



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

# House of Commons Debates

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OFFICIAL REPORT  
(HANSARD)

**Tuesday, March 5, 2013**

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**Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer**

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# HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, March 5, 2013

The House met at 10 a.m.

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*Prayers*

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## ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

•(1005)

[*English*]

### GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to three petitions.

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### CRIMINAL CODE

**Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP)** moved for leave to introduce Bill C-482, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (telecommunication device identifier).

He said: Mr. Speaker, cell phone theft is a crime problem in my riding of York South—Weston and across Canada. Cell phone theft is a growing and troublesome street crime, particularly for young people being mugged for their cell phones. It is a crime of opportunity, because stolen cell phones can easily be reactivated by a different carrier.

The legislation I am proposing today is the result of an initiative I took last summer in response to muggings of high school students in my riding for their cell phones. At that time, I called on the CRTC and the industry to develop a national database to track stolen cell phones. That is now being done, and this bill is the last step.

By making it illegal to tamper with cell phone identifiers, the unique number that is assigned to each cell phone, this legislation would make more effective the national database of stolen cell phones being developed here in Canada by cell phone carriers. It would prevent the reactivation of stolen cell phones and so remove the incentive to mug people for their cell phones.

I hope all members in this House will support this important crime-fighting initiative.

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

## PETITIONS

### CANADA POST

**Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have a petition brought forward by a number of my constituents in Lambton—Kent—Middlesex regarding Canada Post reviewing every post office across the country to see if outlets can be downsized to newer, smaller models.

The petitioners' concern is that in developing this process, a better process for making changes to the retail and delivery network be undertaken.

### THE ENVIRONMENT

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

The first petition is from residents of the Vancouver area calling on the government to put in place a legislated ban on supertankers on the British Columbia coastline. As this House will know, a non-legislated ban has been in place since 1972.

[*Translation*]

### FOREIGN INVESTMENT

**Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP):** The second petition was signed by residents of Salt Spring Island, in my riding, as well as people from Guelph, Toronto, Prince George and Halifax. The petitioners are calling on the Prime Minister and his cabinet to refuse to ratify the Canada-China investment treaty because it will infringe on Canada's sovereignty and its environmental, labour, health and other regulations and protection measures.

[*English*]

### SEX SELECTION

**Mr. Rod Bruinooge (Winnipeg South, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to bring forward this petition from constituents in Manitoba.

The petitioners are calling on the House of Commons to condemn discrimination against pre-born girls through gender selection and are asking the House to support Motion No. 408.

*Business of Supply***QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER**

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

**The Speaker:** Is that agreed?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**GOVERNMENT ORDERS**

[English]

**BUSINESS OF SUPPLY**

## OPPOSITION MOTION—SENATE

**Mr. Craig Scott (Toronto—Danforth, NDP)** moved:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government of Canada, in consultation with the provinces and territories, should take immediate steps towards abolishing the unelected and unaccountable Senate of Canada.

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is time to roll up the red carpet. It is my honour to rise today on behalf of my constituents of Toronto—Danforth to speak to this motion, which I will restate:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government of Canada, in consultation with the provinces and territories, should take immediate steps towards abolishing the unelected and unaccountable Senate of Canada.

To that motion I would like to add that the official opposition is fully prepared and ready to co-operate with the government in this task of consulting with the provinces and territories. We have enough experience with co-operation. Our leader, the member for Outremont, has led the way in starting to talk to the provinces as a mode of co-operative federalism. The means by which the Senate will be abolished can only proceed through that avenue.

The NDP has, since its very inception, been firmly in support of Senate abolition. Indeed, calls for abolition also came from our predecessor, the CCF. The NDP has also long believed that the people of Canada should be consulted as part of the abolition process. This remains important, but we need to start here, in the House of Commons. We need to send an extremely strong signal that the time has come. We are at a historic moment. People have come to realize that the Senate is an archaic, otiose institution, but we have to start here, in the House of Commons, and send the signal and begin to work with the provinces and territories, something it seems our Prime Minister seems allergic to.

Before I continue, I should say that I am going to be splitting my time with the hon. member for Louis-Saint-Laurent.

It is important to note that the government has put a reference to the Supreme Court of Canada, and the question of abolition is one of the questions. It is also important to clear up confusion. The Supreme Court will not be deciding one way or the other whether the Senate should be abolished. That is a political decision we are starting to initiate here, but it will tell us what the correct amending formula under the Constitution is. There is debate on that. It is almost certain that it is not less than 7/50; that is, seven provinces with 50% of the population. The Constitutional Amendments act will also come into play where certain provinces, including Ontario and Quebec, have to be involved in the amendment. However, it

could also be unanimous consent of the provinces along with the federal Parliament. We will wait to see what the Supreme Court says. We will be very interested to see what the Supreme Court says.

The key is to note that with either of those formulas—unanimous consent or 7/50—ultimately the Senate does not have to consent to its own abolishment. With either of those formulas, the Senate can resist, according to the 1982 Constitution Act, but it cannot ultimately block its own abolition, unlike the method the Prime Minister is using with his Bill C-7, in which he is purporting to amend the Constitution by only going to the Parliament with an ill-conceived scheme, when he knows that the Senate's consent is necessary. Under that form of amendment, amendment by the Parliament of Canada alone—which again is not applicable here, and the Prime Minister knows it; that is why he has finally gone to the Supreme Court to get clarity—we need the Senate's consent.

It is a nice turn that the Supreme Court will tell us which amending formula applies, and when we eventually work with the provinces to get the necessary number of provinces and legislatures on board, we will not ultimately be blocked by our friends in the Senate.

Like an Edsel, the Senate was obsolete almost from the moment it was built. Somehow, however, this one is still on the road. However, its lights are broken, the body is totally corroded, the wheels are wobbly and the engine has all but been seized up by dirty oil. It may still have a very plush interior, but it is time to send it to the scrapyard.

•(1010)

The Senate has long ceased to have any meaningful connection to the supposed original reasons for its existence. One of those reasons is the principle of representing the regions, four different regions, and the provinces within the regions.

From as early as the 1930s, reaffirmed in the 1950s and the 1960s, commentators noted that this never was a function seriously carried out by the Senate. It was not built for that. It did not operate in that way. Indeed, over time, in fact, very early on, it was the Privy Council, and it was then taken over by the Supreme Court of Canada, that served as the institution that protected federalism within our constitutional structure. We do not need the Senate for that purpose.

Only a handful of senators, 12, 15 or perhaps 20, make a serious contribution to sober second thought, which is the other major function. They do good work. They are assisted by good staff. They are conscientious. I can bet that they resent the presence of many of their colleagues in the Senate who have brought this institution down around their own ears.

*Business of Supply*

There are good senators. We hope to work with those senators if abolition does not occur before this party forms government in 2015. There are good senators we hope to work with, and I believe we will work with, who generally act in a thoughtful, non-partisan fashion but who, most important, realize, whatever their political stripe—very strongly Conservative, very strongly Liberal, independent—that the Senate is an illegitimate body when it comes to blocking bills coming from the House of Commons. It is those senators with whom we will work on the road to abolition and in any period in which we have to govern with the Senate still in place.

Meanwhile, last year, while whatever the number of senators, 100 or so with the few vacancies that are still there, basked in the comfort of, frankly, sinecure, appearing on average 56 days a year in the Senate, we in the House of Commons were doing the work for the people of Canada.

It is important to note all the controversy over residence and everything else, which my colleagues will speak to in more detail. The senators have no constituency responsibilities, yet they have budgets and they spend much more than we do, frankly, when we add up all their travel expenses. They have no constituency responsibilities. Nobody expects them to engage in that, and they do not do it, yet many of them roam around the country, racking up the miles with no role on the ground that has any legitimacy, and—I will not say “except”—they are great fundraisers. We know many senators come from fundraising backgrounds. They come from a party background. They are there only as a favour for what they did for their party in the past, and they continue in that role.

One of the most significant features of what I would call the structural corruption of the Senate—I am not going to the ethics of individual senators; I am talking about the structural corruption of the body—is how it has served and continues to serve as the means by which two parties, in particular, send out a virtual phalanx of publicly paid individuals to raise money for their parties. One party is doing that a lot better than the other these days. I acknowledge that. The party in power uses its senators extremely deftly. I would be extremely interested to know what, for example, an Auditor General's audit of the Senate would reveal about the use of parliamentary travel funds for fundraising purposes. Let us just say that the Senate is very good at hiding the reasons for travel. At the moment, we do not know the exact reasons some senators have racked up amazing travel budgets.

I indicated at the beginning that the Senate is, frankly, an Edsel. It is an Edsel in a couple of respects. From the beginning, thoughtful commentators knew that it would be a hyperpartisan body that would not be fulfilling the functions originally envisaged.

I would like to read from a wonderfully named book, *The Unreformed Senate of Canada*, page 45, an objection from the opposition at the time, in 1866-1867, by David Reesor, when he said:

[W]e know what the tendency is in England, and what it was in this country when the Government had the appointment of the...Legislative Council; the effect will be to find a place in this House for men distinguished for the aid they have given at elections to certain men or parties, and not as a reward of true merit or legislative ability.

● (1015)

Nothing has changed, nor have the words of Sir John A. Macdonald. He said:

There should be a large property qualification for the Upper house which is then the representative of property.

The Senate, having voted down the former leader's climate change accountability act, has shown that it is the continuation of the defence of property that Sir John A. Macdonald wanted the institution to be so many years ago. It is time for that to end.

● (1020)

**Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Transport), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, how is this member going to explain this to Atlantic Canada? He is essentially saying that Atlantic Canada would lose 32 parliamentary positions, in an area that is already having many challenges. The New Democrats are actually proposing the status quo. Because the abolishment cannot happen, it would be much better if the New Democrats would adopt this government's plan for nine-year non-renewable terms, and elections in the provinces. Only this government has said that it would do that. The provinces would need to hold the elections and the Prime Minister would appoint who is elected. Those are things that would bring meaningful change to the Senate, and the New Democrats oppose it. However, by opposing it, they are actually supporting the status quo.

How would the member respond to that?

**Mr. Craig Scott:** Mr. Speaker, before being a very privileged resident of Toronto—Danforth for the last 23 years, I came from Nova Scotia. I am completely confident that Atlantic Canadians, no different from other Canadians, understand what the Senate really is and that it has no representative function for them. It does not play that role.

That said, we have to listen to the provinces: Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, in the Maritimes, and Newfoundland. We have to listen to what the provinces have to say through their own political processes. If indeed they want the Senate to remain, we are going to have to listen. However, I do not believe that is the sentiment, either politically or among the populace in Atlantic Canada. It is consultation that will determine that, not running away from talking to the provinces, which is the mode of the Prime Minister.

**Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for coming forward with this motion. However, the question is why he and his party want to divert the energy of our governments of this federation, at a time when the economy is so shaky and people are concerned about their jobs, to reopen the constitution, start a mega-negotiation that will go nowhere, and to spend a lot of money on a referendum that will fail because many provinces will say they want to keep the Senate. Why do all this at a time when all our energy should be focused on the economy and the difficult times we are in?

*Business of Supply*

**Mr. Craig Scott:** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question, and I respect greatly the hon. member who has posed it, the work he has done for Canada, and where this question comes from. However, I profoundly disagree with the assumption that we know what Canadians and provinces, through their representatives, think on this matter. Things have changed a lot of late. Canadians are sick and tired of dysfunctional parliamentary politics. They understand that this House needs reform; they understand that the electoral system needs reform. They also understand that the Senate is a useless institution.

Coming from the province that the member represents through his own constituency, I say he should not presume to know what that provincial government's position will be on the question of abolition. Things can change, for example. Let us wait to see what will result from dialogue and talking to the provinces. If it turns out that abolition requires unanimous consent, his point will be well-taken; it will be difficult. However, if it is 7/50, it is going to be extremely possible to do.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by wholeheartedly thanking the member for Toronto—Danforth for his speech and the work he does on this file, be it on democratic reform or the issue of what should be done with the Senate.

He is very learned. He is able to shed light on various elements and show us how to approach the issue from a different angle, because the current situation makes no sense. Something can be done.

Thanks to members like him, we will succeed in coming up with a new proposal that is better for all Canadians. Clearly, the Senate is a major problem. Everyone can see that.

Our motion is clear:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government of Canada, in consultation with the provinces and territories, should take immediate steps towards abolishing the unelected and unaccountable Senate of Canada.

There are two very important parts to the motion. It is very important to consider the consultation aspect, because we believe that the goal is not to impose anything, but rather to encourage a serious discussion on abolishing the Senate. We need to hear what the provinces have to say about this.

I believe that most people would agree that the Senate has become a completely outdated, undemocratic, antiquated institution in this day and age—an old relic that is no longer relevant.

Originally, the Senate was supposed to review and improve legislation; it was meant to be the chamber of sober second thought. It was designed to represent minorities, as well as the provinces and regions in the legislative process. That was the basic idea, but that was never what actually happened. Ultimately, the Senate never played that role.

The Senate has always been an extremely partisan institution that serves simply to thank party cronies, who are appointed to that chamber to enjoy the associated privileges and to block the bills that are passed by duly elected MPs. This causes many problems. In the

end, it all becomes very clear when we ask Canadians what they think.

It is true that, in the beginning, the idea was to provide regional representation, as the Minister of Transport mentioned. However, the reality is that this is simply not happening. Senators are supposed to represent certain regions, to be the voice of those regions, but that is not what they are doing.

The Senate was originally created to represent the regions. The reality is that it has never done that. We must not keep the Senate simply because it was a good idea in the beginning. It currently costs Canadians \$100 million. It is little more than a cushy job for party cronies who raise money for the party. It should not work like this. We cannot let it continue. It is too appalling. We cannot allow such an illegitimate parliamentary institution to continue.

The Conservative Party has been promising to reform the Senate for a very long time. The Conservatives campaigned on this reform in 2005 and talked about it non-stop. I am convinced that many members of the Conservative Party and people who vote for and support them believe, like we do, that the Senate is very problematic as an institution.

The Conservatives have been in power for seven years now, and almost nothing has been done about this. Of the 789 days during which the House has sat, the Senate has been discussed on just 18. It is ridiculous.

Then we are told that it is a priority and that the opposition is to blame if the reform does not go through. Are you kidding me? Come on. After issuing gag orders more than 30 times, they are now telling us that, this time, it is the opposition's fault if the file does not move forward. It is completely absurd. This is not a priority for the Conservatives at all.

The Conservatives introduce Senate reform bills that make no sense. They introduced Bill C-7 last year. They shelved it and have not talked much about it since. Bill C-7 poses huge problems and provides that somewhat bogus elections will be held to elect senators. Furthermore, the provinces will be the ones to pay for the elections because it is obviously up to them to deal with them.

● (1025)

Then, the Prime Minister will decide whether or not to appoint the people on the list. Super. I am so delighted. We will really have a Senate that makes sense.

Basically, the principle of electing senators may cause a lot of problems, because our system is not set up for two elected chambers. There is no mechanism available to us for this to work effectively and in practical terms. So a fundamental problem already exists.

Then, eight-year non-renewable mandates are proposed. That will really make these people accountable to Canadians. After being elected, they will not have to be accountable to anyone for the next eight years. They will be all set, with a good pension, nice perks, a good budget. They can travel around and collect money for the Conservative Party as much as they want. It is completely ridiculous. They will never be accountable to the public.

*Business of Supply*

When you read this bill, it is very clear that it was drafted in such a way that the government would not have to consult the provinces. The bill circumvents all parts of the Constitution. It makes small, superficial changes so that the government does not have to talk to the provinces at all. That is not how things work here in Canada. The federal government and the provinces need to talk and the provinces need to communicate with each other in order to move forward, make things work and make Canada into the country we want it to be.

Let us talk about the provinces. Either they have never had senates or they have abolished them. As far as I know, the provincial governments have not crumbled and no apocalypse has occurred because they have no senate. Everyone agrees that a government can operate just fine without this institution and that the good work that is sometimes done by the Senate can be replaced with something else, such as more work in committee or the creation of more commissions of inquiry. There are many other ways of doing this work.

Right now, we have the example of all of our provincial governments. Their legislatures are working just fine without the need for a chamber to which party friends are appointed and where the government spends outrageous amounts of money that, when you get right down to it, do not really serve much of a purpose.

Let us talk about spending. This year, the Senate's budget was increased by \$2.5 million. The Conservatives are making cuts everywhere. They are telling employment insurance claimants that investigators will have quotas that will force them to cut people's benefits. Yet, meanwhile, they are saying that the Senate is just fine and they are increasing its budget.

Could someone please explain this to me? In my opinion, something is not right. That is not how I see the Parliament of Canada, and that is not where we should be investing our energy and money.

Some people share this view. I was going to talk about a surprise, but it is actually no surprise, because this idea is likely much more widespread than we know. Former senator Michael Fortier clearly stated that he was in favour of abolishing the Senate. It is really important to hear what he said in his own words. He said:

If I had to choose today, I would say that I'm probably closer to closing the place down. I just don't see the usefulness.

I was very naive.

He goes on to talk about when he was appointed to the Senate in 2006.

I thought it would be a different place than the one I found. I found it to be extremely partisan...on both sides, including my own. And it was very annoying because these people were trying to be members of parliament and they weren't.

That is the problem. They are just taking defeated candidates or close friends of the party, giving them a golden handshake and reimbursing their expenses with taxpayers' money. For example, Senator Wallin racked up tens of thousands of dollars in expenses during the 2011 election campaign. That is completely ridiculous. Our money, Canadians' money, is going to a senator who is campaigning for a political party.

Is that what our non-partisan Senate, the chamber of sober second thought, has come to? That is not how the Senate should be. It is absolutely critical that this motion be adopted. We need to say that it is time to consult the provinces and have a serious discussion about abolishing the Senate.

• (1030)

[*English*]

**Hon. Tim Uppal (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the NDP has come forward with the suggestion to abolish the Senate. We are dealing with the Constitution; we cannot just wake up one morning and decide to abolish the Senate. What amending formula would the NDP use to abolish the Senate? Would it be seven provinces with 50% of the population? Would it be unanimous consent? Does the member have clarity on this question, because frankly, the rest of Canadians do not have clarity on the issue? I wonder if the NDP does.

When even the Liberals and the member for Saint-Laurent—Cartierville say we should not get into long, drawn-out constitutional battles, we know we are on the wrong track.

• (1035)

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for his question, which I believe is quite valid.

I would like to commend the government for finally doing the right thing and seeking the opinion of the Supreme Court of Canada in order to know, once and for all, exactly what we will need to do either to move forward with Senate reform or to abolish the Senate. Until then, I am curious to see what they will have to say about it.

Nonetheless, I find it ironic that it has taken seven years for the Conservative government to decide to move on this issue. This is a longstanding issue. We did not just suddenly say that perhaps we should see what constitutional amendments are required.

As my colleague from Toronto—Danforth said earlier when answering a question, if it requires unanimous consent, it may prove difficult. I sincerely believe that enough people are fed up with the Senate that they will say so openly and convince their provincial governments. There will then be a true popular movement and the people will say that they have had enough, that they no longer want a Senate because there are much more intelligent ways to spend our money in Canada.

**Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech. She has stated her position very clearly, but has not provided any studies to support her assertion that the Senate is completely useless.

I have a study by Professor Andrew Heard, which was published in 2009. It shows that, between 1994 and 2008, the Senate amended 9% of the bills passed by the House of Commons and rejected outright two out of 465. Thus, about one in 10 bills is amended by the Senate. These amendments provide clarifications that save taxpayers money and make the laws clearer.

*Business of Supply*

Has she done a study to prove that the House is truly making a mistake by accepting amendments made by the Senate and not just doing the right thing and benefiting from the work of our colleagues in the Senate?

**Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Saint-Laurent—Cartierville. I admire him a lot. He is very knowledgeable about this topic.

To answer his question, I do not think he is taking the right approach by finding rare examples of what the Senate is doing right. No one is saying that the Senate is bad 100% of the time. There are absolutely excellent senators who truly want to do good work, and the work they do can often be helpful to this House.

Does that justify paying \$100 million a year for that chamber? Does it justify having to support people who are appointed for purely partisan reasons?

At the end of the day, if we do things differently, there are many ways we can get the same result as the good work of the Senate, for example, by doing a better job in committee.

It would be great if the government were a little more open to discussing amendments presented by the opposition in our House of Commons committees and if there were a more comprehensive and detailed vision for bills at that stage. This could completely replace what the Senate is currently doing.

[*English*]

**Hon. Tim Uppal (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I stand in the House this morning to join in the debate on a motion put forward by the member for Toronto—Danforth.

I am always happy to discuss changes to the Senate, because the reality is that our government is the only party with a real plan to reform the Senate. We are the only ones taking legitimate action to bring greater accountability and democracy to the Senate. We are the only ones to have a clear plan in the form of a bill before the House.

The NDP talks about abolishing the Senate, yet it is just that: talk. Today those members say they want to “abolish” the Senate, yet just last month the same NDP member for Toronto—Danforth who put forward today's motion said, “...we're open to any kind of reasonable reform”.

The NDP's lead spokesperson on the Senate admitted not too long after that “I can't say exactly what [the Leader of the Opposition] will do in 2015...”. It is true that he cannot say, because the NDP leader refuses to say what he may do come 2015. Yesterday, when asked point blank whether he would appoint senators if his party formed the government, the Leader of the Opposition refused to answer. The real reason the NDP's lead spokesperson on the Senate cannot say what the Leader of the Opposition would do in 2015 is that the NDP has no intention of abolishing the Senate and has the full intention of appointing its own NDP members.

The NDP conspired to appoint its own senators once and it will do it again. When the Liberals, NDP and the Bloc conspired to form a coalition in 2008, the NDP worked out a deal to appoint its own senators. In fact, the NDP's own motion admits that it needs the

support of provinces and territories, support it would not likely receive.

Abolishing the Senate requires reopening the Constitution. The NDP knows it cannot get the support of the provinces to abolish the Senate. That is why it has never put forward a legitimate plan in the form of a bill to do so. The NDP's real plan is to appoint its own senators. It will create a constitutional sideshow and appoint NDP senators while reform continues to be delayed by constitutional wrangling. Creating a constitutional sideshow not only helps the NDP hide behind the premiers so it can appoint its own senators; it also has the added benefit of distracting Canadians from its dangerous and reckless tax and spend schemes, like its \$21 billion job-killing carbon tax.

If the NDP were serious about changes to the Senate, it would have put forward a real plan. Instead it resorts to an empty motion. Rather than discuss real and achievable Senate reform, like term limits and getting provinces to hold Senate elections, NDP members call for constitutional battles with the provinces, and the hypocrisy does not end there.

The Leader of the Opposition claims that he wants to abolish the Senate, yet he just recently tabled a private member's bill to increase the Senate's powers. The NDP leader's bill reads that “The Governor in Council shall...appoint a Parliamentary Budget Officer after consultation with the leader of every recognized party in both Houses of Parliament...”. If the NDP leader really supported abolition, then why did he put forward a plan to increase the Senate's powers? It is because the NDP knows that, when senators are selected by Canadians, it will no longer be able to appoint its own NDP senators, as it conspired to do in 2008.

Our government has always been clear about our commitment to bring reform to the Senate Chamber, including processes for Canadians to select their Senate representatives. We pledged to do this in our most recent election platform, and we repeated our promise in the Speech from the Throne. We even took another step toward a more democratic and accountable Senate by seeking clarification from the Supreme Court of Canada.

The Senate makes, reviews and passes laws that affect Canadians every day, and it is not right that senators have no democratic mandate from the people they represent, nor that they can sit in the other place for decades at a time.

● (1040)

The Senate can be a place where a broader range of experience and expertise can be brought to bear on the issues facing our country. Unfortunately, I believe that the contributions of the Senate are overshadowed by the fact that senators are selected and appointed through a process that is neither formal nor transparent, with no democratic mandate whatsoever from Canadians. Moreover, there are no strict limits on the number of years an individual can sit in the Senate. Taken together, the Senate's effectiveness and legitimacy suffer from its democratic deficit.



*Business of Supply*

We must then ask ourselves this simple question: Is this good enough? Our answer is no. Our government has long believed that the Senate status quo is unacceptable, and therefore it must change in order to reach its full potential as an effective and democratic institution.

While recommendations on how to reform the Senate have differed, and differ still, there is one consistent theme that runs throughout. Nearly all reports and studies agree that the Senate is an important democratic institution and that reform is needed to increase legitimacy in the context of a modern democratic country.

It is clear that while there may be different approaches to solving the problem, reform is the best course of action to actually achieve change to the status quo of the Senate.

Senate reform of any kind has proven to be a complicated process. Under our constitution, reforming fundamental aspects of the Senate, such as its powers or the representation of the provinces, requires at least the support of seven provinces representing 50% of the population of the provinces.

Achieving the necessary level of provincial support for particular fundamental reforms is a complex and lengthy process with no guarantee of success. Abolishing the Senate, for example, at the very minimum requires the consent of at least seven out of ten provinces, if not unanimous consent of all provinces and territories.

Canadians do not want drawn-out constitutional battles, battles that would detract from what Canadians want their government to focus on: jobs, growth and long-term prosperity. At a time when the global economy is still fragile and Canadians are rightly worried about their savings, their retirement and their financial future, long drawn-out constitutional clashes with the provinces would be a recipe for sideshows distracting the government's attention from the economy.

Added to this is the fact that there is no consensus among provinces to pursue large wholesale reform. The NDP's own motion admits that it needs the support of the provinces and territories, support it knows it does not have.

Our government believes that Senate reform is needed now. The NDP does not want reform now. It wants to delay, to keep the status quo and to keep Canadians from electing their own senators. Getting into constitutional battles with the provinces is a good way for the NDP to delay change to the Senate, so that the NDP can appoint its own senators.

Canadians deserve better. Canadians deserve a say in who represents them in the Senate. That is why we are moving forward with the Senate reform bill. Through this bill our government is taking immediate and concrete action to increase the democracy in our upper chamber and to work co-operatively with the provinces and territories.

The Senate reform bill includes two initiatives that would help bring real reform to the Senate. First, the bill provides a suggested framework to provinces and territories that wish to establish democratic consultation processes to give Canadians a say in who represents them in the Senate. Second, it introduces term limits for senators appointed after October 2008, which would ensure that the

Senate is refreshed with new ideas on a more frequent basis and would allow Canadians to select their Senate representatives at regular intervals.

On Senate elections, we have consistently encouraged provinces and territories to implement a democratic process for the selection of Senate nominees.

● (1045)

The framework in the Senate reform act is meant to provide enough details to facilitate the development of provincial or territorial legislation without limiting provinces and territories in the establishment of a consultation process or the precise detail of such a process, which may differ between jurisdictions as local needs may demand. This is, after all, a co-operative venture. Provinces and territories would not be required to implement the framework precisely as written; rather, they would be encouraged to adapt the framework that best suits the needs of their unique circumstances. As we have seen with legislation introduced in New Brunswick, they have adapted the legislation to fit the realities of that province.

The approach proposed in the Senate reform act has already been successful, and this type of reform has already gained a toehold in our Senate. In 2007, the Prime Minister recommended the appointment of Bert Brown to the Senate. In 2012, he appointed the first female elected senator, Betty Unger, and in 2013, he appointed Doug Black to the Senate. Senators Brown, Unger and Black were elected as senators-in-waiting by Alberta voters in selection processes held under the authority of Alberta's Senatorial Selection Act, which was introduced in 1989.

Alberta may have been the first province to pass this type of legislation and to see its nominees appointed, but it is not the only province that has taken steps to facilitate reform. In 2009, Saskatchewan passed the Senate Nominee Election Act, which enables a provincial government to hold a constitutional process on Senate nominees. In British Columbia, a bill has been introduced that would provide the provincial government with the authority to hold consultation processes. In New Brunswick, a bill has been introduced in the legislature to hold Senate nominee processes by 2016. More broadly, I would encourage all our colleagues in all provincial and territorial legislatures and assemblies to consider supporting and moving forward with similar initiatives.

In addition to encouraging the implementation of democratic selection processes for Senate nominees, the Senate reform act would also limit Senate terms, which can span several decades under the current rules. Under the act, senators would be subject to a single nine-year non-renewable term. Limiting the terms of senators can be accomplished by Parliament through section 44 of the Constitution Act of 1982. Similarly, in 1965, Parliament, acting alone, introduced a mandatory retirement age of 75 for senators. Prior to that, senators were appointed for life.

I believe it is fair to say that while many in this House agree that changes to the Senate are necessary, we sometimes disagree on the way forward. In order to underline our commitment to Senate reform, our government has taken another step toward a more democratic and accountable Senate by seeking clarification from the Supreme Court of Canada.

*Business of Supply*

In contrast to the position of other parties, it is clear that our government's approach is the practical and reasonable way forward. It is the approach that can truly achieve results. In fact, the stated positions of the opposition parties are essentially arguments in favour of the status quo. Their proposals have such a low chance of success that they might as well not even propose them at all.

For example, the official opposition claims to be for abolishing the Senate. Aside from the very obvious sideshow that the NDP is attempting to create, abolition is not possible for one major reason: there is no consensus among the provinces to abolish the Senate. Since the NDP members are unwilling or unable to put forward a real plan to abolish the Senate, we have done it for them by seeking clarity from the Supreme Court of Canada.

Then there is the Liberal Party, who in its 13 years in power did nothing to make the Senate more democratic or accountable. Even when it was given the chance to put senators elected by Canadians into the Senate, the Liberal Party refused—not once, but three times. The Liberals do not support Senate reform, and their 13-year record of inaction demonstrates their opposition. They have been clear about this.

In closing, we are the only party with a real plan to reform the Senate. Our government is dedicated to reforming the Senate so that hard-working Canadians across our great country can select their Senate representatives.

● (1050)

My constituents tell me that they want change. Canadians want change. I believe that the time for change in the Senate has come. Frankly, if the NDP wants to change the Senate, it would not be blocking the Senate reform act at every opportunity. In an attempt to filibuster our Senate reform bill, the NDP put up 40 speakers. Since 2006, the Senate reform act has been blocked 18 times by the NDP, including last week, when the NDP blocked a motion to pass the Senate reform act.

The NDP member who put forward the motion we are debating today stated that, “With any motion on an important subject, you have to get to the point where parties’ positions are clear”.

If the member for Toronto—Danforth is struggling with his party's position, as he seems to be, then he should look no further than the words of his own leader, who stated yesterday that “laws should only be made by people who are elected”.

The NDP members say that they want laws made by people who are elected. The NDP should stop dodging the issue and support our real Senate reform plan, which will provide for Senate elections. The NDP has blocked our attempts for an elected Senate 18 times. However, I am willing to give the NDP yet another chance to support our reasonable and achievable reform.

I would like unanimous consent to propose that notwithstanding any standing order or usual practice of the House, Bill C-7, An Act respecting the selection of senators and amending the Constitution Act, 1867 in respect of Senate term limits, be deemed to have been read the whole second time and referred to a committee of the whole, deemed considered in committee of the whole, deemed reported without amendment, deemed concurred in at report stage and deemed read the third time and passed.

● (1055)

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

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Some hon. members:** No.

**The Deputy Speaker:** There is no unanimous consent.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Toronto—Danforth.

**Mr. Craig Scott (Toronto—Danforth, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I was wondering if the hon. minister could respond to a couple of comments.

The first is with respect to the House leader's attempt to seek unanimous consent and now the attempt by the minister, which is an obvious stunt. I just put that on the record. It is completely against the rule of law, even before going to committee with such an incredibly complex bill. That is clearly unconstitutional in that the government itself wants clarification from the Supreme Court. He wants the House to unanimously consent to a bill before the Supreme Court has told us whether it is constitutional. He knows it cannot be operationalized until we hear that. It is a stunt.

In terms of opening the Constitution, the Conservatives have done this without consulting the provinces. The bill they have put forward pretending that Parliament can pass it on its own is clearly unconstitutional. It is a complete disregard for the rule of law. The Prime Minister has done this as a cloak to be able to appoint 58 senators over the last six years.

This business about our wanting to appoint senators is complete nonsense. There is no need to appoint senators on the road to abolition. There can be vacancies in that House. They can be left open as we work toward abolition. We will work with existing senators while making sure the entire Senate knows it is illegitimate to block the will of the House.

**Hon. Tim Uppal:** Mr. Speaker, what is a real stunt is to come here with a motion—not a bill, but a motion—to abolish the Senate when the NDP members know very well that the Constitution will not allow it. They have no agreement from the provinces to do that.

We are the only party with an actual plan to work with the provinces. The Senate reform act that I was talking about not only would limit the terms of senators but would actually work with the provinces, because it would be the provinces that would ask the members of that province and the Canadians who live in that province to elect their representatives and allow Canadians to have a say in who represents them in the Senate. That is how we are working with the provinces to create a better, more democratic and more accountable Senate. At every opportunity we have appointed elected senators. There are three from Alberta who are currently in the Senate today.

*Business of Supply*

**The Deputy Speaker:** Order. I am sensing some impatience in the House at the length of time we are allocating for questions and comments. There is nothing the Chair can do about this if we have long questions and long answers. Therefore, I would ask all members to shorten their questions and their answers.

The hon. member for Saint-Laurent—Cartierville.

**Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, recently Italian voters sent a majority to one chamber and another majority to the other chamber with no dispute settlement mechanism between the two, so they are unlikely to find a government and they may have to come back to an election at a time when the economy is collapsing.

In the United States, the two chambers cannot agree about the budget, and they put the world economy at risk.

I ask the minister not to dodge this question for once. Why do he and his government want to do the stupid thing of importing to Canada an institutional arrangement that would paralyze our institutions here in Canada with two elected chambers that are unable to find a solution other than a stalemate, as is the case in the United States, Mexico and Italy, and in all the countries where there are two elected chambers speaking for the people with no dispute settlement mechanism between them?

This is a very dangerous reform he is proposing. He should not dodge the question but answer it.

● (1100)

**Hon. Tim Uppal:** Mr. Speaker, this is what the Liberals use as an excuse to actually not do anything at all in the Senate. They want to use this as an excuse to support the status quo in the Senate and let it be the way it is today.

We want to see real change in the Senate. I will say that the relationship between the House of Commons and the Senate has developed over many years. When senators are elected by Canadians, when Canadians have a say in who represents them and when senators have meaningful term limits, that relationship would evolve in the best interests of Canadians.

**Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Transport), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to give the minister the opportunity to reflect on the NDP and Liberal positions.

It seems the Liberals compare our system to republics, which clearly shows they do not have a clue on how our system works. If they are going to compare with other countries, they might as well pick a constitutional monarchy, one like Australia, where it does work. To do anything else is just ridiculous.

I would like the minister to comment on how ridiculous the Liberal logic is, and also how disingenuous the NDP is in wanting to just abolish the Senate when it is not possible. Are they not just advocating for nothing to happen, for retaining the status quo? Is that not the real effect of the NDP position?

**Hon. Tim Uppal:** Mr. Speaker, I fully agree with my colleague. At the end of the day, the opposition's position would only support the status quo and not doing anything at all.

We heard in the question from the Liberal member that their proposal is to not do anything, because they want to get into these long constitutional battles.

The NDP members propose abolition, and they know very well that it is not possible. They are hiding behind the provinces. At the end of the day, the NDP members are doing this because they want to appoint their own senators. They do not have any senators in the upper chamber and they would like to appoint their own.

They may say it is not true, but in fact they tried to do it in 2008. They tried to work with the Bloc Québécois and the Liberals and tried to appoint their own senators. In fact, there is a signed agreement to do that.

That is their plan: not to do anything in the Senate at all. We have a real plan to reform the Senate, to bring in term limits and allow Canadians to have a say in who represents them in the Senate. That will go a long way toward having a more accountable and representative Senate for Canadians.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Matthew Dubé (Chambly—Borduas, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I find it interesting that the minister is calling this a stunt and saying that we are trying to distract people from the real issues. The Senate is the one pulling stunts here, as Senators spend their time running from journalists instead of being accountable, as they should be.

To get back to the point that my colleague from Toronto—Danforth raised, these people are not accountable to anyone. If we were to tell people in our ridings to go visit their senator, they would not be able to find them, because senators do not have riding offices and do not provide any services to the public. I have to wonder how they maintain contact with the people they are supposed to represent, when they are never at home, never in their riding.

I would like to ask the minister what he thinks about the fact that these Senators are not accountable to anyone and cannot properly represent people. I would also like to hear what he thinks about the fact that it is the Senate that is pulling stunts and not the NDP with its motion, which is designed to do away with all these stunts and focus on the real issues that are important to Canadians.

[*English*]

**Hon. Tim Uppal:** Mr. Speaker, he seems to be unhappy with the current status of the Senate, as we are as well. We believe the Senate needs to be more democratic and accountable and needs meaningful term limits. Canadians need to be allowed to have a say as to who represents them in the Senate. If he is unhappy with the current status of the Senate, then why will he and his party not support the Senate reform act? Why will he not support our efforts to reform the Senate?

At every opportunity, New Democrats have filibustered the Senate reform act. They have delayed it and opposed it. Even today, when I asked for unanimous consent to pass this bill, they rejected an opportunity to reform the Senate. They have a dream of abolishing the Senate. They are trying to create a sideshow, taking away from the fact that they continuously block, oppose and delay real reform in the Senate.

*Business of Supply*

•(1105)

**Hon. Stéphane Dion:** Mr. Speaker, the minister went further than ever to answer my question. He said he is hoping that elected senators and members of Parliament will find a way to work for Canadians and will do something we do not see in other countries. Does he not understand that the very moment a senator is elected, he has a mandate? Then because he has a mandate, he will not give the last word to his colleagues in the House. They will stand on their views and then block a lot of bills, not 2 or 3 out of 400, as is the case today, but maybe half of them.

This would be a big change in our political system. Does he not realize the consequences it may create in our centralized federation where we need to be sure that our federal institutions are working properly for Canadians?

**Hon. Tim Uppal:** Mr. Speaker, this is where we, the Liberals, and the NDP differ. We believe that Canadians should have a say on who represents them in the Senate. We trust Canadians on this issue. We also believe that a more accountable democratic Senate is actually a good thing for the country.

**Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, institutional reform, if not done wisely, might create more bad than good. It is a well-known tenet of political science that tomorrow's political difficulties are often the result of today's ill-conceived institutional reforms.

[Translation]

I will show that this is exactly what will happen if the House makes the mistake of supporting the motion moved today by the hon. member for Toronto—Danforth on behalf of the NDP caucus. This motion urges the Government of Canada, in consultation with the provinces and territories, to take immediate steps towards abolishing the Senate of Canada.

Let us list all the problems that implementing this motion would cause. First, we would have to open the Constitution. In these times of economic uncertainty, where the governments in our federation have to work together to protect Canadians' jobs, the NDP is asking them to put a great deal of their energy into constitutional negotiations.

Second, the NDP must tell us whether it really believes that all the governments in our federation are willing to open the Constitution to deal solely with the issue of the Senate. If the NDP thinks that is true, then I suggest they go talk to the current Government of Quebec.

[English]

As Professor Benoît Pelletier, from the University of Ottawa, said to *Hill Times* on February 18, 2013:

I don't see the abolition of the Senate to be something that would get the approval of all the necessary provinces that would have to give their approval. I'm sure that different provinces, including Quebec, would like other subjects to be discussed at the same table. We would eventually get something as large, as wide, and as substantial as the Meech Lake Accord or even the Charlottetown agreement.

The NDP may want a new round of mega-constitutional negotiations, but Canadians put constitutional talks at the bottom of their current priorities, and rightly so.

[Translation]

Third, has the NDP taken into account the fact that the constitutional rule to abolish the Senate almost certainly requires the unanimous consent of the provinces? Most experts think that, if the 7-50 rule—seven provinces representing at least 50% of the population—is needed to change the nature of the Senate, then the consent of the House and the unanimity of the provinces is needed to abolish the Senate, and this would likely be confirmed by the Supreme Court.

In the February 18 edition of *The Hill Times*, Bruce Ryder, a professor at Osgoode Hall Law School, reminded us of this when he said that the support of 10 provinces was needed. In any case, I would like to remind all hon. members of something that has not yet been mentioned: the Parliament of Canada has passed regional veto legislation. The regional veto act would therefore have to be abolished so that none of the provinces would have the opportunity to veto changes to the Senate or its abolishment.

Fourth, since the NDP keeps saying that it wants to impose a costly referendum on Canadians on this issue, has the party considered what question should be asked and what majority would be required? A question that gives Canadians only one alternative—to abolish the Senate or not—would not do justice to the variety of opinions Canadians have about the Senate.

As for the majority required for abolition, is the NDP thinking of a simple majority at the national level? That will not do because the provincial governments and legislative assemblies that would have voted to keep the Senate would feel, with reason, that their constitutional duty is to have the wishes of their voters prevail.

So we are talking about a simple majority within each province. The probability of attaining such a majority 10 times from coast to coast is so low that you have to wonder why public funds should be spent on such a referendum.

•(1110)

[English]

Therefore, we see that abolishing the Senate would represent a major change to the federation, requiring the unanimous support of the provinces under the rules for amending the Constitution. This is very unlikely to happen. As a matter of fact, only three provinces have indicated they are currently in favour of abolishing the Senate.

I think the best conclusion we may reach on this ill-advised motion is the one given by Peter Russell, Professor Emeritus at the University of Toronto. He was quoted in *Hill Times* on February 18, 2013. Dr. Russell said:

They [the NDP] really haven't done much homework on the pros and cons of bicameralism. I don't know if they honestly know how to spell the word.

[Translation]

Professor Russell said this. Indeed, if we followed the NDP's plan, Canada would become the only large federation in the world to have a single federal chamber. If we were to lose our upper chamber, then we would also lose the useful role it plays in our political system, which benefits Canadians, particularly the regions and minorities.

*Business of Supply*

This is precisely the role that the Fathers of Confederation set out for the Senate, the role of sober second thought. Since senators are not elected, they play their role with moderation and almost always give the elected chamber, the House of Commons, the last word.

However, with sober second thought, senators can detect mistakes and inaccuracies, and can ask members to amend their bills in the interest of taxpayers and citizens.

[English]

Allow me to cite some recent examples of sober second thought executed by our colleagues of the other chamber. In 2006, the House accepted 55 Senate amendments to improve the Federal Accountability Act. In 2008, the Senate convinced the government not to proceed with changes to the Canadian film tax credit. It was an infamous censorship provision that would have allowed the minister to deny a film tax credit where it would be, according to the minister, contrary to a vague notion of public policy. There was a huge outcry from everywhere in Canada. Thank God we had a Liberal senator who saw the mistake and corrected it in the House.

It was in 2012, after rejecting Liberal amendments to the Safe Streets and Communities Act in the House, that the amendments were made in the Senate and then accepted in the House. Currently, the NDP bill, Bill C-290, an act to amend the Criminal Code (sports betting), is being carefully scrutinized by the Senate after a number of sports leagues and several provinces raised concerns that the House had failed to provide the necessary level of scrutiny before passing it.

As we see, the Senate has always provided useful amendments and clarifications to bills passed by the House, while rarely obstructing the general will of this chamber. In fact, between 1945 and today, I have enough fingers to count the bills passed by the House of Commons that were rejected by the Senate. The Senate performs an important checking role in the Canadian federation by providing an opportunity for sober second thought on bills passed by the House, a complementary chamber of scrutiny and amendment. This is precisely why the Senate was created by the Fathers of Confederation. It would be particularly unwise to abolish a chamber of scrutiny, since we are currently dealing with the most secretive government in Canadian history. What federal institutions need is more oversight, not less oversight.

• (1115)

[Translation]

For the Senate to properly fulfill its role as a chamber of sober second thought, the Prime Minister has to choose good senators who are exceptional because of their hard-working nature, rigour, expertise and moral strength.

[English]

Unfortunately, the Prime Minister has made some very dubious appointments. Instead of appointing highly qualified individuals, he has chosen some people whose sole qualification was as Conservative Party partisans. The Prime Minister is to be held accountable for these bad choices, not the Senate as an institution. The Prime Minister must also be held accountable for the constitutional mess that his own Senate reform would create. He wants to elect senators without changing anything else in the

Constitution. Let me describe how much damage that would do to our country.

Many Canadians would like their senators elected rather than appointed, and that is understandable. It would be more democratic. However, what would happen if, as proposed by the Conservative government, we changed the way Senate seats were filled, without changing our Constitution accordingly?

If we went along with the Conservative Senate reform proposal, we would have: no dispute settlement mechanism between the Senate and the House if both were elected; continued under-representation of Alberta and British Columbia with only six senators each, when New Brunswick and Nova Scotia hold 10 senators when they have five to six times less than Alberta and British Columbia; U.S.-style, now Italian-style and Mexican-style gridlock between two elected chambers unable to solve disagreements; and bitter constitutional disputes regarding the number of senatorial seats to which each province would be entitled. Fortunately, the Supreme Court is likely to confirm that such ill-conceived Senate reform cannot be done unilaterally by an act of Parliament alone.

Therefore, first things first: will the provinces be able to reach an agreement on the distribution of senatorial seats? If they do, we can then figure out which constitutional powers we should attribute to the Senate in order to create healthy complementarities with the House rather than paralyzing duplication, after which we can agree on the process to elect senators and federally amend the Constitution accordingly.

Abolition of the Senate would represent a major change to the federation requiring the unanimous support of the provinces under the rules for amending the Constitution. This is very unlikely to happen. Furthermore, the Senate serves a useful function by improving or correcting bills that pass through the House.

As long as the provinces fail to agree on the number of senators to which each one is entitled, we must avoid the kind of constitutional chaos that an elected Senate would cause.

Instead, let us keep the Prime Minister accountable for the quality of the individuals he appoints to the upper house. Let the Senate continue playing the role conferred upon it by the Fathers of Confederation, the chamber of scrutiny and the chamber of sober second thought.

**Mr. Craig Scott (Toronto—Danforth, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member's speech was very well done, informative and well argued. At the same time, is he not being a little defeatist in his clear understanding that it is impossible to abolish the Senate? It is ultimately, yes, in the hands of the provinces and the people of the provinces, but we owe it to Canadians to work with the provinces to try to persuade them, assisted by Canadians in their outrage about what the Senate now represents.

*Business of Supply*

If the Supreme Court does say 7/50 is the formula, it does become possible. I grant that if it is unanimous consent, it becomes very difficult, but 7/50 it is possible. As my colleague, the member for Vaudreuil-Soulanges, Quebec just reminded me, Jack Layton always reminded Canadians, “don't let them tell you it can't be done”. With that in mind, is the member absolutely certain, for example, that Quebec would never support the idea of abolition?

• (1120)

**Hon. Stéphane Dion:** Mr. Speaker, I failed to meet one Quebec politician who would be ready to open the 1982 Constitution only to fix the problem of the Senate. I never met one in the National Assembly of Quebec, so that answers the member's first question.

I will ask the NDP members, because they have a full day to answer, if they are saying that they are ready to get rid of the regional veto act. When they say that it will be 7/50, that means the regional veto act will not exist any more. The House and the Senate will get rid of it. If that is their plan, they should say that, because I think it will create a big flap.

**Hon. Tim Uppal (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Liberal member agrees with us that the NDP motion is nothing more than a sideshow and a distraction and really it is not possible to abolish the Senate in the way proposed. He also disagrees with us in having term limits in the Senate and allowing Canadians to have a say. Therefore, for so many years, while Liberals were in government, they did nothing to make the Senate more democratic, more accountable? Why do they support the status quo? Why do they support not making any changes in the Senate?

**Hon. Stéphane Dion:** Mr. Speaker, I would argue that under the Liberals, the Senate played its role as a chamber of scrutiny. It is the role that the Senate has played since Confederation.

It is not only the Chrétien government that did not change the chamber of scrutiny in an elected chamber. It is all the governments before. It has not been done before because it is not as simple to do if we have a sense of responsibility. If we have a sense of responsibility, we do not elect senators without changing anything in the Constitution. We do not create two chambers with equal powers that would paralyze each other. We know that, but we do not create a forever under-representation for Alberta and British Columbia. That would be so unfair in an elected Senate.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my colleague from Saint-Laurent—Cartierville a question.

I do not doubt his intellectual rigour and honesty, but does he not see that polls clearly show that what you are proposing, better senators for example, pales in comparison to what is being called for by the 78% of Canadians who are against the status quo? Is this not a do-nothing attitude on your part? It almost seems as though you are satisfied, that you are fine with this problem.

**The Deputy Speaker:** I would remind members that all questions and comments must be addressed through the Chair and not to members directly.

The hon. member for Saint-Laurent—Cartierville has the floor.

**Hon. Stéphane Dion:** Mr. Speaker, I will reply to my colleague through you.

The Liberal Party of Canada is included in the 78%. We would support an elected Senate. However, I would like to know what he would do about the problems that would be created if we did not amend our Constitution accordingly. What would happen if we did not establish a hierarchy of the powers of the Senate in relation to those of the House of Commons and if we did not set the number of senators for each province that the provinces could agree to?

Today, with unelected senators, it is not the end of the world if a province is overrepresented, but the day that we have an elected Senate and it exercises its real powers, the overrepresentation of Alberta and British Columbia will be intolerable. For these reasons, as responsible legislators, we must not take the easy road of abolishing the Senate or having an elected Senate without planning for it. We have to work with the provinces to see whether they can agree on the number of senators for each province. It will be very difficult to do, but just because it is difficult does not mean we can pretend that the problem does not exist.

• (1125)

**Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Minister for La Francophonie, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I appreciated the member for Saint-Laurent—Cartierville's arguments for an effective House of Commons and Senate.

The NDP wants to throw the baby out with the bathwater. Can the member comment on how important the Senate is to the regions, minorities and Quebec? The NDP wants to do away with one of Quebec's advantages in our federal parliamentary system.

If the opportunity arose, would the member support limiting senators' terms to foster renewal and greater effectiveness within the Senate?

**Hon. Stéphane Dion:** Mr. Speaker, I will begin by answering the second question. We are open to the idea if it is constitutionally possible, that is, if it can be done unilaterally by Canada's Parliament. Limiting senators' terms to two years would obviously be unconstitutional because it would change the character of the Senate. Limiting terms to 15 years might be constitutional. The government finally decided to refer the matter to the Supreme Court of Canada. We will get an answer.

In my speech, I emphasized that it would be very dangerous for Canada to be the only large unicameral federation in the world. I hope that our NDP colleagues will take a close look at this issue.

With respect to minorities, I would note that francophone communities outside Quebec are now in court to protest the government's bill because there have always been francophone senators from other provinces to speak on behalf of francophones across Canada. Premiers in Manitoba, Ontario, New Brunswick and elsewhere have wisely appointed French language champions. That would disappear along with the Senate.

*Business of Supply*

[English]

**Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I was not going to raise a question, but the Minister of Veterans Affairs talked about the importance for the regions of the Senate. I happen to be in the unenviable position of having Senator Michael Duffy as one of my senator. I agree 100% on the Senate being very important for the regions in representing the regional interest if the government is going against what the region wants.

However, what we clearly have in this case is a senator who is not a resident. He does not rub shoulders with the residents. He is not fighting for employment insurance, as I and all my colleagues are. What he becomes is the representative of the Prime Minister in the region which has the cart before the horse. There is a problem.

Could my hon. colleague tell us how we protect ourselves against that? The current structure of the Senate is the Prime Minister appoints people to represent his views in the region rather than the senator who is supposed to represent the residents of that region to the Government of Canada.

**Hon. Stéphane Dion:** Mr. Speaker, first, if we link the impression of my colleague with the NDP motion, it is not because we have bad doctors that hospitals are closed, otherwise the House would have been closed for awhile. We had bad MPs who were in breach of many rules, and we know that.

Second, I am convinced that if a senator does not have his or her residence in the province, then that individual should not stay in the Senate. It is constitutional requirement. In French it is even clearer. It is “le domicile”, so it is clearly the principal residence. It is an obligation to do so. If a senator is not respecting this rule, then that senator should leave his or her seat right away.

**Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Timmins—James Bay today.

It has been quite an unsurprising day so far in the House. We have listened to the Minister of State for Democratic Reform spouting conspiracy theories and pulling a stunt like asking for unanimous consent when having just sent the government bill off to the Supreme Court to test its constitutionality. The Liberal member gave his great discourse on the dangers of democracy, while supporting the status quo. We have had two great speeches from NDP members.

Let me comment in particular on the speech given by my colleague from Louis-Saint-Laurent, a member of the House not yet

• (1130)

**Hon. Denis Coderre:** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I am having some problems hearing.

**The Deputy Speaker:** My response is if that end of the chamber on both sides were quieter, the member might be able to hear. I would repeat to all members that it is difficult to hear the speeches. It is obviously an important issue, given the tenor of the debate to this point. If members are to have private conversations, I would ask them to whisper rather than talk at the top of their lungs.

The hon. member for Beaches—East York.

**Mr. Matthew Kellway:** Mr. Speaker, I wanted to comment on the fine speech from my colleague, the member for Louis-Saint-Laurent. She is a member of this House, not yet old enough to serve in the Senate. I think that is evidence enough in support of this motion, a sufficiently compelling argument on which to actually rest my case.

However there is yet more evidence, so I will not rest it there. I am sure she and my colleague from Toronto—Danforth, whose motion this is, have greater expectations of me.

If I might, I will say what a pleasure it is to share the privilege of representing the citizens of the east end of Toronto with the member for Toronto—Danforth. We stand back to back in our common cause of serving the people of the east end of the city. I stand with him today in full support of this motion.

Today's motion is part of a larger progressive vision and plan that we in the NDP have for reforming the electoral and parliamentary systems of Canada.

This is about bringing a more fulsome democracy to Canada, about making representation more meaningful and real, about making sure we have a system whereby the citizens of this country can be sure that they are able to remove us from this place when those of us who occupy this place fail to do our job properly. It is this latter point that is relevant, I believe, to today's motion, to this part of our democracy project.

Let me say at the outset of this speech that it is my desire as an MP to always conduct myself in a dignified and civil manner as befitting this institution. Whatever one wants to say about the conduct and language that is appropriate to this place does not really matter because there are, in any case, some very clear, explicit expectations of my constituents for my conduct.

A speech about the Senate poses a huge challenge to that, because the subject matter is not in fact dignified and is not civil. The institution has become ugly, crude and sordid, and an argument for its abolition cannot avoid but shine a light on that and speak in plain terms about that.

As a new MP, I am not so used to and familiar with this place yet that the Senate and the senator seem normal to me. There is something quite unusual about this collection of people who have made this place home till kingdom come or they are 75 years old. This ought to be a place where we are able to be, only by the will and grace of those who sent us here. We ought to feel lucky about that. We ought to never take for granted the privilege we have to be in this House to represent the views of our constituents on the important issues of the day.

We ought to be well aware, every day, that the privilege is in our constituents' hands to withdraw or withhold should we slip and fail in our duty, or should they change their minds, or should time and events simply overtake us and our usefulness to them.

*Business of Supply*

It was a very strange experience early on in my tenure here—and strange perhaps that I remember it really well—the day I sat down on a joint House of Commons-Senate committee, substituting for one of my colleagues, next to a senator. Here was this man, sitting on this committee nominally for the same purpose as the rest of us sitting around the table, reviewing and scrutinizing legislation, studying the issues of the day, with no one to go back to, no one to account to, no constituency, no events that weekend to get back to the riding for, just collecting a salary until the inevitable. He was entirely unaccountable.

This is to argue that the institution is fundamentally undemocratic and that it represents a deep distrust of democracy. It is and it does. It is a comforting backstop for those who are concerned about the wisdom of the elected, and by extension the wisdom of the electors. There are facts aplenty served up over the course of time to undermine the justifications of that institution.

To focus on the issue of accountability seems a bit naive. There is an unassailable truth to those arguments, but there is a bigger truth that seems to make those finer, higher arguments somewhat moot.

The Prime Minister once described the Senate as a relic of the 19th century. Were it only that, then there may be something pointedly historical about it and some historical justification for keeping it alive, for reforming it, for modernizing it perhaps. This argument might take the shape of tradition versus more modern democratic notions about institutions.

• (1135)

However, it is actually substantially worse and considerably sadder than simply that. The institution, even for what it was, has degenerated and become corrupted beyond rehabilitation. It is not even about what the senators are doing here, or what terms and conditions they operate under, but what they have done to get here.

The Senate is the pension. The work has already been done, their masters have been served and this is the deferred compensation for that work.

I am not a historian, and maybe the institution knew better times. Maybe someone took seriously—and apparently the Liberals still do—the notion of second sober thought. On the other hand, some people say that it has always been thus, and I enjoyed the quote from my colleague by Sir John A. Macdonald about this being the chamber of the propertied. I only know what the Senate has been throughout my adult life: a crass, crude and corrupted institution.

Look what we have there.

We have Senator Doug Finley who is the former national campaign director and director of political operations for the Conservative Party in 2006 and 2008. He was charged for overspending the Canada Elections Act spending limit and falsifying tax claims in the 2006 election. Over the last three years, he has cost the taxpayer just shy of \$730,000.

We have Senator Irving Gerstein, chief fundraiser and chair of the Conservative Fund Canada. He is the largest fundraiser for the Conservative Party and was charged in 2011 with violating the Canada Elections Act. He was involved in filing false tax claims and exceeding federal spending limits on campaign advertisements.

Senator Gerstein has cost the taxpayer just shy of \$1 million over the last three years.

The list goes on, of course, with bagmen, backroom boys and failed candidates in the Senate.

Not to be outdone, the Liberals have enshrined their own set of past political operatives in the Senate. For example, Senator David Smith is a former national Liberal campaign co-chair. He cost the taxpayers \$935,000 over the last three years. Senators Cowan, Robichaud, Mitchell, Campbell, all former Liberal Party operatives, each cost the taxpayers either side of a million bucks over the last years, and the list goes on.

The Senate was never justified on any grounds, but at least the red chamber had the facade and aura of dignity. However, that is no more. That has fallen away and with it has gone the possibility of recovery. A seat in the red chamber is the crude patronage of a twisted cynical political game that has been played out between those two parties since Confederation. It is the pork of political bagmen and operatives of Liberals and Conservatives. The party that wins the election gets to bring its insiders to feed at the trough of the Canadian Senate; wealthy enough men and women gorging themselves at the expense of the taxpayer for doing the dirty work of their party.

Senate reform has been the mantra of this Prime Minister, but there has been no rush, we note. He has had seven years to deliver on that promise, but what he has delivered instead was 58 of his own to feed at the Senate trough; taking a seat as the head of all of but six other prime ministers in the pantheon of patronage.

With Patrick Brazeau, Mike Duffy, Pamela Wallin and Mac Harb, it has come down to audits and investigations over housing allowances and travel expenses. Do senators live where they say they live?

It makes one wish we could go back to debating the principles and the value of the relic. Perhaps it is a debate without a different conclusion, but at least a debate of a higher order. However, the plumbing is backed up on this relic. There is no reviving it or getting rid of the stench. This unconstitutional, undemocratic relic deserves better than the crass feeding trough it has become.

• (1140)

**Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I neither believe that the Senate is necessary, as the former Liberal member indicated, nor do I believe that it is without value, as the NDP has been indicating.

There have been reports such as “Out of the Shadows At Last” on mental illness, which was commissioned in the Senate, the Kirby-Keon report, as it was also known. I think of the value in that and what it has meant to so many Canadians. It was an important piece of work that the Senate completed. There are many important works that the Senate completes.



*Business of Supply*

However, I also believe that the Senate is stuck in 1867, and that is not acceptable. It is not acceptable in a modern context. I have always felt that if the Senate would not accept changes, if it did not become more accountable, if it would not become more democratic and if Canadians do not have a say in who represents them, then it must be abolished because I do not believe it is necessary. I think it can provide great value, but I think that is the challenge for this place.

I would say to the members of the NDP simply this. They have put forward a motion, and I think many Canadians hold its view, but are they prepared to do the work to get the provinces onside to make that motion happen, or is this simply grandstanding here in the House of Commons today?

**Mr. Matthew Kellway:** The answer is simply yes, Mr. Speaker. An NDP government would be a fully competent and capable government that believes in engaging other orders of government in this country in mature discussion about our future as a country and principles of governance. We are a party that believes, unlike the Liberals, that one can focus on more than one issue at a time. A fully competent and capable NDP government is a government that would have discussion about constitutional issues with Canadians, about the fact that we have an unacceptable and, in the terms of the member, undemocratic institution in the Government of Canada that we need to abolish, while, at the same time, focusing on the economy of this country and creating jobs for Canadians.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I find my colleague's attitude here this morning a bit odd. He seems to think that he is the only one who knows the absolute truth, that he is the only one who can walk and chew gum at the same time.

But let us focus on the debate. I think it is great that we are talking about the future of the second chamber, but certain realities need to be taken into account. The member also needs to answer certain questions, since he can walk and chew gum at the same time. The reality is that if we want to abolish the Senate, we also need to take action regarding other existing legislation. Abolishing the Senate would also mean abolishing the right to veto.

Is he prepared to take away Quebec's right to veto? Is he ready to abolish that legislation, too?

[*English*]

**Mr. Matthew Kellway:** Mr. Speaker, as per the motion, this is about starting a process to abolish the Senate that involves consultation with the provinces and territories. Clearly, the first step would be to have those consultations and fully canvass the views and concerns of the other orders of government in this country.

**Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, if I am correct, my research has told me that some four provinces of this country had senates at one time and abolished them. I think if we went to the citizens of those provinces, they would tell us they have absolutely no memory whatsoever of there being a senate nor any loss in terms of the political governance of those provinces. Clearly, there are many examples where this can happen.

What I want to focus my question on has to do with the concept of equality. When the Reform Party began, it spoke of triple E Senate reform, which was elected, effective and equal. I hear the

Conservatives talk a lot about electing senators and trying to make the Senate effective, but the issue of equality seems to have dropped off the radar. I come from British Columbia, which has 6 senators and 4.5 million citizens. Prince Edward Island has 140,000 citizens and 4 senators.

I ask my hon. colleague what he thinks about an institution that not only has no democratic legitimacy but also enshrines a very lopsided and unequal distribution of political weight in this country.

• (1145)

**Mr. Matthew Kellway:** Mr. Speaker, I would say the inequality, in fact, goes to the lack of democratic legitimacy of the institution. I would not distinguish between those two principles. A fundamental concept under democracy is one of at least equity and equality. What the member raises is the fact that the promises made by the Conservatives in 2006 when they formed government have been broken and they have dragged this out while they have put 58 of their own patronage appointments into the Senate. Their proposal about democratic reform has proven not to be a serious proposal.

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, as always, I am proud to rise in the House as the elected member of Parliament for Timmins—James Bay, chosen by the people of James Bay to come and represent them in the House of Commons.

Listening to the discussion this morning about the motion to address the need to begin the process of abolishing the Senate, I remembered, because of my Conservative colleagues, that there was a time when we were actually talking about reform and bringing this anachronism into the 21st century. The Conservatives promised reform. However, they agreed that if they were not going to get reform, they would abolish it, because it is a system that has proven to be deeply entrenched against any form of reform.

Unfortunately, our colleagues in the Conservative Party seem to have fallen off the straight and narrow and have fallen into the cesspool of rum bottle politics in Ottawa. They have gone the route of the Liberals in terms of filling the Senate with a lot of very dodgy appointments: friends of the party, hacks, and people who flip pancakes at Conservative fundraisers. In seven years, they have not come forward with a real plan for democratic reform in the Senate. Therefore, we get back to the original question of abolition.

My colleagues in the Liberal Party are very angry this morning, as they are about any efforts to hold their friends in the system of unaccountable, unelected friends of the party to account.

What we are talking about is not an obscure constitutional debating point. What we are talking about goes to the very heart of democratic accountability in Canada in the 21st century, that being whether a group of people who believe that they have a certain amount of privilege and a lack of accountability should have the right and the power to block the duly elected members of this House, and in doing so, to block the democratic will of the country.

*Business of Supply*

We have to place this motion in the context of the times. There is growing anger and frustration among Canadian citizens, who see the Senate refusing to show any level of accountability and senators thumbing their noses at the Canadian people and showing absolute contempt. Then we are told in the House, by the Liberals, especially, and the Conservatives that as we are not able, as democratically elected members, to hold senators to account. They are somehow above us. I do not believe that this is a principle that any democratic country should accept.

Today the level of frustration has reached a point that we have to, as Parliament, hold those members to account. We have Senator Anne Cools using her position as an unelected senator to stop the Parliamentary Budget Officer from providing information to democratically elected members of Parliament, and by extension, the Canadian people. It is unacceptable. She said that it is a breach of her privilege. That is what senators believe they exist on: their privileges. She called it constitutional vandalism. I will say that there are constitutional vandals, and they are in the red chamber.

Over her career, Senator Anne Cools has been erratic and has said some pretty bizarre things. However, what the Canadian people need to know is that we cannot get rid of her. She is there until she is 75, whether she shows up for work or not, just like the famous Senator Andy Thompson of Mexico. For seven years the guy never showed up for work. Canadians are not even able to remove them. Therefore, Senator Anne Cools can interfere with the work of democratically elected members of Parliament, and that seems okay, because that is her privilege.

Pamela Wallin, who apparently lives on Palmerston Avenue in Toronto, claims to represent the people of Saskatchewan. Pamela Wallin, who is on the board of directors of an oil sands development company, stood up to help defeat a bill that was brought forward to deal with catastrophic climate change. It was passed by the duly elected members of the House of Commons, and she bragged about killing the bill. She said it was a nuisance. Of course, it was nuisance to her. The little people of this country are probably a nuisance to her. However, she gets her perks paid for by the little people who are a nuisance to her.

The situation is unacceptable. We have not even touched on the fact that the senators sit on the boards of major corporations, the banks, the financial sector and private health care interests, and they get to participate in debate and change laws in the country while serving their friends in private industry.

This is not an institution that went wrong somewhere along the way. It was founded on wrong principles, and it needs to be held to account.

• (1150)

One hundred and forty-some years ago, when Canada was establishing its system of governance, the mutton chops who met in Prince Edward Island looked to the House of Lords in England. The House of Lords was set up because England had its long history of class exclusion and hereditary rights. The British Parliament was set up with the House of Lords above the House of the common people. The language itself speaks volumes. They needed a check and balance on the rights of the common people.

For people back home watching this, the common people are Canadians. We did not have a history of peerage and an aristocracy, so what they decided to come up with was the Senate for the check and balance. In some ways they chose something worse. Rather than what the British had, with its lords and men with titles, the Fathers of Confederation decided to pick cronies and friends of the party.

I think of G.K. Chesterton who, comparing England to Ireland, said that what was worse than being priest-ridden was being squire-ridden. However, Canadians have an even worse choice. We are crony-ridden. That is not a balance for legislative approval in a modern democracy.

It is interesting when we see the young tour guides taking people around and showing the Senate. They are fed the fiction that they are supposed to tell people about all the work the Senate does. They say that one of John A. Macdonald's founding principles was that the Senate was there to protect the rights of minorities. That sounds good, but John A. Macdonald was not talking about linguistic minorities, first nations, or new Canadians. What John A. Macdonald said was that we must protect the rights of minorities, because the rich will always be fewer in number than the poor. That was the founding principle. It was a system set up to protect the powerful.

Here we have today the so-called seven years of Senate reform that can be summed up in Pamela Wallin, Mike Duffy and Patrick Brazeau. That is what the Conservatives have given us. It is like a bad reality TV show. If we look at the goings on in the Senate, it is like *Les Bougon*. We are going around in our Armani suits. Instead of *Honey Boo Boo*, we have Pamela Boo Boo. At least *Honey Boo Boo* has something we could actually think is kind of cute once in a while.

What we are seeing with the senators right now is a scandal. It actually cuts to a constitutional issue. They were chosen by the Prime Minister. He has told Canadians that he can personally vet all their residency requirements, yet Pamela Wallin has a health card for Ontario. She is either a resident of Ontario or the people of Ontario are somehow being defrauded. If she is a resident of Ontario, she is not eligible to say that she is a resident of Saskatchewan. It is not good enough to say that her heart is in Saskatchewan or that she goes back to Saskatchewan. She is either a resident or she is not.

The same is true for Mike Duffy. First he lived behind door number one down in Cavendish. He had not been there in months. Then it was door number two in Charlottetown. Now it is door number three, back in Kanata. He is paying the money back, but he did not rip the Canadian taxpayers off. He just did not understand the form that said that his primary residence was within 100 kilometres of Ottawa. He did not understand that, and every single year, he ticked the box and walked out with \$20,000. We see the same with Senator Patterson, of no fixed address.

*Business of Supply*

The senators, all of these men and women, because they tell us that they are eligible for the money, get to collect the money. That is the frustration. They are taking money from taxpayers. They have an institution where it is their word, their pinky swear, that they are entitled to walk out the door with \$20,000 in travel expenses and to represent regions they do not live in. They do not have to prove anything to the Canadian people, because they see themselves as above us. That is not a credible system for governance in the 21st century.

We need to deal with the system. Senators refuse to reform, year after year. They have been defiant about it. It has to come back to the House of Commons and then to the Canadian people. If we asked the Canadian people what they would do, they would get rid of them.

• (1155)

**Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, in one of my last conversations with Jack Layton, he expressed outrage that the first priority of this majority government was to appoint the defeated candidates of the 2011 election to the Senate. In particular, we were talking about the candidate for Lac-Saint-Louis from the Conservative Party.

Michael Fortier had the decency to quit when he lost his election in 2008. He resigned his Senate seat and never returned.

I keep hearing from the other side of the chamber that abolishing the Senate cannot be done. In the words of Jack Layton, “Don't let them tell you it can't be done”.

Would an NDP government, in 2015, work with the provinces not only on abolishing the Senate but also on energy strategy, on developing a job strategy and on developing a policy framework for skilled trades and a training strategy in this nation, among many other things?

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased that my hon. colleague invoked the legacy of Jack Layton, who was a dear friend of mine. Jack never accepted that the status quo of arrogance and corruption that existed in the Senate should be allowed to stand.

We see now, in Quebec, that former Senator Fortier has come forward and has said that it is a system that is unnecessary and unreformable. Senator Fortier, Michael Fortier, when he was with the Conservatives, was a very impressive man in terms of his street smarts, his politics. I disagreed with Mr. Fortier on many things, but I am very pleased to see that one of the Conservatives' own, one of these senators, has come forward and has said that it has to go.

A number of senators are speaking up. Lowell Murray has been good on this. Hugh Segal has spoken up. We need to address this unreformed, unrepentant and under-investigation Senate.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I wish to thank the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay for his excellent speech. We need more people like him, people who are passionate and who are here to really stand up for Canadians.

My question focuses on the whole concept of representation in the Senate. I am 28, so I could not be a senator right now, because one must be at least 30 years old to be a senator. The Conservatives did

not address that at all, not even in their reform proposing the creation of an elected Senate. This means that a huge segment of the population—people between the ages of 18 and 30—could vote, but they would not be able to run as candidates in Senate elections. That demographic is currently not represented in the other place because they cannot be appointed.

I would like to hear my colleague's thoughts on this, because I think we need to talk about representation in the Senate.

[*English*]

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for her excellent work on this file.

We have to expose the lie that has been repeated again and again in this House that the senators are somehow there to represent their regions. Where would the provinces be if they did not have the Conservative and Liberal senators from the Maritimes, who are saying zippo about the EI attack? Where would the people of Saskatchewan have been when the Province of Saskatchewan was fighting for equalization payments? Where would they be without those Conservative senators who said nothing on that?

It is a lie. The senators represent their party interests. They always have. That is why they are fundamentally undemocratic and have to be held to account. They are appointed by the Prime Minister, and they act as sock puppets for the party. They act as an extension of the Conservative war machine. They use the resources the Canadian taxpayers pay them and then use them for the fundraising and political army of the Conservative Party while misrepresenting themselves to the Canadian people as somehow representing the regions of this country.

One cannot show any real examples of their having done this, and it is unacceptable that taxpayers are paying for the partisan work of their bagmen, their campaign organizers and their planners.

• (1200)

**Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am rising today to speak to the NDP opposition motion in front of us today in the House. I will read it for the benefit of people who are watching this debate. The proposed motion states:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government of Canada, in consultation with the provinces and territories, should take immediate steps towards abolishing the unelected and unaccountable Senate of Canada.

There are numerous problems with this proposal. The first problem is that in many people's expert opinion, abolition of the Senate would be a fundamental constitutional amendment, and as such would require the unanimous consent of 11 legislatures in this country, that is, all 10 provinces and the Parliament of Canada. In addition, the precedent has been set in two referenda on separation that were held in the province of Quebec, and on the referendum on the Charlottetown Accord, that not only would 10 provincial legislatures and the Parliament of Canada need to agree to abolish the Senate, but that popular referenda or one single national referendum would be required to support that decision by these 11 Parliaments. From a practical point of view, abolition of the Senate is really a political impossibility.

*Business of Supply*

In considering provinces like New Brunswick or Prince Edward Island, many of these provinces entered Confederation with the condition that they would be allotted a certain number of senators in the upper chamber. This was the deal that brought Newfoundland into Confederation in 1949. It was the deal that brought Prince Edward Island into Confederation, I think it was in 1871. It was the deal that brought the provinces of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, along with the United Province of Canada, into Confederation in 1867. These were fundamental to their entry into the federation, and for the opposition members to so blithely and casually suggest that we abolish the Senate shows either remarkable naïveté or, frankly, irresponsibility.

These provinces today would likely never agree to the abolition of the Senate, by reason that it guarantees them a certain amount of representation in both the House of Commons and the Senate of Canada. In fact, as much as people may not like this point, the reality is that Prince Edward Island, with some 140,000 Canadians, has 8 parliamentarians. It has four senators in the upper chamber and four members of Parliament, and the two are inextricably linked. They are linked because the number of members in this House of Commons, from a provincial division, cannot fall below the number of senators from that particular region of the country. Therefore, why would the people of Prince Edward Island ever agree to the abolition of the Senate? They would not only lose their four parliamentarians in the upper chamber, it would put at risk the number of parliamentarians, of which they have four, in the lower chamber. In fact, they might be reduced to only two members of Parliament, or even possibly one and a half members of Parliament. The people in a province like P.E. I. are being asked, through a motion like this, to consider going from eight parliamentarians, four senators and four members of Parliament, to one and a half members of Parliament.

After thinking through the implications of this motion, members may think the proposer is either uninformed or is being irresponsible.

I could speak about New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland, and I could speak about the Province of Quebec. The fact is, the Province of Quebec has long had requests for amendments to the Constitution.

● (1205)

Before we would even be able to address the abolition of the Senate and the Constitution of Canada, the outstanding requests that came from Meech Lake, and later partially through Charlottetown, would be at the front of the line when it comes to amending the Constitution. I do not think Canadians, either in the rest of Canada or in Quebec, want to reopen those divisive constitutional debates that we had in the late 1980s and early 1990s. There again, I think the motion is not a serious proposal for change.

Finally, with respect to why the motion is not serious and why it should not pass, the Senate is an important chamber. The ongoing present difficulties aside, the fact is that all major western democracies have a bicameral national legislature. All major democracies have two chambers in their national parliament, national congress, national legislature, national system, and there is a reason for that. Laws need to be made cautiously and passed with a great deal of review. There needs to be checks and balances in a system in order to ensure there is not undue concentration of power

and that the power of the state does not run roughshod over minority rights and the rights of individuals and regions of the country.

The most important reason that the motion should not be adopted is because the Senate is an important part of this Parliament of Canada. It was set up to provide a balance to the majoritarianism in the lower chamber. We passed a riding redistribution act about a year ago that has resulted in new ridings for this country. The opposition opposed that because it does not believe this chamber should be representative of its population.

We, as a government, believe this chamber ought to be representative of the population, that each vote in each riding should have the same weight across the country. In order to offset that majoritarianism in this chamber, we have an upper chamber that balances the smaller regions of the country against the larger regions. This is the way it is with chambers in other democracies, for example, like the United States, where each state has two senators. A large state like New York, with millions of people, has two senators, and small states like Hawaii and Alaska also have two senators each. The reason for that is to offset the tyranny of the majority, as it has often been said, of the lower chamber. That is why the Senate is an important institution and that is why the Senate cannot be abolished.

The solution to the ongoing problems in the Senate that we have seen more recently is not its abolition. The solution is to make the Senate more accountable. The solution is to establish term limits for senators, who now are there to age 75, and to establish popular consultations whereby senators can be appointed by the government.

The Government of Canada has made a reference to the Supreme Court because of the questions about the boundaries. We, as a Parliament, can amend current law in Canada to bring about these two broad reforms, the term limits for senators and the popular election of senators, in a way that does not require us to reopen the Constitution. A couple of months ago, the government asked the Supreme Court for a reference as to what the bounds are in legislation for us to introduce new term limits; what the bounds are in terms of us enacting popular consultations for senators; what the bounds are for the constitutional requirements of net worth and property qualifications in the province from which senators are appointed; and, what the bounds are for the abolition of the Senate. That latter question is actually fairly clear.

There have been a number of references and rulings by the Supreme Court that, in my view, have made it quite clear that the abolition of the Senate at the very least requires a two-thirds, 50% plus 1, amendment, or the unanimous consent of all 10 provincial legislatures and the Parliament of Canada.

● (1210)

We hope this reference will come back expeditiously so that we as a Parliament can move quickly to enact the reforms proposed in Bill C-7, the Senate reform act. It is my hope that the court will find the time to give the Government of Canada its reference by the end of this calendar year.

*Business of Supply*

That is the solution to the Senate. It is to allow Canadians to render judgment on the performance of the Senate. It is up to Canadians to elect the senators they think are best able to sit in the Senate and to decide whether to hold senators to account for their performances in their previous terms. That is exactly what this reform act for the Senate would do. This act would ensure accountability in the upper chamber, that the chamber is where the business of the nation carries on and that Canadians can have faith that laws are being verified before they are passed and given royal assent.

The NDP's motion on the abolition of the Senate is not a serious one. It is not something that any serious leader or party would propose. It is not only practically and politically impossible, but it would reopen the divisive constitutional debates and referenda that we saw in the 1990s and late 1980s. It would also, frankly, further concentrate power in the executive branch of our government to the detriment of Parliament. For all of those reasons, it is not a serious proposal. Frankly, it is a proposal to make hay while the sun shines on the current controversies in the Senate and speaks to the fact that the official opposition is not ready for prime time, not ready for government.

I could go on about the challenges the Senate has, but the reality is this. From time to time there are controversies in this chamber about particular members and ministers in the cabinet. That happens in all governments. Nobody is suggesting that we abolish this chamber because of controversies. I am not minimizing the controversies in the Senate. The reality is that the Senate needs to be reformed. There were reforms introduced in the House of Lords in the Westminster parliament. We have the last Parliament with an unelected, completely appointed upper chamber that has no popular consultations or vetting process by which senators are appointed.

It is high time for Canada, Parliament and Canadians to have an upper chamber that has term limits of nine years, as it is in the current bill, though eight years would be acceptable to many of us, and to have popular consultations or elections of senators. That is well past its due date. We need to put that in place, and put that in place quickly. Frankly, I think the government would be prepared, with the consent of all members of the House, to rapidly pass that legislation through the chamber so it can proceed to the Senate where it would be debated and passed.

That is the very important reason for why we need to achieve Senate reform. If we do not achieve Senate reform, all we are doing is delegitimizing the Parliament of Canada. Canadians have been turning out in lower and lower voter numbers in recent elections. Canadians increasingly do not trust political institutions. That has been shown in surveys over the last number of years. There was one survey recently that indicated that trend continues. We bring it upon ourselves as parliamentarians when we propose things we know are just making politics, that have no practical chance of ever being adopted into law and, further, that would weaken this institution.

• (1215)

I will be happy to take questions on this issue. This is not a serious proposal from the opposition. It is irresponsible, if not naive. It shows a remarkable lack of understanding about how upper

chambers have been structured around democracies of the world in order to provide a check on majoritism of the lower chamber.

There is a solution, however, to making the Senate accountable and to allowing Canadians a say in the performance of the hundred or so senators in the upper chamber, and that is to put in place term limits and to allow for the election of senators.

Instead of debating this motion on the floor of the House, what we should be doing is debating the government's Bill C-7, the Senate reform act, which will introduce those two fundamental changes into the upper chamber and ensure that the upper chamber is modernized and remains relevant for the 21st century and for Canada's democracy.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Matthew Dubé (Chambly—Borduas, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech. He made some good arguments, even if we do not agree, but there is a major problem with what he said.

The Americans had the courage to consult the states and to proceed with constitutional amendments to improve their Senate. That is exactly what we are proposing that we do with the provinces. We are being criticized for trying to revisit the Constitution. It takes courage to change an institution that is suffering from institutional arthritis—if I can call it that.

He then talked about concentrating power in the executive branch of government, but it is very different in the United States. First, the executive branch is separate. In Canada, our biggest problem is that backbench government members refuse to hold ministers accountable, in committee, for example. So when debates in parliamentary committee are shut down, it can be difficult.

He can talk all he wants about responsible reform and having a debate on Bill C-7, but the Minister of State for Democratic Reform just criticized us for having too many speakers and for wanting to debate too much. The government needs to be consistent.

**Hon. Michael Chong:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the NDP member for his question.

[*English*]

First, the move in the United States from an appointed senate to an elected senate did not take place through a constitutional amendment. To my recollection, and I could be wrong, it started organically. I believe it started with the state of Oregon, which started to elect senators. It was not a constitutional amendment.

Second, the change in the United States from an unelected senate to an elected senate is the change precisely proposed in Bill C-7, the Senate reform act, which the government would like to see pass.

The United States did not abolish the senate as a solution to the fact that the senate had previously been unelected. That is the problem with the motion of the opposition, which proposes to abolish the Senate. That is a big difference compared to going to an elected Senate.

**Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the remarks of member for Wellington—Halton Hills were well thought out.

*Business of Supply*

The member said that there was a solution, and that would be moving toward the government proposal to put in place term limits and allowing for the election of senators. I think most of us are willing to debate those issues.

However, one of the real shortcomings of the government proposal is that the Prime Minister, who has now appointed more senators than pretty near any other prime minister in Canada, senators, in my view, being more loyal to the Prime Minister than maybe even the country, is a concern.

The shortcoming of the government's proposal is that the Prime Minister has never really sat down with the other first ministers in Canada to see where they are on the issue. We are a federation. I will grant that the Prime Minister has a major leadership role to play. However, could the member tell us why the Prime Minister is so reluctant to sit down with the other first ministers of Canada to discuss this issue, among others?

• (1220)

**Hon. Michael Chong:** Mr. Speaker, first, while the abolition of the Senate, in my view, requires a fundamental constitutional amendment, in other words, the unanimity of all 10 provincial legislatures as well as the Parliament of Canada, the details of the structure and the rules that govern the Senate are the exclusive prerogative of the federal government. They are *intra vires* federal government. When it comes to term limits, one of the member's former party leaders moved unilaterally to reduce the term limits from life to 75 years of age. That is *intra vires* federal responsibility that should not involve consultations with the provinces. We have to be assertive in our area of jurisdiction federally.

Furthermore, I frankly think the Prime Minister has been a very good manager of the federation. In fact, in decades past, we have had too many of these first ministers meetings that have actually created problems rather than solved them. The current management of the federation has been exemplary and is shown in the fact that national unity is very strong, that desire for a third referendum is low and the fact that the federation is working together on a number of initiatives without having to have these high drama, high stakes first ministers meetings that frankly create problems rather than solve them.

**Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I take exception to my friend from Malpeque who talked about some of the senators in the Senate being more loyal to our Prime Minister. That is not the case. It may be the case in the Liberal Senate where we still have that huge division with those who were appointed by Mr. Chrétien and by Mr. Martin. We remember what happened in some of the leaderships consequent to that. Certainly now the Prime Minister has shown leadership in saying that he would appoint those who were chosen by the provinces in an election.

However, that is not why I am asking the question. I have listened to a number of NDP speeches today with some regret and disappointment. A number of speakers have said that we are able to make the decisions in the House. More and more as I sit here, especially when we vote on private member's bills, the NDP stands every time and votes as a body, as one unit, not voicing their own concerns or their constituents' concerns. Those who do not support the party get banished to the back row.

Would the member give us his opinion on the importance of the regional representation of the Senate and why some of those amendments should be made rather than a discussion like we are having today?

**Hon. Michael Chong:** Mr. Speaker, my colleague often has rock-solid views on these sorts of issues, having worked here for so many years and advancing the interests of his constituents, which he very strongly feels.

The fact is that the Senate is required. An upper chamber is required in order to balance the majoritarianism of this chamber. The Senate's purpose is not to represent provincial interests in the Parliament of Canada; it is to represent regional interests. Those senators who sit in the Senate are not at the beck and call of the premiers of the provinces. They do not represent the governments of the provinces. They represent regional interests. That role and function is incredibly important, whether it is through Senate committees that undertake studies or whether it is the review of legislation that passes through this chamber to the upper chamber. That balance between the majoritarianism tendencies of the lower chamber and a check on that majoritarianism through the regional representation in the upper chamber is incredibly important.

• (1225)

**Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP):** Mr. Speaker, I am very concerned that the democratic deficit in this place could be more urgently handled by focusing on those things that do not require opening the Constitution, such as removing the requirement for a leader to sign nomination papers and reducing the excess and unhealthy power of the PMO. However, when I look at Bill C-7, I do not see Senate reform. I see a dog's breakfast that would require the provinces to hold elections to different standards, different fundraising rules for a list of people who could be potentially appointed by the Prime Minister.

Does the hon. member for Wellington—Halton Hills honestly think the Prime Minister would appoint David Suzuki as a senator if the people of British Columbia put him on the list to be appointed?

**Hon. Michael Chong:** Mr. Speaker, the short answer is, yes, I do believe the Prime Minister would appoint Mr. Suzuki to the Senate. The Prime Minister is a democrat. He believes in democracy strongly. If the people of British Columbia were to elect Mr. Suzuki to the Senate of Canada, the Prime Minister would appoint him and I would be proud were he to sit in our caucus as a member of that caucus.

**Mr. Kennedy Stewart (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it is a great pleasure to rise to support the motion brought forward by the very able member for Toronto—Danforth.

The motion is worth reading, if not savouring:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government of Canada, in consultation with the provinces and territories, should take immediate steps towards abolishing the unelected and unaccountable Senate of Canada.

We are talking about abolishing the Senate. This is music to my ears. We should take these steps toward making Canada a better democracy. I am very proud to be a member of a party that is pushing for such a long overdue reform. I really hope we get support from all sides of the House for the motion.

*Business of Supply*

I am of view that when we talk about issues like this, we have to step back and take somewhat of a romantic view of the times we are in. Rather than focusing on the day-to-day details of the activity of life, it is important to think of this issue in the context of the historical period in which we are living.

It is important to not think about how the debate and discussion we are having here is going to be reflected in the newspapers, but how we are going to look back on this period 100 years from now. That is how we have to look at this. It is a major structural change being proposed, not for the first time in Canada. We have gone through many structural changes in the development of our democracy. We have to look at how Canadians will view our efforts today and over the coming months and how future generations of Canadians will view this.

To help with this task of contextualizing the debates read, I often like to read political biographies. I know that is probably a little boring for some, but I think it is extremely important to put this into context. I have just finished a wonderful biography written by Professor Michael Cross of Dalhousie University, who spent 10 years researching and writing about Robert Baldwin, one of the fathers of responsible government in Canada, along with his father and LaFontaine. This is the famous Baldwin-LaFontaine team that brought us responsible government.

I would advise all members to take a look at this book as we go through this debate about whether we should abolish the Senate.

A lot of people would ask why they should read a biography of Robert Baldwin, the man who brought municipal reform to Canada, the man who brought responsible government. Because it is important to see how dedicated he was to transforming Canadian democracy and to improving democracy in Canada. His triumph of responsible government means our government is more responsible to the people than to the monarchy.

If we look back at Robert Baldwin's time in the mid-1800s to the 21st century, if people from the 22nd century look back to where we are now, I think they may see people who have as much passion as Robert Baldwin, putting forward proposals such as the one today.

I will be sharing my time, Mr. Speaker.

The reforms of responsible government were achieved in a uniquely Canadian way, without revolution. That shows the value of the House, that it allows for debate and that it is where these debates should take place and that it is the institution that should make the decisions for Canada.

We need to abolish the Senate because it is proving to be shackle around the neck of Canadian democracy. Even the mighty Conservative Party, with its Reform roots, has fallen victim to its power to undermine public control of politics in our country.

The Prime Minister and his predecessors from the Reform Party and the Alliance Party have all promised to reform the Senate. Indeed, the Prime Minister described the Senate as a relic of the 19th century, a relic of the Baldwin era. In 2004 he said that he would not name appointed people to the Senate.

However, I fear the Senate has the better of him and his party, to where their real passion for reform of this institution has been beaten

down to where what we now have put before us, through the Senate, is a watered down bill. Surprisingly and astoundingly members on the other side of the House are defending the Senate, calling it a valuable institution. If I had heard that 10 years ago, I would have thought I was dreaming.

• (1230)

After tabling several bills for Senate reform that all have gone nowhere—and I have to say mainly due to lack of effort—the Prime Minister has now appointed 58 senators.

If the originators of this western Reform movement—then Alliance and then eventually merged with the Progressive Conservatives—had stood up on the podiums during those times and said they promised to defend the Senate when they got a majority government, people would have walked out of the halls and torn up their membership. I really do find it astounding that this is really the debate going on here.

As outlined earlier by my colleagues and the newspapers and electronic media, the behaviours of senators Brazeau, Duffy and Wallin show why the Senate is no longer relevant and really needs to be abolished. This is an institution whose members within did work that was important to the country, perhaps at one point. Really, this has fallen off the agenda and they are really not doing us proud. It is becoming a joke institution, and that is too bad.

The reforms that are put forward by the Conservatives really are weak and limp and they will not accomplish what they are after.

The Senate costs Canadians \$92 million each year, and even more important, the Senate blocks legislation passed by the House of Commons. This is the elected House. This is where legislation should originate, and the Senate now and for a long time has been blocking important legislation that Canadians want.

It is not really based on any sense of sober second thought, as was the past romantic view of this institution. It is really partisan politics at play here.

Some senators try to practise this view, and in fact I have great respect for Senator Dallaire. I think he has served this country well. Perhaps he would have been the type of senator who would have upheld ethical values. I do not think many of them are doing that now, and I do not think there is any way to curb that, other than by abolishing the Senate.

We are faced with many failed attempts at legislation from that side of the House, of course, but now there is a Supreme Court reference, which will give its legal opinion on the constitutional limits as they apply to limiting the terms of senators, electing senators and eliminating the requirement for senators to have residence in the province they represent; and of course what we are proposing here is abolishing the Senate.

While I look forward to the decision of the Supreme Court—I get some more Friday night reading—I cannot help but think this is a delaying tactic by the Conservatives. They have had years to look at this issue but only now are getting around to it when senators are caught with their hands in the cookie jar.

*Business of Supply*

The Conservative are putting forward these motions, vigorously defending the Senate, unimaginably today, and then hoping this will fade off the public agenda and everything will go ahead as normal.

They are hoping that these scandals will blow over and be forgotten before the decision is delivered, but I cannot help but think that these current indiscretions will only be replaced by new indiscretions as we move forward. As the Duffy and Wallin debacle perhaps fades a bit from public memory, there will be new ones, because the Senate is really unaccountable. They do not really have any incentive to spend taxpayers' money wisely.

That is not all senators. There are some people there with fantastic reputations, but I do worry that others will continue to cast aspersions.

This is a time for vision. Again, going back to Baldwin and responsible government in Canada once being a dream, it was achieved through sheer political will, and although there are difficulties in abolishing the Senate, we should not be put off by those.

The same stands for women gaining the vote or first nations gaining the vote, the bill of rights in Canada or the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. These are all major institutional shifts that were necessary and took significant political will to make them happen. We want to add one more to that list and that is abolition of the Senate.

● (1235)

**Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, perhaps the member has not been here for the entire debate, but certainly I do not think I have heard a single government member stand and defend the Senate in its current form. I simply have not heard that.

For some time we have been arguing for a Senate chamber that has moved forward from 1867 to reflect a modern Canadian reality, where Canadians should have a say in who represents them in the Senate, where those term limits are not for up to 45 years but are at a more reasonable term limit whereby there will be an opportunity for renewal.

In a modern context it is unthinkable that Canadians in my riding, and I am certain in this member's riding, could be asked if they could name senators to represent them in the Senate. I will bet that many Canadians could not come up with any people to represent them.

**An hon. member:** Albertans can.

**Mr. Dean Del Mastro:** However, Albertans can.

The Prime Minister has a perfect record of nominating and selecting senators who have been selected by regions. It would be a welcome reform and something the NDP should support.

**Mr. Kennedy Stewart:** Mr. Speaker, we are talking about institutional change. We should make sure we divorce personalities from institutions. Therefore, it may be that the senators who were elected through this kind of rag-tag system the Conservatives have put together have been appointed by the Prime Minister, but there is no guarantee that will happen with other prime ministers. They are

unable to make proposals that will permanently change these institutions for the better, and that is why we have to get rid of it.

**Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my hon. colleague for a thoughtful speech. I would like to get his views on the following.

First, I have heard members opposite say that we have to have a second chamber to counter what they have termed "majoritarian rule". I am reminded that four provinces in the country did have senates at one time and managed to abolish them and retain one body in the province governed by the principal of majority rule without any noticeable deterioration with respect to democracy. I wonder if the member could comment on that.

Second, I would like to ask his views on the issue of equality. As we know, there are 6 senators in British Columbia, which has 4.5 million people, and there are 4 senators in Prince Edward Island, which has 140,000 people or 1/40 of the population of British Columbia. I wonder if the member could comment on the prospect of having a chamber in our Government of Canada that is so grossly disproportionate in terms of equality.

**Mr. Kennedy Stewart:** Mr. Speaker, of course the political history of Canada is overcoming the evils of upper chambers. The provinces have done it. I referenced Robert Baldwin earlier. It was all about making sure people have control. These changes we are proposing, to abolish the Senate, would permanently do that.

We also need to move on with other reforms, such as proportional representation, ensuring we have full expenditure transparency in the House, and making sure our independent officers of the legislature are firmly protected and funded.

There are a lot of other things we can do right now that should also be addressed. It is our job to make sure we leave democracy in Canada better than we found it, and abolishing the Senate will do that.

● (1240)

**Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the member gave a very good set of remarks. However, there is one issue I think he is conflating.

Robert Baldwin and Louis-Hippolyte LaFontaine, whose statue sits right behind the Senate on Parliament Hill, did not advocate for the abolition of the Senate. They were concerned about the unfettered power of the executive council, which today we call the cabinet. Therefore, they felt that the legislature and Parliament as a whole should be the check on the unfettered executive council and the unfettered Governor in Council power. That is the difference between what they argued for and what the NDP opposition motion is proposing.

**Mr. Kennedy Stewart:** Mr. Speaker, all reforms have to start somewhere. In the 19th century, we had the Baldwin and Lafontaine reforms moving forward to give people more power over their governments. This is a continuation. I think they would be sitting on this side of the House arguing for abolition if they were part of this debate today.



*Business of Supply*

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Laurin Liu (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise today as we debate an NDP motion to abolish the Senate.

I believe that this antiquated, archaic, illegitimate and undemocratic institution must disappear as quickly as possible. As it stands, the Senate represents the worst of both worlds. Unelected and almost impossible to get rid of despite their many indiscretions, senators claim to represent Canada's regions and have the power to block measures passed by the House of Commons, whose members are elected. That is unacceptable in a democracy.

Before I go on to explain why the Senate should be abolished, I would like to point out that our motion states that abolition should occur in consultation with the provinces and territories. We recognize that any reform affecting the balance among the federation's institutions must involve all stakeholders. We want to get rid of the Senate as quickly as possible, but we have to do it properly and we must respect the provinces. We think we can come to an agreement.

Since 1970, every province has deemed its upper chamber useless and abolished it. Ontario, Nova Scotia and Manitoba all support abolishing the Canadian Senate. British Columbia's premier has stated that the Senate no longer serves a purpose.

The number-one argument for abolishing the Senate is that it lacks democratic legitimacy. Senators are not elected. They have the power to introduce, amend and block bills, but they are not accountable to the people.

I think that the most appalling example of this was when, in 2010, the Conservative majority Senate blocked the NDP's climate change accountability bill, which a majority of the people's elected representatives passed. Manipulating democracy, a handful of unelected senators overturned a decision by members of the House of Commons.

In addition to not being elected by the people, senators are almost impossible to get rid of. Even if they vote against the interests of the people, even if they misbehave, as we have seen over the past few months, even if they misuse their expense accounts, they have a job for life in the upper chamber. Only a criminal conviction can boot them out.

Senators' dishonourable conduct and the institution's inability to self-regulate have discredited the Senate in the eyes of Canadians. In the past few weeks, revelations about abuses of public funds have left a bad taste in taxpayers' mouths.

Take Senator Duffy, for example, who claims to live in Prince Edward Island so that he can get reimbursed for his fancy house in Ottawa. And what about Senator Wallin, who is supposed to represent Saskatchewan but lives in Toronto? And then there is Senator Mac Harb, who since 2010 has claimed \$31,000 in housing allowance for a secondary residence in Ottawa, when really, he has always lived in Ottawa.

I would like to make a quick comment. Last weekend, I was stunned to hear Senator Carignan defend senators' excessive expenses by comparing their travel expenses to those of MPs.

How can he show such bad faith? How can he begin to compare a senator's travel expenses to those of an elected member who travels throughout his or her riding to get feedback from constituents and to explain the policies adopted in Ottawa? Senator Carignan's comments show just how out of touch senators are.

To come back to the motion we are discussing this afternoon, I would like to say that on top of these cases of abuse of public money, there are all the other situations that have deeply shocked Canadians. Take Patrick Brazeau, for example. He could sit in the Senate for another 36 years, even though he is quite often absent, he has abused his housing allowance and he is facing charges of domestic violence and sexual assault.

• (1245)

There was also the case of Senator Lavigne, a Liberal who eventually resigned from the Senate after being convicted of breach of trust. He had a Senate employee do landscaping work on his Wakefield property. Of course, the work was done during office hours, on the taxpayers' dime. Interestingly enough, if the employee had not been so incompetent as to cut down some of the neighbour's trees and spark a court battle, this story might never have come to light and Senator Lavigne would still be sitting in the Senate.

The fact that senators are not chosen on merit only makes the legitimacy crisis even worse. Appointments have always been partisan. Long before he was appointed as a senator, Mike Duffy mocked senators for getting "taskless thanks" as opposed to doing "thankless tasks".

And although he said he would never appoint unelected senators, this Prime Minister has appointed 58 senators since 2006. Like his predecessors, he has appointed dozens of friends of the Conservative regime.

I am thinking of people like Doug Finley, national director of the Conservative Party campaign in 2006 and 2008; Irving Gerstein, former chair of the Conservative Fund Canada; Don Plett, former Conservative Party president; Carolyn Stewart-Olsen, the Prime Minister's former communications director; Michel Rivard and Leo Housakos, major Conservative organizers in Quebec; and Stephen Greene, Preston Manning's former chief of staff. I could go on and mention senators like Josée Verner, Claude Carignan, Suzanne Duplessis, Fabian Manning and Percy Mockler, former Conservative MPs or candidates.

Indeed, this government has politicized the Senate so much that even former senator Michael Fortier has had enough. This weekend, he spoke to Evan Solomon and said:

[*English*]

"I was very naive. ... I thought it would be a different place than the one I found. I found it to be extremely partisan...on both sides, including my own, and it was very annoying because these people were trying to be members of Parliament, and they weren't."

*Business of Supply*

[Translation]

I am talking about the Conservatives, but the Liberals were no better. Senators Dennis Dawson and Francis Fox, for example, two former Liberal MPs, were appointed to the Senate by Paul Martin in August 2005. Since then, they have been actively involved in election organization for the Liberal Party. It is shameful.

Since 2006, the Prime Minister has taken a piecemeal approach to reforming the Senate. He has proposed limiting the length of senators' terms and consulting the public in the selection process, but these proposals do not make the Senate more democratic. The results of the public consultation are not binding on the Prime Minister, and there is nothing to make a senator resign after eight years, as the Prime Minister has proposed.

The Conservatives' Senate reform has been hitting a constitutional wall for seven years now. The Supreme Court will have to render a decision on a reference that the Conservative government has just made. Can the government move forward without the provinces' agreement? Nothing could be less certain.

The Prime Minister needs to realize that it would be impossible to reform that institution. Since 1874, barely seven years after Confederation, the Senate has been the subject of criticism and calls for reform. In fact, on April 12, 1874, the House of Commons considered a motion recommending that "our Constitution ought to be so amended as to confer upon each Province the power of selecting its own Senators, and of defining the mode of their election". Here we are, 139 years later, still debating this issue.

I was rereading a speech the Prime Minister gave to the Vancouver Board of Trade in 2007. I would like to quote part of it:

We are dedicated to the basic proposition that Canada needs the Senate to change. And, if it cannot be reformed, I think most British Columbians, like most Canadians, will eventually conclude that it will have to be abolished.

• (1250)

I ask all my colleagues in this House to support the NDP motion to abolish the Senate.

[English]

**Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I listened to the member's speech and I have a simple question.

If the Government of Canada were to propose the abolition of the Senate and convened a first ministers meeting to get that done, what would her party do if the Province of Quebec demanded as a fundamental constitutional amendment in advance of the abolition of the Senate that the four or five requests made in the Meech Lake accord by the Province of Quebec be implemented before that abolition? What would be her party's position on that?

[Translation]

**Ms. Laurin Liu:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for the question.

We believe that the government must work with the provinces and territories and not act unilaterally to abolish the Senate. We say that in our motion.

However, we also know that the majority of provinces and territories are in favour of abolishing the Senate, as I mentioned in my speech. In fact, they abolished their upper chambers in the mid-1900s. We know that many provinces support the NDP motion. I invite my Conservative Party colleague to support it as well.

[English]

**Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am glad that my colleague brought the issue forward that there are even senators coming out now and saying that we should abolish the Senate.

When we speak about the Senate, I think it is important to consider the incredible disconnect that most Canadians have with the institution and, with Mr. Fortier, consider the reality.

Most people could not name the senator who represents their region. They are funded in a similar way to members of Parliament, yet they have basically done nothing with respect to the public and do not have the public responsibilities that elected officials do.

The fact is that unlike MPs—who, if they are doing their jobs conscientiously, have a presence in their communities—senators are ghosts, mere notions of representation at best.

Can my colleague tell me if she knows how many Canadians go to their senators with problems? How often do senators actually help the people they ostensibly represent? I am just wondering. To me, it is no wonder that the Senate is under a microscope. Across the country people are continually being told they will have to make do with less, while these party lapdogs shower themselves in entitlement.

How is that fair? How is that democratic?

[Translation]

**Ms. Laurin Liu:** Mr. Speaker, it is not fair to Canadians.

On the one hand, the Conservative government is telling Canadians and families in my riding to tighten their belts. On the other hand, a number of senators are abusing public funds. Canadians obviously do not accept the Conservative Party's message.

I would also like to address another point that my colleague raised: the fact that this chamber, which is made up of people elected by Canadians, is supposed to carefully study legislation and pass well thought-out bills.

We already have the tools to do this—parliamentary committees. We are supposed to invite experts and members of civil society to appear before committees to talk about laws. However, the Conservatives have abused their power in committee and forced meetings to be held in camera.

We have also seen the Conservative members reject all the amendments proposed by members of civil society and the opposition parties during studies of bills in the House.

*Business of Supply*

• (1255)

[English]

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to be here today to debate a topic that is quite relevant in today's society, inasmuch as it seems that the Senate has been dominating the news cycle for the last month or so. A lot of Canadians will be interested to hear what members of the chamber have to say about the relevance of the Senate and whether it should be abolished, as the NDP suggests, or be reformed, as our government is proposing.

I should begin by giving some of my personal observations and where I have come from throughout the years to finally maintain a position on the Senate. I have to be quite honest: before I was elected as a member of Parliament, I leaned toward abolishing the Senate. At that point in time I did not really see the relevance of the Senate, because I did not understand the role that the Senate played. I think that would be true of most Canadians. Unfortunately, although most Canadians may know we have a Senate and may know we have an unelected upper house, they do not truly understand the role the Senate plays in today's society and in today's Parliament. I was one of those.

However, since I was elected as a member of Parliament in 2004, I have changed my views. Over the years, I have seen that the Senate does play an important and valuable role. However, I do not think the Senate is currently constructed in the correct manner.

We have seen from time to time—and all members of the House could attest to this—that over the last 100-plus years since Confederation, Senate committees have been able to explore issues that are of importance to all Canadians. I can list many valuable reports conducted and completed by Senate committees that influenced not only Parliament in the lower House but also how Canadians view certain subjects throughout the country.

It is not quite fair or accurate to say that the Senate should be abolished because it has outlived its usefulness. I do not believe that, now that I have seen the Senate at work. However, it is imperative that some fundamental changes be made to the Senate to allow it to perform at its utmost capacity. What I am talking about, quite frankly, is reform.

Right now, as everyone knows, senators are appointed. Even though there is a life cycle to the time that senators can spend in the upper chamber, it is far too long. One theoretically could be appointed to the upper house as early as the age of 30 and could sit in the Senate without fear of reprisal for 45 years. That is wrong. We have to impose term limits on senators, although the length of time for which senators should be appointed is up for debate. Our government has suggested a nine-year non-renewable term, but that length of time could certainly be debated. Some flexibility could be shown by our government if we got into meaningful debate about meaningful reform. Unfortunately, we never seem to be able to engage in that meaningful dialogue with the opposition ranks.

In addition to the term limits, which I will talk more about in a moment, there is one more fundamental reform that I would like to see enacted in the Senate, and that is the way in which senators are brought into the upper chamber. Right now, as I mentioned, it is

through appointment. That is the wrong approach, primarily because we do not have the accountability that is required for senators.

Right now, as we all know, senators are primarily responsible to represent the regions from which they come, but through being appointed, there really seems to be a lack of accountability. If a senator is appointed and then fails to adequately represent his or her region, how does one make the senator account for his or her behaviour?

• (1300)

They cannot be fired. I suppose they could be dropped from the Senate if they conducted themselves in an untoward manner, but even then, there are only a few circumstances in which an individual could be dropped from the Senate.

However, in this place, all of us are completely accountable to our constituents. Why? It is because we are elected. If we do not represent our constituents to their satisfaction, we could lose our jobs, because every four years or so, we face the public. We have an election. That is basically a referendum on our performance. If my constituents are dissatisfied with the job I have been doing, they have the right, at the next federal election, at their next opportunity, to vote in someone else and express their dissatisfaction. However, in the Senate, the constituents of the region a senator represents have no such ability. Once a senator is appointed, the constituents of the region that senator is supposed to represent have really no ability to force that senator to account for his or her actions. That is absolutely wrong.

Therefore, I firmly believe that there should be some form of election. Whether it be through Senate consultations or direct election is up for debate. However, we need to have a process in place that allows and forces senators to be accountable to the people they represent.

We, as elected representatives, have term limits. Sometimes the term limits are as short as 18 months. Sometimes they are as long as four and a half years, because the term limit is from election to election, not to a maximum of 45 years.

The first time I was elected, in 2004, it was by the staggering plurality of 122 votes. Be assured that from that moment on, I paid great attention to the needs and demands of my constituents, because I knew that if I did not represent the wishes and the feelings of my constituents, the next time an election rolled around, I might not be sent back to this place. That is accountability, and that is the type of accountability we need in the upper chamber. That is why we need Senate reform.

Unfortunately, we have seen, on a number of occasions, that reform packages we have brought forward for discussion and debate in the House have been ultimately filibustered or rejected by members of the opposition. Therefore, I think we have taken the correct and prudent course of action by asking the Supreme Court to give its opinion.

*Business of Supply*

We have brought forward a reference to the Supreme Court on four fundamental points that deal with the Senate and potential Senate reform. The first is term limits. We want the Supreme Court to advise Parliament on whether Parliament has the constitutional ability to set term limits for senators. We also want the Supreme Court to comment on the selection process and whether it would be constitutionally viable and achievable to have some selection process other than the current appointment process. Furthermore, we want the Supreme Court to comment on the number of senators for each particular region. We want it to talk about residency requirements. We also want the Supreme Court to comment on the issue before us today, which is whether the Senate could be abolished without the need for a constitutional amendment.

● (1305)

Anyone who has studied our Constitution, and we have many academics in the House who have become learned about the Canadian Constitution, would agree with one thing: while it is vitally necessary, it is also, and can be, from time to time an extremely complex and complicated document. There is still an argument, even with some of the basic questions about Senate reform, about whether constitutional amendments would be required to begin with, and if they were, what form constitutional amendments should take.

Some would argue that on certain reform initiatives, the 7/50 process would be required. For those people who are not aware, 7/50 simply means that certain constitutional amendments require a minimum of seven provinces, representing at least 50% of the population of Canada, to agree on a constitutional amendment before it could be put forward. However, others, even with the same democratic reform initiative, would argue that 7/50 is not the type of approach we should take and that we need unanimous consent. There is argument within the Constitution itself and debate among academics and constitutional experts, even within the democratic reform initiatives we have put forward. Does it require only a 7/50 approach, or will it require unanimous consent?

For us as parliamentarians to sit here and suggest that we know how to reform the Senate is, quite frankly, foolhardy. That is why we have asked the Supreme Court to give its opinion. I believe that once we had an opinion from the Supreme Court on a host of questions we have asked, we would be in a better position in this place to start moving forward. I do not believe, however, that we are currently prepared to even deal with the question put forward by the opposition today, the question of whether the Senate should be abolished, because we do not know, quite frankly, whether we have the constitutional ability to abolish the Senate. I do not know how many arguments have been proposed to date by members of the opposition, but I would challenge each and every one of them who suggest that we have the constitutional right and ability to abolish the Senate should we wish to do so. I challenge opposition members on that, because I do not believe we know if we have that ability.

The Supreme Court will render an opinion on that, hopefully sooner rather than later. However, even if it suggests to Parliament that we have, within certain guidelines, the constitutional ability to make fundamental changes to the Senate, such as abolishment, then and only then, I believe, should we start engaging in a debate on the future of the Senate. I firmly believe that we need to try to reform the Senate prior to abolishment and prior to even consideration of

abolishment. As I mentioned at the outset of my speech, I believe that the Senate can perform a vital role in Canadian society, but we have to make some very obvious changes to the way in which it does business.

Opposition members seem to be suggesting today that there is no hope for the Senate, that its usefulness has outlived itself. I believe that they are shortsighted in their thinking. If they actually took a hard look at the accomplishments of the Senate over the past 100-plus years, they would understand, as I understand, that there is a vital role for the Senate to play. It has made contributions to Canadian society over the years, and I believe that it will continue to make vital contributions to both Parliament and Canadians across this country.

● (1310)

It is a difficult time for any parliamentarian right now to be talking about changing the Senate, in light of all the adverse media attention the Senate has been receiving. I recognize that. I understand that. I get that. However, I have to think that we need to set aside, if we can, just for a moment, some of the recent controversies we have seen occurring in the Senate and look over a longer period of time to see what the Senate has actually accomplished.

I would be the first to suggest that if, in my opinion, the Senate had not contributed vitally to democracy and the Canadian way of life that fine, we would do away with it. I do not share that view. I share the view of many other Canadians that the Senate can continue to play a vital role in today's society. We just need to make some fundamental changes, and that means reform.

Therefore, I would like to ask for unanimous consent to propose a motion, as I know some of my colleagues have done earlier today. I move that, notwithstanding any standing order or usual practice of the House, Bill C-7, an act respecting the selection of senators and amending the Constitution Act, 1867 in respect of Senate term limits be deemed to have been read the second time and referred to a committee of the whole, be considered in committee of the whole, deemed reported without amendment, deemed concurred in at report stage, and deemed read the third time and passed.

I believe that if the opposition is truly interested in making the Senate a viable force in Canadian society, it will support this unanimous consent motion.

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

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Some hon. members:** No.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** No, he does not.

Question and comments, the hon. member for Jeanne-Le Ber.

**Mr. Tyrone Benskin (Jeanne-Le Ber, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the member was doing so well up until that last little bit. I appreciate the words he shared with us. I appreciate his thoughts.

*Business of Supply*

Before I continue, I would like to thank my colleague for Toronto—Danforth for bringing this motion to the table, because it allows us to debate this issue. As my colleague across the way said, this is a particularly hot issue right now because of what is happening in the news. However, I think the fact that this is happening tells us why we need to have this debate.

The answer from the other side is to have elected senators. The election process is a good thing, because it creates democracy for Canadians. However, I would like to ask my hon. colleague how creating another partisan level to this place helps make things better. I think the number one thing Canadians want is for this place to work. How would creating an even stronger partisan environment in the Senate help move things forward?

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski:** Mr. Speaker, to be quite honest, regardless of whether there were Senate elections or appointments, as we now have, one could argue that there would still be a partisan atmosphere. One could certainly argue that if one were appointed to the Senate, one would then be beholden to the person who made the appointment. Senate elections, one could argue, would be the same thing. If one were running on behalf of a particular political party and were elected, one would follow partisan or political lines. The argument can be made on both sides.

My point is simply this: I believe that there is more accountability if we elect senators, combined with term limits. When we put those two elements together, senators who are elected to represent the constituents of the region they reside in have to be accountable, because they were elected to begin with.

However, one of the reasons I think we need to debate the government's position on making non-renewable nine-year terms is that, one could argue, if it is a non-renewable term, there is no accountability, because at the end of nine years, they are gone anyway. If, on the other hand, there were renewable terms, perhaps that would take care of the entire accountability package.

I know that we have stated that we would like to see renewal. After nine years, we need to get new members with new ideas in. My only comment is that just because ideas are new does not mean they are necessarily better. We are elected, and we can be re-elected. I think we should give some consideration to whether term limits should be renewable or non-renewable.

• (1315)

**Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, would my colleague accept the distinction between a problem and an enormous problem?

A problem is that a senator is appointed when most Canadians, including me, would like to have an elected Senate. An enormous problem would be to have two chambers elected, paralyzing each other, as is the case now in the United States, putting at risk the world economy, or, in Italy, where they are unable to form a government when its economy is collapsing.

A problem is to have Alberta and British Columbia being under-represented in a modest Senate. An enormous problem would be to have Alberta and British Columbia under-represented in a powerful elected Senate.

Will my colleague agree that it would be stupid to change a problem into an enormous problem?

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski:** I am not sure that I would consider anything regarding the Senate reform package to be stupid. However, with respect to the member's initial comment as to whether electing senators could cause a problem by having partisan interests trump the will of the government, we have that now. Even though the senators are appointed as opposed to elected, we have seen that if there is a government that does not have the majority of the Senate, the Senate can block government legislation. That occurs in the current configuration. Therefore, going to an elected Senate as opposed to the current appointment process does not necessarily mean we would solve the problem that the member has identified.

**Mr. Dan Albas (Okanagan—Coquihalla, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, there seems to be hypocrisy here. We have the New Democrats constantly being on both sides of the issue. Their leader says that he wants to give new powers to the Senate, yet today we see a motion saying to abolish the Senate. We have a member asking if by leaning to elections for senators we would have a more partisan process, yet they claim that the Senate is already a partisan body. They are speaking out of both ends of their mouth.

In the opinion of the hon. member, have the New Democrats thought out this abolition of the Senate? If we see that happen, what would be the natural next step for the New Democrats to deal with the changes to the House of Commons? The Senate right now has a floor for how many members it can have in the House. Have the New Democrats thought further than this motion here today? Are they thinking about the impacts this would have on Atlantic Canada? I would like the hon. member's thoughts on this.

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski:** Mr. Speaker, I would say no. The motion today has more to do with politics than it has to do with reasoned argument. That is why I mentioned during my intervention that we need to hear from the Supreme Court. The prudent course of action is the one we have taken, and that is to ask members of the Supreme Court to gather their opinions on whether the Senate can be reformed on a number of different fronts.

For the opposition members merely to suggest right now that the Senate be abolished, when in fact they do not even know if that can be achieved constitutionally, is at the very least extremely poorly thought out, and at the best disingenuous or, as my colleague calls it, hypocritical.

• (1320)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Marc-André Morin (Laurentides—Labelle, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I admire the parliamentary secretary's optimism, but I think he is a bit naive if he thinks that it will be easier to sell the provinces on holding votes in each province, with the same rules, at their expense, and then to all agree on a standard procedure across the country, from coast to coast. That seems very difficult to me. I think it will be easier to convince the provinces to get rid of this institution, which is used for all kinds of stunts. For example, a senator wanted to get his book translated, so he read it out in the chamber, in order to get an inexpensive translation into French.

*Business of Supply*

It is time to wake up. There are all kinds of expressions that work here, for example, “stop flogging a dead horse” or “putting a Band-Aid on a wooden leg”. I could go on.

[*English*]

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question, but frankly he weakens his argument. He is supposing that he knows the positions of the provinces. He does not. No one does. He does not even know what the constitutional arguments may be. That is why we referenced this to the Supreme Court.

It is entirely presumptuous for the NDP to think that it knows what Canadians feel and what the provinces feel about the role of the Senate. We need to engage them, but first we need to get a clear, concise, precise answer from the Supreme Court on what constitutional requirements there may be for any meaningful reform, including abolishment. To suggest, as the NDP has done, that we can merely abolish the Senate and have the full support of all provinces and territories is absolutely foolhardy and wrong.

**Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his very learned speech. He is a veteran of this chamber and knows what he is talking about.

The first thing I would like to ask him is whether he can speak about what he thinks the intentions of the New Democratic Party might be insofar as abolishing the Senate. I know from past history around the world that when very socialist leaning people are elected they immediately clamp down on democratic institutions to further their own agenda. I would hate to see a \$20 billion carbon tax not stopped by the Senate.

Could the member speak about what he supposes is the impetus from the NDP on this matter?

**Mr. Tom Lukiwski:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague and good friend from Wetaskiwin for his question. Obviously any opinion I have is only my opinion, but as I said at the outset, this debate is more about politics than about substantive change. I think that is quite clear to any Canadian who is tuned in today.

Again, I would go back to many of the comments I made earlier. Let us wait to see what the Supreme Court has to say about the issues we brought forward. Let us not play politics on something as important as this. Let us wait and do things right: put politics out of the equation.

**Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am thankful for the opportunity to speak to one of my favourite subjects.

I would like to acknowledge that I will be sharing my time with the member for Hull—Aylmer.

I will focus my remarks a bit differently than some members, simply because, to me, a lot of these scandals that are happening right now with respect to expenses and where people live is really a symptom of the problem and not the real issue. I am glad that Canadians are focused on it because it is a real part of the problem. However, it is not the biggest problem. The biggest problem is the direction we are going in, whether it is status quo or moving to an elected Senate.

We should recognize that right now Canadians think the Senate sits and does not do any real harm; how much good it does is questionable, so why would we upset the apple cart? What we need to remember is that under the current system every appointed senator's vote carries more weight than those of us who are elected. That is by virtue of the fact that bills have to pass in both houses. There are fewer seats in the other house; therefore each vote carries more weight in our parliamentary system. This is not some add-on or little accessory to our parliamentary system; this is a key focal point.

Fellow Canadians must keep in mind that these scandals involve the people who make the laws and that there is no accountability. At the end of this Parliament, those of us who want to be re-elected have to go to the Canadian people and be accountable for the decisions we made and the things we did or did not do. That house does not report to the bosses, who are Canadians. That is the focal point of what we are talking about.

In my view it is critical to understand that we do not have the luxury of the traditional Canadian way of approaching things. We like Goldilocks solutions. Some issues are a little too hot, some are a little too cold, and we like the soft spot or the warm spot in the middle. That is the Canadian way. We look for compromises and ways for people to get along.

The problem in this case is that what looks like a Goldilocks solution is as dangerous as the status quo. I would argue that it is even more dangerous. The status quo or abolishing means that the middle is not voting. That is not the Goldilocks solution. I am shocked that there is any member of the west in the House who is willing to elect the Senate, give senators even more power and let them utilize all of the constitutional authority they have. If I ever ran for an open seat in the Senate and got elected as a senator, I would certainly exercise every bit of the mandate that I have been given, just as I do now as a member of Parliament.

In 1980, the Supreme Court of Canada stated this with respect to electing our Senate:

The substitution of a system of election for a system of appointment would involve a radical change in the nature of one of the component parts of Parliament.

The Supreme Court of Canada stated that to elect members to the Senate is a radical change. That means that radical change would entrench the following: British Columbia, with over 4.5 million people, would get six seats; Alberta, with 3.8 million people, would get six seats; Manitoba, with 1.2 million people, would get six seats; Saskatchewan, with just barely over a million people, would get six seats; Newfoundland, with a population of 512,000 people, would get six seats; and, just to round it out, P.E.I., with a 150,000 people, would get four seats.

● (1325)

Why on earth would any member of the government, in particular those from the west, support electing the Senate to entrench that power, when the numbers are so unfair? If I were from B.C., I would begin every speech about the Senate with how unfair it is that there are not enough seats in my province to reflect our population and that it is unfair, undemocratic and needs to be improved.

*Business of Supply*

In fact, I was just at the procedure and House affairs committee an hour ago, and the whole exercise around redoing the boundary commission reports is all about the number of people per riding. It is an important gauge of our democracy, yet here we are with a Senate that is extremely skewed against the west, and the government members seem to be willing to entrench that, exacerbate it and make that unfairness go on forever.

I just want to say to my friends in western Canada that as a proud Ontarian, I will stand up every chance I get for their right to proper representation, even if some of their own members will not.

I have a couple of last things.

Some of the good work and the good deeds the Senate does are often pointed out. It is possible to point to very good studies that help all of us, but the issue is whether the people who authored those reports should also be given the right to vote on laws.

That is the point. It is not whether they do good reports or not, or whether they do good deeds; it is a question of whether or not they should be entitled to pass judgment and vote on our laws, particularly when their vote has more strength than our vote. Is that really the way we want a modern democracy to operate?

If we need good deeds done, we have lots of good citizens we can call on to be on a royal commission or a blue-ribbon task force or a stand-alone commission. There are lots of people willing to do that. It will cost us some money, but it will be a lot less than the \$100 million a year the Senate costs. Most importantly, we will not be bestowing upon them the right to vote on our laws. In a democracy, they should not be able to vote on laws unless they are accountable.

By the way, the government's current proposal to elect the Senate means that by law they cannot be accountable. They would run in an election on a platform of "Here is what I will do; I promise to do this, that and the other." Then, if they were elected members of Parliament, they would come here and spend a few years, and at the end of the Parliament they would go back to Canadians and say "Here is what I promised. How did I do? Are you going to give me the right to go back, yes or no?"

Under the current government proposal, they can make any promise they want. They would serve a nine-year term and then be prohibited by law from running again. How are they supposed to be accountable? It gives no accountability, and that is what democracy is about. That is why this proposal does not work.

On this whole notion that the Senate is a chamber of sober second thought, spare me. First of all, structurally they have whips. Why is there a need for a whip if everybody is independent? Why is there a need, if there are no caucus positions? Why is there a need for a whip if everybody is supposed to give everything sober second thought?

They have a whip because it is a caucus system in all but name. There are a few senators who are truly independent, but most go to the weekly caucus meetings, and they do not rotate through the three caucuses. They go to their home caucus, the Liberal caucus or the Conservative caucus. They say, "Yes, sir. Yes, sir." to the Prime Minister at the end of that caucus meeting, just like very other member, and they march into the Senate and do what their partisan politics dictate that they need to do.

Mr. Speaker, you are indicating my time has concluded, and I can only hope that the time for the Senate is equally concluded soon. It is the best thing we could do for this country, and the sooner we get rid of the Senate, the stronger our democracy will be.

● (1330)

**Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his passionate speech. I would like him to answer a question without dodging it.

His party is hoping that the rule of 7/50 will prevail, and not unanimity. Does that mean his party is ready to get rid of the regional veto act first?

Second, if Quebec is against it, does that mean abolishing the Senate without the view of Quebec? If it is not the case, if the NDP does not want to do that to Quebec, in which province is the NDP willing to abolish the Senate against its own view?

Can I have a very clear answer to this question?

**Mr. David Christopherson:** Mr. Speaker, the answer is contained in the motion itself that we are debating. The whole point of this is to begin and initiate a discussion with the provinces, because they are equal partners in our Constitution.

Therefore, before we get into all these kinds of academic games that the member wants to get into, let us first start with a basic premise that his party was not very good at and that the current government does not do at all, which is to sit down and ask the provinces what they think and what role they want to play. Let us start with that kind of confederation.

**Mr. Jim Hillyer (Lethbridge, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, is the member suggesting that we cannot have sober or independent thought just because there is a caucus? Does that mean that no members of the NDP in this House have sober or second thought because they are part of a caucus? Our party is allowed to be sober and thoughtful.

**Mr. David Christopherson:** Mr. Speaker, there are days I dream of being offered this opportunity.

However, the point is not whether we individually bring independent notions. Of course we all do. I say to my colleague through you, Mr. Speaker, that yes, we all do in our caucuses.

However, when we structurally put together a chamber that is supposed to be non-aligned—that is what the "sober second thought" means—it does not matter what the parties have done, it does not matter when the next election is and it does not matter who the prime minister is; what matters is the law in front of me and whether I think it is good or bad.

*Business of Supply*

I submit through you, Mr. Speaker, to the hon. member that in that place, that is not what happens in most cases. They have whips, they have party leaders and they attend caucuses because in large part they follow the partisanship of this place, and the rest of it is a scam.

• (1335)

[Translation]

**Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my excellent colleague, the member for Hamilton Centre, for his passionate speech. It is always a pleasure to listen to him speak. We can see how passionate he is and that he is motivated to change our country for the better. When we share our time and work with people like him, we can see that it is possible to make this kind of reform.

My question for him is about the Senate and the answer we often hear from the government. The government tells us that its proposed reform in Bill C-7 is the best and that we should adopt it.

The government's proposal does not make any changes to the age of eligibility for being a senator. If their bill were adopted, senators would be nominated and someone who is 28 years old, like me, could not run. Since I am not yet 30, I could not be a senator.

I would like to hear what my colleague thinks about that. What kind of problems could that cause with respect to representation?

[English]

**Mr. David Christopherson:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question and for the fantastic work she is doing on this file.

Quite frankly, it is a bad bill the government has in front of the House in terms of reforming the Senate. It is made worse by the fact that the government did not even bother to take care of what is clearly unacceptable policy and unacceptable legislation in this country in this year—that is, that there is an age limit. People can come here as long as they are the age of majority, but they cannot go to the other place until they are 30. It is completely unacceptable and undemocratic. It points to how little a democratic lens the government put the bill through. Not only did the government not consult with Canadians, it did not even take into account basic values, meaning that if people are old enough to serve in the House of Commons, they ought to be old enough to serve in any other chamber in this country.

[Translation]

**Ms. Nicole Turmel (Hull—Aylmer, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I must say that the hon. member for Hamilton Centre is a hard act to follow, given the quality of his speech and his enthusiasm. Yet, I am nevertheless pleased to speak today in the House to support the motion presented by the hon. member for Toronto—Danforth.

This motions calls on the government, in consultation with the provinces and territories, to take immediate and necessary steps towards abolishing the Senate.

The Senate is a costly, outdated and unaccountable institution made up of unelected members.

Today, Canadians have lost confidence in this institution. They know that the Liberals and the Conservatives have used the Senate to reward their friends. They also know that the Senate rarely makes

things better. From the time Canada was founded in 1867 until 1992, the Senate passed 99% of the bills that were submitted without any amendments in 95% of the cases.

Things have not changed much since then, except perhaps with regard to opposition bills, which rarely receive support from senators.

When he was in opposition, the current Prime Minister swore, with his hand on his heart, that he would clean up the Senate and that he would not appoint any senators.

After seven years in office, the Prime Minister has appointed over half of the senators—58 of the 105—currently in the Senate.

Many failed Conservative candidates and Conservative Party fundraisers now sit in the upper chamber. A good example of this is when the Prime Minister appointed Josée Verner and Larry Smith to the Senate after they were defeated in the 2011 election. Everyone remembers that.

Canadians are tired of friends of the government being given preferential treatment. They are tired of paying while the government tables one austerity budget after another and keeps saying that there is no money. They are tired of making sacrifices and tightening their belts.

Canadians' belts are so tight that hundreds of thousands of them are having trouble making ends meet, despite the fact that they are working full time. That is unacceptable in a country such as ours.

Ask those people who get up early each day and work hard if they think it is normal that Senator Wallin ran up \$350,000 in travel expenses. That would be enough to pay 57 seniors their old age security benefits for a year. For anyone wondering, Ms. Wallin has cost taxpayers \$1,285,000 over the past three years.

Do you think Canadians think it is fair that Senator Duffy, who claimed housing expenses that he was not entitled to, simply has to apologize and reimburse the fees in order to be cleared and not worry anymore? The answer is absolutely not. Canadians find it scandalous, and we understand them.

If someone who is unemployed makes a fraudulent claim, their benefits are cut off. If a senator does the same thing, he is simply asked to apologize and pay back the amount. Canadians want to get rid of this double standard.

I remind the members of the House that Senator Duffy, an unelected, unaccountable official, like all his senator colleagues, has cost taxpayers more than \$1,165,000 over the past three years.

What would our constituents say if we asked them whether they agree with paying up to \$7 million so that Patrick Brazeau could be a senator until he retires? Mr. Brazeau is currently facing very serious criminal charges. He was appointed by the Prime Minister for life in 2009. If he sits until age 75, Canadians will have to pay \$7 million.



*Business of Supply*

Keep in mind that before the Conservatives decided to kick him out of their caucus, Mr. Brazeau was one of the Senate's champion absentee members. He missed 25% of meetings between June 2011 and April 2012. He also missed 65% of meetings of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Peoples, of which he is a member, and 31% of meetings of the Standing Committee on Human Rights, of which he was the deputy-chair. During that time, taxpayers continued to pay 100% of his salary, and the Prime Minister continued to tolerate the repeated absences of a member of his caucus.

• (1340)

But Mr. Brazeau was not the only one to attend the Senate sparingly. Nineteen senators missed more than one-quarter of the sitting days in 2011-12. The average number of days worked by a senator in 2011-12 was 56 days. That means a great deal of money has been spent while many people are suffering.

The Senate will now cost \$92.5 million a year. I say "now" because the Conservatives have just increased the budget allotted to Senators. Over the next 10 years, Canadian taxpayers will spend some \$92.5 million on the Senate. Over 10 years, that amount could be much better invested. For instance, it could be invested in health, through transfer payments to the provinces that the Conservatives have slashed. It could be invested in building social housing to support people who do not even have a roof over their head in a wintry country like Canada. It could be invested in small and medium-sized businesses, to improve their growth and their ability to hire more people. It could also be invested in ways to fight food insecurity, which is seen in a number of aboriginal communities. It could be invested to help our regions that the government is emptying and abandoning with its employment insurance reform. There are dozens of better ways to spend public money than the government's plan to spend it on the Senate.

Parties that continue to defend the Senate will have to explain to Canadians why the operating costs associated with this relic of the 19th century are justified. I hope that the Liberals, who have lately started to side with the Conservatives, will be voting with us. The hon. member for Toronto-Centre, interim leader of the Liberal Party, has already spoken in favour of abolishing the Senate. I hope he will have the courage of his convictions and vote in favour of this motion.

Today, the parties represented in this House have the opportunity to send a clear signal to the Canadian public. By voting in favour of our motion, they will demonstrate that they are serious in their intentions to avoid waste in public spending.

At least one Conservative agrees with us, and we commend him. Michael Fortier, a former Conservative minister, fundraiser and senator, recently spoke in favour of abolishing the Senate. Mr. Fortier was able to see the operations of that institution from the inside and his comments are not flattering. Among other things, he said he simply did not see the usefulness of the Senate and he felt that the practice of appointing friends of the regime is clearly not optimal: a mild way of saying that it makes the Senate dysfunctional.

It is time to move ahead and reform this country to make it better, and one necessary step is to abolish the Senate.

• (1345)

**Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her remarks.

Our esteemed colleague, the hon. member for Toronto—Danforth, said earlier today that if the Constitution requires unanimity in order to abolish the Senate, it would be difficult, but if it is 7/50 it might be possible. I hope the hon. member will give me a straight answer, because up to now I have not had any reply from the NDP.

Would the NDP be willing to abolish the Senate against the wishes of Quebec?

**Ms. Nycole Turmel:** Mr. Speaker, we have made it very clear in our speeches and our motion that the discussions about abolishing the Senate must be held in co-operation with all the provinces. That is our position and we will maintain it. The Conservatives have had seven years to begin discussions with the provinces. That has not been done and it must be done, for the good of all Canadians.

**Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the official opposition is playing with constitutional fire. This is not a real proposal to abolish the Senate. The Senate exists as an institution in Canada's Constitution.

[*English*]

It exists in the Constitution Act and requires a unanimous adoption of motions across 10 provincial legislatures and the Parliament of Canada. I am certain the province of Quebec would make its demands made in Meech Lake in advance of any abolition proposal.

We are looking at an official opposition that is proposing to play with constitutional fire, reopen the divisive debates of the 1980s and 1990s. I do not think that is what any part of the country wants or that it reflects a responsible proposal from the official opposition.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Nycole Turmel:** Mr. Speaker, the Conservative Party's solution is to send the issue to the Supreme Court rather than having a real debate

For every problem, there is a solution. If discussions had been held, perhaps we would not be debating the abolition of the Senate here today in the House. We would be talking about the real problems that affect Canadians, such as poverty, for one. We would also be talking about the economy in general and not about abolishing the Senate. If the discussion of a problem gets held back, this is what results.

**Mr. Mathieu Ravignat (Pontiac, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, what our friends in the other parties do not realize is that this is a fundamental issue that has to do with the democracy and legitimacy of the parliamentary system. We are talking about \$90 million in spending and a lack of accountability. Something simply must be done. I do not agree that Quebecers do not see the lack of democracy in the parliamentary system as a problem. They are just as concerned as other Canadians.

I would like to hear what the hon. member for Hull—Aylmer has to say about democracy and renewal.

*Business of Supply*

● (1350)

**Ms. Nycole Turmel:** Mr. Speaker, indeed, the system we have now is not necessarily a democracy, which is sad. As we have already said, if we had discussions and talked about the situation, the real problems and Senate spending, as well as its cost and value, I think it would answer all the questions about the present problem. They are talking a lot about value for money and productivity. Speaking of value for money, I mentioned the average number of days senators were at work in their chamber. For the sake of democracy and people's well-being, we must discuss the problem in order to solve it.

[English]

**Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, sometimes people who perform at a concert will stand up and dedicate a song to somebody. I thought I might dedicate this intervention today to the memory of the Hon. Stan Waters, Canada's first elected senator, a man who demonstrated that having elected senators was definitely a step up from having a fully appointed Senate and who demonstrated as well, I think very clearly, that having an elected Senate was superior to having no Senate at all, no sober second thought at all.

I want to divide my remarks today. I only have 10 minutes, but I will try to divide them into three sections. First, I want to talk about the idea of bicameralism. Second, I want to talk about why the reference questions are being presented as they are to complex form. Three, I want to talk a bit about the way in which the Supreme Court should address this issue.

Let me start with the issue of bicameralism. The New Democratic Party proposes to cause Canada to become a unicameral federation, a federation in which the federal Parliament has one house only. This would make us unique among the federations of the world. Australia, our good friends whose country is marginally smaller than ours, has a bicameral Parliament. Then there are the United States, the Austrians, the Belgians. Germany, which is also a federation, has a bicameral Parliament. Switzerland has a bicameral Parliament. There are some countries that are not federations, but they also have bicameral assemblies.

The point I am making is, we would be venturing out in a direction that is very distinct from the pattern that has been engaged in by other countries. It is very distinct from the vision the Fathers of Confederation had. They spent more time discussing in the 1864 Confederation debate the issue of what to do with the upper chamber than they did on anything else, very nearly more than everything else put together. It was a widely discussed issue in all the newspapers at the time.

While we may feel the current Senate does not accurately reflect what their intentions were, having no Senate definitely would not achieve what they were after.

In all fairness, to amend the constitution, we could say that their vision was out of date and that we were amending it to reflect a more modern understanding, and that would be legitimate. However, let us be aware of the fact that this is a major departure. That was the first point I wanted to make.

The second point is to talk about the nature of the reference question. Canada has a constitution that is unique in one other respect. We do not have a single amending formula in our constitution. To amend the Canadian constitution, depending on the part that is being amended, it could take place by means of a unilateral amendment passed here or in the Senate; or a unilateral amendment passed in a single provincial legislature; or it can require an amendment passed both in the provincial legislature and here; or it can involve the approval of seven provinces with half of the population, the famous 7/50 formula; or, in certain cases, unanimity is required.

There are aspects of the constitution on which it is not clear which amending formula ought to be used. This has been a considerable source of frustration as we try to work our way through the Senate, where it seems likely, although not certain, that more than one amending formula must be used, depending on the kind of amendment that is made and on the part of the Senate that is being altered.

If, for example, we want to eliminate the requirement that senators must own \$4,000 of real estate in the province they represent, can we do that through a unilateral amendment, or is some other amending formula required?

If we want to deal with the question of independence of senators, whether they are going to be independent, what formula must we use?

If we are going to consider abolishing the Senate, as the New Democrats propose, what is required? On that one we know, at the very least it is the 7/50 formula. It is conceivable that it might be the unanimity formula. This is the source of several of the questions that are being placed before the Supreme Court in the package of reference questions as I would describe it.

The questions are broken up, dealing with Senate term limits, the Senate appointment consultation, property qualifications, Senate abolition. On the one dealing with Senate abolition, I will read what it says in the question:

● (1355)

Can an amendment to the Constitution of Canada to abolish the Senate be accomplished by the general amending procedure set out in section 38 of the Constitution Act, 1982, by one of the following methods:

Then three different ways of potentially amending the Constitution to abolish the Senate are contemplated. Would any of these work? The attempt here is to determine whether or not we can actually use the 7/50 formula at all, or whether we have to resort to the unanimity formula.

It should be clear that either of these formulae would involve a very considerable amount of work trying to achieve the consent of the provinces. I am certain we would find very quickly that opening up the Constitution in this manner would lead to many requests for other things. It might well lead to requests from the provinces for some form of constitutional amendment and change to the Senate other than abolition. That is certainly a likelihood.

*Statements by Members***STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS***[English]***CANADIAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION**

However, as a starting point, there really is no point in going to the provinces until we know what the legalities are. Does Prince Edward Island hold a veto, as does every other province if unanimity is required, or can we achieve agreement if only three provinces are holding out and we have provinces representing half the population? We had better figure that out before we proceed forward on a particular strategy. We certainly should not shut down the other options, which might indeed be the kinds of things that the various provincial legislatures would like to see and indeed the people of Canada would like to see.

The last topic is the issue of the tools that are available to the Supreme Court as it goes forward in dealing with these questions. We ask questions like what it means for senators to be independent. Does that mean that having some form of election process is a compromise? Does it mean that the potential for re-election compromises their independence? Does having a term that is eight or ten years long, one or the other, allow them to be genuinely independent?

To determine that, one has to go back and examine what was meant by independence in the minds of those who were discussing what would become the British North America Act, when they were debating it in the 1860s; and not only that, but those who were discussing similar issues for the prior institution that was replaced by the Senate. I refer to the legislative council of the united Province of Canada, which was implemented under the Act of Union of 1840 and then was changed from an appointed to an elected institution in 1856. There are records of debates dating back to these times. They are not readily available, but they need to be consulted to ensure a fulsome presentation of the facts to the members of the Supreme Court on this and other similar questions that are highly technical in nature.

I mention all of this because of the fact that I am involved in an effort to try to take many of these documents—many of which are available only in limited numbers, frequently in documentary form, in various archives—scan them, make them available and put them online through a website that will be called [originaldocuments.ca](http://originaldocuments.ca). Our intention is to have as close to an exhaustive compilation of these documents as possible in time for the Supreme Court's hearings, for those who are advocating on both sides of each of the questions involved and also those who are going to ultimately be ruling on these questions.

Letting the process continue as the government has laid things out in Senate reform—which is to say allowing for the Supreme Court to consider these options, to provide thoughtful, thorough responses to these questions, as it did on a previous ruling that dealt with Senate reform about 30 or 32 years ago—will allow us to move forward in whatever direction seems best to the people and the provinces of Canada. That is preferable to moving in the direction the NDP is proposing today through this motion.

● (1400)

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** When the Chair gave the floor to the hon. member for Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, it was noted there were 10 minutes before question period; however, the hon. member will have 10 minutes remaining for presentation, to be followed by 10 minutes of questions and comments following question period as well.

**Mr. Brent Rathgeber (Edmonton—St. Albert, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, private member's bill, Bill C-461, the CBC and public service disclosure and transparency act, would correct a well-documented deficiency in the Access to Information Act, which allows the CBC to refuse to disclose documents if, in its discretion, it believes the documents affect its creative, journalistic or programming activities. This blanket exclusion would be replaced with a discretionary injury-based exemption.

The bill would also amend the definition of “exempt personal information” in the Privacy Act to allow specific salary and responsibility access requests for the senior levels of the federal service.

However, there is much misunderstanding and confusion regarding this bill. Some opposition members have called the bill an attack on the CBC. It is not. CBC is in no way being singled out. In fact, the prejudice test would provide enhanced protection to recognize the unique position a public broadcaster is in vis-à-vis the state.

Transparency and sunlight are fundamental to open democracy and indispensable in holding government to account, so I encourage all hon. members to support this private member's bill, unamended, at all stages.

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**FOOD BANKS**

**Ms. Isabelle Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, a UN report released yesterday showed us that the Conservative government is failing Canadians, failing to reduce poverty and failing to help Canadians thrive. Everywhere in Canada, more and more families are going to food banks. According to HungerCount 2012, there is a 31% increase in demand for food banks since 2008. I see this in my riding. The NDG Food Depot fights to feed the community. Up to 800 people come to this food bank per week. Thirty-five per cent of its clients are children, and this is going up. Fifty-five per cent are on welfare, and fourteen per cent have no income because of bureaucratic obstacles. Canadians have a right to food security.

Where the Conservative government is failing, community organizations try to help. I thank the following organizations for the work they do to feed my community: the Meals on Wheels program at Volunteer West Island; Dorval Community Aid; Saint-Vincent-de Paul Society in Lachine and Ville Saint-Pierre; Extended Hands in Lachine; and the NDG Food Depot.

*Statements by Members***BLANKET BC**

**Mr. Randy Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate my constituent, Gregory Ould, the founder of Blanket BC, a charity that collects blankets and distributes them to those in need in our local communities. Recently, Blanket BC reached the milestone of having distributed 100,000 blankets to those who find themselves out in the cold.

I also applaud Ben Ould, one of the unofficial co-founders of Blanket BC and its most active volunteer. As a warm-hearted blanketeer, Ben works several hours every week to help those in need. When he is not volunteering for Blanket BC, he might be found every day out picking up garbage on his Adopt-A-Block route, or this remarkable young man might be found at elementary school, because he is just nine years old. Ben and his five-year-old sister, Emma, who also volunteers, are setting a good example for us all to follow.

I invite all members of the House to join me in thanking members of the Ould family for their compassionate leadership with Blanket BC. They are making Canada stronger and better.

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**MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS**

**Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, notable progress has been made toward achieving the millennium development goals, or MDGs. Child deaths have dropped; more children than ever before are attending primary school; global poverty continues to decline; access to safe drinking water has been expanded; and investments in fighting AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis have saved millions. There is widespread feeling among policy makers and civil society that the MDGs have played an important part in securing progress and that globally agreed goals should continue beyond 2015.

There is also widespread understanding that the world is undergoing dangerous climate change and other serious environmental problems and that worldwide environmental objectives need a higher profile. As described by Bill Gates, the MDGs became a type of global report card; they generated incentives to improve performance. Canada must play a role in supporting ambitious globally shared economic, environmental and social goals beyond 2015.

\* \* \*

● (1405)

**BOWL FOR KIDS SAKE**

**Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Oxford, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to highlight an event that took place in my riding of Oxford last month: Bowl for Kids Sake. This event was organized by Big Brothers Big Sisters of Woodstock in support of its youth mentorship program. This three-day event brought together various companies and individuals from across our community and saw 68 teams dressed up in costumes from their favourite decade. The goal this year was to raise \$40,000, and I am happy to announce it reached its goal. Members of our community really stepped up and enthusiastically displayed their support. I congratulate the members of Big Brothers Big Sisters of Woodstock for organizing this

successful event and for all their hard work and dedication to the youth in our community. I also congratulate all the teams and community partners involved, for their time and support.

The fun continues with Curl for Kids Sake happening in Ingersoll on May 2-4, and in Tillsonburg on May 10 and 11.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**ORDER OF MILITARY MERIT**

**Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, today I had the honour of attending the Governor General's ceremony to award the Order of Military Merit at Rideau Hall.

The Order of Military Merit recognizes distinctive merit and exceptional service displayed by the men and women of the Canadian Forces, both regular and reserve, who have demonstrated dedication and devotion beyond the call of duty.

Today this service medal was awarded to Master Warrant Officer François Vidal, originally from Châteauguay. Master Warrant Officer Vidal joined the Canadian Forces in 1989 as an air defence artilleryman. He has taken part in four Canadian missions: one in the Persian Gulf, one in Israel and two in Afghanistan. I am very proud of Master Warrant Officer Vidal's dedication and achievements, and I was pleased to be able to congratulate him personally.

Canadian Forces personnel exemplify honour and sacrifice, and all Canadians have a duty to recognize the contribution they make to creating a safer, more democratic world.

Congratulations to all the recipients of the order, and especially to Master Warrant Officer François Vidal.

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[English]

**KOREAN WAR VETERAN**

**Mr. Phil McColeman (Brant, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, 2013 marks the 60th anniversary of the Korean war armistice and the year of the Korean veteran. Therefore, it is fitting that I rise to share the story of Private Robert Clark from Brantford, a soldier described as a keen and conscientious man who was not afraid of work and exhibited leadership qualities. He lost his life in Korea.

Ben Clark, his brother, recently learned a great deal about Robert, so when a friend visited South Korea, Ben asked him to take a picture of his brother's gravesite. However, the photograph showed an error in the age displayed on the tombstone. The thought of his brother's tombstone being wrong for so long just did not seem right, and Ben was determined to do something about it.

Thankfully, working with my staff, the tombstone has been corrected and a small piece of justice for the memory of Private Clark has been achieved.

*Statements by Members*

Across Canada, there are untold stories to be heard, fleeting memories to preserve and opportunities to pay tribute. We thank the Clarks for doing just that and for helping to ensure that another piece of our national history is never forgotten.

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**CANADIAN CITIZENSHIP CHALLENGE**

**Mr. Ray Boughen (Palliser, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, new Canadians must learn about Canada to become citizens, and it follows that all Canadians should be able to answer the same questions about their home and native land.

The Historica-Dominion Institute challenged youth from grade 7 to 12 to put their national knowledge to the test by studying for and writing a mock citizenship exam. Yesterday, I had the honour of meeting two winners of the 2012 edition of the Canadian Citizenship Challenge. Carly Firth, from my riding of Palliser, and Jason Losier, from my colleague's riding of Acadie—Bathurst, have shown their pride in Canada by working through and learning about our history and the people who made Canada what it is today.

I congratulate Carly, Jason and all the 44,000 students who discovered Canada through this challenge.

\* \* \*

**WAGE EARNER PROTECTION**

**Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, when a hundred people lost their jobs at Vertis Communications in Stevensville they did not think they would be left fighting to get \$2.7 million in severance packages and termination pay, which they deserve and the company owes them. Unfortunately, this is the position they find themselves in after U.S.-based Vertis filed for bankruptcy in the United States, not Canada, and then closed its doors in Canada.

The workers have turned to the federal government to fight on their behalf under the wage earner protection program, a program designed to compensate eligible workers for unpaid severance and termination pay when their employer declares bankruptcy and goes into receivership. Just like countless times before, however, the government has turned its back on the workers in Niagara and ignored their pleas for help, and once again it is hard-working Canadians who are left out in the cold.

American companies enjoy millions of dollars of corporate tax breaks in our country.

We would like to say this is an exceptional case, but under the Conservative government's watch, we are seeing more and more U.S.-based companies shut down facilities in Canada, declare bankruptcy in the United States and deny workers what is owed.

Workers and their families are sick and tired. They deserve to get paid. I hope the government will find that—

●(1410)

**The Speaker:** The hon. member for Kenora.

**PUBLIC SAFETY**

**Mr. Greg Rickford (Kenora, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Canadians know they can count on this government to give police the tools they need to do their job. This is true in all communities across Canada, including aboriginal communities.

Our government has stood up for matrimonial real property rights on reserve, tougher sentences for dangerous criminals and funding to keep young people out of gangs.

Shockingly, the NDP has opposed our government on each and every one of these initiatives. Actually, I am not that surprised.

[*Translation*]

Yesterday the Minister of Public Safety announced that our government will continue to support existing first nations policing agreements. This is an important part of our plan, which will help keep our streets and communities safe.

[*English*]

This initiative has received wide support from first nation chiefs, including those from the great Kenora riding, who concur with National Chief Atleo, who said, “[S]ecurity is of paramount importance to our people...so I think it's important” that this is a long-term signal, as the Minister of Public Safety had confirmed yesterday.

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**JACK LAYTON**

**Mr. Craig Scott (Toronto—Danforth, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the inspiring story of the late Jack Layton, the former leader of the federal NDP and my predecessor in Toronto—Danforth, is captured in a brand new movie, which is simply and appropriately titled *Jack*.

It is a moving film about a man's love for Canadians and Canada and his eternal optimism that by working together, we can build a better country.

[*Translation*]

As my friend Jack used to say, if we work together, we can create a fairer and more equitable Canada.

[*English*]

The movie will be airing this Sunday, March 10, at 8 p.m. across the country, and at 8:30 p.m. on the east coast.

I would like to salute the efforts of the producer of the movie, Laszlo Barna, his immensely talented crew and the CBC for making the movie possible. It is my sincere hope and belief that Jack's story and this movie will motivate us all to work together for a better and more caring society.

[*Translation*]

As Jack said, “Let us be loving, hopeful and optimistic and we will change the world.”

*Statements by Members**[English]***INTERNATIONAL HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE ALLIANCE**

**Mr. John Carmichael (Don Valley West, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today on the occasion of Canada assuming the position of chair of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance. The IHRA is an inter-governmental body comprising government officials and experts from 31 countries to support Holocaust remembrance, research and education. Our Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism is attending the handover ceremony in Berlin today.

On the initiative of our Prime Minister, Canada became actively involved with the IHRA in 2007, and we became a full member in 2009. We can all be proud of Canada's leading role in Holocaust education, fighting anti-Semitism and sharing best practices with other countries.

We must never let our guard down against the pernicious evil of anti-Semitism. The Holocaust stands as history's greatest atrocity. Thus it remains essential that we ensure that such hatred and prejudice will never again rise to such an extreme.

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**FRONTIER COLLEGE**

**Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, this year marks the 100th anniversary of Frontier College in Nova Scotia.

Frontier College, a national volunteer-based literacy organization, was founded by Alfred Fitzpatrick, who felt passionate about bringing literacy skills to workers in logging camps, mines or railway lines.

The mission of helping new Canadians improve their language skills continues today. Volunteers still work with children, youth, adults and aboriginal communities to improve literacy skills. As its motto says, literacy is learning for life. I know the House will want to congratulate Frontier College as it marks 100 years of helping Nova Scotians learn to read and write.

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**NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF CANADA**

**Ms. Joan Crockatt (Calgary Centre, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Keystone XL pipeline project passed a really important hurdle last week. Conservatives know that it will add to our economic prosperity by creating thousands of jobs on Canadian soil. No wonder thousands of workers are lining up behind the project, including Christopher Smillie, of the AFL-CIO's Canadian building trades, who testified at committee last week.

Calgarians certainly know. I have constituents waiting, sitting unemployed, for this project to be given the green light, so why does the NDP not get it? The NDP pretends to stand up for Canadian workers and families, but really, it is branding this entire sector a disease. They are risking thousands of jobs, and, unbelievably, fighting against this job-creating project. The NDP has turned its back on Canadians and their families.

To the Canadian workers who count on Canada's resource sector for their livelihoods, we say, workers unite behind the Conservative

government to build Canada, create jobs and ensure long-term prosperity.

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● (1415)

*[Translation]***EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE**

**Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle (Rivière-du-Nord, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, we knew that the Conservatives were harassing unemployed workers with home visits and that they even question the delivery dates of new mothers. Now we have learned that they have spy classes to teach their employees how to shadow unemployed Canadians.

What is next? Hidden cameras in employment insurance paperwork? GPS bracelets to track the unemployed?

Instead of investing in job creation and training, the Conservatives have created their own mini CIA to keep track of unemployed workers.

Workers are sick and tired of being treated like criminals and fraudsters, while real criminals, like Arthur Porter, are being rewarded by the Conservatives.

Workers know that the NDP stands up for them. They are going to give the Conservatives their due at the next election.

To paraphrase Vigneault, sow the wind and reap the whirlwind.

Perhaps they do not even realize it—

**The Speaker:** The hon. member for Scarborough Centre.

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*[English]***NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF CANADA**

**Ms. Roxanne James (Scarborough Centre, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, last week the NDP was surprised by the fact that its housing plan would cost a whopping \$5.5 billion. One would think by now that the official opposition would actually know how much a proposal would cost Canadian taxpayers before putting it forward, but unfortunately, this is not the first time. They have put forward other risky spending schemes, like the 45-day work year that would cost Canadians almost \$4 billion.

*Oral Questions*

NDP members just do not seem to do their homework when it comes to spending taxpayers' dollars, but they certainly do their homework when trying to take our dollars. In their last platform, written in black and white, they proposed a carbon tax that would generate revenues of over \$20 billion. Canadians do not want a carbon tax that would raise the cost on everything they need to support their families, and they certainly do not want risky spending schemes at a time of economic uncertainty. That is why Conservatives will continue to oppose risky spending and the NDP's \$20-billion carbon tax.

world and is backed by the performance of the Canadian economy. In spite of the tremendous difficulties that continue to exist, the global uncertainty, the Canadian economy has managed to create 900,000 net new jobs since the end of the recession, and that is due, in no small measure, to the good efforts of the Minister of Finance.

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**ETHICS**

**Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the finance minister lobbied the CRTC on behalf of a Conservative donor, a grave breach of ethics. Now officials from his own department are calling him gravely incompetent as well.

When a minister under Brian Mulroney phoned a judge, he was dropped from cabinet. When a minister under Jean Chrétien lobbied the CRTC, he was dropped from cabinet. When the Prime Minister's own aboriginal affairs minister recently wrote a letter to Tax Court, he was dropped from cabinet. Why is the Prime Minister blind to his finance minister's repeated and inexcusable failures, and why do the rules of Parliament not apply to him?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the real question is why the NDP and its leader are blind not just to the achievements of the Minister of Finance but to the superior performance of the Canadian economy. The Canadian economy is part of the global economy that continues to have significant challenges, but we are very fortunate to live in this country and very fortunate to have the firm and steady direction that has been given by the Minister of Finance over these years.

**Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, one of the main reasons we are lucky to live in this country is we have stable institutions based on rules that apply to everyone.

The Prime Minister has just invented a new rule: if someone is competent, the old rules do not apply. Will he publish a list of ministers he continues to consider competent compared to his aboriginal affairs minister, whom he fired, so we will know which ones keep their jobs when they break the rules?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, let me use this opportunity to thank the former minister of aboriginal affairs for his strong work.

We have stable institutions in this country, which have been enhanced by this government, and also democratic institutions, and we are very proud to have received three mandates from the Canadian people.

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**EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE**

**Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are playing fast and loose with the rules, and now they are playing fast and loose with training dollars.

**ORAL QUESTIONS***[Translation]***EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE**

**Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, as if being interrogated by the Conservatives' secret police were not enough, now employment insurance claimants are being spied on as well.

Inspectors are being told to tail and observe honest job seekers. Inspectors hiding out in their cars say that, in general, there is no wrongdoing to report. The Conservatives are spending more on spying than they are recovering from fraud.

Can the Prime Minister tell us how many honest people have suffered this invasion of privacy?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we are committed to ensuring that employment insurance is available when workers lose their jobs and are not able to find other employment.

Public servants have long been called upon to ensure that the employment insurance fund is used for people who really need it. The methods designed to guarantee that the fund is used properly have been in place for a long time. They ensure that those who are really unemployed can use the funds when they need them.

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*[English]***FINANCE**

**Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the finance minister announces changes to mortgage rules and then reverses them. The finance minister announces changes to skilled training programs and then reverses them, all without warning, all without consultation, all at great cost. It is no wonder that senior public servants from the finance minister's own office are now calling his actions "a disgrace and an insult to Parliament".

If the finance minister cannot manage his own department, then how can the Prime Minister expect him to manage Canada's economy?

• (1420)

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, of course, nothing could be further from the truth. Canada is very lucky to have the most successful finance minister in the world. That has been recognized by experts in this field around the

### Oral Questions

This money comes out of the EI fund, out of the pockets of workers and employers. This is not the government's money. The government is removing training dollars, making substantial changes to the training program, all without proper consultation.

Since the government is spending millions sending investigators to the doorsteps of EI claimants, why does it not take the opportunity to start consulting them instead of interrogating them like criminals?

**Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our government is consulting with Canadians from coast to coast to coast in preparation for economic action plan 2013, the budget, which will include positive initiatives to create jobs, growth and long-term prosperity.

I will not speculate on the contents of the budget other than that.

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### INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

**Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, two former officials of the Minister of Finance's department have criticized, deeply, the pattern of secrecy and the abuse of Parliament by the government.

The question is, now that the cat is out of the bag with respect to the \$2 billion program which the government is intending to recapture and take away from the provinces, does the Prime Minister not agree that it is now time to consult, not broadly, simply saying it is consulting with all Canadians at all times, but to sit down with the provinces and talk about this program before the government suddenly announces it, springing it on the people of—

**The Speaker:** The Right Hon. Prime Minister.

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as the Minister of Finance said, it would be premature to speculate on the contents of the budget. The government has obviously been consulting widely across the country.

In terms of the government's record on transparency of accounts, rather than cite the partisan report that the leader of the Liberal Party cites, let me cite the non-partisan C.D. Howe, which has looked at this and said that not only—

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

• (1425)

**The Speaker:** Order, order. The Right Hon. Prime Minister still has the floor.

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper:** Mr. Speaker, not only does the C. D. Howe recently have a very detailed report on how this government has more transparent public accounts than at any time in history, it is more transparent than any other senior government in the country.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

### PUBLIC SAFETY

**Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the political neutrality of the chair of the Security Intelligence Review Committee, a position Mr. Porter held, has been monitored very

closely by both Ms. Gauthier and Mr. Filmon, who are both former chairs.

First of all, can the Prime Minister explain why Mr. Porter completely broke with this tradition? Can he explain once again how the security system and the security reviews have been changed by this government?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, security reviews for this organization have not been weakened by this government; on the contrary, these processes have been strengthened by this government.

Obviously, as the Liberal Party leader knows quite well, the allegations are not linked to the former federal responsibilities of this individual.

\* \* \*

[English]

### NATIONAL DEFENCE

**Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, at the sentencing of Mr. Delisle, the federal prosecutors and the defence witnesses emphasized the unprecedented nature of the leak that had taken place and the damage that had occurred to Canada's reputation, in particular with our allies with respect to the information.

Every other security breach of this kind has been met by an independent inquiry reporting to the government and reporting to Parliament. Can the government please tell us why it has yet to establish such a committee of inquiry in to this particular instance?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, obviously the government takes national security matters such as this very seriously. They are not unique to Canada. We have seen the Bradley Manning situation, in the United States.

Obviously, when things like this happen all procedures are reviewed to ensure they cannot happen again.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

### EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

**Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives see crime everywhere, even when there is none. They are now sending inspectors to spy on unemployed workers at home because they suspect them all of being criminals. The Conservatives automatically see law-abiding Canadians as criminals because they are looking for work. These people are guilty of having lost their job and of living in a region whose economy is driven by a seasonal industry.

When will the Conservatives stop treating law-abiding Canadians like common criminals?

**Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, despite the fact that Service Canada stopped half a billion dollars in ineligible payments last year, the employment insurance program still lost hundreds of millions of dollars as a result of fraud and ineligible payments.



*Oral Questions*

For decades, authorities have been using measures to identify and stop bogus claims so that Canadians who contribute to the program are able to get benefits when they need them.

**Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, protecting the integrity of the system should not come at the expense of the privacy rights of law-abiding Canadians.

The Conservatives decided to re-centralize the management of the training programs offered as part of the employment insurance program. Given how disastrous the Conservatives' current management practices have been, provinces and workers have reason to be concerned. These changes took years to negotiate, and the provinces had to make a lot of adjustments.

Why do the Conservatives want to take the management of this program away from the provinces?

**Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Service Canada is responsible for protecting the integrity of the employment insurance system. Last year, this organization stopped hundreds of millions of dollars in ineligible payments.

I can assure you that employment insurance will be there for people when they lose their jobs, as always.

• (1430)

**Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, no one can trust the Conservatives. They want to centralize training programs at the same time they are scrapping employment insurance.

The Conservatives say that the regions are the government's priority and that they will continue to introduce promising economic measures. However, while the Conservatives are drinking their Kool-Aid, people are mobilizing. Yesterday a new alliance appeared, repeating the same message as the coalition from eastern Quebec. These workers are saying no to the destruction of the employment insurance system.

Why are the Conservatives abandoning the regions? Why do they not listen to the real world?

**Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our goals are job creation, economic growth and long-term prosperity.

In order to achieve them, we must have the labour force available to fill these new positions. We are helping people find work in their own regions, using their skills, and connecting them with the positions. For those who cannot find work in their region and in their field, employment insurance will still be there to help them.

**Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives have an unbelievable amount of nerve.

They are sending inspectors to spy on unemployed people in their own homes. These are not the criminals or cheaters: that would be the Conservatives' friends like Wallin, Duffy, Brazeau, Porter and Carson. Those people have enough money to buy their way out of trouble.

The Conservatives should leave the workers alone and do some housecleaning in the Senate and the Privy Council Office. When will

they be spying on those people who lie about their residence? Let them get to work.

**Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Service Canada has a mandate to protect the integrity of the employment insurance system so that Canadians who pay their premiums can receive benefits when they need them.

For decades, the authorities have been using certain methods to investigate and block payment of unwarranted benefits, in order to protect the system and so that Canadians who have paid their premiums can receive benefits when they need them.

\* \* \*

**THE BUDGET**

**Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives rode into Ottawa on the great white horse of accountability, but ever since then, they have undermined the accountability process at every opportunity.

Two former senior civil servants with the Department of Finance have strongly condemned this government. The Conservatives have deliberately kept parliamentarians in the dark and systematically used the Access to Information Act to undermine transparency. They have done everything in their power to hide information.

With the next federal budget on the horizon, will the minister promise to reveal all of the relevant information, including detailed budgets for departments and agencies, and stop trying to hide information?

[English]

**Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the report that the hon. member references is a partisan report by Liberals.

Since 2006, we have consulted more than any other government with respect to budgetary matters, including online consultations, which we were the first government to start back in 2006.

We also do quarterly financial reports. We created the Federal Accountability Act of Parliament. Both provide more financial information than ever before.

We will continue to consult broadly and report to Parliament through the budgetary process.

[Translation]

**Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the former civil servants who said that the Conservatives have been chipping away at the credibility of the budget process year after year were non-partisan. That is an insult to Parliament and a disgraceful way to act.

There is less economic and fiscal information in the Conservatives' current budget than there was 25 years ago.

It is not surprising that Kevin Page had to take the government to court to get information.

What happened to the Conservatives' big ideas about transparency?

*Oral Questions**[English]*

**Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as I said, this is a partisan report by Liberals. One of them is a very well-known Liberal. The other one is less well-known. In February 2008, when I asked the Liberal Party to tell me who they would like to send to the budget lock-up, his name appeared on the list. Therefore, I do not worry about the impartiality of it because it is not impartial.

The fact is that we have consulted more, disclosed more and provided more information than any other government with respect to budgetary matters.

• (1435)

**Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, that's not good enough. Talking about transparency alone is not good enough. The Conservatives have simply failed to be the transparent and accountable government that they promised Canadians seven years ago.

This week we heard from former senior officials from the Minister of Finance's own department who said that the Conservatives have also failed to uphold the integrity and credibility of the budget process. Is this who Canadians are supposed to trust their tax dollars with?

When will the Conservatives stop hiding behind empty promises and start actually listening to Canadians?

**Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am sorry to disappoint the member opposite. I will try to do better.

The report is by partisan Liberals who used to work, I guess before my time, at the Department of Finance.

The non-partisan C.D. Howe Institute did provide a detailed report showing that our government has been the most transparent government in Canada.

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*[Translation]***GOVERNMENT SPENDING**

**Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the poisoned, hyper-partisan atmosphere created by the Conservatives is starting to be seen in organizations that work with the public and need federal funding.

A test administered by a literacy group in Saskatchewan associates the conjugation of the verbs “to vote” and “to elect” with the Conservative Party.

That is what happens when organizations are threatened with losing their funding if they do not toe the PMO's ideological line.

Do the Conservatives realize that the political climate they have created is downright poisoned?

**Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the government does not design or approve the content of the learning materials used by this organization.

Our government is committed to ensuring that Canadians have the essential skills needed to succeed in the job market.

*[English]*

**Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, maybe the Conservatives should give senators a literacy test, since they are the ones who cannot seem to read the rules.

We are not suggesting that the minister wrote the test herself. The point is, she does not have to. Grant recipients are so scared of being cut-off that they feel the need to kiss the ring just to keep their funding, even so far as to rewriting history to align with the Conservative fiction.

When will the Conservatives take responsibility for the environment of fear they have created in our communities?

**Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the government does not design or approve the content of the learning materials that are used by this organization.

It is quite clear our government is committed to ensuring that Canadians have the essential skills they need to succeed in the workplace.

I would invite the NDP to join us in support of our efforts to help create jobs, to help create economic growth and to create long-term prosperity.

\* \* \*

*[Translation]***NATIONAL DEFENCE**

**Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we have seen nothing but incompetence from the government on the F-35 file for two and a half years now. It would be funny if it were not so tragic.

At stake is billions of dollars of taxpayers' money. At stake are considerable industrial spinoffs for the aerospace industry. Now, the word is that replacing the CF-18s will be delayed.

Who is in charge here?

**Mr. Jacques Gourde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, for Official Languages and for the Economic Development Agency for the Regions of Quebec, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the National Fighter Procurement Secretariat—

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

**The Speaker:** Order.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

**Mr. Jacques Gourde:** Mr. Speaker, the National Fighter Procurement Secretariat is currently assessing all of the options for replacing the CF-18 fleet.

*Oral Questions*

• (1440)

[English]

**Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the CF-18 replacement program is on track to becoming the greatest fiscal procurement fiasco by the government if it is not overtaken by the new ship program. Now we are hearing about upgrades and extensions to the CF-18 after being told we needed the F-35 really urgently. What is the new solution? It is to hit the reset button.

This is my advice for the Prime Minister. It is not the reset button that needs to be pressed; it is the eject button on a couple of his ministers.

[Translation]

**Mr. Jacques Gourde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, for Official Languages and for the Economic Development Agency for the Regions of Quebec, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the secretariat is conducting an options analysis and a full assessment of all available choices. It is not simply redoing the work that was done before.

Independent examiners will ensure that the options analysis is thorough and comprehensive.

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#### INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

**Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, in its next budget, the government plans on cancelling the \$2.5 billion transfer to the provinces for professional training and managing this program itself.

Given the government's chronic incompetence, there is reason to be concerned. On December 17, the Minister of Finance met with his provincial counterparts to discuss federal transfers.

Did he discuss the transfer for professional training with them, or will the Conservatives act unilaterally, in secret and with contempt, as they usually do?

[English]

**Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I will not get into the discussions I have had with other finance ministers on specific subjects.

We have consulted very broadly from coast to coast to coast. We are still consulting in preparation of the budget. We look forward to delivering the budget in due course. There will be initiatives in the budget which will promote jobs, growth and long-term prosperity.

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#### GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, in 2008 Arthur Porter donated to the Conservatives and three weeks later was appointed to the Security Intelligence Review Committee. In 2009 Arthur Porter donated again to the Conservatives and was appointed chair of SIRC. Then as chair of SIRC, he donated to the Conservatives again. Most of these donations were in clear violation of SIRC's rules and guidelines.

Does the government believe it was appropriate for the Conservative Party to take this money? What steps will the government take to clean up the abuse of its patronage system?

**Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as has already been explained to that member, the individual in question resigned long ago and the allegations had nothing to do with his time in government.

While I am on my feet and on the subject of abuses, the member across the way said in 2010 that he would like to impose an iPod tax on Canadian music listeners. That is the same member of Parliament who now denies it, but he denied that he was in favour of the long gun registry in order to get elected. Do people think the constituents of Timmins—James Bay trust him this time?

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, this really is not the place for schoolyard taunts, not when the government needs to explain—

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

**The Speaker:** Order, please. I have asked members previously to hold off on their applause until members are finished asking a question or a minister is finished answering a question. We are losing a lot of time here.

The hon. member for Timmins—James Bay has the floor.

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** Mr. Speaker, it is unfortunate that the Conservatives believe it is recess when they need to explain why a man who is facing an international warrant for money laundering was personally chosen by the Prime Minister to oversee Canada's spy agents, why the Prime Minister personally chose a convicted fraud artist, Bruce Carson, into his inner circle and why the Prime Minister's appointees Wallin, Brazeau and Duffy continue to thumb their nose at the taxpayer. This is about the Prime Minister's judgment.

When will Conservatives come clean and clean up the patronage system that the Prime Minister has put in place?

• (1445)

**Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, normally I would be hurt by those angry words, but the member across the way is just depressed. I would suggest that he put a little spice in his life, but then he would end up on the NDP's sodium registry. Maybe a hunting trip with the boys, but then again he would not be welcome after the gun registry betrayal. Perhaps a countryside drive, but then he would have to pay the NDP carbon tax on the gasoline. Maybe some gentle music would help, but then he would have to pay the iPod tax. No wonder he is so depressed over there. Those members want to register and tax fun out of existence.

*Oral Questions**[Translation]*

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, would it be so hard for the Conservatives to give a real answer for once?

The facts speak for themselves. While Arthur Porter sat on the Security Intelligence Review Committee, he was greasing the palms of the Conservatives even though it is against the rules. That man stole millions of dollars from Quebec's health system under the watch of the Conservatives who were prepared to trust him. The appointment of Arthur Porter was irresponsible and dangerous.

When did the Prime Minister learn that Arthur Porter broke the Privy Council rules? When will he throw him out of the Privy Council?

*[English]*

**Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, why do those members not ever ask any serious questions? They ask nothing on the economy. Tax filing season is coming up soon and Canadians will be taking advantage of the many family-friendly tax breaks for things like kids sports, bus passes, the tax-free savings account, which is good news for Canadians, but it is also good news for the member. It gives him plenty of ways that he can save on his taxes so he does not have to contribute to Québec solidaire anymore.

*[Translation]*

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, people across the country will be pleased to learn that the Conservatives do not think fraud and corruption are a serious matter.

Arthur Porter rubbed shoulders with the Conservative elite. He was all smiles when he was with the President of the Treasury Board and especially with the Prime Minister. He wrote them fat cheques, but it was against the rules. However, we should not be surprised. In 2008, Conservative Senator David Angus told *Les Affaires*: “[Arthur Porter] recognizes power and knows how to get close to it.”

I have a very simple question: just how close to the Conservatives' inner circle did this embezzler of public funds get?

*[English]*

**Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, instead of asking questions about someone who resigned a long time ago and whose actions had nothing to do with his role in the government, the member should start to answer questions about his own political decisions. When he donated 29 times to the separatist Québec solidaire, he made himself sort of a leader for that wing of his own party, but it seems that some of his members have been separating from him and joining the Bloc Québécois. I wonder how he is going to move forward in a spirit of solidarity forever to keep him and his separatist friends together.

**LABOUR**

**Mr. Mark Adler (York Centre, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, constituents from my riding have brought to my attention the latest propagandist newsletter issued by the radical Canadian Union of Postal Workers to its members. This radical political pamphlet outlines Fredericton local member Ruth Breen's trip to Israel using public funds, while at the same time accusing Canada of committing war crimes through its support for Israel.

Could the minister responsible for Canada Post comment on CUPW's latest trip using public funds?

**Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Transport), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, what the member has raised is awful. Using public funds for radical political trips is wrong. CUPW should apologize for this misuse of public funds and its anti-Israel rhetoric.

Will the Leader of the Opposition continue to support his big union bosses and their radical political views, or will he stand with taxpayers and demand an apology for the misuse of these public funds and to the state of Israel?

\* \* \*

● (1450)

**NATIONAL DEFENCE**

**Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, documents have revealed that Conservative mismanagement is now forcing Canada's military to scale back plans in the Arctic.

The air base at Resolute Bay is shelved. The promised navy port is nothing more than an unheated shed and the navy's Arctic patrol ships are delayed until at least 2018.

When will the Conservatives realize that Arctic sovereignty comes from working with other Arctic nations and listening to northerners? Do they not understand that high-priced photo ops for the Prime Minister do nothing to help Arctic communities?

**Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as the member would know, Canada's north and our efforts to augment security in the Arctic remain central to the Government of Canada's efforts through our years in government.

The northern strategy remains central. The increase in Canada's presence and sovereignty in the Arctic is apparent. The Canadian army will continue to conduct training exercises that are ongoing now. The opposition, including that member, has been critical of these efforts throughout all the time we have put into infrastructure, into new equipment, into exercises that augment Canada's sovereignty and security.

**Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are clearly flying blind in the cuts they are making at the Department of National Defence.

*Oral Questions*

Army Commander General Peter Devlin wrote in January in a document outlining cuts that, “The uncertainty created by anticipated additional reductions has yet to be factored in”. Therefore, it will get worse. Everything seems to be open to cuts, from the reserves, civilian staff, to the capacity of the Canadian Forces to carry out domestic operations, including the Arctic.

When will the Conservatives finally come clean on how cuts will affect military communities and families and the readiness of the Canadian Forces?

**Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, that is rich, coming from the member and his party. They have continually opposed all of the investments, the augmentation that we have made for the Canadian Forces.

To be clear, the budgets of the Canadian Forces, including the army, have significantly increased since 2006. In fact last year, the army's annual budget was \$500 million more than it was in 2006.

After years of unprecedented growth, we are realigning with the end of the combat mission in Afghanistan. We have seen the civilian workforce that was backfilling positions held by reserve and regular members now being brought back to a regular tempo. We will continue to invest.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, after having completely botched the process to replace the CF-18s, the Conservatives now realize that they might have to extend the lifespan of our fighter jets beyond 2023.

Oddly enough, when the Conservatives wanted the F-35s, it was completely impossible to keep our CF-18s operational, because experts said it would cost a fortune. Now that there are so many problems with this file, suddenly our CF-18s can continue to fly after 2020.

In the end, who will pay the price for the Conservatives' incompetence?

**Mr. Jacques Gourde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, for Official Languages and for the Economic Development Agency for the Regions of Quebec, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the National Fighter Procurement Secretariat is currently evaluating all options for replacing our CF-18 fleet.

[*English*]

**Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives wired the statement of requirements to the F-35. They challenged the patriotism of anyone who dared question the need for them. Now they are talking about extending the life of the CF-18, even though the former chief of air staff said that the F-18 could not go beyond 2020.

Who are we to believe: the Minister of National Defence when he was allowed to talk about military procurement, the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, or the former chief of air staff?

When will they put in place a process Canadians can trust?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Jacques Gourde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, for Official Languages and for the Economic Development Agency for the Regions of Quebec, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the options analysis will not be limited by the statement of operational requirements. A panel of independent reviewers will ensure that the options analysis is done rigorously and thoroughly.

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[*English*]

**HEALTH**

**Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Minister of Health misled Canadians about the Eat Well campaign when she said, “Our government wants Canadians to make healthier choices and provide leadership on nutrition”. What choices? What leadership? Most processed foods on store shelves are way over limit on trans fats and sodium. Expert panels, even her own department, have asked her to regulate healthy levels. Five years later she has done nada.

When will the minister act like a minister of health, and not industry, and do her job?

**Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and Minister for the Arctic Council, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it appears that parties want an agreement to create a massive new bureaucracy called the sodium registry. They want every family restaurant and bakery in Canada to register how much salt they consume with our government.

Our government does not want more bureaucracy. We want to be able to provide choices to Canadians to make informed choices on sodium consumption. Again, this just goes to show how out of touch that party is, along with the other party. They are soft on crime and very hard on potato chips.

● (1455)

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday the health minister dismissed a UN report on food security as ill-informed. She refuses to—

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

**The Speaker:** Order. The hon. member for St. Paul's.

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** Mr. Speaker, she refuses to accept data from her own ministry, such as the shocking Inuit health survey showing that 70% of adults living in Nunavut face hunger. The central recommendation of the report was a national food strategy, so far an empty promise from the Conservative 2011 platform. Two years later, nothing has happened.

Will the minister do her job and finally get on with a national food strategy?

*Oral Questions*

**Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and Minister for the Arctic Council, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I take no lessons from that individual, whose colleagues cut transfers to the provinces and territories when they were in government. Again, I take no lessons from—

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

**The Speaker:** Order. The hon. Minister of Health.

**Hon. Leona Aglukkaq:** Mr. Speaker, we see no value in such a one-sided, biased report written by an individual from outside of Canada. Implementing the recommendations he put forward would increase tax burdens to Canadians, including an amount of \$48 billion in taxes to Canadians. That is unacceptable, and we will not accept the recommendations from a person who resides outside of Canada.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**PUBLIC WORKS AND GOVERNMENT SERVICES**

**Mr. Matthew Dubé (Chambly—Borduas, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, maybe the third time is the charm, so I will try again.

On June 15, 2012, the Supreme Court ruled in favour of the City of Halifax. The court stated that the federal government was undervaluing historic sites and had to compensate municipalities for lost tax revenues.

The government valued Fort Chambly at five times less than the municipality did. That is a loss of \$500,000 in property tax revenues for the City of Chambly.

When will the government comply with the Supreme Court's ruling and compensate the municipalities?

**Mr. Jacques Gourde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, for Official Languages and for the Economic Development Agency for the Regions of Quebec, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we are committed to ensuring that municipalities receive fair compensation for federal properties in their jurisdiction.

The dispute advisory panel was created to provide impartial advice in disputes over the calculation of payment.

[English]

**Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the member speaks about an advisory committee, but there is this huge piece of prime real estate in downtown Halifax, and it belongs to the federal government. When it came time for the feds to make payment in lieu of taxes to Halifax Regional Municipality, the government claimed it was worth \$10. Now, after 17 years of wrangling, they have struck an advisory committee, but the Supreme Court has actually ruled in favour of Halifax.

Does the minister not agree that it is time for the Conservatives to stop stalling, do the right thing and pay Halifax what it is owed?

[Translation]

**Mr. Jacques Gourde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, for Official**

**Languages and for the Economic Development Agency for the Regions of Quebec, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we have asked the advisory panel for advice on resolving these disputes, and we have asked the panel to provide its advice as quickly as possible.

Officials from the Halifax Regional Municipality and Public Works and Government Service Canada will meet soon to try to find a solution for the citadel.

\* \* \*

[English]

**EMPLOYMENT**

**Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, every Canadian knows that our government is supporting jobs and economic growth in all sectors of the Canadian economy. In the natural resources sector, there is \$650 billion in possible investment over the next 10 years in support of jobs across Canada. Keystone XL alone will help create over 140,000 jobs over the next 25 years in Canada.

Could the parliamentary secretary tell the chamber about other groups that are supporting and creating jobs?

**Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Canadians tell us that they support resource development across this country, including Keystone XL. I can tell members that hundreds of thousands of workers from the Labourers' International Union, Canadian piping trades, Canadian building trades and Christian labour organizations are all fighting to get Keystone XL approved and to create those Canadian jobs.

What is the NDP's response? New Democrats go to Washington to advocate against these jobs. They call these jobs a disease. They insult resource-based communities that depend on these jobs.

Canadian workers cannot count on the NDP to support their jobs. Our government will be there to support jobs and economic growth in every sector of this country.

\* \* \*

● (1500)

**INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION**

**Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, Canadians are well aware of the Conservatives' cuts to our foreign aid. The CIDA minister's meeting with the mining industry this weekend reminded us that instead of aid dollars going to poverty reduction, they are going to subsidize mining companies and programs that they are already obligated to support.

Canadian mining companies are world leaders, but they are there to mine, not to deliver aid. For that we have excellent NGOs. Why are the Conservatives contracting out our international aid obligations?

*Oral Questions*

Our government, and indeed all Canadians, continue to stand by the Syrian people in their time of need.

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#### HUMAN RESOURCES AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT CANADA

**Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, CPP disability recipients are victims of a data breach that includes highly sensitive information, including their medical condition. To top things off, HRSDC is asking these victims, some of whom are seriously ill or profoundly disabled, to visit a Service Canada office if they suspect fraud.

Under the Conservatives, data breaches reported to the Privacy Commissioner have gone up 300% since 2009. When will the government start taking these breaches of privacy seriously?

**Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the loss of this information is totally unacceptable. That is why the department has been instructed to overhaul all of its systems and all of the processes that it uses so that Canadians can be sure that the privacy of their personal information will be protected.

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]

#### SERVICE CANADA

**Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, with a new season of farm work approaching, the federal government has abandoned Quebec producers who need temporary agricultural workers.

Producers who call to find out why their applications have been delayed, to ask questions about forms or just to make sure that their files have been received get nothing but an outgoing message that states their call will not be returned. Service Canada is not providing any service.

Will the government come out of hibernation and wake up to the fact that agricultural producers need access to service at that number now?

● (1505)

**Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Service Canada recognizes how important foreign workers are to farmers in Canada.

I can confirm that the program will continue and that Service Canada will meet our producers' needs as soon as possible.

\* \* \*

[*English*]

#### PRESENCE IN GALLERY

**The Speaker:** I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of Ms. Zhanar Aitzhanova, Minister of Economic Integration of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

**Hon. Julian Fantino (Minister of International Cooperation, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, let me be clear. CIDA does not subsidize mining companies, nor NGOs, for that matter. CIDA is an outcomes-driven agency, and we use all legitimate vehicles, including the private sector, to help bring those most in need out of poverty.

Canadians deserve no less, and that is exactly what we are doing.

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]

#### FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS

**Mr. François Lapointe (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, two-thirds of the members of the Association des économistes québécois support regulations governing credit card processing fees.

Credit card processing fees for merchants are excessive and affect a company's profitability.

The Conservatives need to implement mandatory regulations instead of an ineffective voluntary code of conduct. Otherwise, profit margins for small and medium-sized businesses will continue to shrink.

Will the Conservatives stop hiding behind their ineffective voluntary code of conduct? Will they finally take the measures needed to fix this problem, which has been raised by merchant associations across the country?

[*English*]

**Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, in fact we heard the concerns of small business and introduced the code of conduct with the support of retailers, consumers and small business, and we have updated the code from time to time. It is working and is accomplishing the goals that were set by consumers, by small business and by the retailers.

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#### FOREIGN AFFAIRS

**Mr. Brad Butt (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, two years ago tomorrow, the Assad regime arrested and brutally tortured 15 children from the Syrian city of Dara, simply for having painted graffiti calling for Assad to go. This deplorable act marked the beginning of the regime's public attack against its own children and its own people. It galvanized Syrians to take to the streets to demand the removal of the Assad regime and to demand their fundamental rights.

Would the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs please tell the House our government's reaction to this sombre date?

**Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as my colleague from Mississauga—Streetsville has rightly pointed out, the events at Dara, and many more since, have shown the world that Assad is completely unfit to govern and increasingly unable to rule. The actions of Assad and his thugs have so far left 70,000 Syrians dead and driven hundreds of thousands from their homes.

*Business of Supply*

**Some hon. members:** Hear, hear!

**The Speaker:** I would also like to draw the attention of hon. members to the presence in the gallery of Rachel Homan, Emma Miskew, Alison Kreviazuk and Lisa Weagle, winners of the 2013 women's national curling championships at the Scotties Tournament of Hearts, who will be representing Canada at the world championships.

**Some hon. members:** Hear, hear!

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## GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

### BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

#### OPPOSITION MOTION—SENATE

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

**The Speaker:** Order. When question period started, the hon. member for Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington had the floor. He has 10 minutes left to conclude his speech.

Order. I will ask members who wish to carry on their conversations to do so outside of the chamber. The hon. member for Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington.

**Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am picking up where I left off before question period. I got about 10 minutes into a 20-minute talk, and as I have said on more than one occasion in this place, there is nothing like an hour-long break in the middle of a 20-minute speech to allow one to concentrate their thoughts a bit.

Here is what I have done. During question period, I gathered some materials from my office, and also from the library, to allow me to elaborate a bit more on two of the themes I had been addressing before the break. I think I dealt well with the spirit of bicameralism and the importance of it, and I had two remaining issues to deal with. The first was the question of the amending formula that is appropriate for dealing with the Senate and for different aspects of the Senate question. The second topic was dealing with having appropriate documentary evidence available to allow those who are advocating before the Supreme Court on this issue to advocate intelligently, and those on the Supreme Court who are trying to make the decisions, to do so in a fully informed manner.

Let me start with the question about the appropriate amending formula. I want to indicate just how complex this question is. One of the things we have to deal with is the question of property qualifications. A second question we have to deal with is the question of the age to which senators can serve. Other questions deal with their requirement not to be in a state of bankruptcy. The question of what is meant by independence needs to be dealt with. Senators are to be independent. The questions, as members can imagine, go on at some length.

These questions have required us in the past to determine whether or not constitutional amendments were necessary and what kind of constitutional amendment was appropriate. Let me give an example. In 1965, the Constitution of Canada, the British North America Act,

as it then was, was amended to terminate the practice of appointing senators for life and replace it with appointment to age 75.

The Constitution, as it now reads in section 29(1) says:

29. (1) Subject to subsection (2), a Senator shall, subject to the provisions of this Act, hold his place in the Senate for life.

That allowed all existing senators at the time to remain in the Senate for life. Subsection (2) reads, “A Senator who is summoned to the Senate after the coming into force of this subsection”, meaning after 1965, “shall, subject to this Act, hold his place in the Senate until he attains the age of seventy-five years”.

That amendment was permissible because of the fact that in 1949, the U.K. Parliament passed an act called the British North America (No. 2) Act, 1949, which is its formal name. That stated that the Parliament of Canada could unilaterally amend certain aspects of the Constitution of Canada, though not all aspects of the Constitution.

That provision, which is no longer part of the Constitution, was the only amending formula in our constitution, in fact between 1949 and 1982. It read as follows:

It shall be lawful for the Queen by and with the Advice and Consent of the Senate and House of Commons Canada...the amendment from time to time of the Constitution of Canada except as regards matters within the classes of subjects by this Act assigned exclusively to the Legislatures of the Provinces, or as regards rights or privileges by this or any other Constitutional Act granted or secured to the Legislature or the Government of a province, or to any class of persons with respect to schools or as regards the use of the English or the French language or as regards the requirements that there shall be a session of the Parliament of Canada at least once each year, and that no House of Commons shall continue for more than five years from the day of the return of the Writs for choosing the House.

I am sure that is completely incomprehensible to just about everybody here. What is going on is a list of things that Parliament cannot unilaterally amend, and that includes most of the important stuff. It says that it is all classes, except all the important things we have listed. However, in the remaining class of things were changes to the structure of the Senate. That was the authority under which the House of Commons and Senate were able to unilaterally amend the Constitution of Canada, in 1965, to change the tenure of senators so that they were appointed only to age 75.

• (1510)

That question could have been appealed to the Supreme Court; someone could have argued that it was inappropriate for the House of Commons and Senate to do that unilaterally. However, it was not appealed to the Supreme Court. We generally agree now that it was a legitimate use of power and constitutional authority to act that way, but it was then removed from the Constitution.



*Business of Supply*

If members thought the wording there was confusing, I will turn now to the procedure for amending the Constitution of Canada, enacted as part of the Constitution Act, 1982. In very fine print in this particular compilation, it goes on from the bottom of one page all through a second page of text, and on through a third page, dealing with the subjects that can be dealt with under various formulae. As I mentioned before, there are five distinct formulae for amending different aspects of the Constitution of Canada, each of which involves a different combination of federal government and provincial legislatures. There is no single formula, and there is much lack of clarity. There is, for example, no consensus as to what formula is the one necessary to allow a province to secede. That was one of the subjects that was raised, but ultimately not answered by the court during the secession reference in the 1990s. The questions posed by the government to the Supreme Court of Canada in the reference, deal extensively with determining which formula applies for which aspect of Senate reform.

We see that the objective is to provide complete clarity where there has been a lack of clarity, in order to permit some avenue to be put forward. There is, of course, the government's legislative agenda, which has consisted of a series of measures for electing senators, looking at changing the length of their terms, and perhaps removing property and other qualifications. With regard to all of these things, we need to determine whether the Parliament of Canada, acting on its own, can do so, or is it restricted and required to go to the 7/50 formula? That would change dramatically what we could potentially do, and would change, depending on the nature of the answer, the kinds of initiatives the government would take.

Similarly, for the proposal to abolish the Senate, proposed by the New Democrats, there are numerous different ways we could do that. We could write the Constitution differently, to have the effect of removing the Senate from the Constitution. The question of whether any of these different ways of working requires unanimity or can be done using the default 7/50 amending formula, where seven provinces with half the population must give consent, would be determined as well. It would answer the question, as a practical matter, as to whether it is possible to make any change whatever, as they propose. There is no question that it would be difficult to use the 7/50 formula to change the Constitution, but it would be very high impossible to do so under the unanimity clause, if that is what the court were to determine is required.

These are important questions to resolve. They are all arguments for presenting questions to the Supreme Court, and they are arguments against voting in favour of the New Democratic motion.

I turn again to the matter of having an adequate documentary record available to the Supreme Court as it makes its decision. I, and a number of other people, under the Canadian Constitution Foundation, the CCF, an organization which seeks to expand Canadians' knowledge about their Constitution, have been working to create an online archive of constitutional documents, which will be called "OriginalDocuments.ca". These will assist the court in all future decisions, but in particular on its decisions relating to the Senate.

The Senate and its predecessor, the legislative council of Canada, is an issue that has been debated, in one form or another, going back as far as the 1840s and 1850s. I have with me a volume that I dug up

from the bowels of the Library of Parliament, in which there is a debate from 1856, over a bill to take the legislative council of Canada from being appointed to being elected. I would argue that an understanding of that debate is absolutely necessary in order to move forward, as we might create an elected Senate again.

I look forward to putting these things, and all the reference questions, on the record, and making them available to everybody so we can have a truly informed decision from the Supreme Court later this year.

• (1515)

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP):** Mr. Speaker I wish to sincerely thank the hon. member for Lanark—Lennox and Addington. I know I am forgetting part of his riding's name; it is a bit long and hard to remember.

I really enjoy working with the hon. member. I admire his depth of knowledge, and he is always willing to share it with others, even opposition members like me. I want to say that I will be rereading his speech in detail, because it contains a lot of information that may be very useful.

I have a question for him about the reform his party has proposed, and I would really like to have his answer. At the moment, a senator must be at least 30 years old. The hon. member is a great believer in democracy. What does he think of the fact that if there were senatorial elections, people like me, between 18 and 30, who have the right to vote, would not be able to stand for election as senators? I would like to hear his comments on that subject.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** Mr. Speaker, that is a very good question.

First, I would like to explain to the House that my riding is called Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, and after redistribution, it will be Lanark—Frontenac, so it is impossible to have a riding named Lanark—Lennox—Addington, because Frontenac is in the middle of the other counties.

But the question of the age of senators may be more important. It is true that there is an upper limit on the age of senators as well as a lower limit. In our Constitution, the upper limit is 75 and the lower limit is 30 for the youngest senators. I believe that a more modern, reformed system should eliminate both limits, but it will be up to the voters to decide.

I lived in Australia during the 1990s and, there, some elected senators were under 30. In fact, the party leader of the Australian Democrats was under 30. That shows that the ability to be a senator is not limited to those over 30. If it is possible in Australia, then it is possible in Canada.

*Business of Supply*

• (1520)

[English]

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, there are so many outstanding issues before Canadians right now, and although it is somewhat of an important issue, we find it interesting that when Canadians are most concerned about our economy, jobs, health care, and so forth, the NDP and the Conservatives want to talk about constitutional reform. That is the essence of what would have to take place. In order to achieve the abolishment of the Senate, we would have to get agreement from all of the different provinces and open up the Constitution, at a time when I believe Canadians are more interested in other issues.

There is an alternative, that is, to look at the way in which appointments are being made. If good appointments are being made, I suspect there would not be the types of problems that have been talked about. For example, no one would question Senator Dallaire and the fine work that he does representing Canada either abroad or here. He is an outstanding senator, who has contributed immensely to our country.

My question to the member is this. As opposed to having this constitutional debacle or potential crisis that is being generated by the New Democrats, would he not agree that one of the ways to deal with this issue would be to make sure the appointments are of a high calibre?

**Mr. Scott Reid:** Mr. Speaker, I suppose, in principle, that the answer to that question would be yes. However, in 1856, in the volume I brought from the library, they were debating the fact that they had an appointed upper house then and were not getting the highest quality appointments. One hundred and sixty years of failed attempts to have the best quality people be the only ones appointed to the Senate suggests to me that in reality, keeping with an appointed system is unlikely to produce the highest quality appointees possible.

I hasten to add that I mean no disrespect to the members who are there now, either the current ones or the previous ones. However, as a practical matter, I think we all understand that in this House, we would not improve the quality if we went for an appointed system. The same thing applies everywhere.

There were very few precedents in the 1850s and 1860s for elected upper houses. The Senate in the United States was not elected until the second decade of the 20th century. Exactly 100 years ago, it made an amendment. Australia did not move to an elected upper house until about 1901. The upper house in Britain is still not elected. That is a system that at the time seemed modern. I do not think it works so well now.

While I think the NDP proposal opens up the constitution, all the questions asked of the Supreme Court are about which amending formula could be used. How do we narrow this down so that we do not need the formal consent of every province, creating the danger that a province will say that it is not giving its consent unless we open up some other area to it? That is a particular fear. We would wind up having macro-constitutional reform. What we seek here, and this is the appropriate approach for any mature democracy, is micro-constitutional reform that deals with one issue at a time.

That is what I hope will be achieved here. What we are trying to find out from the Supreme Court is whether that is possible for each of the questions.

• (1525)

**Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the member speaks of micro-reforms. We all remember Preston Manning and Doug Roche, who was the MP in my riding before me. He is a wonderful man. They called for triple-E reform. Of course, that included equal representation.

By electing members of the Senate one time only, with really no accountability thereafter, and by retaining only eight senators in Alberta, how is he going to deliver more accountability for my province, which his party calls the economic engine of the country, which I would concur with?

Second, the policy of the government has been to have bills come from the unelected Senate, and we get the second look. Have we now been reduced to being the house of sober second thought?

**Mr. Scott Reid:** Mr. Speaker, based on our history in the 19th century, the first or second house having sober second thought at all was a marked improvement. We were the house of drunken first thought. I have the impression that when they said sober second thought in the 19th century, they literally meant that these people were actually not coming out of the tavern.

With regard to the first question, I have one small correction. It is actually six senators only for Alberta, not eight.

**Ms. Linda Duncan:** Then we are even worse off.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** The hon. member is quite right. Equality was the original idea proposed by the triple-E movement about 25 years ago. I could say a number of things about it. One is that equality by province was what they were thinking of.

The Fathers of Confederation sought equality by region. There were three regions of the country in 1867: Ontario; the new province of Quebec; and what they called the maritime region, which was Nova Scotia and New Brunswick only. They then expanded in two ways. First, they recognized a fourth region, the west, which at the time, in the early 20th century, was the smallest region. It became, of course, a larger region over time. The idea of equality between regions was what they were seeking. If we were to change the number of senators, we would have to talk about some kind of balance between the two.

However, that is very much a discussion that can only happen at the level of seeking consent from all the provinces. It is quite a complex question. That is why it has been left out of the package of reference questions and out of this round of attempts to democratize the Senate.

I made this point when Paul Martin was prime minister and we debated the same subject. We should not let perfection be the enemy of the good. If we seek a perfect solution that takes into account everything, we will find that we will not get anything. That leaves us with an appointed Senate, which is the worst of all possible worlds. Let us not, in our search for the best of all realistic worlds, lose sight of the fact that politics is ultimately the art of the possible.

*Business of Supply*

**Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I should mention at the beginning of my intervention that I will be sharing my time with the member for Vancouver Kingsway.

I really looked forward to this debate today, because as we know, it has been an ongoing debate since the beginning of our discussions about Confederation, going back to the 1800s. If members will recall, and there has been some mention by previous speakers, when we actually talked about an upper house, it was at a very different time.

One of the guiding principles in our Constitution, which guides us here in this place, is the notion of peace, order and good government. That idea was to help guide us in what we do. If members will recall, at the time peace, order and good government was actually contemplated, it was to ensure that we were going to be responsible in how we governed our country, our nascent country, at the time. If we are going to have this guiding principle of peace, order and good government work, it has to be tied to the notion of responsible government.

Inherent in the guiding principles of the Constitution is that each of us, as elected representatives representing our constituents, after having been duly elected, would come to this place and look for a group of people in this place to gain the confidence of the rest of the people in this place. That is basically how it works here. Elected people come here and organize themselves in such a way that one group, and we do it through political parties, gains the confidence of the rest of the House. They choose one person to be the first among equals and that person becomes our prime minister.

That is important to go over, because that is the notion of responsible government. We actually have the writ given to us by citizens. It is the notion that we actually have legitimacy given to us by our electors. That was something that was near and dear to the founders of Confederation. Going back to the conferences in Charlottetown and subsequently Quebec City, in 1864, the whole debate around the Senate took the most time. They were the most intense debates, certainly around the numbers, as we heard from my colleague. Should all provinces be given the same representation in the Senate?

There was actually another Macdonald, not Sir John A. Macdonald but Andrew Macdonald, from P.E.I., who said that we should fashion ourselves like the Americans and give each province the same number of senators. Of course, that did not fly. What we ended up with was based on regions, which we have already heard. In that case of the Maritimes, they would be equal to the other partners in Confederation. That was because we were looking at a very different setup. We were looking at provinces that were not fully vested with powers. They were not fully vested with what the provinces have been given through negotiations, constitutional debates and agreements over the years, such as oversight of natural resources and different revenue streams. These are all things provinces now have. That did not occur before. In 1864, it was the concern of the smaller provinces that they were going to have a voice.

Let us be clear. No one, during those debates, believed that the upper house, the way it was concocted, was a virtue. It was a compromise they had to have to get the Constitution agreed to.

Think of George Brown, the original reformer. George Brown, founder of *The Globe and Mail*, agreed to an appointed house at the time, simply because he did not want to give it legitimacy to challenge this House. I think that is important to acknowledge, because when we look back at the Reform Party of more recent times, it had this notion that we could just elect them and they would be equal. If we had that, we would have George Brown's worst nightmare; that is, we would have a lower house, with more legitimate representation, being challenged by the upper house.

● (1530)

Right now, both houses have primary mandates. That means that we are given the same powers, not through convention but by way of the Constitution.

The problem we have on this side is that we have to catch up with the times. Provinces now have strong constitutional responsibilities and revenues. The concerns that existed back in Quebec and Charlottetown in 1864, when we were discussing, debating and looking at putting Canada together, are not the same concerns we have now.

If we ask any of our constituents who their senators are, we would get a question mark. Some of them might know them now, because they have been in the press recently, but that is not the same thing. That is the controversy of the day. Ask them if they ever ask their senators to do anything and if they represent them. I think we would get a puzzled response. They would probably say that they are not aware of who their senators are and that they have never contacted them. That is important, because if we are talking about responsible government in 2013, it has to be based on the legitimacy that this House and the house next to us is given by citizens.

The house next to us is appointed by the government of the day. It is not elected by citizens. I am sorry to say, and I hate to put a damper on the government's attempt to come up with a quasi-legitimate process, that it just does not work. It does not work, because the essence of this is that we cannot have a selection process that can be ignored by the Prime Minister, because that is unconstitutional. The Prime Minister could easily ignore, and has in the past, the options given to him or her under the selection process at the provincial level.

Finally, it comes down to what Brown's point was. There cannot be a body that is not represented as thoroughly as this House challenging this House.

What do we need to do? It is clear that we need to abolish the Senate, not just because it does not belong in its current state but because we do not need it any more. The committee work is something we should actually be doing a better job of here. They should be given more resources here. The Library of Parliament should be given more resources to enable our committees to be as strong as what we see south of the border and in other jurisdictions.

I am told that the Senate provides an opportunity for people to have oversight in terms of the government of the day. We have, and I know my colleague from Toronto—Danforth has, many solid ideas on how we can reform affairs. That can be done.

*Business of Supply*

At the end of the day, what we need to do is abolish the Senate. For those who wish to come up with something else, that will not happen until we start afresh. Those who want to come up with another construction of the Senate need to acknowledge that we have to abolish the existing Senate. If we are to adhere to that notion of peace, order and good government, of responsible government and what John Stuart Mill referred to, back in 1861, when he wrote that it is only from the people that governments receive their right to govern, then in 2013, we can no longer play this game and say that we have a legitimate body next to us. We have to acknowledge that it is no longer acceptable to have laws passed here killed in the house next to us.

The people who vote for us expect us to represent their interests. When people are appointed by the government of the day, that not only undermines our ability to do our jobs, it undermines democracy and responsible government. That is the critical piece.

As my colleague said before, it is not about the people over there, although some of them need to be more accountable. It is about the construct of the Senate in 2013.

I will just finish by saying this. When peace, order and good government was given to us, it meant that it was connected to responsible government. As long as we have an unelected and unaccountable Senate next to us, we do not have responsible government in this country.

• (1535)

**Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windor, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the motion starts out by talking about consultation with the provinces. If the majority of the provinces say they want an elected Senate, that would make the motion null and void, because it then becomes overly prescriptive by saying we are going to abolish it.

What would my colleague's opinion be if most of the provinces said they want an elected Senate?

**Mr. Paul Dewar:** Mr. Speaker, I would start with surprise. What we hear from leaders in provincial capitals is more about abolition. We hear it from Saskatchewan to Ontario to other parts of the country. The point of having consultation with the provinces obviously has to do with how we do this. That is the first important step. The member is speculating on what the answer would be. What we have heard so far is that many of the premiers, either past or present, believe that right now the only way to deal with this is abolition.

• (1540)

**Mr. Jasbir Sandhu (Surrey North, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am surprised to hear Conservative speakers defending the very ineffective Senate across the hall from here. It really surprises me, especially hearing it from members from western Canada, a number of whom are former Reformers. A few years ago they wanted a triple-E Senate, which should be an elected Senate. Senators are sort of elected in different ways in different provinces and they are really not accountable to anybody at all.

Could the member talk about a few years ago when the Conservatives used to stand up for an elected, effective and equitable Senate?

**Mr. Paul Dewar:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for bringing that up, because there are still some in the House who were elected under the Reform Party banner. I even remember the ridicule that was placed upon the Senate at the time, the mariachi bands and all sorts of fanfare. In essence, those members came to Ottawa to clean it up, to bring in a new way of doing things with the Senate, and all we have seen are half measures that do not work. Ultimately, they failed.

I have not talked to Preston Manning recently, but I think he would acknowledge his disappointment or say he has given up on the project entirely. I would suspect that, if I were to have a coffee with him, he would suggest that abolition is the only way to go.

We cannot have a Senate with a primary mandate, because it would undermine the legitimacy of the House of Commons. I do not know of a place with a bicameral system that would afford the same powers, in a Westminster model that functions well and is democratic.

**Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I cannot believe the channelling of Preston Manning over here from the opposition benches. It is interesting.

I want to talk about Prince Edward Island for a moment. I listened to the member's intervention earlier. Is he suggesting that the complement of MPs in the House of Commons from P.E.I. and the fact that P.E.I. has its own legislature means it is sufficient enough to safeguard P.E.I.'s interests in our—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** The member for Ottawa Centre.

**Mr. Paul Dewar:** Yes, Mr. Speaker, I do think members, regardless of their party affiliation, represent P.E.I. in a responsible way. I might not always agree with them, but I would not want to take seats away from P.E.I., as the member is suggesting. That would not be helpful.

It is important to make sure there is clarity and purpose here. The Senate is an unelected body. The government has failed in trying to reform it, so let us acknowledge that and abolish it.

**Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it gives me a great deal of pleasure to stand in support of the motion today:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government of Canada, in consultation with the provinces and territories, should take immediate steps towards abolishing the unelected and unaccountable Senate of Canada.

I want to start by talking about the original formation of the Senate. There is a phrase that the older we get, the better we were, and that applies to the Senate. There is a lot of romanticism about what the chamber is today and what it was intended to be, but there are different schools of thought on that.

My reading in law school and as a student in the political science department at the University of Alberta some time ago left me with a distinct impression of some of the less attractive aspects of the Senate when it was envisioned by the founders of this country.

*Business of Supply*

First of all, the Senate was envisioned as a bastion of protection for the propertied and elite classes of this country. The propertied classes had a fear of the majoritarian democratic view at that time. At that time, of course, the concept of having directly elected legislatures, where the people of a country or a state would directly elect their legislators, was new and there was great fear of that direction, particularly by the classes that represented the nobility or the monied classes.

That is why in our Constitution, to this date, we have a requirement that a senator must own \$4,000 worth of property in order to even sit in the Senate. Right off the bat, that disenfranchises millions of Canadians in this country, who by their own Constitution cannot take a seat in the Senate, because they do not own a piece of property. In addition, there was a fear of majoritarian rule and democracy. There were people who wanted to sit in the Senate and keep watch over what democratically elected officials would do in the House of Commons chamber.

Let us burst through some of that romanticism and recognize that the chamber has a very ignoble beginning, not one of sober second thought or of lofty ideals, but one of a fear of democracy, entrenchment of propertied classes and rejection of the idea of majoritarian rule in this country.

I want to move to sober second thought, because I have heard a lot of comment on that today. Any concept that the Senate chamber stands today as the chamber of sober second thought was burst two years ago when the House of Commons passed the climate change bill by democratic vote, and then it went over to the Senate, where the senators who are unelected and unaccountable to Canadians voted against that bill without any real substantive debate. There was no sober second thought on that bill.

It is an affront to democracy that a bunch of fundraisers and failed candidates, who do not have any mandate from the Canadian people to pass judgment on legislation, ended up overriding the democratically elected decision of the people in this chamber who do have a mandate from the Canadian public. Not only was it undemocratic, but my main point is that there was no deliberation done whatsoever. It was orders from the PMO that went into the Senate, and its members killed that bill for political reasons. So let us disabuse ourselves of any notion that the chamber stands as any kind of chamber of sober second thought in this country.

I want to talk about democracy. I heard my Liberal colleagues say the economy is on people's minds, and asking why we are wasting time talking about the Senate. With respect, I think Canadians are concerned about their democracy. I think Canadians are concerned about the institutions of government in their country. To make that a second-rate concern of Canadians and to try to make a hierarchy is unbecoming. We are a democracy in this country, and Canadians are proud that we live in a democratic structure. Whenever any parliamentarian or any Canadian wants to talk about improving the democracy in this country, that is an issue of first order of importance to the New Democrats, not second order of importance as it is to the Liberals, which is maybe why the Liberals never did anything to reform the Senate in their time in office.

I want to talk about the concept of electing senators, because there has been some talk about that. We have a problem with the Canadian

structure if we actually have two chambers in this country that each claim democratic legitimacy, because it was not set up that way.

● (1545)

The Senate was set up with certain powers. On paper, it has the power to stop legislation, but senators have always recognized that because they have no democratic legitimacy, they do not have the ability to stop legislation that comes from the House of Commons. On rare occasions in the history of Canada, the Senate has overridden legislation, as we saw on the climate change bill or the abortion legislation at some point. However, generally, at least senators have recognized that they have no right to override legislation in this House.

If we elect senators and they feel they do have a mandate, what happens if we have a New Democrat or Liberal controlled House and a Conservative controlled Senate? What happens if we have gridlock, because that is exactly what we would have?

We are not like the United States, where it has a carefully crafted system with an executive branch of government that can often override the problems of having a stalemate. However, the United States and other countries do have such stalemates. Therefore, keeping a Senate and electing senators would lead to further gridlock in this country.

In terms of election, I keep hearing the Conservatives, in particular, say that senators do not represent provinces; they represent regions. They are saying that the Senate is about regional representation and not provincial representation. Of course, they are saying that because one of the problems with the representation in the Senate is that it is unequal. I have pointed out several times today that British Columbia, with 40 times the population of Prince Edward Island, has six senators and P.E.I. has four. Therefore, we have provincial imbalance. That is why the Conservatives then switched and said that it is not about provincial representation, but regional representation.

If that is the case, why are the Conservatives pledging provincial elections? Why are they not regional elections? How can a person be elected to represent the region of the west, but only be elected in Alberta? That disenfranchises the rest of the people in the so-called region that they are claiming those people represent. It shows the absolute hollowness and lack of thought that is going into some of the comments being made today by the Conservative side of this House. It has nothing to do with regional representation. It has nothing to do with provincial representation. It has to do with an unelected chamber that has no democratic legitimacy to anybody making decisions in government, and it has no place in a modern democracy in 2013.

I also want to talk a little about hope.

Any country should be able to look at its Constitution and improve it. A Constitution is a living, breathing document. The United States has amended its Constitution some 20 times. Yet in Canada, we have not amended our Constitution once since we repatriated it in 1980. In fact, the repatriation of our Constitution and the establishment of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms was a sign that we can, as a country, make progressive democratic changes to our nation.

*Business of Supply*

We in the New Democrats think we can do that. We believe we can think big. We can think of possibilities to improve our democracy. Yes, most likely it would require a constitutional amendment of some type, but all constitutional changes would require that. Even the changes the Conservatives are proposing would require a constitutional amendment. If we talk about electing the Senate or changing in some way its powers, we are going to have to talk about amending our Constitution. For my part, I believe that Canadians are ready to do that. We can look at our Constitution and update it just as the Americans have and many other people have as well.

I want to talk a little more about cost.

I have heard that the Senate costs \$90 million a year. Actually, it is much more than that. The \$90 million is the amount in the estimates for the actual running of the Senate. However, if we add in travel bills and staffing costs, it is actually more than \$150 million a year. I would say that today, when we are talking about one-eighth of a billion dollars, Canadians would rather see that money spent on many other things than on partisan appointed senators who do not have constituencies, who do not have any accountability to the people of Canada, yet have the ability on paper to make legislation.

I believe that all members of this House want to improve democracy. I think we are all well intentioned, but we may have different paths on how we get there. However, it is important that we do not shy away from discussing fundamental issues of democracy and ways we can improve it.

• (1550)

We see people in Syria today who are fighting for responsible government. All over the world people are doing that. Surely we can have a mature discussion in our country about ways to improve our democracy and make it more accountable to Canadians. We can start by abolishing a structure, like four provinces have done, without any diminution or ability to govern, including Quebec and Ontario, when those institutions are not democratically chosen by the people of our country.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the New Democratic Party's position is very clear. It would abolish the Senate. On the other hand, when we look at the constitutional requirements, it could potentially only require one province to say no, that it does not want the Senate abolished. One province could indicate no and the population of that province could want the Senate retained. I was involved with the task force on the Senate. There is a great deal of support for having a Senate in Canada, more than abolishing the Senate.

If a province or Canadians as a whole want a Senate, would the NDP's position still be to abolish it? Even if 50% plus one of the population in the province of Quebec says we should retain the Senate, would the New Democrats still say to the residents of Quebec, "Tough luck. The NDP policy is to abolish it?"

**Mr. Don Davies:** Mr. Speaker, I do not know why my friend thinks his particular version of the constitutional requirements is the correct one because we have a reference to the Supreme Court of Canada now.

My hon. colleague thinks a change to the Senate would require unanimity in the Constitution, and some would think that. Others, however, believe that we can amend the Constitution with the approval of seven provinces with 50% of the population. That is the first thing.

Second, I would ask why he is disagreeing with the interim leader of his party, who, in 1984, stated:

In its conception and in its operations, the Senate is neither regionally representative in the sense that we understand it today, nor is it democratic. In fact the Canadian Senate is an undemocratic institution working at the heart of democratic government. That fact, combined with the history of the Senate as nothing more or less than a tool of patronage in the hands of the party in power, has led [me]...to the conviction that the Senate should be abolished.

That is what the leader of the Liberal Party said. The former premier of Ontario, Mr. McGuinty, has called for the abolition of the Senate. Premier Christy Clark of British Columbia said that the Senate has outlived its usefulness. I do not think my hon. colleague commands—

• (1555)

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** Questions and comments, the hon. member for Pontiac.

**Mr. Mathieu Ravignat (Pontiac, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the reality is, which is the issue before us, that the Senate is a joke. It is an insult to Canadian democracy and a vestige of aristocracy that existed. It needs more than a dusting off. Dusting it off is not going to solve the issue. We spend \$90 million a year on people who do not do their jobs. It is an affront to all things democratic. That is what I understood was the emphasis of my hon. colleague's speech, which was of great interest.

In the absence of a bicameral structure, I would like to hear my colleague's opinions with regard to how our democracy would be strengthened.

**Mr. Don Davies:** Mr. Speaker, I have touched on this already. Four provinces in the country have abolished their senates with absolutely no harm done to their democratic structure or ability to govern, including Ontario and Quebec, which are both large provinces with many diverse regions. The idea that there must be some sort of regional counterbalance to majority view is simply belied by the facts.

The average number of workdays for the average senator in 2011-12, not a problem in past history, was 56 days. I have heard the Conservatives say that they cannot expand EI because they do not want Canadians to work very little during the year and collect money. Senators are working 56 days. I think most Canadians would find it offensive to learn that their tax dollars are paying \$135,000 a year to someone who is working 56 days. Nineteen senators have missed more than a quarter of the sitting days in 2011-12. This is not acceptable to modern democracy and it is time to abolish it. We can have a unicameral country, like Britain, where we make decisions by democratically-elected people in the chamber. We can save money and be more democratic to boot.

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Charlottetown, so people can stay tuned and look forward to his comments.

*Business of Supply*

I am happy to speak to the motion today from my colleague from the New Democratic Party, the member for Toronto—Danforth. I and my colleagues in the Liberal caucus will be voting against the motion when it comes up for a vote. In our view, not only is this motion constitutionally very naive, it may in fact even be a cynical attempt on the part of the New Democrats to change the channel on what will be a difficult evening for them tomorrow night when they are forced to get up and vote on a Bloc Québécois private member's bill, Bill C-457, with respect to the Clarity Act.

It is constitutionally naive because, although some NDP members in their comments have suggested otherwise, most constitutional experts acknowledge that not changing the character of the Senate but abolishing the Senate would require the unanimity of the provinces, and that is for a very important reason. At Confederation, the Senate was, as members will know, designed to offer the smaller provinces in our federation a chance to have some regional balance that would not necessarily be found in this chamber, which reflected the population of different provinces and different constituencies. The New Democrats realize that unanimity with respect to abolition of the Senate would be impossible and, if we are being generous, we might even say it would be very hard to achieve.

The member for Vancouver Kingsway offered examples of premiers who had been in favour of the abolition of the Senate, but they are from Canada's most populous provinces. That the premier of Ontario or the premier of British Columbia may favour the abolition of the Senate should not surprise many Canadians. It would surprise me if the premiers of small provinces such as the premier of Manitoba, the premier of my own province of New Brunswick or the New Democratic premier of Nova Scotia were in favour. These premiers correctly recognize that the Senate offers the smaller provinces in our federation a chance in the Canadian Parliament to have some balance.

The opening of the Constitution, as my colleague from Saint-Laurent—Cartier so properly pointed out this morning, would offer a constitutional swamp that would see no end. There is the idea that we could have the partners in our federation come to a constitutional meeting. We know the Prime Minister certainly is averse to any meetings that would involve all first ministers in the federation, so we should not hold our breath for that ever to happen. It has not happened on issues as important as the economy, so I find it hard to imagine it would happen on an issue as complicated as abolishing the Senate. However, at that meeting, we know very well that first nations people would want to talk, correctly so, about self-government and aboriginal rights. Certainly the current separatist Government of Quebec would arrive with a laundry list, which would take up a two or three week meeting, of ridiculous grievances and complaints that it would fabricate to try to hijack the meeting.

As for the idea that we could ever get to a point, Canadians are not interested because we have been at that point. In the 1980s, under the leadership of a Progressive Conservative prime minister, Mr. Mulroney, Canadians remember Meech Lake and they remember the Charlottetown accord process. Canadians are correctly asking their elected parliamentarians to focus on issues that affect their daily lives, like the economy, youth unemployment and the environment. Those are the calls I get in my constituency office in Shediac. I have

not had numerous people say to me that we need to convene a first ministers conference to discuss the issue of abolishing the Senate.

• (1600)

[*Translation*]

I understand why the NDP tried, somewhat cynically, to take advantage of some of the problems the Senate is having right now.

We have seen in reports from various media outlets that expenses have been called into question and that some senators seem to be having difficulty determining their place of residence.

Obviously, we are not in any way minimizing the importance of settling and resolving the situation and holding accountable anyone who acted inappropriately.

That is why the Standing Senate Committee on Internal Economy, Budgets and Administration decided, on its own initiative, to refer certain cases to a major external audit that will be made public, and some cases involve certain senators appointed by the current Prime Minister. I have no doubt that if the external audit indicates potentially fraudulent circumstances, the senators will do the right thing and refer everything to the appropriate authorities. The Senate takes its financial responsibility seriously.

We are in no way minimizing the concerns of Canadian taxpayers about circumstances that are of significant concern to us. I must say that no one in the Liberal caucus will object to having people who may have done something inappropriate face serious consequences, including prosecution, if so required.

However, we cannot pretend that we need an endless constitutional discussion because there is currently an issue with residency or expenses. This problem may be resolved severely, appropriately and quickly, as the Senate itself has said. I think this is an attempt by the NDP to change the subject. Perhaps the NDP is thinking that tomorrow evening, with the vote on Bill C-457, put forward by the Bloc Québécois, will be difficult for them. We know very well that the NDP opposed the Clarity Act. The NDP will have to be absent en masse tomorrow evening when we, the Liberals, will vote against this Bloc bill that makes no sense. Sort of along those same lines, the NDP is pretending that another constitutional crisis needs our attention.

• (1605)

[*English*]

The Senate at its very inception, as I said at the beginning of my comments, offers the regions of the country a chance to balance the obvious demographic weight of some of the larger provinces in this chamber. An unelected Senate will certainly never be able to play the effective and, I hope, regionally equal role that the Fathers of Confederation, almost 150 ago, thought this model might achieve.

We need to be clear. The Liberal Party has supported and continues to support the notion of an elected, effective and equal Senate. For us, that would be an appropriate Senate reform measure.

*Business of Supply*

In our view the country is not ready to proceed to a constitutional conference to discuss that at this moment. However, if we were to accept that the abolition of the Senate was in fact the alternative, then smaller provinces like mine in New Brunswick, like Manitoba, where my colleague from Winnipeg North sits as a member of the House, would not have an opportunity to work with the other partners of the federation and hopefully a prime minister who would be interested at some point in having a discussion, when the moment was right, on how we could achieve an elected, effective and equal Senate.

My colleague from Toronto—Danforth, a member for whom I have considerable respect, also has on the order paper his own private member's bill, Bill C-470, which seeks itself to abolish the Clarity Act and substitute this bizarre 50% plus one formula, which shocks many Canadians, as a threshold to break up the country.

I think some NDP MPs would also have difficulty voting, and I am thinking of my friend from Acadie—Bathurst, who represents so well francophone minorities outside Quebec. For him to get up and have to vote for a bill by the member for Toronto—Danforth would obviously be difficult. That is probably why it is so low on the order of precedence, with no possible hope of ever actually coming before the House to be debated.

It is a cynical attempt, from our perspective, to change the channel at a time when Canadians think we should be referring and discussing issues a lot more important to the daily lives of Canadians than a pipe dream that somehow we could convene a constitutional conference to abolish the Canadian Senate.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Marc-André Morin (Laurentides—Labelle, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to reassure my colleague by saying that I would have no trouble voting against any bill introduced to trick us or to demonstrate that we are dealing with a hidden agenda or some other ploy.

I want to thank him, because while listening to his speech, I remembered why I got into politics. The fact is that the vast majority of Quebecers and people from my riding are fed up with sterile discussions and the dead end into which the Liberals and Conservatives have in turn led us.

I would like to reiterate what someone said this morning about how the Bloc, which introduced this bill, was invented by a bunch of Conservatives and Liberals back in the day. We no longer feel like playing a role in this movie. We have moved on. I am afraid that abolishing the Senate could turn out to be a missed opportunity, because the idea of getting rid of this idiotic body would probably be very easy to sell to Canadians. I cannot think of anyone who would want to defend the Senate, apart from them.

• (1610)

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Laurentides—Labelle for his comments and his question.

If he wishes to talk about dead ends, then he will have to speak about the bill introduced by his own colleague from Toronto—Danforth, Bill C-470, to abolish the Clarity Act and thereby lead

Canadians and francophones outside Quebec to think that our country could be split by a simple 50%+1 majority.

If he wants to talk about dead ends, then he should talk about his own motion—the NDP motion—which we have been discussing all day, about abolishing the Senate. The NDP, which claims to care so deeply about unemployment, young people and the environment, has decided to talk constitutional nonsense today. The motion may be welcomed by some, but New Democrats know very well that it will never see the light of day. The NDP might think that it could happen, but it is constitutionally impossible.

[*English*]

**Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am surprised to hear new-found passion for Senate reform from the Liberal benches. I recall the reform package they had back in 2008, when the then leader of the Liberal Party, the current member for Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, had a coalition agreement that apparently included a side deal to put the current leader of the Green Party into the Senate if they were successful in forming a coalition government. That is the Senate package I remember from that particular party. Is that what the Liberals currently support today?

Could the member stand and say he supports our government's approach to refer this to the Supreme Court and get some real clarity before pursuing Senate reform?

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc:** Mr. Speaker, the member for Essex can perhaps imagine all kinds of scary scenarios from 2008, but I have no reason to think any of his musings are accurate.

If he is asking if we support the government's decision to refer to the Supreme Court the whole issue of the constitutionality of some of the supposed Senate reform bills that it leaves on the order paper and does not bring up for debate, the answer is yes. In fact, we were urging the government to put the question to the Supreme Court even before it left a number of its alleged Senate reform bills languishing on the order paper, and more importantly, we were urging the government to ask its partners in the federation what kind of Senate reform would be appropriate. The Government of Quebec had already taken a reference case to the Quebec Court of Appeal. The Province of New Brunswick was preparing to take a reference case to the New Brunswick Court of Appeal.

The government's sudden conversion to some respect for the Supreme Court and its decision to take its cynical, piecemeal, ineffective Senate reform measures to the Supreme Court for an opinion hide what it is unable to get it from its own Senate caucus, which supposedly agreed with these Senate reform measures. I see no evidence that Senator Duffy is ready to send in a resignation letter because he suddenly had a conversion over getting himself elected to the Senate from the province of Prince Edward Island.

**Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it is indeed a pleasure to be able to address this motion from the NDP and to be able to follow my colleague from Beauséjour. He is always a tough act to follow, and I expect you are aware that his tongue was planted firmly in his cheek as he was praising what he may expect in remarks from me. Nonetheless, I welcome the opportunity to speak to the motion before the House. I will be opposing the motion.



*Business of Supply*

The Senate is an important and essential component of our constitutional and political life. The motion put forth by the NDP to abolish the Senate is a simplistic and knee-jerk response to the current and questionable behaviour of some senators. If lack of decency, lack of integrity, half-answers, half-truths and a general disregard for democracy are grounds for abolishing the upper chamber, then there would be ample grounds for Canadians to call for the abolition of the House of Commons.

Our democracy is in decline, but not because of the Senate. Rather, its decline can be traced to a Conservative government that believes the entirety of our democratic legitimacy occurs during an election. To the Conservatives, once an election is held, there is no more need for democratic engagement. That is why we see them shutting down voices in the public sphere and in civil society. That is why we see a complete evisceration of facts and evidence from their decision-making through gutting science and Statistics Canada. That is why we see women's organizations and other civic voices that disagree with the Conservatives having their funding cut or being told to toe the line.

If there is concern about the political health of the country, it is not the Senate that should be the focus of the NDP but the reform of this place, the House of Commons. Day in and day out we see scripted questions and scripted answers. Day in and day out we hear empty words and hyped-up rage and rhetoric, disingenuously calling it debate. It is not debate. Debate implies that we listen to one another. Debate implies that we are genuinely open to different options and new ideas. It implies as well that the health of our democracy cannot be sustained when we as MPs simply sit here like trained seals and do what we are told. We need fundamental change on how MPs operate.

We do need real reform, and it should start here in this chamber, but today we are chasing headlines again by debating a motion introduced by the NDP, a motion to abolish the Senate. The motion shows a lack of appreciation of our history, and that to me is troubling. I am privileged to be a member of Parliament and further honoured that I represent the riding of Charlottetown, the birthplace of Confederation.

This debate is meaningful to me because the construction and building of our federation was not an accident. The creation of the Senate was not an accident. It was a deliberate and thoughtful decision made by our founding fathers, as the Senate was meant to be a counterbalance to the House of Commons.

Again historical context is important. Representatives of the Maritime colonies at the time, including Prince Edward Island, were rightly concerned that the concentration of political power and decision-making would be centred in what was then Upper Canada. Even the distinguished Quebec representatives from Lower Canada at the time understood the need for a counterbalance against the power centre of Ontario, then Upper Canada.

That is why it is shocking that today we have Quebec MPs who would in any way wish to reduce the power and influence of Quebec. This would in fact occur if the NDP had its way and the Senate was abolished.

The principle of representation by population, rep by pop, was to apply to the election of members of the House of Commons. Under this principle, the people of Upper Canada would naturally have received the greatest number of seats in the House of Commons. That is where the population centres existed. For the people in the Maritimes who embraced responsible government, though, the idea of a second chamber based on regional representation was fundamental to the Confederation agreement.

• (1615)

Again, it was, and is, fundamental to counterbalance the power of the House of Commons and the concentration of power in what is now Ontario.

The Province of Prince Edward Island has as its coat of arms a large red oak tree and, beside it, three small saplings. Under the coat of arms, in Latin, are the words *parva sub ingenti*, which means "the small under the protection of the great". That has been the motto of Prince Edward Island since 1769.

The Senate is there to ensure that the small are protected by the great. Provinces like mine need a strong federation. We need that representative regional voice that is part of the Senate. We need that to avoid being trampled. We need it to avoid the tyranny of the majority.

My province is small but proud, and we have some very serious challenges. The government is quite happy to kick us to the curb.

In my province, we have a chance to diversify our economy. We had that chance through the announcement that was made in 2005 by the Liberal government of the day to construct a third subsea cable that would ensure electricity would come from the mainland. That is the key to energy security, to economic opportunities going forward. That project was cancelled by the Conservative government.

Right now we are going through a very vigorous debate. The gutting of the EI system and the impact it will have on the seasonal economy that we have in Prince Edward Island are topics on the lips of everyone in my province.

Back in the last budget, when the Conservative government decided it was going to cut back the civil service, the rate of cuts across the country was 4.8%, but not in Prince Edward Island. In Prince Edward Island it was double that, so where we do have good-paying jobs, they are being cut at twice the rate they are in the rest of the country.

We are the only province without a passport office. In every province in this country, if veterans want to see their case manager, they can go to a case manager in their province, but not in mine. If immigrants want to talk to a live person about their case, they can talk to somebody in their province, but not in Prince Edward Island. If taxpayers want to talk to a live person about their income tax return, they can talk to a live person in any province in Canada, but not in mine.

*Business of Supply*

There has been a lot of talk in this chamber about a certain senator, Mike Duffy. I can tell members that the appointment of Mike Duffy in Prince Edward Island was a huge insult. As far as we are concerned, out of the four seats that were set aside for Prince Edward Island, one has been given to Ontario. Every time he opens his mouth, that embarrassment is further exacerbated.

The real issue in this debate should be the quality of the appointments, not the Senate as an institution. When we see the Prime Minister appointing Senators Brazeau, Duffy and Wallin, we should rightly question his judgment. We certainly must not, as the NDP is proposing, rush out with simplistic and ill-conceived policies that would undermine the protection of Quebec and the Maritimes as well as their constitutional and historical links to the Senate.

The NDP's approach to democratic reform looks a lot like the Conservatives' approach to justice: when the only tool they have in their tool kit is a sledgehammer, everything starts to look like a rock.

As the member of Parliament for Charlottetown, I say to the NDP that the current government has done enough to undermine Prince Edward Island's status as a province. Please stop helping them.

• (1620)

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to take a moment to read a quote from my Liberal colleague: "In its conception and in its operations, the Senate is neither regionally representative in the sense that we understand it today, nor is it democratic. In fact the Canadian Senate is an undemocratic institution working at the heart of democratic government."

It is this, combined with the fact that the Senate has been an instrument of favouritism for the party in power throughout its history, that has led our party to the conclusion that the Senate should be abolished.

And just whom was I quoting? The current interim leader of the Liberal Party.

I would therefore like to know whether the member thinks, as he said in his speech, that the interim leader of the Liberal Party is redirecting debate and has no understanding whatsoever of history.

**Mr. Sean Casey:** Mr. Speaker, I do understand history. That quotation was from 1984 when the interim leader of the Liberal Party was Ontario's New Democratic premier. My colleague certainly did her homework.

However, that is not our party's position. We believe that it is more subtle than that. This is not a simple issue; it is a complex one. We understand that. The problem with the NDP and its position on this issue is that it does not seem to understand that this is a complex issue.

• (1625)

[*English*]

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, like Prince Edward Island, Manitoba is a relatively small province compared to Ontario and Quebec. There is a great deal of value in looking at the Senate as a strong regional force going into the future.

The concerns I have, and I kind of picked up on the comments of members, are the issues about which my constituents are most concerned. Those issues relate to jobs, health care, crime and safety on the streets and things of that nature.

What the NDP is proposing today is to open up constitutional debate, knowing full well that it will never get unanimous support across the country to abolish the Senate.

Could the member provide some comment on what is important for us to be debating versus having a motion of this nature today?

**Mr. Sean Casey:** Mr. Speaker, the question is actually a timely one. Since my election in May, I have decided to spend one full day per month going door to door within the riding of Charlottetown to simply ask people what is on their minds and how I can do a better job representing them.

Nobody is talking about the abolition of the Senate. Nobody is talking about constitutional reform. The topics on the minds of the constituents in my riding change from month to month. Last week it was Senator Duffy and EI. The EI topic seems to be a consistent one. Health care is a consistent one. I can assure members that Senate reform and constitutional negotiations are not.

We have dramatic economic issues in provinces where we have seasonal economies, economic issues that are not only being ignored but exacerbated by the government. That is what is on the minds of the people in my riding, not constitutional negotiations.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the truly wonderful member for St. John's South—Mount Pearl.

Today, we are debating a motion, and I will take the time to read it.

That, in the opinion of the House, the government of Canada, in consultation with the provinces and territories, should take immediate steps toward abolishing the unelected and unaccountable Senate of Canada.

I want to emphasize one very important element of this motion: "in consultation with the provinces and territories". The NDP believes that it is essential to consult the provinces and the territories when making decisions that affect them.

We spend \$90 million per year on a Senate made up of unelected, unaccountable senators. Since coming to power, the current Prime Minister has made 58 partisan Senate appointments even though he said that he would never appoint an unelected senator. He has appointed more senators than Mr. Mulroney, including several Conservative candidates who were defeated at the polls. Half of the 105 Senate seats are currently occupied by people appointed by this Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister's Conservative Senate has become even more corrupt than the Liberal Senate that he inherited when he came to power. Worse still, the Conservatives have just increased the Senate's budget, which is now \$92.5 million.

*Business of Supply*

I would also like to point out that the Senate is currently fraught with scandal. I will just mention a few. Senator Brazeau, a Conservative, was recently arrested for domestic violence; he is yet to appear in court. Even before he was appointed to the Senate, several complaints of sexual harassment were filed against him. He is also under investigation for stealing from the Senate and committing tax fraud. Should he remain a Senator until the end of his term, in 2049, taxpayers will have forked out \$7 million, not to mention all the other benefits Senators receive, such as their residence and travel expenses—and that does not even take into account other possible acts of fraud. He has been suspended with salary. Taxpayers, therefore, continue to pay an annual salary of over \$130,000 to a possible sex offender.

To top it all off, he holds the record among Senators of having been the most frequently absent during the parliamentary session, both in the Senate chamber itself and in the committees on which he sits, or rather, on which he is supposed to sit—I am not sure how I should put it. He has, in other words, missed 65% of the meetings of the aboriginal affairs committee.

Senator Mike Duffy, also a Conservative, claimed a generous housing allowance, alleging that his main residence was on Prince Edward Island despite having an Ontario health insurance card. This is completely unacceptable. In my opinion, if every member of the House were asked which health insurance card they have, I am certain that they would have the card for the province they represent. This, however, is not the case when it comes to Senators.

Over the last three years, Senator Duffy has cost Canadian taxpayers \$1.2 million. He is never in the Senate chamber, but he readily participates in Conservative Party fundraising activities.

Senator Pamela Wallin, also a Conservative, is currently being investigated by the Senate, which suspects that she does not meet the residency requirements. She claimed over \$300,000 in travel expenses over the past 3 years alone, in spite of the fact that only 10% of these expenses covered travel in Saskatchewan, the province she is supposed to represent. Moreover, just like Mr. Duffy, Ms. Wallin has an Ontario health insurance card, rather than one from Saskatchewan. This is unacceptable.

In 1999, Senator Eric Bernston, also a Conservative, was found guilty of having defrauded the Saskatchewan government. He nevertheless continued to sit in the Senate for two more years at the taxpayers' expense costing over \$260,000.

Unfortunately, the Conservatives are not the only ones to have brought shame upon this country's democratic institutions.

●(1630)

Let us start with Senator Philippe Gigantès. This has to be my favourite example of lack of respect for democratic institutions. This failed Liberal candidate read one of his books in the Senate—from start to finish—in order to get a French translation. And then what did he do? He published that French version. Unbelievable. What a lack of respect for democratic institutions. You have to be pretty cheap to not want to pay for your own book to be translated into French. Come on.

Mac Harb, another Liberal senator, is also being audited for travel expense fraud. He claimed \$30,000, even though he has several

residences in Ottawa. Andrew Thompson, a Liberal, showed up for work only 12 times in seven years, and continued to be paid. That works out to an average of two days a year, for a salary of \$132,300. I imagine that a lot of Canadians would like to get \$132,300 for two days of work a year. The government is harassing the unemployed, and meanwhile, senators can work two days a year for \$132,300. That is shameful.

This is what the Prime Minister has said about the Senate in recent years:

...the upper house remains a dumping ground for the favoured cronies of the prime minister...

These comments were posted on his website on January 15, 2004, during his party's leadership campaign. Here is another quote:

The truth is the Senate is a patronage position—virtually a lifetime patronage position—with little responsibility or accountability. And this is the fundamental problem...

That is an excerpt from an interview he gave on CTV on December 10, 1997.

Taxpayers are now on the hook for millions so that the Prime Minister's friends and generous Conservative Party supporters can sit pretty for the rest of their lives. In my opinion, there is no place in our democracy for a Senate made up of unelected members who have no accountability.

We could find much better ways to spend the \$90 million a year needed to run this archaic institution. How many seniors could we lift out of poverty with \$90 million? How many job opportunities could we help create for our young people? How much could we help young single mothers who are living in difficult situations? But no, we are paying senators so that some of them can work two days a year and earn \$132,000. We can see where the priority is here.

Appointed senators, especially the ones who abuse their privileges, do not represent the interests or values of Canadians. Canadians, senators aside perhaps, are hard workers. This situation is completely unacceptable to them when they have to get up early every morning to work hard, despite sometimes difficult living conditions and economic situations that the Conservatives do not seem to be aware of. That is what normal Canadians do, while senators hardly do anything and are not accountable.

So we are calling on the Government of Canada to abolish once and for all the upper chamber of unelected, unaccountable officials. Why not simply abolish this archaic, undemocratic and outmoded institution? No province has had an upper chamber since 1968. No province has since said, "We made a mistake and will be reinstating our upper chamber."

The provinces, which have not had an upper chamber since 1968, have shown that they are able to operate democratically and that they have not been affected by this. The behaviour of some senators shows that it is high time to review the benefit of this democratic institution. Even if senators are elected for a nine-year term, they are still not accountable to anyone once they are elected, right up until they retire. So this does not solve the problem at all.

*Business of Supply*

●(1635)

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** Before we move on to questions and comments, 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 Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, Employment Insurance; the hon. member for Winnipeg North, Citizenship and Immigration; the hon. member for Beauport—Limoilou, Health.

[English]

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, NDP members have declared that the biggest issue facing Canada today is abolishing the Senate. Whether Canadians want it abolished or not is irrelevant. The NDP has taken a position that it has to be abolished.

There is no doubt, and we have to be very clear on this issue, that in order to abolish the Senate, we need the support of all the provinces in Canada.

I am wondering if the member could provide a list of the provinces that she and her caucus colleagues have compiled that are prepared to abolish the Senate. Does she even have a list? Has she any concept of which provinces want to abolish the Senate?

If in fact there is no list, if in fact a province like Quebec, Prince Edward Island, Manitoba or any other province wants to keep it, would it be the position of the NDP that it does not matter, that at the end of the day the NDP wants it gone even if Canadians do not? Is that the position the NDP is taking?

[Translation]

**Ms. Christine Moore:** I would like to re-read the motion, so that it is very clear for my colleague:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government of Canada, in consultation with the provinces and territories, should take immediate steps towards abolishing the unelected and unaccountable Senate of Canada.

Again, it is in consultation with the provinces and territories. Does that mean that we will act unilaterally? No, because we will consult the provinces and territories. The NDP understands the importance of consulting the provinces and territories when they are affected by the decisions.

We are not like the Conservatives, who make major reforms without studying the repercussions, without consulting the provinces and without talking to the ministers. We do not scoff at them. Our motion clearly says that we will consult with the provinces and territories, and that is what we will do.

●(1640)

[English]

**Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, in follow-up to the previous question, which was put forward rather aggressively, I must say, I wonder if the hon. member could speak to the fact that Canada remains the only major democratic nation in the world that has a second, unelected body that can override the decisions of our elected chamber.

None of the provinces still retain a second body, a senate. Quebec and Ontario removed theirs.

I wonder if the member thinks Canadians have expressed a strong interest in electoral reform. Does she agree that seems to be something that the Liberal contenders for leadership say Canadian want? Is Senate reform perhaps one of those areas of democratic reform for which Canadians are calling?

Finally, do we all in this House recall that this elected House passed the climate change accountability act, which the Senate then crushed?

[Translation]

**Ms. Christine Moore:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind the House that an Ipsos Reid survey from February 18, 2013, showed that a minority of Canadians, 22%, were in favour of the status quo. The vast majority of Canadians, 78%, spoke out in favour of abolishing or reforming the Senate.

It is obvious that Canadians want something to happen with the Senate. Since Senate reform is going nowhere, it is high time we consider abolishing the Senate, in collaboration with the provinces and territories.

As I said in my speech, every province has abolished its senate. The last one was abolished in 1968. Since then, has any province discussed the idea of reinstating their senate? Absolutely not. They function perfectly well without an upper chamber. We could do the same.

Given how much money is wasted in the Senate, I believe it is really the only option available to Canadians. We need to enter into discussions with the provinces and territories about abolishing the Senate.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** The hon. member for Hull—Aylmer on a point of order.

**Ms. Nycole Turmel (Hull—Aylmer, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I wish to move the following motion:

That, at the conclusion of today's debate on the opposition motion in the name of the member for Toronto—Danforth, all questions necessary to dispose of the motion be deemed put and a recorded division deemed requested and deferred to Wednesday, March 6, 2013, at the expiry of the time provided for Government Orders.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** Does the hon. member for Hull—Aylmer have the unanimous consent of the House to propose this motion?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** I declare the motion carried.

(Motion agreed to)

[English]

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** Resuming debate, the hon. member for St. John's South—Mount Pearl.

*Business of Supply*

**Mr. Ryan Cleary (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I stand in support of today's motion that immediate steps be taken toward abolishing the Senate, tabled by the hon. member for Toronto—Danforth.

One of the debates in this country involving the Senate that I followed as a young journalist covering former Newfoundland and Labrador Premier Clyde Wells in the 1990s was the debate over whether the upper chamber should be reformed into a triple-E model, as in elected, equal and effective, a triple-E Senate.

Today, there is no debate that the upper chamber has become a triple-U Senate, as in unaccountable, unelected and unapologetic.

We should abolish it. There is no alternative. The Senate is too far gone to save. It has become a gated country club, a political pasture and a golden handshake for friends of the Conservative and Liberal parties for fundraisers, for partisans and for failed politicians. The senators do the bidding of the parties they represent. They are unelected. They are unaccountable to the people. They are unapologetic for the embarrassment they have become.

Yes, the Senate is an embarrassment, an embarrassment to Canadians from one end of this country to the other. It is an embarrassment to real Canadian politicians like the elected members of Parliament in the House today.

I have no excuses for the Mike Duffys of this country who take months to figure out exactly where they live. What a joke and an embarrassment.

To quote Michael Bliss, a professor and historian at the University of Toronto:

This is a classic case of Canadians discovering that senators have no clothes... They've turned themselves into our daily comic relief segment of politics.

I was a journalist in my previous life. I have no defence for Mike Duffy or Pamela Wallin. Wallin is supposed to represent Saskatchewan, but her primary residence is in Toronto and she holds an Ontario health insurance card. I personally find the Duffy and Wallin cases particularly appalling. Journalists should know better, when we spend our working lives holding politicians to account. It is bred into us. We instinctively know where the line is that must not be crossed, and it has most definitely been crossed.

Then there is Senator Patrick Brazeau. If it was not bad enough that he is facing allegations of abuse of his housing allowance, there have also been sexual assault complaints lodged against him.

The embarrassment has become constant. The embarrassment is daily.

The scandal over senatorial housing allowances has led the Senate to seek legal advice that says that as long as senators sign a declaration of qualification form that says they reside where they reside, then it is okay. The hon. member for Timmins—James Bay stood in the House yesterday and equated that declaration to a pinkie swear.

In my own province of Newfoundland and Labrador, there is Senator Fabian Manning. He was a member of Parliament. He lost his seat. He was appointed to the Senate. Then he was cherry-picked for the 2011 federal election to run again for the Conservatives in the

federal riding of Avalon. Manning lost again. Then he was appointed to the Senate again. We have a senator who was rejected by the people, not once but twice, speaking on behalf of the Conservative government all over my riding of St. John's South—Mount Pearl. Is Senator Manning supposed to be Newfoundland and Labrador's voice? He is not. We are supposed to represent Newfoundland and Labrador in Ottawa. We are not supposed to be representatives of Ottawa in Newfoundland and Labrador. That is not the way it is supposed to work.

Senators are held to one level of account; Canadians are held to another level of account. For example, EI claimants have investigators knocking down their doors, while senators hide behind their doors; that is, if their doors can be found.

● (1645)

The budget of the Canadian Senate is \$92.5 million a year. Most Canadians cannot even fathom that much money. Let me bring this home. Senator Wallin's \$350,000 in travel expenses would cover old age security for 57 seniors a year. Mike Duffy is eligible to collect another \$1.3 million in salary before his mandatory retirement at the age of 75. Patrick Brazeau will bring in another \$7 million in salary before he turns 75.

These are basically jobs for life. Well, they are not really jobs for life, but salaries for life. The average number of work days in 2011 and 2012 for a Canadian senator was 56 days, with an annual salary, as has been said before, of \$132,000 a year plus living expenses, for a job, I am sorry, for a salary, that they will continue to receive until they are 75.

They do not have to run for election. They are not accountable to anyone. They do not have to apologize to anyone when they fleece the taxpayer. The Senate absolutely should be abolished.

Senators vote according to the interests of the parties they represent, as I mentioned earlier, rather than the regions they are supposed to represent. However, the Senate was created as a chamber of sober second thought. It was created to offset the representation by population in the House of Commons. Again, it was envisioned that senators would vote according to the region they represented, to offset representation by population.

Small provinces, such as Newfoundland and Labrador, have seven seats in the House of Commons. Small provinces like Prince Edward Island have five seats in the House of Commons. Altogether, the Atlantic provinces have 32 seats. Then, we have provinces like Quebec that has 75 seats, and Ontario with 106 seats. The bigger provinces with the larger populations obviously have more seats in the House of Commons, and those totals are destined to increase. The number of seats in the House of Commons will rise by 30 in the 2015 general election. Quebec, Ontario, B.C. and Alberta will all see their number of seats increase. Meanwhile, provinces like Newfoundland and Labrador and the three maritime provinces will not see any increase. Our representation will be watered down.

The point that I am getting to is that while I agree with the abolition of the Senate 100%, there is a bigger debate taking shape in this country over the need for democratic reform. Let me cut to the chase.

*Business of Supply*

How does a smaller province like Newfoundland and Labrador, with a population of 514,000 people, half the population of Ottawa, ensure we have an equal seat at the confederation table with larger provinces like Ontario and Quebec that have more representation because they have larger populations? How do we ensure that the interests of Newfoundland and Labrador are heard and acted upon?

This week, in my province, we have news that three more groundfish plants will be shut down, throwing 300 rural Newfoundlanders out of work. It has been more than 20 years after the northern cod moratorium, and there is still no recovery plan in place. Ottawa's handling of the fisheries has been a disgrace and an affront to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

Again, how do we ensure that smaller provinces have an equal seat at the confederation table? From Newfoundland and Labrador's perspective, and from the perspective of smaller provinces across the country, that is the debate that must happen. That is a debate that is destined to happen.

The Senate absolutely must be abolished, but the question must also be asked on how we offset representation by population so that smaller provinces have an equal footing, for the good of our culture, our identity, and for the good of future generations, and so that small provinces like Newfoundland and Labrador are not made to feel like lesser provinces?

Yes, abolish the Senate and the abomination it has become. However, we must then get to the real work of democratic reform.

• (1650)

**Mr. Gerald Keddy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I listened, somewhat, to the member's speech, and the mistakes in it. I would like to thank him now for the extra seat in Prince Edward Island. Hopefully it will be a Conservative seat. He should perhaps check on who is doing the research.

I have listened to many NDP speakers talk about that nasty unelected Senate, how people run for office and happen to lose and then get appointed to the Senate. That is the sin of all sins; that is the evil of all evils. However, that is the party that wants proportional representation in this place. If an individual runs for Parliament and gets defeated but the party has 30% of the vote, if they get five more members, they are appointed to the House of Commons instead of elected. What a bunch of hypocrites. Good Lord.

• (1655)

**Mr. Ryan Cleary:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for the question. I would also ask the hon. member to please listen to my answer. He said at the beginning of his question that the Conservatives listened "somewhat". The problem with the Conservatives is the fact that they listen somewhat. They do not listen like they should to everything that is being said.

I did not hear a question from the hon. member, so I have nothing to respond to. As the member is only listening somewhat, I will repeat again: first things first, abolish the Senate, and then democratic reform.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the member makes a very strong statement when he says abolish the Senate and then look at democratic reform.

The member who spoke before him stated that his party was going to consult with the provinces before it would do anything. It seems to me that NDP members have adopted the position to abolish the Senate. Why would they declare publicly that they would abolish the Senate and then listen to what the premiers have to say? It seems to me that there is a gap in reality here. You cannot abolish the Senate and then have consultations with the provinces. You need to consult with the provinces. You need to get all of the provinces onside, which you are not going to do. Technically, that party would have to get all of the provinces onside in order to abolish the Senate.

On the other hand, the member wants to ensure that the regions have representation in Ottawa. Many regions of the country, including Manitoba, Atlantic Canada and the prairies, look at the Senate as a reformed body that could guarantee regional representation, if we arrive at the day when we could have constitutional debates inside our country. Today is not the day. Today is about the economy—

**Mr. Ryan Cleary:** Mr. Speaker, I find it hard to take the hon. member seriously when he stands and asks a question about the Senate. Every time he asks a question about the Senate, I see it as the hon. member defending the old boys' club of the Senate, the Liberal appointees. I do not only hear the hon. member speaking; I hear him speaking on behalf of his old boys' network. It is the Conservative Party and the Liberal Party protecting their friends. That is what I hear. I find it hard to take any question that he asks seriously.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** Members should recall that they must direct their comments, questions, speeches to the chair and not to other hon. members. It keeps the debate civil.

We are going to resume debate. The hon. member for Elgin—Middlesex—London has 20 minutes available to him, but I will need to interrupt him at 15 minutes past the hour, which is the end of the time allocated for business of supply today.

The hon. member for Elgin—Middlesex—London.

**Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, thanks for the fair warning about the amount of time. I am sure I will be warned before it is over; I love the signals that are given by the chair.

Today I am going to discuss a number of things on the motion that has been brought forward by the party opposite. The first thing I want to cover is something I am hearing a lot of in the House today, whether this is truly the best use of our time.

*Business of Supply*

I have to say that when visiting the coffee shops back in St. Thomas or Aylmer, it is not. We should be here talking about jobs and the economy. I certainly have that conversation a lot. When we get out of this place to spend time back home, the real answer is that it is about jobs and the economy. If the discussion of the Senate ever came up, it would probably be because I brought it up. I chair our procedure and House affairs committee, and that is where we talk about this. I might be asked what I have been doing, and if we talked about Senate reform that would probably be the only reason it would come up on the street.

The real question is about jobs and the economy. This government and this Prime Minister has proven that we can multi-task; we can do a number of things at once. Here we are, sharing in that multi-tasking, covering off a topic that does not seem to be of much use to us today.

I will talk a little about the priorities of this place and how we got to where we are today on this topic. When we get to Senate reform, I will talk a little about Senate reform and what has been put forward by this Prime Minister and this party in our time here, and the help or hurt, whichever way members would like to take it, of the party opposite on helping move that through expeditiously to create the reform they all look for. I will point out the good points and the bad. Certainly another piece we will talk about will be the Senate reform that we are already working on.

I will spend some time talking about our referral to the Supreme Court for an opinion on some of the topics we are talking about, and how instead of the filibustering, talking about topics over and over, and showboating, that we will probably get better answers waiting for the opinion of the Supreme Court and then taking action based on what it has to say.

Unlike some of the speakers before me, who have already come to the conclusion that they need to abolish the Senate, before they have even done the consultation that is talked about in the motion, I will wait and listen to the Supreme Court's ruling first. From that, I will formulate a plan going forward, and I will certainly follow up on Bill C-7, Senate Reform Act, that is currently before the House, which has been referenced. We will do that. We will move forward in that fashion. I think that would be appropriate.

Let us talk about those things. Let us talk about jobs and the economy, and talk about how this fits in. I cannot get up to speak in the House without sharing how the motion before us today on Senate reform is not the topic that is enthusiastically embraced back home. Most often, the topic is on jobs and the economy, and I wish that had been the opposition's choice to talk about today. We could be vigorously debating our opinions on something about jobs, the economy and growth.

However, here we are again. I do not do this often, but I am going to quote one of my friends from across the way. I will talk about one of my friends, the member for Louis-Saint-Laurent. She is special. She does a great job on committee, and we have had discussions on some of these issues.

This morning I was listening, as closely as I possibly could to the topic, when I would rather be talking about jobs and the economy. I listened to the member's speech. In answers to questions, she did

respond, which I thought was very appropriate, twice, and it was great.

First, I believe she said thank you for referring it to the Supreme Court. She is right. It was an appropriate thing for us to do. Therefore, on behalf of all Canadians and myself, she is welcome.

• (1700)

The other thing I believe she was asked about were some of the good things that happened in the Senate. The Senate has actually done some remarkable studies and research on topics. She said that they agreed that this had happened. It did work, that it was really what was going on over there.

We should not judge all for the lack of some and we should not judge an institution based on the hypocrisy of wanting today's talking points. It is only safe to say, that this is where we should go.

I find it somewhat strange that we are here today discussing the motion. When asked, the Leader of the Opposition could not clearly deny that he would not appoint senators. There is a bit of hypocrisy there also. Maybe we should have talked about that too.

I want to talk about another one of my other favourite members. The member for Hamilton Centre was up earlier today. I could listen to him for hours. I believe it is part of why I have a loss of hearing, because whether he is right or wrong, he is loud. Whether he is right or wrong, he will ensure that we hear what he has to say. I love him for that and, honestly, for his participation at committee also. He has been a good friend.

I would like to let him know that today I also looked through speeches and the number of times that Senate reform had come to the House and the number of times the members opposite had spoken. I will give a bit of a history lesson on some of that. There were some 40 speeches from the NDP alone on this. There were 88 opposition speakers. It has come forward for debate in the House on 17 days. There have been nine different committee meetings.

We are sometimes asked, where it is. We rotate legislation around from certain days, but I will give some thoughts on some of this.

Bill C-7 was brought forward in June of 2011. It came to the House on September 30, 2011, with a couple of opposition party members speaking to it. On October 3, three more got up and spoke to it, I am sure in conjunction with a number of government members and members of the third party. On November 14, more members got up and spoke to it. On November 22, 15 different opposition members spoke on that day alone to Bill C-7, the Senate reform package.

I have been spending today reading through some of those speeches and watching as many speeches as I can in the House also. One would think that if we had to tell anyone the same thing over and over again, this many times, it has been said and done. The real answer is, apparently it is not. We are still putting more speakers up.

On December 7, 2011, two more speakers from the opposite side were up. On December 8, it was another bountiful day on Senate reform. Eleven more members from the opposition got up that day and spoke to Bill C-7.

*Private Members' Business*

We have now moved into 2012 on the bill. On February 27, 2012, the same thing occurred. Another seven members from the official opposition were up speaking that day.

The NDP members have found a niche, something they were looking for, a topic that they like, and that is what this is about.

I would like to paraphrase a speech I read today from the member for Winnipeg North, from November 2011, saying perhaps this was what this was about.

● (1705)

The NDP members have found a topic that they think will stir public interest and will move their interests forward, rather than they found a real interest in what would help in the democratic reform of our country.

We need to look more into what it will take to get it done and that leads me to the other topic of the referral to the Supreme Court and how with that in-hand, significant progress may actually work forward, when members quit standing and saying that the court will not accept that or coming up with other reasons as to why we have this legislation going forward.

Let us talk about what was referred to the Supreme Court.

First, the first piece of opinion we have asked the Supreme Court for is something pretty simple and that is term limits. What term would be appropriate for senators to have if indeed senators had term limits? Can we limit the terms of senators? I know that in the past, the retirement date was changed, so I think terms for senators is an opinion that the Supreme Court will come back to us with. We are suggesting nine years in the one piece of legislation, but we have asked the Supreme Court give us an opinion on a number of different terms.

I believe the last study I read at committee the average length of time served by a senator in our House was nine-point-something years and that was the average length of time a senator did serve in the Senate. Therefore, asking about term limits of nine years is probably very appropriate.

The next thing is the democratic selection of Senate nominees. We have asked an opinion of the Supreme Court about the democratic selection of nominees. Can we ask provinces to determine within their provinces who they would like their senators to be? If that happens, then they would be appointed by the Prime Minister to the Senate. Alberta has already chosen to do this. We have senators now who have been elected by the people of Alberta, representing provincially the province of Alberta in the Senate who have been appointed by our Prime Minister. We are asking for the Supreme Court's opinion on that topic to see whether that is a process we could continue to follow. Would that handle the democratic lack we have of unelected senators by having provinces elect them and then move them forward?

There are a couple of other pieces of opinion we have asked the Supreme Court for and one has to do with net worth for senators and the other has to do with what we are talking about today, the abolition of the Senate. We are asking the opinion of the Supreme Court on this very topic. I mentioned the hypocrisy piece that the member for Winnipeg North mentioned in his speech in November

2011, about bringing this topic forward for the sake of political reasons rather than for real democratic reform. We have hit on it exactly. The party opposite knows the Supreme Court has been asked for its opinion on this topic and yet what is its motion today? Let us spend the whole day talking about this instead of—

**An hon. member:** Jobs and the economy.

**Mr. Joe Preston:** The member is right. Instead of talking about jobs and the economy, we are talking about a topic that the NDP believes will add some political oomph.

I talked about the number of speakers we had in the House and how many members from the NDP rose to speak and said the same thing over and over again. It was enlightening reading some of these speeches over again after having listened to them in the first place. However, we have also had a number of committee meetings on this same topic. Therefore, it not only happened here, it happened at committees, whether it was Bill C-7 or previous democratic reform pieces on the Senate. Since 2006, I am told there have been 28 committee meetings that have taken place on Senate reform.

As the chair of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs that had to deal with this, it was a topic of discussion and a bit of filibustering, a delaying tactic.

● (1710)

I was a stay-at-home defenceman. People may not be able to tell by my appearance, but in hockey I seldom got past centre ice. My coach thought I was a far better defenceman than I was a goal scorer. Therefore, I know when players are delaying the game and I know what it looks like when players are not rushing the puck. I would suggest the party opposite has gone even further on not rushing the puck.

● (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 Wednesday, March 6 at the expiry of the time provided for government orders.

**Hon. Gordon O'Connor:** Mr. Speaker, I ask that you see the clock as 5:30 p.m.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** Is it agreed?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** It being 5:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

**PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS**

[English]

**RELIGIOUS FREEDOM**

**Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC)** moved:



*Private Members' Business*

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should: (a) continue to recognize as part of Canadian foreign policy that (i) everyone has the right to freedom of religion and conscience, including the freedom to change religion or belief, and the freedom to manifest religion or belief in teaching, worship, practice and observance, (ii) all acts of violence against religious groups should be condemned, (iii) Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights be supported, (iv) the special value of official statements made by the Minister of Foreign Affairs denouncing violations of religious freedom around the world be promoted, (v) Canada's commitment to the creation of an Office of Religious Freedom should be used to help protect religious minorities and promote the pluralism that is essential to the development of free and democratic societies; and (b) support (i) the opposition to laws that use "defamation of religion" and "blasphemy" both within states and internationally to persecute members of religious minorities, (ii) reporting by Canadian missions abroad in responding to incidents of religious violence, (iii) coordinated efforts to protect and promote religious freedom, (iv) the maintaining of a regular dialogue with relevant governments to ensure that the issue of religious persecution is a priority, (v) the encouragement of Canadian embassies to seek contact with religious communities and human rights organizations on gathering information related to human rights abuses, (vi) the training and support of foreign affairs officials for the advocacy of global religious freedom.

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege for me today to rise and begin the first hour of debate on my private member's motion, Motion No. 382, which speaks to Canada's role to protect and promote the freedom of religion and conscience.

In my riding of Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, my constituents are appalled when they too often hear and see the persecution of people, the beating, the raping and the killing of individuals. Why? It is only because of their religion, their belief or their desire to change it.

This is in fact an issue of human dignity.

Allow me to read into the record, again, my Motion No. 382:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should: (a) continue to recognize as part of Canadian foreign policy that (i) everyone has the right to freedom of religion and conscience, including the freedom to change religion or belief, and the freedom to manifest religion or belief in teaching, worship, practice and observance, (ii) all acts of violence against religious groups should be condemned, (iii) Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights be supported, (iv) the special value of official statements made by the Minister of Foreign Affairs denouncing violations of religious freedom around the world be promoted, (v) Canada's commitment to the creation of an Office of Religious Freedom should be used to help protect religious minorities and promote the pluralism that is essential to the development of free and democratic societies; and (b) support (i) the opposition to laws that use "defamation of religion" and "blasphemy" both within states and internationally to persecute members of religious minorities, (ii) reporting by Canadian missions abroad in responding to incidents of religious violence, (iii) coordinated efforts to protect and promote religious freedom, (iv) the maintaining of a regular dialogue with relevant governments to ensure that the issue of religious persecution is a priority, (v) the encouragement of Canadian embassies to seek contact with religious communities and human rights organizations on gathering information related to human rights abuses, (vi) the training and support of foreign affairs officials for the advocacy of global religious freedom.

I want to take this opportunity now to thank my friend and colleague, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board and the member for Cypress Hills—Grasslands, Saskatchewan, for seconding the motion.

Indeed, we are here today, in part, because of his commitment to this important and timely issue. I am pleased to have worked closely with him in bringing the motion forward.

As I begin, please allow me to address the first part of my motion, dealing with the importance of promoting religious freedom in our foreign policy and our government's intention to continue to speak

out against discrimination and all acts of violence against religious groups.

Unfortunately, this human right is facing increasing restrictions worldwide. Our government is a strong and committed supporter of the individual rights of freedom of religion or belief, and we will continue to promote the protection of religious minorities around the world and support pluralism as a key objective of our foreign policy.

Clearly, the need is urgent and, as the Prime Minister recently stated, as citizens of a free country we have a solemn duty to speak out on behalf of those who are under constant threat just because of their religious beliefs.

The Prime Minister also correctly stated that democracy will not, and cannot, find fertile ground in any society where notions of the freedom of personal conscience and faith are not permitted.

• (1720)

In Canada we have promoted and enacted human rights for a very long time. The right to religion in Canada is foundational, just as democracy is a fundamental right in Canada.

Recently, I had the honour of joining the Prime Minister as he announced the official opening of our government's Office of Religious Freedom. This office will be an important vehicle through which Canada will advance fundamental Canadian values including freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law worldwide.

It will focus on protecting and advocating on behalf of religious minorities under threat, opposing religious hatred and intolerance and promoting Canadian values of pluralism and tolerance abroad. This includes when governments use laws of blasphemy, apostasy and defamation of religion to restrict religious freedom and expression.

Through this dedicated office, under the leadership of Dr. Andrew Bennett, Canada's first ambassador of religious freedom, we will coordinate diplomatic efforts to respond to areas of religious discrimination and persecution and maintain frank dialogue with other governments to ensure that religious freedom is a priority.

Last week, I met with Ambassador Bennett. I congratulate him on his appointment and wish him every success in a position that will surely come with its challenges.

When considering this issue and this motion, it is useful to reflect on the original meaning of the word "religion". In Latin, the word "religion" means "respect for what is sacred". This is key to our approach, respect for religious beliefs, for the ability to worship in a safe and secure environment and for expression of one's faith, free from persecution.

We believe strongly that everyone should have this right. As my motion, M-382, makes clear, our government will continue to speak out against and condemn all acts of violence against religious groups.

*Private Members' Business*

Freedom of religion also means the freedom to change religion or belief, and the freedom to follow one's religion or belief in teaching, worship, practice and observance, free from discrimination and fear of violence and free from persecution.

We know there are strong linkages between religious freedom, pluralism, peace and security, which are pillars of strong democratic and prosperous development. As the Prime Minister has said:

Pluralism is the principle that binds our diverse peoples together.

It is essential to our civil society and economic strength....

Most of the world's nations are, like Canada, composed of diverse ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious populations....

Pluralism allows individuals to retain their cultural, linguistic and religious heritage within a framework of shared citizenship.

Canadians, like those in my riding of Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, want us to take a strong and principled stand against religious persecution, particularly relevant to these recent years, a time when restrictions on religious freedom are on the rise worldwide.

A Pew forum study has found that one-third of the countries in the world have high or very high restrictions on freedom of religion. As some of the restrictive countries are very populous, this means that nearly 70% of the world's population live in countries with high restrictions. The world needs leadership, and we are willing to stand with our partners to promote fundamental human rights.

Simply put, societies that protect religious freedom are most likely to protect other fundamental freedoms. They are typically more stable and more prosperous. When we have religious freedom, other freedoms follow. That is why religious freedom is prominently found in documents such as the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

• (1725)

Canada will continue to be a strong and committed supporter of the individual's right of freedom of religion and conscience. Pursued in conjunction with other civil and political rights, the right of the individual to freedom of religion is enshrined in articles 2 and 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as well as articles 18, 24 and 26 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. In addition, our own Canadian Constitution enshrines "freedom of conscience and religion" as a fundamental freedom.

Canada has an important role to play globally, a role from which we will not shy away. Canada is a country of tolerance, acceptance, peace and security, and we are also a pluralistic society. Our diversity gives us a unique perspective on the world. Canada has long been building the conditions in which people live with the dignity others wish for—built around our fundamental values of freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law. For example, these fundamental values were ripped away from someone of whom we all know. Shahbaz Bhatti, an upright appointed minister for minorities in Pakistan, was gunned down and assassinated last year, because of his beliefs and because he was working and advocating for the dignity of all.

Canada, by its very nature and our history, is well positioned to promote freedom of religion and belief. At the time of Confederation, the neutrality of the Canadian state toward citizens' choice of faith and belief was affirmed in the British North America Act in

1867. In the early period of the 20th century, tolerance for religious minorities was entrenched by way of several court decisions, for example, protecting the rights of Jews and Jehovah's Witnesses.

Later in the second half of the century, respect for social diversity was reasserted in an emergent culture of human rights, as reflected in the Canadian Bill of Rights adopted by the Diefenbaker government in 1960 and then again in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, 1982. On the day Prime Minister John Diefenbaker introduced the Canadian Bill of Rights in Parliament, he spoke these words:

I am a Canadian, a free Canadian, free to speak without fear, free to worship in my own way, free to stand for what I think right, free to oppose what I believe wrong, or free to choose those who shall govern my country. This heritage of freedom I pledge to uphold for myself and all mankind.

Today, that great challenge, that great responsibility, is shared by me, my colleagues and, indeed I believe, all who sit in this chamber. It is important that we take this seriously.

To conclude, I am pleased to present this motion for debate, and I hope it will receive support from all parties and all members. I believe it would be entirely compatible with our values and our beliefs as Canadians and that it would clearly demonstrate Canada's duty to promote religious freedom on behalf of the high number of individuals and groups around the world facing discrimination, persecution and oppression.

• (1730)

**Mr. Bob Dechert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague, the member for Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, for his stirring speech. I know this is an issue that is very close to his heart, and he is to be commended for bringing this important motion forward before this House. This is a core Canadian value, and he has said it well. His speech was well thought out, and he spoke from the heart.

Can the member give us a flavour of what he thinks the current state of religious freedoms is around the world? Does he see things improving on an annual basis? Does he see things deteriorating? Could he give us a little example of what he has seen happen over the last few years and tell us why he thinks Canada needs to stand up for this most fundamental human right?

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs for his kind comments and also for the amount of work I know he has done and has been a part getting the Office of Religious Freedom up and running.

As I mentioned at the beginning of my speech, when we read the news of the atrocities around the world, it was easy when they were a few thousand miles away to put them behind us. By the time we received the news, it was old news. However, when these atrocities happen now, they are instant, they are on our doorstep and on the digital stuff that surrounds us every day.

As a father and grandfather, I am concerned when I hear of these things happening now. I would note what has happened in Bangladesh, for example. The continual extreme of organizations that do not have a conscience for human life seems to be on the rise.

I am so proud to be Canadian, as all of us are. I believe Canada is a country that, because it is held in esteem around the world, has an opportunity to be a leader and to build on our partnerships with other countries to have some influence in persuading and bringing down some of those problems.

• (1735)

**Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I do not doubt for a moment the sincerity of the words of the member for Lambton—Kent—Middlesex today. I have seen him enough times in the House. I am heartened to hear the amount of times he referred to the United Nations in his remarks and its various protocols. There is a back and forth that occurs in this place and at times on this side we have questioned the commitment of the Conservative government to the United Nations.

I want to echo the member's thoughts on Mr. Bhatti. I am vice-chair of the subcommittee on human rights and we had Mr. Bhatti before us. He quite clearly told us that he was at risk for his beliefs and he ultimately died as a result of them.

Again, this is more of a commentary on the evolution of the relationship, or what could be perceived as a deterioration of the relationship, between the Conservative government and the United Nations. Hopefully this is a sign that perhaps we may have misjudged.

**Mr. Bev Shipley:** Mr. Speaker, I have known the member for a while and I know his comments to be sincere.

As a nation, when we look at our approach, we look at declarations of not only the United Nations but also the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The United States of America, Germany and the United Kingdom are all signatories. This is not just about Canada; it is about bringing along the partners that are there.

As I mentioned in my speech, for a democracy that allows the freedom of speech and freedom of religion and expression to happen, those countries are strong and democratic. They are the ones that will prosper in the end. Therefore, we come alongside and build partnerships with these countries.

I hope the member will support this motion.

**Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am going to start off my remarks by reading into the record some material supporting the perspective of this particular individual.

According to the December 2009 report from the Pew Research Center's forum on religion and public life dealing with global restrictions on religions, threats to religious freedom around the world are increasing.

The report found that nearly two-thirds of the world's population, or 59%, live under high government restrictions on religion. Almost half, or 48%, live in areas where high religiously motivated social hostilities exist.

Sixty-four nations, or about a third of the world's countries, have high or very high restrictions on religion, but because some of those most restrictive countries are very populous, nearly 70% of the

### *Private Members' Business*

world's 6.8 billion people live in countries with high restrictions on religion, the brunt of which often falls on religious minorities.

A recent 2012 report from Pew, "Rising Restrictions on Religion", found that between 2006 and 2010, Christians were harassed in more countries—139—than any other faith group. As well, Muslims were harassed in 121 countries and were second. The Christians and Muslims together comprise half the world's population.

What might be surprising to some people is that the Jewish community actually came in third. We hear a lot about anti-Semitism, and in reality they are still seriously harassed in 85 countries, even though they make up only about 1% of the world's population. We can understand the devastating effect of that harassment.

The Pew studies reinforce the recent observations by *Globe and Mail* columnist Doug Saunders, who notes that "the most important religious freedom is freedom from religion". That happens to be his perspective. He says that the number one reason people are persecuted for their faith is being a member of a religious minority within a nation or a region in which another religion or sect dominates.

I want to go back to the bill for a minute. It was introduced in May of last year. I want to read parts of it, and then I will comment as I go.

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should: (a) continue to recognize as part of Canadian foreign policy that (i) everyone has the right to freedom of religion and conscience, including the freedom to change religion or belief, and the freedom to manifest religion or belief in teaching, worship, practice and observance

I would observe that most Canadians believe that is how the government and this Parliament are functioning. I do not mean to put this down, but people have asked me why we need it. Obviously the mover of the motion believes in the motion, and I am not suggesting he should not; it is just that often Canadians believe things are a certain way, and maybe they are less so than what they believe.

The motion continues:

(ii) all acts of violence against religious groups should be condemned

Again, a fundamental view of Canadians would be precisely that. We are very much in line with this bill.

The motion goes on:

(iii) Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights be supported

In my notes I put that it is not often we hear the government side quoting. I will say quite frankly that I am pleased to see it.

The motion goes on to state:

(iv) the special value of official statements made by the Minister of Foreign Affairs denouncing violations of religious freedom around the world be promoted

I was a little surprised. I think it is anticipated and expected of anybody in the Government of Canada to stand up in that fashion.

The motion continues:

(v) Canada's commitment to the creation of an Office of Religious Freedom should be used to help protect religious minorities and promote the pluralism that is essential to the development of free and democratic societies

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The previous speaker spoke to that very point, and I was pleased to see that. We accept that all religious paths are equally valid, and promoting coexistence is something that Canada is well known for.

The motion goes on in (b) to state:

(i) The opposition to laws that use “defamation of religion” and “blasphemy” both within states and internationally to persecute members of religious minorities

• (1740)

No matter what the tool used, we agree that persecution, particularly of minorities, on the grounds of religion is repugnant and needs to be opposed in all forms.

(b)(ii) reporting by Canadian missions abroad in responding to incidents of religious violence

(iii) coordinated efforts to protect and promote religious freedom

We hear within those two points the obligation to protect. Those who know the United Nations will know that Canada promoted that particular group, but that has been seen within the United Nations as sometimes preventing support for some countries and people because of the fear that it would drag the United Nations into wars. Perhaps this is a question I should have asked the member following his remarks. I wonder if he sees it that way, or is he suggesting a lesser form of engagement, which I believe is the intent of the motion?

(iv) the maintaining of a regular dialogue with relevant governments to ensure that the issue of religious persecution is a priority.

In this area, I wonder just when was the last time the current government had discussions with China regarding religious rights in that country. It is an obvious question.

We see here:

(v) the encouragement of Canadian embassies to seek contact with religious communities and human rights organizations on gathering information related to human rights abuses.

Fewer than 10 days ago, I was in Burma. We met with expatriated Canadians who talked at length about their views of what had happened in that country. They lamented the loss of rights and democracy. They believe that it was an essential part of the development of Burma. I thought I would raise it here as a commentary, because they saw that as a group that was promoting precisely what the motion is talking about.

(vi) the training and support of foreign affairs officials for the advocacy of global religious freedom.

This particular part of the motion is likely the most concerning for some Canadians who believe in the separation of church and state. We oftentimes hear discussions about that, and I am sure that a variety of views could be brought forward here. Speaking for the group of Canadians I come in most contact with, they actually believe that we have the separation of church and state in Canada at this point in time.

We all know that people oftentimes do not look deeply into a bill that might come before the House. Oftentimes, as well, they will have the kinds of questions about those bills, because of that lack of understanding, that makes it sound as if they are raising a concern that perhaps is not even necessary.

I want to go back a moment to my role as vice-chair of the subcommittee on human rights. Over and over, we hear testimony to the effect that in many parts of the world, religious persecution is commonplace. Just today, a woman in Egypt spoke to us by teleconference. She talked about the situation for religious minorities, such as Coptic Christians, Shia Muslims and others within that country, because of the change that has taken place. We have heard of Iraqi minorities, such as Christians, Mandaeans and the Baha'i, who have become targets of violence since the 2003 U.S.-led invasion. Last year we were told that in Pakistan, the Taliban have targeted Christians for attack through killings, torture and forcible confinement. Again, Mr. Bhatti's name comes to the fore when we have that discussion. Witnesses stated that they believe that at least some of this was a backlash against the U.S. and Pakistani military operations.

If we really honestly step back and look at it, a lot of the things that have occurred in countries are historic by nature. There are groups of people within those countries who have been at odds for an awfully long time. It is easy to point to one particular situation and say that it is the cause. It certainly was a contributing factor, but to say that it was the cause might be over-extending.

• (1745)

Being in Burma, I had the pleasure of meeting with Aung San Suu Kyi, along with others, and she spoke to us about the situation with Rohingya Muslims in that country, the deportations and things that were happening.

I will wrap up by saying that New Democrats support this bill. We question the need for the bill, but we support it.

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to take part in this debate. I want to tell my colleague from Lambton—Kent—Middlesex at the outset that I intend to vote in favour of this motion. I listened carefully to the member's comments, as well as the comments from my colleagues in the New Democratic Party. From my perspective, there is considerable merit in the motion advanced by the member for Lambton—Kent—Middlesex.

As members know, the Liberal Party and my colleagues in caucus have always supported and been very much in favour of the freedom of religion and conscience. However, we have some concerns about the implication that one particular right or freedom, in this case, the freedom of religion and conscience, would be promoted above another basic human right or freedom that our country has always defended and stood up for abroad.

Our perspective tells us that our foreign policy should include the promotion of all freedoms and rights, for example, the rights of women, homosexuals and different groups around the world, who at various times have faced terrible oppression. They also deserve a robust defence in Canada's foreign policy. Our foreign policy and our diplomats should not shy away from speaking out against many of these abuses and practices which appall and shock millions of Canadians. The Liberal Party has always promoted and defended freedom of religion and conscience as a fundamental human right, not only under our Charter of Rights and Freedoms but also as a matter of international law.

*Private Members' Business*

• (1750)

[Translation]

We strongly believe that we must defend and promote all human rights, including rights that go against certain religious beliefs, including equality for women and equality for the LGBT community.

One right or freedom should not be promoted as more important than other rights or freedoms. The government must guarantee that it will not encourage any interpretation that would give precedence to religious rights over other rights and freedoms, as fundamental as the right to religious freedom is, and it must tell us how it will do so.

[English]

We have also spoken about some concerns we have with regard to the Office of Religious Freedom. After considerably and consistently diminishing Canada's international presence and engagement, cutting democratic development programs focused on human rights, and ignoring or marginalizing Canada's knowledgeable and experienced diplomatic corps, the Conservatives have established an office with limited scope and resources to do what many of these very diplomats and programs did so effectively in the past.

The promotion of freedom of religion as an objective of our foreign policy obviously has very considerable merit. However, again, it should not and cannot replace a broader engagement of Canada on the international stage in the promotion of other rights and freedoms with the same vigour and enthusiasm that the government wants to promote religious freedoms. Rather than pursuing substantive results in the areas of religious freedoms alongside other human rights, the government's approach often prefers to resort to symbolism or posturing, often focused on a domestic political audience. The government must demonstrate to Canadians that it is focused on a constructive engagement for Canada in foreign policy, not simply easy symbols or gestures, which have considerable merit in and of themselves, but should not replace a more broad and robust engagement for Canada abroad.

[Translation]

We must ensure that the creation of the Office of Religious Freedom does not create a hierarchy among religious rights and other rights to equality, that it is not used for partisan or political purposes and that its conception of religious freedom is truly pluralistic.

We feel it is very important to ensure that the Office of Religious Freedom, which we believe has merit, is never used to exclude certain religions or forms of religious expression.

[English]

For example, Canada should be investing a national endowment in a centre for democracy to establish a framework for the protection and promotion of democratic rights as basic human rights as well. Since 2008, the Conservatives have promised to set up a non-partisan office for democratic development but have failed to do so.

We see the promotion of democracy, the rule of law, an independent professional public service and an effective, truly transparent electoral mechanism as essential parts of Canada's foreign policy, as well as the promotion of human rights and religious freedoms.

Members will remember that the Conservatives dismantled, in a rather dramatic and unfair way, an organization known as Rights and Democracy. Until the Conservatives sabotaged it, it had previously played an effective role in promoting Canadian foreign policy in terms of our participation in helping fledgling democracies implant basic institutions of democratic rule and electoral transparency.

The Liberals will always work with the government in supporting and promoting matters as important as the protection of religious freedoms and the promotion of freedom of conscience and freedom of religion. Clearly, for a long time this has been an essential part of Canada's engagement abroad.

However, we have real concerns that we are increasingly limiting the face of Canada's foreign policy to a more narrow range of issues, instead of accepting that Canadian NGOs and a professional and competent diplomatic corps that has served this country for generations with honour should be allowed to also express, in a very robust way, our support for other freedoms and other human rights as extensively as the government would propose with respect to this Office of Religious Freedom.

• (1755)

**Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC):**

Mr. Speaker, it is a great pleasure for me to be here today to speak to Motion No. 382. I want to congratulate the member for Lambton—Kent—Middlesex for having the courage to bring this forward and for his great leadership on this issue and also the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs for his work and commitment on the issue as well.

I would also like to take a moment to thank my staff member, Joycelin Ng, for the work she has done on this issue, in particular, and on other issues dealing with religious persecution as well. I want to acknowledge her great work on this.

As others have said in the House, I do support the motion. I see this as a seminal document, a seminal declaration by this Parliament. It is past the time that it should have been brought forward, and I appreciate the fact that we are able to discuss this now.

The real issue on this topic is actually the fundamental right that people around the world should have. That is the right to choose what they believe, the right to speak about that belief and the right to change that belief if they so choose. That is really what is encapsulated in the beginning of this motion and what we want to reinforce today, because an increasing number of citizens around the world are under attack simply for their religious beliefs.

Governments around the world continue to repress religious freedom, but it is the right to choose, the right to believe and the right to change belief that needs to extend to every individual in every community and country.

*Private Members' Business*

As the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom has said, it is a basic tenet of humanity, a moral, ethical and legal duty. For many around the world, Canada can really provide leadership to protect this fundamental human right.

The reality is that religious minorities around the world are constantly harassed. They are arrested and imprisoned.

I would like to acknowledge my colleague in the NDP and thank him for his enthusiastic support for the motion. We are glad to see that. He pointed out that the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life has reported that 75% of the world's population, as of mid-2010, live in countries where governments, social groups or individuals restrict people's ability to freely practise their faith.

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom lists, in particular, countries such as Burma, North Korea, Egypt, Eritrea, Iran, Iraq, Nigeria, Pakistan, China, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and a few other countries as countries of particular concern where religious persecution is most severe.

It is obvious that the motion is necessary, despite the protections of religious freedom in international rights law. We talked a little about article 18 of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and every country has signed on to that, as obligated, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Religious minorities still continue to face a global crisis of persecution. Individual countries, such as Canada, where this is not a big issue for our people, should do their part in recognizing religious freedoms in their foreign policy and promote those values abroad.

Just to address the concerns that my colleague from the Liberals has, what we are doing here does not in any way take away from the defence of other rights. Our Minister of Foreign Affairs has been very vocal about those rights. Our Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs has stepped up to defend those rights. We have been clear on that. I would like to think that the members opposite would see this as a declaration that complements our position on the other rights, not restricts it. That is how it was intended by the author of the declaration, the member for Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, who has brought it forward.

Successful passing of the motion would ensure that our commitment to human rights and democracy, for which we are known around the world, includes the basic right and freedom of religion and that it would become a mainstay of foreign policy in years to come. We think that is a good commitment to make.

A parliamentary motion outlining this commitment sends a message to the international community that we condemn all acts of violence against religious groups and are coordinating efforts to protect and promote the fundamental right to choose to believe and to change beliefs.

To address the concern that the member opposite from the NDP raised, we are not talking about sending the UN into countries when we are talking about protecting. We do want protection and that should be extended. Governments should understand that they need to extend that to their rights, but we want to see that done consistently and effectively.

The motion puts Canada on the international stage with like-minded countries. We are working together with other nations, multilaterally, that can strengthen the international capacity within the United Nations, OSCE, the IPU and other monitoring bodies such as the European Union, Council of Europe, Organization of American States and entities like that.

● (1800)

I would like to point out that in researching for the motion, it became evident that some other countries have led the way in this. The United States, for example, in 1998 passed a bill, the international religious freedom act, which led to the creation of the Office of International Religious Freedom. It made the U.S. one of the first to officially recognize the protection of religious freedoms as a foreign policy objective. It also established, at that time, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom.

In 2010 the German Bundestag passed a bill that served to establish religious freedom as a human rights priority in the German Bundestag. That was a resolution, not a bill, but it expressed its resolve toward a number of issue areas, including its opposition to laws that used defamation of religion, and we see that in the motion before us today. It continues to take a stand on religious freedom issues, even as recently as defending the rights of Jews and Muslims and their right to practise religious circumcision, which is an issue that has been somewhat in the news.

The European Parliament has passed a number of resolutions dealing with religious freedom. The resolution on the situation of Christians, passed in 2011, recognized that the majority of acts of violence were perpetrated against Christians and recommended ways in which an EU strategy could enforce religious freedom for Christians and other faith groups around the world.

The United Kingdom has what is called a freedom of religion or belief toolkit, which is interesting way. It outlines ways foreign officials can assess religious violations in their assigned countries.

Norway has what is called the Oslo coalition on freedom, religion or belief, which has been in operation since 1998 and was established by its ministry of foreign affairs.

We see this is not something that is new around the world. Canada is taking its place as a leader, as one of the leading nations that is doing this, but it is not something that is brand new either.

I would like to talk a bit about my own personal commitment to this. We heard Shahbaz Bhatti's name mentioned a couple of times in the House today. In 2011, I had the chance to meet him for about 20 minutes before I went to listen to his presentation at the subcommittee on human rights the next day. He knew full well that if he went back to his country, he would probably be assassinated because of the courageous stand and leadership that he had shown. It was only about three weeks after he was here that he was in fact assassinated as he drove down the driveway of his mother's house. I think not only myself but a number of people in the House have been energized by his commitment and by the great leadership he showed.

We have hosted some forums on religious freedoms. Members of the House have come to those and we have seen the benefits of being able to be part of that.

*Private Members' Business*

I want to point out Motion No. 382 could establish credibility among advocacy groups, organization and faith groups, the very groups that are most familiar with these issues of religious freedom. It would give our country credibility internationally on the issue of protecting freedom of religion. The establishment of the Office of Religious Freedom is a commendable step toward defining Canada as one of the few distinguished nations willing to recognize religious freedom as a foreign policy priority.

I would like to point out that I believe a successful motion passed by the Parliament of Canada, and it sounds like we will be able to have that, will ensure that the steps taken by our Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade have the broad majority support of Parliament and that will ensure religious freedom becomes a mainstay of foreign policy for future years.

We have looked to other nations and seen what they have done. We believe Canada can be a leader in this issue as well. I want to thank the member for bringing this forward. As we pass this, we will be able to share around the world Canada's commitment to the issue of religious freedom.

• (1805)

[Translation]

**Mr. Jean Rousseau (Compton—Stanstead, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, all this talk about a motion to set up an office to promote religious freedom and the comments from government members saying that they are making a commitment leave me feeling skeptical.

The motion's intentions are excellent. I do not have a problem with them. However, I do have a problem with the credibility of this government that wants to open such an office abroad, when every day it is violating most of the rights and freedoms guaranteed by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The government introduces vicious bills that attack fundamental human rights and the freedom of association in our own country.

Before promoting these values abroad—values that are essential to community development—the government needs to take a stand and promote them in our country. I have not seen the Conservatives do so since I have been here.

Hon. members will recall that, in June 2011, we had to filibuster for 56 hours because the rights of postal workers were being violated. These were fundamental rights guaranteed by the Charter, the right to associate and to stand together in the defence of rights.

With regard to credibility, this bill is far from anything individuals or society could accept.

The Conservatives are defending a noble bill. It is a good example but, *tarbarnouche*, the fundamental rules governing rights and freedoms—

**An hon. member:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Jean Rousseau:** “*Tarbarnouche*” is not a swear word. It is just Quebec slang, like “*câline*” and “*ah*”.

**An hon. member:** Do not dig yourself in any deeper.

**Mr. Jean Rousseau:** At first glance, this motion was written for the clear purpose of upsetting the opposition parties. It also includes

a section regarding the current Minister of Foreign Affairs that is inappropriate and unconscionable from a parliamentary ethics perspective. This has become somewhat frustrating coming from this government.

The sections that are not designed to upset us do nothing but duplicate the work that is already being done by consular offices.

In many areas of the world, religious persecution is commonplace. That is very unfortunate. Foreign consulates have often shared what is happening through the Department of Foreign Affairs.

However, the Conservatives promised to create such an office in the 2011 election campaign. This motion promotes the creation of that office.

The three priorities of this new office will be to protect and advocate on behalf of religious minorities under threat, to oppose religious hatred and intolerance, and to promote Canadian values of pluralism and tolerance abroad.

What about promoting these values in Canada, these values of pluralism, multi-ethnicity and the basis of our inclusive society? Why not address what is going on here first? Why not build up our credibility and then promote it abroad?

The estimated cost of creating this office is \$5 million a year. Work to create this office would already be under way, but it seems that there has been some difficulty finding an ambassador, which is causing a delay.

And although we know that the office will have a vague mandate of fighting religious persecution in the world, we are not really sure how the office will be run or what its promotion duties will entail.

This certainly has a whiff of the former government's firearms registry about it, with its mismanagement and skyrocketing costs.

Let us look a little closer at the content of this motion. The sponsor of this motion, the hon. member for Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, wants the House to agree:

That...the government should: (a) continue to recognize as part of Canadian foreign policy that (i) everyone has the right to freedom of religion and conscience, including the freedom to change religion...

• (1810)

Of course, all this is in keeping with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which contains the basic principles and elements for fair respect of individual rights, which should also be promoted here.

We live in a society of law where reasonable and justifiable limits can be demonstrated in a free and democratic society. Do we currently have in Canada this context that allows a free and democratic society to flourish and grow?

One part of the motion seeks to support article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Since when have we given up these principles?

Article 18 says that “[Everyone] has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion...”. I would say this is a carbon copy.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

The motion also says that the official statements of the Minister of Foreign Affairs denouncing violations of religious freedom are to be promoted. Is it not already his role as a representative of a free and democratic country to denounce these things? His duties abroad include denouncing such things. Do we need an office to promote that?

The motion also talks about supporting opposition to laws that use “defamation of religion” and “blasphemy”, both within states and internationally, and encouraging Canadian missions to report incidents of violence.

Quite frankly, our consulates and the Minister of Foreign Affairs should already be condemning these acts. What we want is for this government to be responsible and credible when it speaks out against events abroad.

I have already said that this is a very noble motion and we will support it. However, as you know, I have been criticizing for some time this government to which I belong indirectly because I want it to be credible. I am a member of the official opposition. I have the right to criticize my government, but I also have the right to participate in its activities, for example, by proposing amendments to bills in committee so that we can discuss them together. We must be able to talk about the issues. It is part and parcel of the freedom of expression, the freedom of association and the freedom of thought. In a democracy it is essential that these freedoms be recognized and promoted.

In closing, I will mention one last small thing. We are a little concerned that freedom of religion, that we will be promoting abroad, will conflict with other human rights, such as the rights of women, gays and lesbians, religious minorities, and also of first nations and aboriginal peoples. There are many people who belong to these groups in other countries, and we must protect their rights and freedoms and respect their traditions.

As I was saying earlier, we are still not quite sure how this famous office will work or what it will do. It—

\* \* \*

•(1815)

[English]

### ENHANCING ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE ACCOUNTABILITY ACT

BILL C-42—NOTICE OF TIME ALLOCATION MOTION

**Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I regret to advise that, with regard to Bill C-42, An Act to amend the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Act and to make related and consequential amendments to other Acts respecting RCMP accountability, no agreement was reached pursuant to Standing Orders 78(1) and 78(2).

As a result, pursuant to Standing Order 78(3), at the next sitting of the House a Minister of the Crown will move to set a specific number of hours or days for consideration of this matter.

[Translation]

### RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

The House resumed consideration of Motion No. 382.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** The hon. member for Compton—Stanstead has one minute left.

**Mr. Jean Rousseau (Compton—Stanstead, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, right now, we are witnessing persecution here in Canada by the phoneys who are in power. Just think about unemployed workers or the various environmental advocacy groups. The government is going to change the definition to include them on the list of terrorist groups. That is shameful. And it is just the beginning.

It is also surprising that, to date, no Muslim organizations have been invited to participate in the consultations related to the creation of the office in question, and neither have any human rights advocacy groups, such as Amnesty International.

In closing, here is an excerpt from a Jimi Hendrix song:

[English]

Freedom, that's what I am. “If you wanna get out of here alive, Freedom, give it to me.”

[Translation]

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** The hour provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

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## ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[Translation]

### EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

**Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am speaking today to go into further detail about an issue I raised in the House last November. I asked the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development why access to employment insurance was being further restricted for those who need it most and who have paid into the program.

Just who are the people being denied employment insurance benefits? There are no records being kept. People have come to my constituency office. They are looking for work, and they start looking early in the morning and finish late at night. They want to work. They are not earning any money and are not part of any statistics. They are unfortunate enough to be looking for work either in a field where the government cut nearly 19,000 positions—the federal public service—or in seasonal industries. I am thinking about the man who shingles roofs or the woman who works on-call as a benefits clerk.



*Adjournment Proceedings*

In November, I talked about new data from Statistics Canada that showed that only 40% of unemployed workers were collecting employment insurance benefits. In other words, over half of these people are not getting a service for which they pay. This is the lowest access rate in 10 years. It is outrageous.

I cannot accept the answer given by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, who said that around eight out of 10 individuals in Canada qualify for employment insurance. What the parliamentary secretary said completely contradicts the data from Statistics Canada.

Restricting access is part of the Conservative government's pseudo-solution to save money on the backs of the unemployed. This is the Conservative government's scheme to save money by taking it from the fund that belongs to workers, from the benefits they should receive when they are between jobs, until they find another job or return to their regular job when seasonal work starts up again.

Since the introduction of the employment insurance counter-reform, Bill C-38, thousands of Canadians have spoken out against the negative affects these changes will have on our economy, and have called this a direct attack on unemployed workers.

One of the direct consequences of reducing employment insurance is a lower unemployment rate. In turn, claimants will have to have more qualifying hours, and they will receive fewer weeks of benefits. When the unemployment rate goes down in a region, residents there receive fewer weeks of benefits. That is clear.

The government is once again limiting access to employment insurance by changing the appeal mechanisms for workers who are denied. We have proven that it will become increasingly difficult for claimants to appeal. It will have to be done in writing, and the wait times are increasing for responses. Not to mention the fact that there are fewer people to respond to claimants or to potential claimants hoping to receive benefits, since they are among those 19,000 people I mentioned earlier, who are unemployed and looking for work.

● (1820)

[*English*]

**Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to respond to the question posed by the member opposite regarding access to employment insurance, which we recognize is a vital resource for those who lose their jobs.

According to the 2011 employment insurance coverage survey, results among unemployed workers who have been paying EI premiums and those who are laid off show that 8 out of 10 are eligible for EI benefits.

[*Translation*]

We know that most Canadians want to work.

[*English*]

Our government's top priority remains job creation and economic growth. That is why we have introduced changes to better connect Canadians with available jobs. We are 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 community, as well as postings for jobs in related occupations.

[*Translation*]

These job alerts will help them to make more informed decisions about how to conduct their job search.

[*English*]

We have also strengthened and clarified what is required of claimants who are receiving EI regular benefits. The definition of suitable employment is based on a number of criteria, such as working conditions, hours of work, commuting time and personal circumstances. Two additional criteria, type of work and wages, vary based on the claimant's EI history and the time spent on claim.

EI claimants will never be expected to take a job that is hazardous to their health or physically too difficult for them to perform. They will never be expected to take a job that makes them worse off than they would be on employment insurance.

We are also increasing the coordination between the temporary foreign worker program and the EI program. Many employers have said they are facing significant skills and labour shortages and need to have access to temporary foreign workers. We want to ensure, though, that Canadians who are available and have the right skills have the first crack at those jobs. That said, the temporary foreign worker program will continue to be there for employers, as is needed.

These changes are about empowering unemployed workers, helping them get back into the workforce and focusing resources where they are needed most. That is why Canadians elected us to do what the NDP continues to vote against time and time again.

Finally, let me make it clear that the employment insurance program is there and will continue to be there for unemployed Canadians who lose their jobs through no fault of their own, and it will continue to be there when they need it.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Anne-Marie Day:** Mr. Speaker, I feel like we are playing cat and mouse. The secretary of state is saying that 80% of Canadians are eligible for employment insurance, but we are saying that only 40% of those eligible are receiving benefits and that people are being excluded because they cannot access EI, which is becoming increasingly difficult to obtain.

I found some figures to illustrate this. The number of people receiving regular benefits dropped in all provinces in December. The largest decline, in percentage points, was in Prince Edward Island, where there are very few jobs in the winter and where the number of claimants dropped to 4.6%. In Newfoundland and Labrador, it dropped by 4.1%. In Manitoba, the number of people receiving regular benefits is now 3.3%.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

In December, the number of claimants in Saskatchewan dropped by 2.5%; in Nova Scotia, by 2.1%; in New Brunswick, by 1.9%; in Alberta, 1.7%; in Quebec, 1.1%; in Ontario, 0.8%; and in British Columbia, 0.8%.

In conclusion, it is obvious that this reform is being completely improvised, and Canadians deserve a better safety net than that. They are entitled to more.

We are entitled to ask this government the following: what will happen to these people without jobs and without any income?

[English]

**Ms. Kellie Leitch:** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased that both the International Monetary Fund and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development expect Canada to be among the growing economies of the G7 this year and the next.

However, we are not immune to global economic uncertainty and we are well aware of our recovery during this fragile economy. That is why the economic action plan brought changes to the employment insurance to help better connect Canadians with available jobs, and since July 2009, our labour market has created over 900,000 net new jobs.

It is important to also note, and I have mentioned this before this evening, that employment insurance will continue to be available to those who need it and have paid into it. Those who are unable to find employment will continue to have employment insurance available to them, as it always has been.

• (1825)

## CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it will be interesting to see who answers the question. I was somewhat hopeful that it would be either the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism or the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration because I have been raising a very serious issue. Not only was it a number of months ago that I raised the issue about services, but I have been talking about this issue as recently as the last few days in the House.

There is a great deal of concern from residents across this land, from coast to coast to coast, in regard to how long it is taking to acquire citizenship. Back in 2005, the Liberal government committed close to \$70 million to speed up processing times for individuals who met the residential requirements and wanted to get citizenship. I have no idea what the government has done with that money. What we do know is that the processing times have gotten worse and worse every year. This is completely unacceptable. We want the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism to deal with this issue. He seems to be more preoccupied and focused on his potential leadership ambitions or whatever it might be, as opposed to dealing with what is important to Canadians. What is important to Canadians is to speed up the unacceptable processing times to get citizenship.

We are not interested in the rhetoric from the government. We want to see tangible action. What is the government going to do to speed up processing times for citizenship? It is not acceptable that it now takes two years and longer, especially if people want the

residency test applied. Then we are talking four, five or six years before people can get citizenship.

I appreciate that the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration is somewhat aware of the issue. The minister addressed it when I first asked the question, and the parliamentary secretary addressed it the more recent times I asked this question. He needs to be straightforward with residents. We are talking about more than 300,000 residents all across Canada who have been waiting in excess of two years to get their citizenships processed. That is just not good enough.

The question I would now pose to the minister is the same question I posed last Friday. Will the government acknowledge that it needs to speed up the processing time for people applying for citizenship and agree to have a specific target of less than a year as a goal? Is he prepared to make that commitment today?

**Mr. Rick Dykstra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is great to hear the Liberal Party, while it is now sitting in third place in the House of Commons, talk about expediting, rushing, hurrying, being fair to citizens, being fair to those foreign skilled workers who are trying to come to this country and being fair to temporary workers who are trying to fill positions here that cannot be filled by Canadians.

It is great to finally hear the Liberal members. It is too bad that while they were in government, they did not even think about trying to tackle the immigration file, about trying to make it better, trying to make it more efficient and trying to make it more responsive. It is great to hear them finally acknowledge all of the mistakes they made while they were in government. They turned them over to us and are now starting to complain about the fact that they should have done a much better job.

It is good to hear that they are finally on the right track when it comes making sure that we are moving forward on the backlogs, because immigrants from across this country resoundingly rejected the Liberals' handling of the immigration file in the last election. When we look at their record, it is no surprise as to why.

We will not take any lessons from the Liberals on how to manage this immigration system, based on the kind of wait times they left for those who are trying to become Canadian citizens and those who are trying to come here through the various other areas of immigration that we have.

It is important to point out that the ministry is now accepting applications and payment online for a growing number of immigration streams and is moving toward a paperless system. This means that much less physical space is required. We are able to expedite individual files on a much more timely basis, while at the same time maintaining a ministry office in each and every province in our country.

We have also revamped the website, including online wizards, how-to tutorial videos, and online help centres, so that applicants can receive the information and help they need. It is a lot more convenient, and it is 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

When it comes to processing times, the member has asked on a number of occasions about this question. Let us look at the facts.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

First of all, Canadians should be proud that there is such a high demand for Canadian citizenship. After all, who would not want to be a citizen in the greatest country in the world?

Second, I am not sure what the Liberal Party is bragging about, because under the Liberals, in 2005, one year before we took office, the processing time for citizenship was 17 months. Between 2006 and 2011, the average processing time for citizenship was 17 months. It was exactly the same.

What the member is purposely not mentioning is the fact that our government has welcomed the highest sustained levels of immigration in Canadian history. That means there has been a significantly higher demand for citizenship. We have processed 30,000 more applicants on a yearly basis, and we have maintained that 17-month processing time.

I think we have addressed the issue. We are going to do some more work. We are obviously trying to make sure that we expedite every single backlog that we have in each individual area within this ministry. In fact, 185,000 individuals have become Canadian citizens each and every year since we have been in government.

We have made improvements and we are going to continue to make improvements. One thing we are going to make sure of is that the threshold for Canadian citizenship in this country will continue to rise because of this government.

• (1830)

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux:** Mr. Speaker, when the Liberals were in government and recognized the processing times were getting lengthy at 17 months, we made a commitment of \$69 million to speed up that processing time because we believed that it needed to be under 12 months.

Today it has become a lot worse. There are a lot more residency requirements, and individuals are waiting two, three, and four years, and even beyond that. The area that the minister is responsible for has gotten a lot worse. We budgeted additional money to reduce the time.

The question is actually very simple: when you think ahead to the 300,000-plus people, which is a record high number, when are you going to be able to deliver citizenship in a more timely fashion? We need to speed up the processing time. Will you set some goals?

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** Before I go to the parliamentary secretary, I would like to remind all hon. members to address their comments to the Chair rather than to their colleagues.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

**Mr. Rick Dykstra:** Mr. Speaker, I have addressed the question. In fact, this government and the Minister of Immigration have addressed the question.

Since we took government, we have lowered the backlogs in every category we received from the Liberals, whether it be foreign skilled workers, or those seeking refuge in our country or those seeking citizenship. We have ensured that all wait times and backlogs dealing with family reunification, sponsorship and adoption are down because there is a higher demand for those who want to become Canadian citizens and permanent residents

because of the last six years of this government. We are processing faster and processing more.

I can assure the House that we are delivering on the time frames to which we have committed.

• (1835)

[*Translation*]

## HEALTH

**Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House to speak about a very serious matter that I discussed with the Minister of Transport on November 29.

Unfortunately, even though the situation is serious and the concerns are shared by a majority of the population, the Minister of Transport gave an unsatisfactory answer. I spoke about it to groups working on this issue, that is the people who are really concerned about and directly affected by the red dust and contamination by various heavy metals, as proven by analyses.

I will not repeat in the House the comments I received because it would be too easy to accuse me of using unparliamentary language. However, that gives an idea of the tenor of the issue and the indignation of the people of Quebec City with regard to the response by the Minister of Transport.

I will distill the minister's response. He clearly said that the Port of Quebec is an independent organization that assumes its responsibilities. Whether the Minister of Transport likes it or not, the reality, as the Department of Transport clearly stated, is that the Port of Quebec is one of the Canadian port authorities under the supervision of Transport Canada, which is also responsible for compliance with environmental laws, in particular the Canadian Environmental Protection Act.

According to Transport Canada, the department also oversees the environmental management of leased facilities. Port authorities have a certain amount of autonomy, but they are accountable, and the Minister of Transport must take responsibility for them.

There is something very disturbing about this whole situation. Since I raised this question, Véronique Lalande, the woman who warned the public, received her lab results and was able to take a closer look. The samples she sent for analysis contained potentially dangerous metals such as arsenic, copper, lead, zinc and nickel.

I will focus on nickel, which is a potentially highly toxic metal. It was present in very high concentrations and could be quite dangerous.

For the benefit of the Minister of Transport, I simply want to remind the House that nickel dust can be carcinogenic. It can cause lung and throat cancer.

In addition, the skin reacts to varying degrees after coming into contact with nickel. A significant percentage of the population is potentially allergic to nickel—some studies say as much as 12%. In Limoilou, thousands of people were affected.

*Adjournment Proceedings*

First, I would like to ask the Minister of Transport again if he was aware of the problem. Second, I would like to ask him if he has really taken any action on this issue, instead of simply waiting for the situation to deteriorate.

**Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would first like to thank the hon. member for his question. In response to the question from the member for Beauport—Limoilou, I am pleased to comment on the incident that occurred last October at the Port of Quebec and that affected some residents in part of the Limoilou sector.

On October 26, 2012, Quebec Stevedoring, a company that operates on the quays in the Port of Quebec, unloaded a ship containing a cargo of iron oxide, which is a fairly fine iron ore substance that also contains fine dust. Unloading began during the day, and no incident was reported. However, unloading continued until dusk, and fine mineral dust in the bottom of the ship's hold was discharged. That was when the unloading created a red dust cloud that affected part of Limoilou's residential sector.

After learning about the incident, Quebec Stevedoring put in place measures to respond adequately to the situation and to make sure that this kind of incident does not happen again. Specifically, Quebec Stevedoring set up a telephone line for residents who were affected by the dust cloud to help them get financial assistance to clean their goods and property.

Quebec Stevedoring also improved its operations to minimize the risk of a reoccurrence, mainly by adding water cannons. For its part, the Quebec Port Authority is installing a new dynamic system to monitor the nature and quantity of air emissions from port operations.

As you can see, the port authority reacted promptly to the incident on October 26, 2012. I would like to point out that this is an isolated event despite the millions of tonnes of dry bulk cargo that are transported to the Port of Quebec each year. As a result, there is nothing to indicate that we are dealing with a public health problem.

I am fully confident in the ability of Port of Quebec officials to take the action required to ensure that strategic economic activities can continue in Quebec and in Quebec City, and to protect the health of city residents and the environment they live in.

● (1840)

**Mr. Raymond Côté:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to express my disappointment with the answer I was given. Beyond warnings and, at the very least, public concern, there are some stakeholders, such as the Agence de la santé et des services sociaux de la Capitale-Nationale and the Quebec department of the environment, who took the incident very seriously and made arrangements to examine the issue.

I would like for Arrimage du Saint-Laurent, which is the name of the company, and the Port of Quebec to take some measures, but that does not in any way absolve the minister of his responsibilities and does not mean that he does not have to take an interest in what is happening. The analyses that Ms. Lalonde received showed that there were very high—potentially toxic—concentrations of heavy metals. This issue cannot be avoided. Provincial authorities do not have jurisdiction over port facilities, which are a federal responsibility.

What is stopping the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities? Is he waiting until he is backed into a corner?

**Mr. Pierre Poilievre:** Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, I am fully confident in the ability of Port of Québec representatives to take the action required to ensure that strategic economic activities can continue, and to protect the health of residents of beautiful Quebec City and the environment they live in.

The Port of Québec's tonnage rate for 2011 makes it a leader among port authorities on the St. Lawrence. Nearly 29 million tonnes of goods passed through Québec City's port authority in 2011, which is an 18% increase over 2010. Québec City's port and marine activities generate over \$786 million in economic spinoffs every year.

The economy is our main priority, but we can protect health and the environment at the same time.

● (1845)

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:45 p.m.)





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