentence than that which would otherwise be imposed on the offender.

I would like to thank the hon. member for Red Deer for introducing Bill C-444, and allowing us, as parliamentarians, to

discuss this serious problem, and in doing so, educate Canadians on these very real risks.

• (1720)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Pierre Jacob (Brome—Missisquoi, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to Bill C-444, introduced by the hon. member for Red Deer.

This bill would amend the Criminal Code to establish that personating a peace officer or public officer for the purpose of committing an offence must be considered by a judge to be an aggravating circumstance for sentencing purposes.

This bill is a good, balanced response to this real problem, and I support it at second reading.

It reproduces what was in Bill C-576, which died on the order paper during the 40th Parliament, and it adds the notion of personating a public officer.

The purpose of this bill is to sanction such actions. I commend my hon. colleague from Red Deer who worked on this issue. During previous debates, he mentioned a number of sad stories from across the country in which criminals have used this scheme to commit offences ranging from theft to forcible confinement.

The hon. member for Red Deer also mentioned the fact that Canadians' trust in peace and public officers must be protected. He said in the House:

By supporting the bill, we are also helping to preserve the trust and respect that citizens have for real, bona fide police officers. When citizens see a police uniform, they naturally trust and respect the authority that comes with it. Our laws must reflect this reality.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice clearly explained the importance of this relationship of trust, and the bill seeks to strengthen that relationship between citizens and police officers.

I would also like to comment briefly on the reservations the hon. member for Mount Royal has about this bill.

Although he agrees with the objective and supports the bill, the hon. member doubts that the bill will have the desired effect, namely, of making it possible to impose longer prison sentences. He also mentioned the efficacy of the deterrent effect of longer prison terms. This is a very interesting debate, and I will have the pleasure of talking to him more about it when this bill is sent to committee.

We must recognize that, for once, a bill that amends the Criminal Code is a good thing.

There is no reference to minimum sentences, the independence of the justice system is not being challenged and respect for victims is being made a priority. These things do not happen often enough in this Parliament, and it is important to point it out.

*Private Members' Business*

Too often, the Conservatives do not take a logical approach to justice, and I always criticize bills that are sent to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights that either seriously undermine judicial independence or add standards to the Criminal Code that weaken its legal logic.

I would like to commend the hon. member who worked long and hard on this issue and introduced this bill on September 27. I will vote in favour of it.

I would like to come back to the valid statements made by the hon. member for Mount Royal, who brought up some things to think about as we work to solve this rather uncommon problem of personating a peace officer or public officer.

The hon. member brought up the problem of access to police uniforms and equipment. It is true that that is a concern. Restricting access to this sort of clothing and other equipment could be worth looking into.

● (1725)

My hon. colleague also suggested that there be a campaign to raise awareness about police identity cards. These are two interesting possibilities that in no way diminish the merits of the bill. I would like to talk about another point that the bill sheds light on, the fact that people have lost trust in our police institutions.

The member for Red Deer insisted that this was something he thought about when drafting his bill. Therefore, it is essential that people who are approached by police officers for whatever reason know who they are dealing with.

I will come back to my colleague's comments, which echo the member for Mount Royal's suggestion concerning badges, which could be explored:

This is an opportunity to encourage people to think about why they are being stopped, to make sure they ask to see a badge and look for the number. The police are prepared to do that. When I spoke with police officers they said it was common practice. I know a lot of times we think that if we ask for the number, it will cause more concern, but that certainly was not an issue in my discussions with the members I spoke with.

This quote shows that some people are intimidated by the police and do not dare make this legitimate request. The bill brings this out into the open.

I would also like to congratulate my colleague from Gatineau, who provided a good explanation of how the judge and crown prosecutor determine the sentence when the offence is punishable by indictment or by summary conviction.

In closing, I would like to recognize the work of the member for Red Deer and give him my full support for his bill, because it respects the victim and also the independence of the judiciary, and provides appropriate punishment for the offender. This is a well thought out and balanced approach. If a similar approach is taken again, I would be happy to collaborate.

[English]

**Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am grateful for the opportunity to speak to Bill C-444, presented by the Conservative member for Red Deer. According to the bill, its enactment amends the Criminal Code to establish that impersonating a police officer or a public officer for the purpose of committing

another offence must be considered by a court to be an aggravating circumstance for sentencing purposes.

From the outset, I want to reiterate the position put forth by the Liberal Party critic, the hon. member for Mount Royal, that this bill be sent to the justice committee for review. I would also suggest, as did my hon. colleague for Mount Royal, that the bill seems more declaratory than prescriptive. I say this not to in any way impugn the motives of the member, who raises an important issue, but rather to suggest that the effect of the bill, if passed, would be of little consequence. It is already an offence under the Criminal Code to impersonate a police or peace officer. However, I am pleased that the member resisted the temptation to constrain judicial discretion in the bill and that he further resisted the temptation to impose a mandatory minimum sentence. I want to say that the hon. member is providing an opportunity to draw the much needed attention of Parliament and the public to the fact that there are people out there who will impersonate a police officer.

The case that motivated the hon. member for Red Deer to introduce the bill relates to a very tragic and disturbing situation whereby an individual posing as a police officer pulled over a young woman. He did so using police-style flashing lights and wearing what appeared to be a police uniform. I would note that this young woman of 16 reacted the way most of us would. Most of us would pull over if we saw flashing lights. The young woman regrettably placed her trust in the hands of someone who caused her great harm, both physically and emotionally. This type of event would naturally cause most of us to stop and wonder how this could happen and what we might do to remedy it in future. Therefore, I understand the motivation behind the bill and applaud the member for his effort.

As mentioned earlier, we should review this bill at committee. We should ensure that the justice committee hears from victims, law enforcement and the legal community. We need to do this to ensure that the bill meets the intended objective of the member and the House. The committee process would also provide an opportunity to highlight the issue of individuals impersonating police officers.

I took the opportunity to read previous interventions on this bill, including the speech given by the member for Mount Royal. In his speech, he correctly indicates the difficulty of deterring an individual intent on impersonating a police officer. For whatever reason, there are obviously troubled individuals who seek to become people they are not. As suggested, an individual impersonating a police officer is not likely to parse through the relevant sections of the Criminal Code to identify the sentencing regimes involved for such and such a crime. Therefore, a higher sentence in a circumstance such as this is unlikely to be a deterrent. What would be of some value is to explore the possibility of limiting or cutting off the ability of individuals to buy and sell paraphernalia that allows criminals to impersonate police officers. In particular, I speak of limiting the ability of individuals to obtain flashing lights and police-like uniforms.



*Private Members' Business*

I want to return to the point about public awareness, which to me is the value of the bill. It is important that governments and police at all levels work together and encourage public awareness. We need to tell Canadians that it is okay to ask questions when pulled over or when otherwise engaged by people presenting themselves as police officers. Canadians should know that it is okay to be cautious. It is okay to request a badge number or to call 911 if something seems to be seriously amiss.

I commend the initiative put forth by the hon. member for Red Deer. I would also suggest that in some respects, he is setting himself apart from his Conservative colleagues.

● (1730)

Time and time again, we have seen a right wing ideology emerge in the private members' bills of the Conservative back bench. These so-called tough on crime pet projects are approved by the Prime Minister's Office and the Minister of Justice. Most of them, except the measure before the House today, are rooted in ideology not in reality.

Conservatives have a very loose relationship with facts. They have an even more distant relationship with reality when it comes to crime. Far too often, Conservatives use the Criminal Code as a fundraising tool. Most of us would agree that we must deal with crime in our communities. We must continue to send the message to criminals that there are consequences to committing crime. However, Canadians want a justice system that is evidence-based, cost effective and focused on crime prevention. Therefore, while most members of the Conservative caucus have an approach to crime that lacks evidence and facts, Canadians want and deserve evidence-based policy.

Recent data provided by Statistics Canada tell us that crime rates are going down in Canada. Serious crime, in particular, is down across the board.

Justice must be firm, fair and proportionate. It cannot, however, be arbitrary and punitive. Nonetheless, the government continues to introduce bills that run contrary to evidence and facts. One of the more egregious aspects of their so-called crime agenda is their wilful failure to make a proper connection between addiction, mental health problems, generational poverty and resulting criminal activity. We can never excuse crime but we cannot ignore the role, for example, that poverty and addictions play as key factors in the commission of crime.

The real danger, it seems to me, with these one-off crime bills is the damage they cause to the coherence of the Criminal Code. It is simply not good public policy to cherry-pick the Criminal Code. Changes to the Criminal Code should never be made to satisfy the political interests of the Conservative caucus. Furthermore, the Criminal Code should never be used as a fundraising tool by Conservative operatives. Unfortunately, however, this is what is happening in Canada under the Conservative government.

I will close by saying to the hon. member for Red Deer that this bill is an exception in this regard. I believe that the issue he is raising in this legislation is worthy of review and study, and I salute him for his effort.

● (1735)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise in the House to speak to Bill C-444.

I will not keep you in suspense and I will tell you right off the bat that I will support this bill at second reading. As for the other stages, we will see, but there is a very good chance that I will continue to support this bill after it is examined in committee.

As my colleagues from all the parties have said, although this bill addresses very specific and relatively rare cases, it still proposes a positive amendment to the Criminal Code. The bill seeks to address a number of needs that have been expressed, particularly by my esteemed colleague from Red Deer. He has legitimate reasons for introducing this bill and I congratulate him for doing so. I congratulate him in particular for choosing to introduce a bill that adds a provision to section 130 of the Criminal Code.

The bill is somewhat based on the notion of making the offence an aggravating circumstance, instead of creating, as some of his colleagues tried to do, a mandatory minimum sentence. This took away the court's freedom to act and even undermined the desired objective of some of my Conservative colleagues.

I had the pleasure of working on the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights. I will use the example of a bill that my Conservative colleague from Kootenay—Columbia introduced. That bill also had legitimate goals, but the effects were rather worrisome. There were even fears that the purpose intended by my colleague from Kootenay—Columbia would be overridden and that we could end up taking a step backwards because of how the bill was presented. Unfortunately, the bill passed and we hope that it will not have any devastating consequences.

I am pleased to reiterate that I will support Bill C-444. I am so pleased because I have a vested interest in this bill—I will not hide it and want to disclose it in the House. I have a loved one who is an active member of a police force.

I want to mention what the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance and member for Saint-Boniface said during another debate, regarding the public's view of and lack of trust in police forces. It is not true that the public no longer trusts police forces. What we are saying is that because of certain situations, this trust may be wavering, may be fragile, and as elected members of the House, we have a duty to protect it.

Of course, I feel a direct link to this, because I have a loved one who works for a police force. More than anything, I do not want him to become a victim, either of the misconduct of some of his colleagues on the force or another police force in the country, or of any perception, whether legitimate or false, on the part of the public because of problems related to the involvement of police forces.

*Private Members' Business*

Although I do not wish to dwell on the issue, I would quickly like to mention the unfortunate case of the now famous Robert Pickton. It is not something that we would have liked to achieve such notoriety. However, as they say, the damage is done. What is important is finding solutions, rather than just pointing the finger. That is what is most important, which is why I am very pleased to see that all members of the House plan to support this bill.

• (1740)

I wish to explore the importance of the authority enjoyed by anyone who wears a uniform or appears to be in a position of authority, that is, when someone steals an identity and takes it on as their own. This is an aggravating factor, so it is very important. Although things change completely whenever a firearm is involved, there is no denying that the authority held by someone in uniform or with a certain title can very easily intimidate and frighten some people who are sensitive to such authority. That is a fact.

The bill introduced by the hon. member for Red Deer sends a clear message to Canadians and builds some level of confidence. The 308 members of this House all have an opportunity to send this message. The level of trust will depend on the means that are developed.

My hon. colleague from Brome—Missisquoi was right to repeat some parts of the speech given by the member for Mount Royal. As the Romans used to say, “*dura lex*”. The law is strict, indeed—in its existence, in its form and in its message, as well as based on the means put in place to enforce it. These means can take various forms and avenues.

Our esteemed colleague from Mount Royal rightfully raised concerns about the availability of uniforms, for example, and the fact that although a tough law will be on the books, if we do not take certain measures, the law will come too late, which will defeat the purpose. That is very important to recognize.

I want to talk about section 130 of the Criminal Code. To begin, it states:

130. (1) Everyone commits an offence who
- (a) falsely represents himself to be a peace officer or a public officer; or
  - (b) not being a peace officer or public officer, uses a badge or article of uniform... as the case may be.

It goes on to say:

- (2) Everyone who commits an offence under subsection (1)
- (a) is guilty of an indictable offence and liable to imprisonment for a term of not more than five years; or
  - (b) is guilty of an offence punishable on summary conviction.

The bill proposes adding section 130.1, which states:

If a person is convicted of an offence under section 130, the court imposing the sentence on the person shall consider as an aggravating circumstance the fact that the accused personated a peace officer or a public officer, as the case may be, for the purpose of facilitating the commission of another offence.

I think it is a major step forward. Once the bill has passed, it will be interesting to see how the courts and the various stakeholders use it and apply it to different types of offences.

Obviously, the member for Red Deer introduced this bill in response to a truly appalling crime, an extreme case. However, the bill has some potential, and it will be fascinating to follow the work

of my colleagues on the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights to see how it could be useful.

• (1745)

[*English*]

**Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, this is a good bill. I would like to thank my colleague, the member for Red Deer, for tabling this piece of legislation. It is identical to Bill C-576, which he tabled in the 40th Parliament and at that time was supported unanimously at second reading. I will beg his forgiveness if I repeat a lot of the information that was already said, but when we are supporting a good bill, there is nothing wrong with repeating the good points about it.

It is my understanding that the bill is a response to a very tragic incident in Red Deer, where a young girl was sexually assaulted by a man disguised as a police officer. Our society should not have to tolerate this kind of abuse of trust. We need to ensure that our citizens can turn to police officers and other public officials when in need and feel safe in doing so. We see in other countries where criminals disguise themselves as police officers in order to commit crimes, many of them very violent crimes against unsuspecting citizens. We cannot allow this to take place in our country.

[*Translation*]

Bill C-444 amends section 130 of the Criminal Code to establish that personating a police officer or a public officer for the purpose of committing another offence must be considered by a court to be an aggravating circumstance for sentencing purposes.

This is not a very common offence, but the Criminal Code must be amended all the same. We recognize that this offence is not only an attack on its victims, but it also represents an abuse of the institutions in our society that Canadians must be able to trust. Considering false representation as an aggravating factor instead of proposing a minimum sentence allows us to support this bill, because it respects the victim and judicial independence, and punishes the offender appropriately.

We believe that justice for victims is important and we are pleased to have been able to work with the government on this bill. It is not often that we are able to work with the government so closely, and so I am pleased that we were able to do so on this.

As I already said, this bill comes as a result of an incident that happened in Red Deer when a poor young woman was sexually assaulted by a man who had disguised himself as a police officer and had put fake flashing lights on his car. The assailant is now in prison after being sentenced to 18 years, including an additional six months for impersonating a law enforcement officer. My colleague, the hon. member for Red Deer, described this as the equivalent of committing a crime with a weapon, because the victim is forced to submit to a false authority who is committing a violent act.

This bill says nothing about a minimum sentence. Allowing judges discretionary power is very important.

*Private Members' Business*

We will therefore support this bill at all stages, as we planned to do for its predecessor in the previous Parliament. We on this side of the House recognize that this type of crime is not only a horrible attack on the victim, but also an usurpation of the power of the forces of law and order, which is very serious. By pretending to represent institutions that Canadians trust and obey, criminals are attacking society as a whole.

This bill will formally codify this offence and achieve justice for those who have been victims of such crimes.

● (1750)

New Democrats are satisfied with this bill, which will fill a void in the Criminal Code. This bill will ensure justice for victims, respect for judicial independence and suitable punishment for offenders.

We agree with my colleague and his party on this bill. It models a logical and balanced approach to justice, and we are happy to support it. I think this is an excellent example for democracy.

Once again, I would like to congratulate my colleague from Red Deer for his hard work and for introducing this bill again.

[*English*]

**Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, two days ago Canadians took to the airwaves for the Let's Talk initiative to help bring awareness of those struggling with mental health issues.

Today on this Valentine's Day we recognize the things that play to matters of the heart, and so to that end I would like to say Happy Valentine's Day to my wife. That said, it is fitting that we remember how important it is to talk, to listen and to act by supporting those who are so significant in our lives.

I am honoured to close second reading debate on my private member's bill, Bill C-444. I appreciate the fact that my colleagues from all sides of the House have shown that they too are prepared to talk, to listen and now to act as we take this very important step of moving this bill to committee. I thank everyone for their support.

My bill seeks to amend section 130 of the Criminal Code by adding a sentencing provision to the crime of impersonating peace officers or public officers. There are really three main components of this bill.

First, it is an acknowledgement to those who fall victim to this cowardly act of deceit that society views this crime seriously and that our trust in authority, which has been ingrained in our psyche since childhood, is not to be trifled with. We can do this by recognizing that the personation of an officer in the commission of another offence should be considered an aggravating circumstance at the sentencing of a criminal.

Second, since aggravating circumstances in this case are currently specific to those who abuse a position of trust or power, this bill would create clarity by recognizing that those who pretend to have this position of trust to overpower or disarm a victim should be treated similarly when sentencing occurs. Herein is the key aspect of my bill: the existing aggravating circumstance does not currently apply to offenders who are posing as police officers. I am calling on Parliament to recognize this gap in the law and to work with me to fill it by passing my private member's bill. My bill recognizes this

gap in the law and would ensure that this kind of malicious deceit would be dealt with properly.

Third, by making this change to the Criminal Code, we would also show our support to the fine men and women who put their lives on the line and whose public trust is diminished by the actions of these unscrupulous criminals. Our police officers' jobs are difficult as they are, and by highlighting this type of criminal activity we would recognize the damage done by these illegal acts.

Here I will recap some of the issues germane to this bill. Within the maximum sentence for personating an officer, the appropriateness of a sentence would still rest with the sentencing court. Sentencing is a pillar of our justice system and it is up to us, as legislators, to establish sentencing provisions in the Criminal Code. When an offender personates a police officer to further victimize someone, this is a severe instance of personating an officer and can have serious and long-lasting effects on a victim. The sentence for this kind of malicious deceit must denounce this unlawful conduct and reflect the significant impact that the crime has on victims' lives. Victims must be assured that there will be serious consequences for the criminals who have hurt them.

As a further point, the way that section 130 now reads, the crime relates to the deception of the public about a person's status as a police officer. It does not differentiate whether it was for the specific purpose of facilitating another crime, or whether another crime is actually attempted or committed. However, in cases where the deception is intended to and in fact does facilitate the commission of another more serious crime, this is an extremely serious instance of the offence of personating an officer and therefore deserves an appropriately higher sentence. In 2009, we legislated a new maximum sentence for this crime and now we must give the courts this tool to exercise the new maximum in those most serious cases. Personating a police officer to force someone to do something is just as effective as pointing a firearm. It is no less aggravating than breaking and entering with the knowledge that a residence is occupied, nor many of the other situations that fall into the category of aggravating circumstances. Moreover, it is no different to a victim than having been abused by a person who really was in a position of authority.

● (1755)

By supporting this bill, we are also helping to preserve the trust and respect that citizens have for real bona fide police officers. When citizens see a police officer's uniform, they naturally trust and respect the authority that comes with it and our laws must reflect this reality. The bill brings to light the support that our police forces need to combat this type of crime.

I would like to once again thank my colleagues for their support. I appreciate that they, too, recognize the timeliness and the necessity of the bill. I look forward to working with the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights where we can further our discussion.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

• (1800)

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** Accordingly the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights.

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

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## ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[*Translation*]

### SERVICE CANADA

**Ms. Marie-Claude Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, last November, the Parliamentary Budget Officer released a report on the Conservative government's proposed cuts.

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**Ms. Marie-Claude Morin:** Mr. Speaker, I would appreciate it very much if my colleagues would take their conversations outside the House and if this were not deducted from my time.

I will continue.

Members will recall that the government promised that the \$5.2 billion in cuts would not directly affect services provided to Canadians by Service Canada. The Parliamentary Budget Officer discovered that, on the contrary, most of the savings would be realized from program cuts.

In his report, the Parliamentary Budget Officer stated that only 15% of the anticipated cuts over the next three years would be made to administration, for example communications or human resources. When the report was released, the government slammed the Parliamentary Budget Officer for supposedly overstepping his mandate by asking for details about the money Ottawa was not spending, in other words, the cuts. It claimed that the PBO was supposed to concentrate on the money that was being spent.

Do I need to remind the House that the position of Parliamentary Budget Officer was created by this same Conservative government out of a concern for transparency?

We realize today that the transparency the Conservatives talk so much about is deteriorating as the government's tenure increases.

The role of the PBO is critical. His analyses to date have shed light on a number of files and have even led to the elimination of some policies that were too expensive or unjustified.

Yesterday, the House voted on the NDP motion to reaffirm the essential role of the Parliamentary Budget Officer and to make the incumbent of the position a completely independent officer of

Parliament. Unfortunately, the Conservative majority voted against our motion.

Last fall, I asked the minister whether she had read the Parliamentary Budget Officer's report and whether she realized that services to the public were being significantly affected. As usual, I received an empty response that did not really address my question.

So this time, I am asking why her government refused to heed the opinion of the Parliamentary Budget Officer, who was just trying to do his job.

If the Parliamentary Budget Officer, an office created by the Conservative government, is an independent officer of Parliament, it would be a good idea to listen to what he has to say, would it not?

• (1805)

[*English*]

**Mr. Andrew Saxton (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board and for Western Economic Diversification, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be here today to add to this debate. It gives me a chance to discuss what we have achieved to create a leaner and more efficient government.

As one can imagine, there are many opportunities to find efficiencies in the operations of government. From consolidating internal services to introducing new productivity-enhancing technology solutions to replacing paper publications with online content, we have been tackling this issue from every single angle. In the process, we have put billions of dollars of direct program spending under the microscope. This has required all federal departments and agencies to examine every function and activity within their organizations to ensure value for money, including their operations systems and processes. It has led them to reduce unnecessary spending by focusing on providing programs that are consistent with federal roles and responsibilities. It has been a big job, but the effort was well worth it.

As outlined in economic action plan 2012, we have managed to find \$5.2 billion in ongoing annual savings. We are now in a great position for the future. As the Minister of Finance said recently, "we remain on track to return to balanced budgets over the medium term".

This is despite the ongoing global uncertainty in the European and American economies. This is an achievement we can all be proud of. I would like to recognize the hard work of everyone who played a part in helping the government meet its objectives during these challenging economic times. I would like to thank, in particular, public servants everywhere who continue to demonstrate the dedication and innovation needed to respond to the expectations of Canadians.

Let me be clear. We will continue to manage the employment reductions resulting from the reduction in departmental spending in a manner that treats federal employees fairly and minimizes disruptions to Canadians. We will also keep our promise to not reduce transfers to persons, including those for seniors, children and the unemployed, nor will we reduce transfers to other levels of government in support of health care and social services.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

In fact, we have increased funding for health care to record levels, from \$20 billion a year in 2006, to almost \$29 billion this year. It will increase to about \$38 billion by 2017-18. Funding to social programs, through the Canada social transfer, will increase to almost \$12 billion this year. Funding for children's benefits, such as the universal child care benefit, will increase to about \$13 billion this year.

We will continue to work hard to rein in spending and find efficiencies in government operations. A leaner and more affordable government is good for taxpayers. It will also help us return to balanced budgets. The actions we are taking reflect a determination to fundamentally rethink the role of government in how it serves Canadians. These actions will sustain economic growth, job creation and prosperity now and for the next generation.

[Translation]

**Ms. Marie-Claude Morin:** Mr. Speaker, I listened very carefully to my colleague's response.

When the Conservatives talk about optimizing the budget, I understand. I understand that sometimes cuts have to be made somewhere. That is normal. They are managing a country. However, when we see frivolous spending, such as when senators spend on extravagances and ministers pay \$16 for orange juice at the expense of taxpayers, I think it is completely illogical to cut public services.

Right now, the provinces have their hands full as a result of the current government. They are drowning and so is the middle class. Never has the state of social programs in Canada ever been so critical. Things are not working at all.

The minister gave me a rhetorical answer and I do not believe him.

[English]

**Mr. Andrew Saxton:** Mr. Speaker, allow me to say a few more words about the benefits of spending responsibly.

Our government understands that balancing the budget is not just an end in itself. The real end is to ensure that Canada is positioned to continue succeeding in today's global economy. By reducing debt, we can free up tax dollars that would otherwise be absorbed by interest costs. This money can then be reinvested in the things that matter most to Canadians. I am talking about things such as health care, public services or lower taxes. Reducing debt also helps us to strengthen the country's ability to respond to economic shocks, such as the recent global financial crisis, and challenges such as our aging population.

The bottom line is that it helps us to preserve the gains that Canada has made from our low-tax plan for jobs, growth and long-term prosperity.

## EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

**Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, my question of November 6 related to the fact that the Conservative government, without a minute of study, with no economic analysis, with absolutely no consultations and without so much as a discussion at committee, changed the employment insurance system such that the government is stealing five weeks of income from seasonal workers. I ask members in this place what would happen to them, with the good salaries of the people in here or the bureaucracy in this town, if

all of a sudden, five weeks of that income were gone, cut, just like that, without any consultation. That is what happened here. Worse, these are people in seasonal industries who do not have the high salaries of people in this place.

Cutting employment insurance is a very serious matter, and it affects individuals who are hardworking and dedicated to their communities and their families. I would go so far as to suggest that to make a change of this magnitude without any economic analysis of the impact on families, on the communities and on the regional economies is absolutely cruel and unbecoming. This action is something we would expect to see in a third world dictatorship. It is certainly not one we would expect to see in an industrialized country like Canada.

Regardless of the government's spin, and we will get it in a moment, the government's decision will drive some seasonal workers onto provincial welfare rolls, will force some people to leave the region, will cause an increase in stress and will lead to family and social unrest.

For a government that likes to talk about the importance of the economy, this decision is, in fact, seriously undermining the regional economies. Seasonal industries contribute 17% to our GDP. They are important, and this attack on the EI system undermines their ability in the seasonal industries to maintain skilled workers.

As an example, Premier Alward of New Brunswick was given a briefing note on June 28, and it said this in part:

Forcing workers into alternative employment during off-seasons may create an unstable business environment if they are unavailable to seasonal enterprises on resumption of production.

It went on to say:

The resulting erosion of economic returns may induce a further exodus from rural areas.

The premier was advised that if seasonal workers are forced to leave their home communities to find work because of the EI changes, it could be even harder for the remaining companies to find workers. Quoting from the report further:

The potential loss of employees to other sectors or jurisdictions would pose a significant challenge for the long-term viability and growth of business and industries and disrupt supply chains.

Seriously, this is an attack on not only seasonal workers but on seasonal industries. The government talks about the importance of the economy. This is undermining seasonal industries that contribute 17% to GDP, that require the skilled workers who come back every year to those seasonal industries, and that are important to the country as a whole.

I ask the government to rethink what it has done, to consult with the communities and to reinstate those five weeks of employment insurance.

● (1810)

**Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Happy Valentine's Day to you and your wife.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

I welcome the opportunity tonight to respond to the member for Malpeque regarding his concerns about seasonal workers.

The extra five-week pilot project was always intended to be a temporary measure brought in during Canada's economic action plan to help people during the recession. Thankfully, Canada has been leading the G7 in economic growth. Since the deepest days of the recession, we have seen over 900,000 net new jobs created. This is tangible proof of Canada's economic recovery.

As the hon. member already knows, our country faces ongoing skills and labour shortages. Therefore, it is important that we ensure that the employment insurance program is working effectively for Canada and Canadians.

Canadians want to earn a good living, support their families and be productive members in their communities. Our government is ensuring that the EI program supports them in achieving this goal and never acts as a disincentive to Canadians who really want to work.

That is why on October 5, our government announced its intention to amend the current working while on claim pilot project. This amendment would provide a new option for recent EI claimants who are on claim and had earnings between August 7, 2011 and August 4, 2012 and were eligible to benefit from the working while on claim provision. I would add that previous claimants have the option to use the previous pilot program if they feel the program was more advantageous.

We are also providing enhanced labour market information to claimants to support their job search efforts, including enhanced online job alerts. EI recipients can now get job postings up to twice a day for their chosen occupation within their communities, as well as postings for jobs in related occupations.

• (1815)

[*Translation*]

These job alerts will help them to make more enlightened decisions on how to direct their job search.

[*English*]

We will also be increasing the coordination between the temporary foreign worker program and the EI program. We want to ensure that Canadians who are available and have the right skills get first crack at the jobs.

[*Translation*]

The employment situation of all Canadians is of great concern to this government.

[*English*]

That is why our government's top priorities will continue to be focused on jobs, growth and long-term prosperity.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** Mr. Speaker, I really find it amazing that the parliamentary secretary could stand in her place and give us that crap and that spin. I say this because these are the real lives of people who are affected in the regions. They are seeing five weeks cut from their employment insurance without any economic analysis of it being done by the government.

The parliamentary secretary says that it is all about finding jobs. Well, in a lot of the regions, there are just no jobs available. A 50 or 55-year-old person cannot be trained overnight to be a welder on an oil line in Alberta.

The parliamentary secretary of all people should understand the impact this is having on people in the province. Worse yet, to the question I asked yesterday in the House, the Conservatives are not only doing away with the five weeks of employment insurance, they are now actually clawing back from EI fifty cents on the dollar from the Canada pension plan that seasonal workers paid into.

These are the changes that the Conservatives made and they are hurting seasonal workers and seasonal industries. I ask the government to rethink this drastic and ridiculous measure.

**Ms. Kellie Leitch:** Mr. Speaker, the member opposite knows that his claim about the CPP and EI is completely false. There has been no change to that program. In fact, the extra five-week pilot project came to its intended end as a pilot project, as the member opposite knows.

Our government acknowledges that Canada is not immune to economic uncertainty and we are well aware that our recovery remains exceptionally fragile. That is why the economic action plan brought forward changes to employment insurance to help better connect Canadians with available jobs.

[*Translation*]

Our government's priorities are job creation, growth and long-term prosperity.

[*English*]

As I mentioned earlier, since July 2009, Canada has created over 900,000 net new jobs and our focus for the future will remain job creation, just like it has been. As well, employment insurance will continue to be there at all times for those who require it.

[*Translation*]

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** 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 6:18 p.m.)







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