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Monday, February 13, 2012

—

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, February 13, 2012

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayers

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1100)

[*Translation*]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE ACT

The House resumed from November 22, 2011, consideration of the motion that Bill C-291, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act (waiting period and maximum special benefits), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to speak today about Bill C-291, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act, which was introduced a few weeks ago by the hon. member for Bourassa. This bill is extremely important since it is designed to change the way the current employment insurance system works, particularly for people with serious illnesses.

Sadly, in the past, the Liberals were not shy about dipping into the employment insurance fund, which, at that time, had a surplus of \$54 billion—money that belonged to Canadian workers. During the 12 years that they were in power, they could have padded the coffers, but they did not. On several occasions, they were also in a position to modernize the Employment Insurance Act, but unfortunately, they did not do that either. Nevertheless, today, I am very pleased to see that the Liberal members are finally joining the NDP in order to modernize the Employment Insurance Act once and for all. This bill has been introduced in the House a number of times.

Since coming to power, the Conservatives have been unable to remedy the situation. Rather than helping workers, the Conservatives are giving billions of dollars in gifts to large corporations, which, in return, are closing their Canadian branches and exporting our good-quality jobs abroad. It is time to stop playing politics and do something to resolve the real problems affecting our society. It is time for all the parties to join together to help Canadians who are suffering from serious illnesses. It is time to forget the mistakes of the past and focus on viable, long-term solutions in order to help workers and their families. Most of all, it is time for all members of the House to unite and work together.

Unfortunately, Canada's Employment Insurance Act has remained unchanged for 40 years, since 1971. It does not meet the current needs of Canadians. What is more, Canada is one of the worst G8 countries when it comes to employment insurance coverage. Some G8 countries are much more progressive, and Canada is the only one that does not offer at least one year of benefits to those with serious illnesses.

As all of my colleagues know, coverage in cases of serious illness is currently 15 weeks. Employment insurance exists to help Canadian workers, and our society is changing. The population is aging, and the types of illnesses affecting people are changing. Employment insurance must be updated to adapt to Canadians' new needs.

My colleague from Bourassa introduced a bill that is in line with employment insurance changes the NDP would like to see. This bill would eliminate the mandatory two-week waiting period for employment insurance benefits and would increase the benefit period from 15 to 50 weeks.

There are many diseases, such as cardiovascular disease, kidney disease, and especially cancer, that are very serious and that take longer than 15 weeks to treat. Unfortunately, the current Employment Insurance Act provides just 15 weeks of benefits.

We have a lot of facts about cancer. I would like to take a moment to talk about one of my constituents who cares very much about this bill. Her name is Marie-Hélène Dubé. My colleagues have probably heard about her. She is battling thyroid cancer for the third time in five years. She is a young mother in her forties. Instead of feeling sorry for herself and battling the disease alone, Marie-Hélène Dubé decided to help all Canadians who, like her, have a serious disease. She circulated a petition calling on the government to modernize the Employment Insurance Act by introducing the very changes reflected in Bill C-291. To date, Marie-Hélène has collected over 430,000 signatures from across Canada. Four hundred and thirty thousand Canadians agree that the Employment Insurance Act is outdated and should be changed.

Points of Order

●(1105)

I would like to point out that this is the largest petition presented in the House of Commons since 1992. In order to recuperate from a serious illness, one must rest. That is extremely important. One must avoid all stress and take time to recover. The last thing people need when sick is to worry about paying their bills, like the mortgage, the electricity bill or anything like that. They need to have peace of mind in order to focus all of their energy on fighting the illness. Offering the possibility of receiving up to 50 weeks of special benefits for illness does not mean that all beneficiaries will use all of those weeks. At present, only 31% of beneficiaries collect the maximum 15 weeks of benefits. The goal is to extend the benefit period for those who truly need it, in other words, Canadians with serious illnesses.

I find it interesting that my Liberal colleague from Bourassa is the one who introduced this bill. As I said a little earlier, this bill has been introduced many times in the House. It was part of our 2011 election platform. The NDP has been fighting for this for several years.

According to the Canadian Cancer Society, nearly 50% of the population will be diagnosed with cancer during their lifetime. In Quebec alone, there are currently over 44,000 people fighting some form of the disease. It causes tremendous stress, and the treatment and remission period is typically a lot longer than 15 weeks. On average, cancer treatment lasts about 38 weeks. Thus, 15 weeks is not even half as long as people with cancer need for treatment. Many people who have cancer are forced to return to work before their treatment is complete. Also, the waiting period before they can collect their first payment is so long that some people are forced to go back to work after the first treatment. Cancer treatment is extremely difficult. Even people being treated with small doses of radiation therapy, which is the mildest form of cancer treatment, are seriously affected. Other forms of treatment are even more difficult.

The current employment insurance sickness benefits simply are not adapted to the reality of Canadians, especially when, on average, those benefits run out seven weeks before cancer patients begin to receive treatment under Quebec's public health system. Asking a person to fight a serious illness in only two months is just not right.

A study showed that on average, patients go through 23 weeks of treatment with no income. Earlier I talked about 38 weeks in total, on average. Most patients see a significant drop in their income, to the tune of roughly \$12,000 per household. Some 80% of the participants in the study suffered a significant financial impact. Some 44% of the respondents had to dip into their own savings and 27% went into debt. One person in five went back to work before having fully recovered from their illness, for financial reasons. The proportion of patients with a full-time job goes from 61% before treatment to 45% after treatment. Some 16% lost their job and some did not return to work because of the effects of the treatment or the lack of accommodation in the workplace. It is therefore important to accommodate people who are not lucky enough to have private insurance or the possibility to take extended leave for financial reasons.

We have to look at this bill humanely in order to help all Canadians deal with serious illnesses in the future.

●(1110)

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Before we resume debate, I believe the hon. member for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound is rising on a point of order.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

COMMENTS BY THE MEMBER FOR BRUCE—GREY—OWEN SOUND

Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I believe that some members in this House and the media misunderstood the point I was making last week during debate when I argued that the confiscation of firearms was often the first thing that authoritarian governments do.

While calls and emails of support from my constituents and from Canadians across the country indicate that they understood the point I was trying to make, and I do stand by my beliefs, but, because of my respect for the House, I want to reiterate my withdrawal and apology for referencing two individuals in the way I did.

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I accept my colleague's apology, but I would urge the House to be very careful when making references to Hitler, who was a tyrant. We have commemorated tragic events such as genocides. Today, people should look to the Internet and consider Godwin's law. These types of comparisons should never be made lightly. We know the damage that this has caused and I hope that decorum will prevail in the House.

That said, I accept my colleague's apology.

[English]

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound for raising the matter in the House to clarify his remarks.

I hope I will not prolong this episode, which I think has been unpleasant and worrying for all of us, by asking if the member's apology is predicated on the notion that the registry had anything to do with confiscating weapons.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): It is not the practice of the House that we debate the content of what a member is rising on in a point of order. It is the practice of the House that, when a member rises and withdraws remarks and/or apologizes, we accept that and move forward. If members would like to discuss this among themselves, that is at their discretion.

Resuming debate. The hon. member for Malpeque.

Private Members' Business

•(1115)

[English]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-291, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act (waiting period and maximum special benefits), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Bill C-291. I congratulate the member for Bourassa for putting the bill forward.

I would also like to recognize the work of Jean-Claude D'Amours and Mike Savage, who in past Parliaments tried to move this serious issue forward.

I would like to provide some background on this issue.

Bill C-291 would amend the Employment Insurance Act by amending the waiting period and maximum special benefits. In summary, the bill states that enactment would amend the Employment Insurance Act to extend the maximum period for which special benefits for illness, injury or quarantine may be paid from 15 weeks to 50 weeks. It would also eliminate the two week waiting period when special benefits for illness, injury or quarantine are paid.

Bill C-291 is an important bill. It would bring the system up to date. It would make us more comparable with many other countries.

The EI act in this regard has not been amended since 1971. This is really a matter of social justice. This is about instilling a better social safety net for people affected by health issues due to factors beyond their control. These changes would improve the lives of workers and their families affected by sudden health issues.

These two improvements follow on two improvements that were made by previous Liberal governments: compassionate care and maternity leave. Those two improvements are widely accepted by the population. They are seen as important aspects of the employment insurance system and Canada's social safety net.

There is an opportunity here for the government to step up to the plate and do the right thing for those people affected by health problems. Even though the private member's bill came from the third party on this side of the House, there is a real opportunity for the government to seize the moment and ensure that this legislation is carried through Parliament because it would improve our social safety net.

I want to talk a bit about the reality of what this amendment to the EI act would do.

I expect every member of Parliament has probably had many constituents in their constituency office talking about the fact that 15 weeks of sick leave under the present legislation is woefully inadequate in terms of assisting those people who, through no fault of their own, find themselves out of the workforce and more than likely in treatment. Cancer is one of the most prominent causes.

One of the most difficult conversations that I have with constituents is when the partner and/or the affected individual tells me that the affected individual has just started chemo or radiation

treatment, is out of income and has nowhere to turn. We have to tell those individuals that the reality is the legislation specifies 15 weeks. We all know that 15 weeks is not long enough. What happens to those individuals? Some of them can go into the system within the province.

•(1120)

In our community there are all kinds of fundraisers to assist these people. In fact, we had a benefit for my cousin's son a week ago Friday night. He is 44 years old and has cancer in three spots. The community comes together and raises funds to help these individuals.

We all know in the House that the system is not meeting the need. Going from 15 weeks to 50 weeks is the right thing to do.

If we were to put ourselves in the place of those individuals who are perhaps the breadwinners of the family, starting perhaps their third chemo treatment, now knowing they are out of money, the mortgage has to be paid, food has to be put on the table, the car payment has to be paid and they have to pay for some of their drugs, we can only imagine what that stress does to them. What is the cost of that stress on their ability to get better? What is the stress on that family? It is so unnecessary. This small change could alleviate that concern.

I really think everyone in the House has faced those moments. There is enough on the individual's mind who is taking the treatment. Fifteen weeks is not enough. The EI system itself, as it currently stands, is cruel in its denial. The government, if it would see the way, could overcome that problem. The bottom line is 15 weeks of sick leave is just plain unacceptable.

To improve it would not be really costly. It would bring us up to where many other nations are at the moment. Such a step would improve the ability for an individual to regain his or her health by eliminating that stress and concentrating on health improvement. It would also lessen the burden on provincial resources. It would allow that person to get back into the workforce faster so that that individual could contribute to the economy and provide for his or her family.

Here is a specific example of why I think the EI system in this regard is cruel. I had an individual come into the office in early December. He had Crohn's disease and so had applied for employment insurance. In part, because of the way the Minister of Human Resources has undermined the system by taking away the ability for people to do claims by closing down many of the offices, this person's file had not even been processed yet. It had been eight weeks. The individual firmly believed that as a result of that additional stress of wondering where the dollars were going to come from, he ended up in the hospital for a longer period of time. Part of the reason was that, before he went to hospital, he had cut back on his drugs. It became a problem of whether he would provide food for the table or buy the drugs.

That ends up costing the whole system, including the individual. It is just wrong. Therefore, not only is it the weeks, it is that fact that the minister has undermined the system in terms of its ability to function.

Private Members' Business

•(1125)

What concerns me is the fact that the spokesmen for the government thus far in this debate, the Conservatives, seem to have stopped speaking. Perhaps they are ashamed of the government's position. I wish some of the backbenchers over there would stand and speak up. The government's excuse is that we are in a time of fiscal restraint. That is an excuse. This would be good for the economy and it would be good for individuals. The government has an opportunity to do something right to support the EI system and make it better. I ask the government to seize this opportunity and support the bill.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Giguère (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, NDP): I am rising to speak to Bill C-291. It is a good bill that everyone is asking us to pass. All members of the House, no matter what their political affiliation, have had to face the same situation: people are knocking at our doors asking for this help. It would be interesting, for once, to set aside all partisanship and really tackle the problem. It is important for the House to pause and study employment insurance and benefits for those suffering from a serious illness or injury.

We are still dealing with the economic distress resulting from the 2008 recession. It is not over. We are not yet out of the economic downturn. We have never had such high unemployment. After four years of economic difficulties, Canadian households have exhausted their savings and maxed out their lines of credit. In such conditions, it is understandable that if one family member becomes seriously ill, the family cannot cope financially. The income is gone and there is absolutely nothing to fill the gap.

There is a reason why food banks have never been so busy. There is a reason why the demand for meals-on-wheels services has spiked. People have no more money. They do not have the financial means to meet their daily needs. Just imagine if, in addition, they cannot earn a living because of a serious illness or injury.

Employment insurance is the best tool for dealing with this type of situation. In fact, 66% of Canadians do not have income protection insurance and 66% of Canadians are not covered by collective agreements. In addition, private or group income protection insurance is often not enough even if people do have it. There are limits and constraints, which means that, even with some type of insurance, people do not have what they need. This is what Bill C-291 will address.

The money is there to cover the benefits. Contributors pay into the employment insurance system and their money is managed. Paying into the system fosters a sense of solidarity. Contributors pay into the system to protect themselves against the risk of unemployment or sickness. Yet, they are being told that their money will be managed differently. They have been gouged to the tune of \$54 billion. This is extremely sad and serious. If the money was still there, there would be no problem with the employment insurance system. The money would be there to pay for claims to be processed. There would be enough money to pay more public servants to deal with the massive influx of claims. There would be enough money to cover the needs of people who want one year, that is 50 weeks of sickness benefits. The money would be there. Corrective measures have been undertaken. This is not easy in the

midst of an economic recession. However, it is because we are in the midst of an economic recession and people have exhausted all other means at their disposal, all other sources of income, that we must support them. This is where we are at.

There have been delays in processing. And yet people already face a two-week waiting period. We want this two-week waiting period to be a thing of the past. People do not ask to be sick. They do not ask for permission to be injured. They just are. As the luck of the draw would have it, they are no longer able to work. Employment insurance is probably the only tool that can guarantee all these people that falling ill will not necessarily result in poverty.

•(1130)

The time is ripe for debate. How many of us have seen people who are still unwell after 15 weeks? A chemotherapy treatment can last for six months. If the treatment period is doubled to ensure that there is no relapse, that makes a year. I can guarantee that after one year of chemotherapy, you lose a lot of weight. Fifteen weeks does not give people ample opportunity to get the proper care they need. It certainly does not make their treatment experience peaceful.

People are faced with a major void after only 15 weeks. Too often, collective agreements rely on employment insurance. Employment insurance plans are excluded from collective agreements because there is government-sponsored employment insurance. In that it is our duty to bridge the gaps, we must do so effectively.

I call on my colleagues opposite, many of whom have medical training. I can see one such member right now. She could convince her colleagues that 15 weeks for a chemotherapy treatment is quite unreasonable. The people telling the Conservatives this are not only experts, but also their constituents. My constituents come to me asking for help out of their own contributions to employment insurance. People pay into the system, so they are entitled to receive benefits. Everyone wants this guarantee, this protection against poverty.

This amendment to the law addresses a major shortcoming, which explains why too many people become poor following an accident or illness. Being sick is already frightening enough, but because of the employment insurance waiting period, Canadians are also faced with the prospect of poverty.

The NDP has always supported this bill, even before the Liberals did. It is not a problem for me that this bill has come from the Liberal Party. It does not matter who is introducing the bill; what matters is who it is protecting. That is what is important. It protects my constituents in the same way as it protects theirs. I would call on all members to join us in backing this essential protection.

In closing, I would like to mention an important fact. In Canada, given our good social safety net, the main cause of personal bankruptcy is divorce. In the United States, the main cause of personal bankruptcy is illness, and the other causes lag far behind. In Canada, sickness is much further down the list. It needs to be even further down the list, and we must combat poverty.

Private Members' Business

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have this opportunity to speak to Bill C-291, which would amend the Employment Insurance Act to extend the maximum period for which special benefits for illness, injury or quarantine may be paid from 15 weeks to 50 weeks. It also eliminates the two-week waiting period when special benefits for illness, injury or quarantine are paid.

I would like to congratulate the member for Bourassa on his employment insurance bill. As my colleague just said, all members, regardless of which party they belong to, must examine this bill and decide whether or not to support it. This is a very important bill. Our party has raised the matter a number of times. Former NDP member Dawn Black introduced Bill C-420 in the first and second sessions of the 39th Parliament. Ms. Black reintroduced the same bill as Bill C-316 during the second session of the 40th Parliament. The bill would have extended the maximum period for which benefits for illness, serious injury or quarantine may be paid from 15 to 30 weeks.

During the third session of the 40th Parliament, the NDP member for New Westminster—Coquitlam introduced a similar bill to extend the maximum period for which special benefits for illness may be paid from 15 to 52 weeks. He introduced that bill again on November 15.

I truly believe that it is time for this bill to move forward. Earlier, one of my colleagues mentioned Marie-Hélène Dubé, a Quebec woman with cancer. I remember seeing her on the current affairs program *Tout le monde en parle*, where she spoke candidly about her disease. Ms. Dubé discovered that, after having worked her whole life, she would receive just 15 weeks of employment insurance sickness benefits. She made it her mission to circulate a petition. She asked several members to present it. The member for Bourassa, several Bloc Québécois members and I have presented the petition, which has raised awareness among MPs not only of Ms. Dubé's case, but of the consequences such a loss of earnings can have for a person with cancer or a long-term illness.

I wish to congratulate Ms. Dubé. After what she went through, she could have easily told herself she would never again need these benefits and done nothing. Instead, she thought of other people and gathered 430,000 signatures from across Canada. If people had been more informed about her efforts, I am sure she could have doubled or tripled that number.

Employment insurance exists in order to help people who have lost their jobs and are looking for a new one. Over the years, EI has expanded to provide income for individuals in special circumstances. One example is parental benefits. So, employment insurance can take many forms. The system is meant to protect people's incomes.

It is important to remember that workers and employers are the ones who pay into the EI system; it is not the government. EI is an insurance system that allows people to look after their colleagues, those who suddenly learn that they have the misfortune of having developed cancer after working their entire lives. Has any family not been affected by cancer? It could be a brother, sister, cousin, uncle, aunt, father or mother. In my case, my mother died of cancer.

• (1135)

No one is exempt from this. Let us think about someone who has cancer. In most cases, treatment is absolutely necessary and, in the case of chemotherapy, for instance, can last up to one year. Someone who has a heart attack usually needs some time to rest. Whether someone has a heart attack, heart disease or a long-term illness, the last thing they need is a financial burden on top of their illness. That is the worst thing that could happen. That could prolong the healing process and have a very negative effect on their health.

The least we can do for colleagues, workers and employers, is examine the issue, especially the case of prolonged illness. Doctors and specialists can provide a medical certificate enabling the person to be on leave for 50 weeks. I do not know whether the member for Bourassa was thinking of this type of illness, but I do not believe that he was talking about people with the flu or a cold. It is not about that. We are talking about long-term illnesses, those that force people to stay home for a number of months, or more than 15 weeks.

For example, consider someone who has worked their entire life and contributed to employment insurance. They were lucky because they were able to work all their life. All of a sudden, they come down with a dreaded illness. We do not wish it on them. We do not even wish it on our worst enemy. We tell such people that if they need employment insurance, they can have it, and at least get through their treatments. That would be the right thing to do.

I must say something about the Liberals. They had the opportunity to take action. They were in power for 13 years. They could have done it. We asked for it. We introduced bills for 50 weeks and 30 weeks of benefits. We asked that the two-week waiting period be eliminated. This waiting period should not even exist. People should not be without income. They have payments to make. The Liberals could have done it.

I find it sad—and I think the public needs to know, if it has not already noticed—that the Conservatives did not even rise today to give their opinions, to say whether they are for or against this bill, which is good for our society and all people—the workers. I get the impression that they will be against it. They have not even given their opinion on a bill introduced in the House of Commons. Normally, members from all parties speak. They give their opinion. Today, we are having a one-hour debate. Unless it is to impose closure in the House of Commons or to say that certain bills have to be debated in less than two days, they do not even bother to rise when a bill they are against is introduced. I find that sad for our MPs. I do not know whether the government told them not to rise. This is a fine example of the Prime Minister's "my way or the highway" iron grip.

Private Members' Business

This is a very important bill for workers and the government members are not even bothering to stand up and state their opinions. Are they ashamed? Is the Conservative government too ashamed to rise and tell our workers that it will not give them their employment insurance benefits when they become ill? These people have worked hard; they receive employment insurance benefits for 15 weeks and then nothing. I can see it coming. They work their entire lives and help build this country only to end up on social assistance. I bet there is not a single worker in Canada who would not be willing to help his or her colleagues get employment insurance benefits. I would have a hard time believing that.

It would not cost so much. Maybe the Conservatives do not want to speak today because they have their own bill to introduce. Their bill would pass because it needs a royal recommendation. Maybe that is it. We might be getting a big surprise in 2012.

I sincerely hope that Bill C-291 passes and that the government, having failed to rise today, will rise on the day of the vote to vote in favour of the bill.

● (1145)

[English]

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, here in Canada, according to the Canadian Cancer Society, one out of two Canadians will be or is at risk of developing cancer.

If one looks at the House of Commons, out of the over 300 members of parliament, half are at risk of developing cancer. All across this country there are thousands and thousands of cancer patients who have just been diagnosed. On average, they have to wait at least seven weeks, or almost two months, before treatment starts.

The treatment, on average, takes at least nine months. There are the CT scans for them to take and chemotherapy or an operation or radiation treatment. Yet, when they are going through this kind of surgery or treatment, they are told by the government, "Sorry, you cannot receive any employment insurance beyond 15 weeks." That is less than four months.

Imagine, people are already going through a lot of stress, their bodies are stressed, their mental health is stressed and their families are under stress. Then on top of that they are told that the employment insurance they have contributed to every two weeks all of their lives to cover them when they fall sick will end not quite four months after they claim it. They are told they cannot get any more employment insurance.

Yet most of these Canadians, on average, are still going through treatment. According to the Cancer Society it takes at least nine months to receive treatment. This means that they are either going to have to remortgage their homes, go into debt or use up their savings in order to continue their cancer treatment.

This is exactly what happened to Marie-Hélène Dubé. She is a 40-year-old woman who has had cancer over and over again. She has collected thousands and thousands of signatures, in fact half a million. One would think this government would listen, but the Conservative government is out of touch with the reality of people in Canada. It is not listening. It is ignoring the desires of half a million

Canadians who have signed a petition to say that we have to extend employment insurance benefits to at least 50 weeks.

The New Democrats have said so for many years. It was in our election platform of 2011. The member of Parliament for New Westminster—Coquitlam, sitting right behind me, our fisheries critic, introduced a private member's bill that would do exactly what the bill before us would do. Our past leader, Jack Layton, said many times that EI had to be extended to least 50 weeks, or close to a year, for people who have a serious illness.

Canadians should not have to go into debt or lose, on average, \$12,000 per household, which is how much money they end up using because of their illness. They should not have to wait for two months. Surely there should be a benefit period that would last beyond 15 weeks.

● (1150)

In England it is 52 weeks; in France it is 12 to 36 months, depending upon the kind of illness; and in Germany it is 78 weeks. We are incredibly behind in the way we treat people suffering with a serious illness.

It is not just people who have cancer: there are a lot of illnesses that take a long time to recover from. For example, for people who have had a stroke or who have liver disease or some kind of heart problems, it takes them more than two or four months to recover from those serious illnesses.

It is not as if these Canadians are asking taxpayers for their money; this money belongs to them. If we look at the demographics, most of the people suffering from a longer lasting illness, by and large, are older Canadians. They have contributed to this EI fund for many years, for most of their lives.

One would think this is just natural. However, after all these years, why do we have a system like this?

When the Liberals were in government, they gutted the EI program. They changed the waiting period, they changed the criteria, they changed the benefit period and they took \$54 billion out of the EI program, money that in fact belongs to Canadians who have contributed to the employment insurance fund.

What happened then? Because the Liberals gutted the program and used the surplus for their own purposes, the Conservatives said, "That's fine. We'll make it into a law". They then established a separate body for the EI funds, and limited the separate EI fund to \$2 billion.

An hon. member: And legalized it, too.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Exactly. My colleague is absolutely right. This has legalized the theft of the \$54 billion of Canadians' hard-earned money in the EI fund, which they had contributed to every two weeks. As a result, people like Marie-Hélène Dubé are not allowed to get their EI money.

This is not just about her. On average, right now, as of today, we note that there are 328,770 claims for special benefits under the EI program. A third of them are for a serious illness requiring more than 15 weeks of treatment.

We are talking about over 100,000 Canadians who have their employment insurance benefits cut off just at a time they need these the most, at the time they are under stress and need the government to support them so they can get some of their money back. They are told, “No. Sorry, your benefits are gone”. As a result, they are disqualified or they run out of benefits and end up having to use their savings or to go into debt.

This is completely irresponsible behaviour because household debt in Canada has been going up tremendously. We know why: this is one of the reasons. We have all these Canadians who fall sick and really need help but have to go into debt, take out a line of credit or borrow money, or find other ways to make ends meet. Some whom I know start paying rent with their credit cards and then pay 18% to 20% interest on that debt. They become more and more indebted.

• (1155)

We know that a third of Canadians are worried sick that they are one or two paycheques away from getting into trouble. They are getting into trouble precisely because the Conservative government, and the Liberal government before it, is out of touch with the reality of ordinary Canadians who desperately need help when they are sick.

Let us collectively approve this private member's bill and get it to committee so that it can become law and people who are sick and have cancer, like Marie-Hélène Dubé, will finally get the money they deserve.

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The hon. member for Bourassa has five minutes remaining on his right of reply.

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think those colleagues who support this bill. I find it a little sad, however, that the Conservative Party members are not rising today, since this debate concerns everyone. I also deplore the fact that certain NDP members are attempting to engage in petty partisan politics, and take over this bill, when I was the first on this issue to salute the contributions of every party, including the NDP, the Bloc Québécois and the Liberal Party.

Marie-Hélène Dubé would not be very proud of a number of the speeches. However, I would like to highlight an extremely worthy speech by the member for Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, who demonstrated that one can properly play one's role as a legislator and deliver a decent speech without trying to make political gains. I find this very sad. Marie-Hélène Dubé, like the others, deserves better.

When it comes to an issue like employment insurance, it is about protecting and helping our fellow man. Just as we did with parental leave, the onus is on us today to determine in a non-partisan fashion what changes need to be made, in the current situation, to a bill that concerns living legislation, such as the Employment Insurance Act. Changes have been made in the past, but they have never been enough. There are things that must be changed, and the situation certainly requires due consideration. In Maslow's pyramid representing the hierarchy of needs, self-esteem is near the top, and it is important to find a way to ensure that people have this self-esteem when they are put to the test. The employment insurance program is a program that protects. It is important to think about those men and

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women who are currently suffering and who need help, not additional pressure.

We have the means to take action and to do so within the employment insurance system, whether it is called a fund or something else for actuarial operating reasons. Not only do we have the means to ensure that people do not have to wait as long—and I am pleased to see that the Minister of Human Resources is here to hear this—but we need to help these men and women who are suffering. It is not about engaging in politics and pointing a finger at the previous government or the current government. Rather, it is about acknowledging that we are currently facing tough economic times, which is precisely the reason why there should be no further pressure placed on these men and women who, too often, are unable to help their loved ones and their families because they are unwell.

If we can fix this problem by extending coverage from 15 to 50 weeks and removing the two-week waiting period, not only will we be helping these people with their self-esteem, we will be ensuring that they do not become an additional financial burden on society. This is an investment and not an expense. When these people have nothing else to think about other than taking care of their families or illnesses, that is when we will be able to say that this is a good bill.

[English]

It was sad listening to some music by Whitney Houston last night. One of her songs says that “the greatest love of all” is “learning to love yourself”. I think this bill is about helping these people love themselves.

The role of government is to enhance the quality of life. With the actual program, our role as legislators is to do what it takes to protect people who are suffering right now and are most in need. This is what it is all about. It is not about some restrictions as a result of economic constraints in the past, or about our having to look at the pension plan, and all of that. It is not about that but our role as parliamentarians to ensure that we enhance people's quality of life.

I urge all members to forget their band or banners, to forget about whether or not they are Liberals, Bloquistes NDP, Conservative or Greens, but to think about what they should do concretely to help people. Do not score political points, just provide a better quality of life for people and let us vote in favour of this bill.

• (1200)

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): It being 12:01 p.m., the time provided for debate has expired.

The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Pursuant to Standing Order 93 the division stands deferred until Wednesday, February 15, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

ENDING THE LONG-GUN REGISTRY ACT

Hon. Diane Finley (for the Minister of Public Safety) moved that Bill C-19, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Firearms Act, be read the third time and passed.

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased and honoured to have the opportunity to begin the third reading debate on Bill C-19, the ending the long-gun registry act. I thank the public safety minister and the parliamentary secretary for allowing me the honour to lead off on this debate.

The legislation before us today fulfills a long-standing commitment of our government to stand up for law-abiding Canadians while ensuring effective measures to crack down on crime and make our streets and communities safer for all Canadians. The bill before us today is quite simple. It would put an end to the need for law-abiding hunters, farmers and sports shooters to register their non-restricted hunting rifles and shotguns. It is nothing more and nothing less.

For those who are not familiar with this issue, there were two requirements to gun ownership in Canada. One was registration and the other was licensing. I am sure by now that my hon. colleagues on both sides of the House are very familiar with my position on Bill C-19. I feel that laying a piece of paper beside a firearm, which is called registration, does nothing to improve public safety.

Instead of explaining my position over again, I have decided to simply highlight testimony from several expert witnesses who appeared before the public safety committee as it studied Bill C-19 last November. There is a recurring theme in all of their remarks and the four elements of that theme are: First, the long gun registry has been a colossal waste of money; second, it has targeted law-abiding gun owners, not the criminal use of firearms; third, it has done nothing to enhance public safety; and fourth, the data is so horribly flawed that it must be destroyed.

For the rest of my remarks, I will read into the record witnesses' testimony. The first person I will quote is Mr. Greg Farrant of the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters who had this to say about Bill C-19:

A paper trail of trained, legal, licensed firearm owners does not address the real problem. Even a well-run registry, which this is not, will not prevent random violent crime. Believing in that ignores the glaring reality that the vast majority of criminals

don't register firearms; and in the rare case when they do, a piece of paper and the creation of a system where possibly 50% of the firearms in Canada are not included does nothing to anticipate the actions of an individual, nor do anything to prevent such actions in the first place.

In the case of the long-gun registry, there's a glaring absence of fact-based evidence to support its existence. Suggestions that gun crime in Canada has declined since the introduction of the long-gun registry under Bill C-68 ignores the fact that gun crime, particularly gun crime using long guns, has been on the decline in this country since the 1970s, two decades before this registry ever came into being. Crimes committed with long guns have fallen steadily since 1981. Bill C-68 was not introduced until 1985 and wasn't mandatory until 2005.

The present system focuses all of its efforts on law-abiding firearms owners and includes no provisions for tracking prohibited offenders, who are most likely to commit gun crimes.

This should be about who should not have guns rather than about who does.

Another prominent argument we've already heard here today is how many times per day the system is used by police. ... We've recently heard 14,000 and 17,000. ... The vast majority of so-called hits on the registry have little or nothing to do with gun crime. The majority of these are cases of an officer maybe stopping a vehicle for a plate identification or an address identification, which automatically touches all databases, including the long-gun registry, despite the fact that the check has nothing to do with firearms in the first place.

The next quote I will read is from Solomon Friedman, who is a criminal defence lawyer. He stated:

You will no doubt hear in the coming days and weeks from various interest groups about how the long-gun registry is a minor inconvenience, merely a matter of paperwork. We register our dogs, our cats, and our cars, they say. Why not register our shotguns and rifles, as well? As you know, the registration scheme for non-restricted long guns, and for prohibited and restricted firearms as well, is enacted as federal legislation under the Criminal Code and under the Firearms Act.

● (1205)

With the criminal law power comes criminal law procedure and, most importantly, for the nearly two million law-abiding licensed gun owners in Canada, criminal law penalties. Unlike a failure to register a pet or a motor vehicle, any violation of the firearms registration scheme, even the mislaying of paperwork, carries with it the most severe consequences: a criminal charge, a potential criminal record, detention, and sometimes incarceration. This is hardly comparable to the ticket under the Provincial Offences Act or the Highway Traffic Act....

In addition, registry violations are often grounds for colourable attempts on the part of police, the crown, and the chief firearms officer to confiscate firearms and revoke lawfully obtained gun licences. ...long-gun registry violations used as a pretext to detain individuals, search their belongings and their homes, and secure evidence to lay additional charges.

Parliament ought not to be in the business of transforming licensed, law-abiding, responsible citizens into criminals, especially not for paper crimes.

There are millions of Canadian gun owners who will be glad to know that in the halls of Parliament Hill, hysteria and hyperbole no longer trump reason, facts, and empirical evidence.

...the registration of firearms, aside from having no discernible impact on crime or public safety, has merely alienated law-abiding firearms owners and driven a deep wedge between gun owners and law enforcement.

The next quotation is from Sergeant Murray Grismer of the Saskatoon police service. He said:

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...the registry for non-restricted rifles and shotguns...should be abolished. Thousands of police officers across Canada, who are in my opinion the silent or silenced majority, also share this position.

...the Canadian Police Association...adopted their position without ever formally having polled their membership.

The Saskatchewan federation is the only provincial police association that polled its entire membership on the issue of the registration of firearms. When polled, the Saskatoon Police Association was 99.46% against the registry, while our compatriots in many of the other Saskatchewan police forces were 100% in opposition to the registry.

...the registry can do nothing to prevent criminals from obtaining or using firearms. École Polytechnique, Mayerthorpe, Spiritwood and Dawson College are synonymous with tragic events involving firearms. However, the firearms registry for long guns would not, could not, and did not stop these tragic events. The retention of the firearms registry or records will do nothing to prevent any further such occurrences. ...even Canada's strict licensing regime and firearms registry cannot prevent random acts of violence.

For the officers using the registry, trusting in the inaccurate, unverified information contained therein, tragedy looms at the next door. ... Knowing what I do about the registry, I cannot use any of the information contained in it to square with a search warrant. To do so would be a criminal act.

Projections from within the Canadian Firearms Centre privately state that it will take 70 years of attrition to eliminate all of the errors in the registry and to have all of the firearms currently in Canada registered. This level of inaccuracy is unacceptable for any industry, let alone law enforcement.

Constable Randy Kuntz of Edmonton stated that the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police said that police officers support the registry but that he was one who did not. He went on to state:

I conducted a self-funded survey of 2,631 heroes of law enforcement across this country. They were all identified by their police-issued e-mail. They were all serving police officers. Of the 2,631 who responded to me between March 2009 and June 2010, 2,410 were in favour of scrapping the long-gun registry. In April 2011, the Edmonton Police Association surveyed its members: 81% voted to scrap the long-gun registry.

I'm also a victim. In my personal life, I have 15 friends, teammates, classmates, and co-workers who have committed suicide with a firearm. I also have three friends who were murdered with a firearm.

I am still sitting here in front of this committee telling you that I do not support a firearms registry. I tell you that it does not save lives.

● (1210)

Ontario police officer Constable John Gayder had this to say:

The Firearms Act and its long-gun registry were marketed to law enforcement as a tool to target the criminal misuse of firearms, but only six of its 125 pages deal with increased penalties for criminals. The other 119 pages are aimed squarely at law-abiding Canadians who own or seek to own firearms...front-line officers...want funding to go toward things that have been proven to assist in the detection and apprehension of real criminals. They don't want money wasted on dreamy, ivory tower ideas like the long-gun registry, which are costly, ineffective, and drive a corrosive wedge between them and the public they are sworn to protect.

I have another quotation from police officer Sergeant Duane Rutledge of the New Glasgow Police Service in Nova Scotia. He said:

My experience is that these people take their weapons and share them with their friends and family. They have other people who will hold the weapons for them. That's part of the issue with the whole registry. An individual registers the guns, but there's no way to track where that person keeps his weapons....As a front-line police officer, I believe there are more hidden guns today...This, therefore, makes it more dangerous for me now, because I'm guessing every time I go to a house if I rely on the registry to give me the facts. I don't believe it can do that, simply because there are so many people who haven't registered guns.

I would like to continue with another quotation from Sergeant Rutledge. He said:

I'll go back to the female police officer who was shot in Quebec. She had full belief that the person was prohibited from having firearms and she let her guard

down. Complacency is what gets police officers killed. I'd rather have no hope than false hope.

That one point alone is key to this debate. Could it have cost a life?

I would like to now quote from Linda Thom, the Canadian Olympic gold medal winning shooter, who said:

—I'm accorded fewer legal rights than a criminal. Measures enacted by Bill C-68 allow police to enter my home at any time without a search warrant because I own registered firearms, yet the same police must have a search warrant to enter the home of a criminal. I'm not arguing that criminals should not have this right—they should. I'm arguing that this right should be restored to me and all Canadian firearms owners.

Ms. Hélène Larente, volunteer coordinator of a Quebec women's hunting program, had this to say:

As a hunter, I don't think it is fair that we are being treated like criminals...the registry does not protect women any more than it does society as a whole. The fact that a firearm is registered does not mean that it will not be used, either against women or anyone else...I am in charge of an orientation program. Women who participate in that orientation learn how to handle guns and realize that the gun itself is not dangerous.

I asked Ms. Larente if the long gun registry had a negative effect on people getting into the hunting and shooting sports in Quebec. Her answer was:

That certainly has a negative effect...If we are stopped, we are seen as criminals because our gun is registered...We risk committing an offence if we forget our registration.

● (1215)

My next quotation comes from Ms. Diana Cabrera of the Canadian Shooting Sports Association. She had this to say:

—I'm an international competitor shooter. Although I'm Canadian, I currently compete for the Uruguay national team...The challenge of obtaining the public safety goals of the firearms...are major concerns...the fear of confiscation, the perceived social stigma of firearm ownership and demonization, and the many costs and burdensome processes involved....There is no question that the long-gun registry has deterred individuals from entering their shooting sports....The main issue for competitive participants is the fear of imminent criminality. They may easily find themselves afoot of uniformed law enforcement or CBSA officers, even if all the paperwork is in order. Any paperwork error may lead to temporary detention, missed flights, missed shooting matches, and confiscation of property....Law enforcement and media coverage of firearm issues have made this situation even worse. Firearm owners are subject to spectacular press coverage in which reporters tirelessly describe small and very ordinary collections of firearms as an 'arsenal'....Will I be targeted at a traffic checkpoint if a CPIC verification says I possess firearms?

Tony Bernardo, executive director of the Canadian Shooting Sports Association, talked about the number of firearms owners of guns in Canada. He said:

Based upon the Canada Firearms Centre's polling figures, in 1998 there were 3.3 million firearms owners in Canada. On January 1, 2001, 40% of Canadian gun owners—over 1 million people—became instant criminals.

Fewer than half the guns in Canada are actually in the registry....Getting the ones that are out there to actually come into the system would be like pulling teeth....To get those people to come forward now, you would have to go right back to the very basics of the act and change the very premise of the act; the first sentence says that it's a criminal offence to possess a firearm without a licence.

Professor Gary Mauser of Simon Fraser University introduced some interesting research findings. He said:

First, responsible gun owners are less likely to be accused of homicide than other Canadians. Second, the police have not been able to demonstrate the value of the long-gun registry. Third, the long-gun registry has not been effective in reducing homicide. Fourth, the data in the long-gun registry are of such poor quality that they should be destroyed.

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Maybe I will have more time to deal with some of his statistics later.

From Greg Illerbrun:

I am a former RCMP officer as well as a past provincial president of the Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation...the thousands of people I represent support the permanent elimination of the registry.

This...targets law-abiding citizens, but does little to stop the criminal use of firearms. That approach is fundamentally wrong.... Registries do not work to stop crime....Government inspectors—not police services—can enter your home without a warrant based on the suspicion that there is a firearm, ammunition, or documentation of a firearm...the Firearms Act removes your right to remain silent. Inspectors can demand that you tell them where your firearms are... and if you do not assist them you can be charged and put in jail.... We're all criminals, because the mere possession of a firearm makes you a criminal....Criminals enjoy more rights than firearm owners.... We support gun control; we just support gun control that is effective and focuses on the real problem, not the legal and law-abiding owner.

There are so many quotations that I would still like to read. Maybe I will do some of them in questions and comments.

Dr. Caillin Langmann, an emergency medicine resident in Hamilton noted:

I treat suicide and violence on a daily basis...the money that has been spent on the long-gun registry is unfortunately wasted; however, we can prevent further waste by taking the money we currently spend on the long-gun registry and spending it on... women's shelters; police training in spousal abuse; and psychiatric care, which is sorely lacking in this country. We are not winning the battle against suicide.

I would like to quote from Mr. Donald Weltz. He is a retired Ontario conservation officer with 32 years of service. He said:

—the registering of long guns does nothing to increase the safety of the public. The fact that a long gun has been registered does not prohibit that firearm from being used by an individual with criminal intent. It is not the long gun that commits the criminal act, but the individual in control of that long gun...I have heard people ask why individuals would be upset with registering their long guns. We have to register our vehicles, they say, so what's the difference?...I would ask this question: has the fact of registering our vehicles the number of impaired drivers? In an impaired driving situation, is the vehicle the problem or is it the driver who decided to drive while their ability was impaired with alcohol?...even though I probably had the ability to check that registry ahead of time...I chose not to, and I did so specifically so that my mind would not have some kind of little inuendo hiding there that would lead me to take my guard down for a split second....If you have the perception that there is nothing there that really can hurt you, you have a tendency to not be as careful as you should be.

I have more comments but I will have to finish them later.

• (1220)

[Translation]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his speech. He might think that the firearms registry does not save lives, but we disagree. The Government of Quebec has unanimously spoken: all MNAs voted to preserve the data and have it transferred to the provinces. Why does this government refuse to accept the political consensus to preserve the data in the registry and transfer it to the provinces?

[English]

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz: Mr. Speaker, that question has been dealt with many times in the previous parts of the debate, at report stage

and so on. Our commitment is to destroy the registry. The data is the registry. The province of Quebec is part of Canada. Our commitment is to all Canadians.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the member's comments. He made reference to the law enforcement agencies and focused his attention on the province of Saskatchewan.

Does the member feel comfortable in believing, or at least the impression he is trying to give Canadians, that a vast majority of law enforcement officers across Canada do not support any form of gun registry, the registry that the government is currently taking out of commission? Is that the impression he is trying to give Canadians, that a vast majority of law enforcement officers across Canada do not support the gun registry? If he could be clear on that point, I would appreciate it.

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz: Mr. Speaker, I think I have been very clear on that point. I did not focus on just Saskatchewan, I focused on police officers from Ontario, from Nova Scotia and from Edmonton.

One of the surveys taken was by a policeman in Edmonton. He surveyed policemen from right across Canada. He found that the vast majority of them opposed having the gun registry. They wanted it scrapped, and that should be abundantly clear.

Mr. Greg Rickford (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, for the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for championing this cause over the years and for standing up for the interests of northern Ontarians, particularly northwestern Ontarians, who have long coveted this issue. I know the member enjoys the great-tasting pickerel from northwestern Ontario and our great traditions, including our first nations.

I also know that in the past couple of elections, we have noted a doubling of the number of Conservative MPs and strong seconds in many, because they have understood that the NDP has turned its back on northern Ontarians. In fact, many of them have flipped on this issue and it has been, or will be, at their expense. The third party lost a couple of its long-standing members over this issue.

That is unfortunate, but thankfully we are here. Could the member talk about where the real emphasis is on this, which is our government's commitment to firearm handling and a rigorous licensing process that ensures people who are lawful gun owners have the appropriate safety training in order for them to have carriage of those long firearms, like I do and like I have?

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•(1225)

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz: Mr. Speaker, I really appreciate the support from the member and all of my colleagues on the other side, many of them who unfortunately have been forced by their leadership not to vote according to the wishes of their constituents. We have made it very clear that we need to focus on the criminal and not the law-abiding firearms owner.

I want to say one thing. This may be my last speech in regard to Bill C-19, and I want to thank all the fine citizens of our great nation for their patience over the past 17, almost 18 years. I have always said that government moves slowly, but I never dreamed it would take this long to get rid of something that has been absolutely a waste of time.

We have had a majority government for less than 100 days and we have made the commitment to get rid of this. Therefore, in answer to the member's question, yes, we are acting on this. Unfortunately so much money has been wasted on this and am really pleased to finally put this whole issue to rest. I thank all those who supported me.

The paramount question is if the firearms legislation cost-effective in improving public safety. That should have been the core question. That is what we should have been debating.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the member a question. We are talking about the Conservatives destroying the data in the registry, and not just eliminating the part relating to long guns. The government keeps saying that this makes sense, because the registry is the data. It seems to me that this is not completely accurate. The data, by itself, is not the registry. The registry has more to do with failing to register a weapon. It is a little intellectually dishonest—and I am not calling the member dishonest—because the government is doing some mental gymnastics by claiming that the data in the registry is the registry itself.

[*English*]

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz: Mr. Speaker, I think that gymnastics are being played on the other side by saying the registry is not the data. The registry is the data. Anybody who has dealt with this issue sees that the key point is that the registry is essentially laying a piece of paper beside someone's firearm and then storing that information in a central data bank.

It cost almost \$2 billion to do that. It was not cost effective. Less than half the guns have been captured in the registry according to some witnesses. Should we spend another \$2 billion trying to fix it over the next 70 years according to experts at the committee?

Let us make the responsible decision here. Let us not focus on emotion. Let us focus on the facts. Let us make a rational decision and get rid of the gun registry once and for all.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Before I go back to questions and comments, if some hon. members would like to carry on a private conversation about this matter, they are welcome to do so outside the chamber. However, while in the chamber I would encourage all hon. members to pay respect to their colleagues.

The hon. member for Davenport.

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am sure the member for Yorkton—Melville, who is essentially a Trojan horse for the National Rifle Association, is having a happy day today.

The member talked about facts. On one hand, there is a registry on which a lot of money has been spent to gather a lot of important data that law enforcement agencies across the country use. On the other hand, the government is about to introduce lawful access legislation that is going to gather the private personal data on millions of Canadians. I am wondering if the member, in his apparent staunch defence of civil liberties and privacy, will be voting with our side to block the lawful access legislation.

•(1230)

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz: Mr. Speaker, with respect to the broadside comment that somehow I am connected to the National Rifle Association, there is not a shred of evidence to that effect, because I am not. That is really ridiculous.

I would like to point out to the member something that was said at committee. I have to lay this on the public record here. During the eight years from 2003 to 2010, there were 4,811 homicides, and of these, 1,408 involved firearms. The data Statistics Canada gathered revealed that only 135 of the guns were registered. In just 73 cases, fewer than 5% of all firearms homicides, was the gun registered to the accused, and some of them of course may be innocent. Only 45 of the 73 cases involved long guns, fewer than 1% of homicides. One hundred and twenty-three police have been shot and killed. Only one of these murders involved a registered long gun and it did not belong to the murderer.

We are focusing on the wrong thing. All the statistics I have heard, and the member referred to some of them, are completely irrelevant in the way they are being cited.

We really need to dig to the bottom of this. I have done that. I had to change my mind on this issue after I had dealt with it for one year. I had to do a 180 and tell myself after I had looked at the evidence that the firearms registry is not working. I thought one could not be opposed to gun control, but many people confuse gun control with the firearms registry. It is not, and that is what we need to remember.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I think I am even sadder than the member opposite who just spoke to be talking about Bill C-19 for what is probably the last time before it goes to the Senate, which is overrun with partisan Conservative appointees. The Senate is supposed to be above partisanship but I will not waste my breath talking about that.

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First, I would like to point out that I am one of the people who participated in all stages of Bill C-19. I was there at first reading. I participated in the debates at second reading. I sat on the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security, which examined Bill C-19. This committee is not very aptly named, nor is this bill even related to public safety. I am not questioning the words of the member opposite who just said, with a straight face, that he changed his mind on the subject. I do not know what hit him but it must have been quite heavy.

From the outset, I have been in favour of maintaining the firearms registry. In fact, I was in favour of creating it. Unfortunately, we have a tendency to quickly forget history, and that is why we keep making the same damn mistakes all the time. We are forgetting why the registry was created. The firearms registry was created under Bill C-68. I would like to give a short history lesson. I would like to tell you what really happened, since the Conservatives like to reinvent history.

This bill was introduced because, in 1989, a deranged man entered the École Polytechnique with the expressed intention of shooting the young women who were going to school there. He had mental health problems, but whatever the reasons, this crazed gunman entered the school, targeted people and killed them. We must remember this. My heart bleeds for these victims. Yet since that time, the Conservatives have been constantly using the issue of abolishing the firearms registry to gain political advantage. They have turned it into their pet issue, as though Canada would crumble if we kept the firearms registry.

All this time, the parents, friends, sisters and brothers of Geneviève Bergeron, Nathalie Croteau, Anne-Marie Edward, Maryse Laganière, Anne-Marie Lemay, Michèle Richard, Annie Turcotte, Hélène Colgan, Barbara Daigneault, Maud Haviernick, Maryse Leclair, Sonia Pelletier, Annie St-Arneault and Barbara Klucznik-Widajewicz have not forgotten them. We have not forgotten these women either.

But that does not mean that the NDP proceeded blindly with respect to the gun registry. Our caucus examined the issue carefully. Some members did not want to change a thing, but other members from other regions saw things differently. We have to remember how the legislation came to be. When politicians are inspired by historic events like that one and begin a crusade to create related legislation, the result is not always well thought out. That is not to say the legislation cannot be improved down the line.

The goal was for our society, our country, to have a record of who owns guns and how many they own in order to ensure that the individuals have the right to own those guns, that they are storing the weapons safely, and that they do not intend to use them for criminal purposes. Is it a threat to public safety for a society to seek that assurance? If so, what a terrible society. This is not a perfect system, but if we have to choose between scrapping it entirely and improving it, I think we would be better off improving it.

Yes, it was expensive to develop and implement, but I am tired of hearing Conservative members repeat, ad nauseam, that the registry cost \$2 billion.

● (1235)

Once and for all, can they stop treating us like imbeciles? The registry as a whole, and its implementation, have been exaggerated and decried by everyone. You do not, however, throw the baby out with the bathwater just because the Liberals did not know how to do their job. You try to improve things.

That is what we strove to do, on our side of the House. We listened to people with completely opposing points of view. We listened to those who said that the registry must not be touched. That is what we do in the NDP: we listen to what people have to say. We do not listen only to one category of individuals in society, as the members opposite have done on this issue. We listened to the concerns of hunters, aboriginal people, first nations and police chiefs. We listened to the concerns of almost all stakeholders so that we could attempt to eliminate the irritants.

Obviously, if you are a hunter, you do not want to be labelled a criminal for forgetting to register a weapon. However, what our colleagues opposite do not admit is that the irritants have been largely removed. There are now fewer complaints because of the armistice and the fact that there are incredibly generous time frames for the registration of firearms.

The group of members opposite see this as an opportunity to rejoice, as if abolishing the long gun registry were going to be the biggest victory seen this century in Canada. That is the plan, according to certain people on Twitter. I hope that the Conservatives will be humble in their victory because there are victims involved. I am not going to repeat the names of these people. I could speak about the Dawson College tragedy. The wounds are still fresh for those involved. We have heard that there will be a big party on February 15 because we will be gagged from that date onwards. We certainly will not have enough time to all be able to speak one last time on the issue. My crystal ball tells me that our friends across the way are going to silence us sometime soon. That is unfortunate, because there are still voices that have not been heard. I am not just talking about members. We do not speak just for ourselves; we speak on behalf of the constituents in our ridings.

The Conservatives are speaking on behalf of a minority of people and the National Rifle Association. There is perhaps no hard evidence that this is the case, but there is something fundamentally bizarre. As a lawyer, I know that when something factual seems to point to but one conclusion, even if not by direct association, there is a good chance that it will be fact. Given that the witnesses who appeared before us in committee are the same people who travel around the United States advocating that every American citizen should carry a weapon in their pocket, I can put two and two together and work out what truly motivates them.

When I talk to hunters—and there are many in my neck of the woods—I ask them what is the matter with the gun registry. They have told me that, at first, it was cumbersome, and that they did not know how it worked. They do not seem to really understand how it works. They also told me that, with time, they have gotten used to it, have registered their guns and do not talk about it.

Government Orders

In a similar vein, I can just imagine the debate that took place when the lawmakers introduced automobile licensing. People travelled by horse and buggy, and I am sure that there was not much registration. How did we establish the registration system when we began driving cars? I am trying to imagine the debates that took place in the early days of Confederation.

That said, we do not have to get rid of something just because it irritates people. After conducting studies and having discussions with various people who were for or against the registry, we presented some very reasonable proposals to remove the irritants.

From the outset, I have tried to understand why our friends opposite have mounted such a visceral attack on the registry. Thinking of the victims does elicit great emotions in me and I do feel very sad. But I can still take Bill C-19, read it and ask myself, what complaints do our Conservative friends have? First, they say that it does not save lives. No one here can confirm this.

● (1240)

When I asked the question in committee, it made the government's witnesses uncomfortable. It bothered them when I asked them whether they could tell me with certainty and with evidence to back their claims, that not one life had been saved thanks to the firearms registry. Chiefs of police came to tell us that they were using the registry. People in suicide prevention came to tell us that since the registry was established, suicide rates had dropped. Generally speaking, long guns are used for suicide. A smart person can put two and two together and realize that the number of suicides with a long gun goes down when there is a registry. The problem was that no one was able to tell me that the registry had not saved at least one life. Saving a single life is certainly worth \$1 million or \$2 million a year. If we can save a few lives a year, then so much the better.

Whether some people like it or not, the registry is that and more. I would not base my entire argument on the fact that the registry saves lives because often, people will counter the argument by saying that the registry did not prevent a man from gunning down women at the Polytechnique. That is the type of debate we are having. No one on this side of the House is claiming that the registry is going to prevent a mentally ill person from walking around with a legally obtained gun and doing whatever he wants with it. That is one of the Conservatives' arguments. However, evidence shows that the police have used the data in the registry in their investigations in order to find out how many guns a person possesses, and so forth.

After listening to about 10 witnesses who all had to answer the same question—if the registry saved even only one life—the Conservatives asked another person to appear. That individual came and told us with a straight face that, on the contrary, a police officer from Laval, from my province, had died because of the registry. The Conservative member said it himself earlier. It was the last straw. It is indecent to say such a thing. Not only is it indecent, but it demonstrates a total lack of respect for the person who died. There is so much evidence in this case. The people of Quebec know full well what happened. No one said that the police officer consulted the registry and determined that, because the individual did not have a weapon, because he did not have the right to own one, and because the court forbade him from owning a weapon, she could enter his residence, where she was then shot. Come on. How can someone say

something like that? That is not what happened. A young police officer arrived at the individual's residence—and perhaps she did not have a lot of experience—and was the victim of a heinous crime. An individual who was not supposed to have a firearm had one. That is not something that could have been prevented, registry or no registry.

The government claims that it wants to protect public safety, but it is not doing the Canadian public any favours by using that kind of argument. I cannot tell the House that we will all feel safer if we pass Bill C-19. After all this time, all these debates and all these studies, the Commissioner of Firearms submitted a nice report. The government made sure that it did not send us the report quickly enough so that we would have time to consult it when we were examining Bill C-19. I encourage the members opposite to read that report, particularly those who will be called upon to speak on the subject, so that they have something to say other than the registry is no good and the data are not valid. Why are the data not up to date? Because the Conservatives imposed a moratorium. It has been a number of years since anyone has registered, but the existing data are necessary.

Quebec wants to have the data transferred to it. How does transferring the data to Quebec hurt anyone? The province does not want to use the data to criminalize people. It has no jurisdiction when it comes to the Criminal Code. The friends of the members opposite who are hunters will not have a problem. If Quebec wants to legislate in this area and ensure that people with long guns are registered and wants to know how many weapons the registrants have, then the data will be useful.

Clause 11 of Bill C-19 includes a shocking loophole: I could own a legally obtained weapon and transfer ownership to my colleague on my right, and the only question I would be asked would be whether I had reason to believe that my colleague should not have a weapon.

● (1245)

Some people might contradict me on this, but honestly, I do not really get the sense that he should not have a weapon, so I transfer ownership of the weapon because I do not feel like having it anymore and I need the \$300. So I give the weapon to my friend. If the Conservatives cannot see the loophole in that, then there is a problem. It is not safe.

Let us turn to the Commissioner of Firearms' report. From what I know, the commissioner is not a hysterical person or someone who is out of touch. The commissioner's report includes facts and is based on factual data collected year after year demonstrating how the registry works and how it is useful. I would encourage hon. members to read this report, because having read it, members cannot in all decency rise in this House and vote in favour of Bill C-19 because we know what steps have been taken to address all the irritants. And that is all the hunters, aboriginal peoples, first nations, gun collectors and the rest were asking us for: to have a way of registering a weapon without it being more worrisome and damaging than necessary. Everything is there, everything is permitted and registration hardly takes 15 minutes. Hold on. We may want to prevent the proliferation of weapons in circulation, but we will no longer be complying with our international treaties.

Government Orders

I am absolutely stunned that our friends across the way cannot see all the problems with Bill C-19. I just cannot get over it.

They are doing this just so they can tell a few people in the Minister of Public Safety's circle that they went through with it. Some people have a visceral feeling about this. An athlete who appeared before the committee thinks it is appalling that she would be asked to register her weapon to take part in the biathlon. For crying out loud. I register my car. It is not a problem for me as long as it does not take two hours of my time and the process is simple. Every time we made this case to the Conservatives, it seemed less and less clear that registration was a problem for them.

In closing, there are so many things that need to be said. People write to me about this every day to share data with me. The public health authorities in Quebec are calling unanimously for the registry to be kept. This is important, and it has been proven that the registry has had an impact when comes to long guns.

I say to my colleagues once again, do not get caught up in the rhetoric from the Conservatives who like to amuse themselves by saying that the astronomical costs are associated with long guns. This is not true. The cost is for the registry as a whole. There are still other weapons that are included in the registry. The registry has not been abolished.

Some of the Conservatives in charge of the firearms file have no doubt been telling people that they will get what they want, and so, anyone listening now who believes those Conservatives is going to wake up with one heck of a headache the morning after the party on February 1. I guarantee it. There will still be a gun registry.

That \$2 billion was spent setting up the entire registry. That is not the true cost since then. The cost is somewhere between \$2 million and \$4 million. When I calculate what has been spent on the anniversary of the War of 1812, when I see the millions spent on all kinds of celebrations for the Queen—though I have absolutely nothing against the Queen—I have to say that, in terms of logic, and as a legislator who wants her constituents to be safe, my heart bleeds today. What are we supposed to say to the people who worked from 1989 to 1995 to set up the registry? It will take nearly as much time to dismantle it as it took to create it. Wait and see how long it will take to destroy the data. That does not happen at the touch of a button. It will cost billions, and one day, people will talk about how much money the Conservatives wasted dismantling the long gun registry.

● (1250)

[English]

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the reason my constituents and I have such a visceral dislike of the long gun registry is that it is an attack on a wonderful way of life, a way of life that the old NDP used to support. The new NDP, unfortunately, has changed. Back in the days of Bill C-68, Audrey McLaughlin and eight of the nine NDP MPs voted against the long gun registry. I would also make the point that both the former NDP premier of Saskatchewan, Lorne Calvert, and the former NDP premier of Manitoba, Gary Doer, were adamant opponents of the long gun registry.

My question for my hon. friend is twofold. First, what has caused this change in the NDP to go from the old NDP that supported a way of life in natural resource communities to the new NDP that is a party of big government elites and union bosses? Second, were Premier Doer and Premier Calvert merely being stupid?

[Translation]

Ms. Françoise Boivin: Mr. Speaker, that is such an easy one, my God. I do not think the member listened to my speech at all.

I will explain it to the hon. member, and I will do so with the time I have left: it is not a question of a drastic change here. Rather, it is because we heard the grievances of people like Gary Doer, Lorne Calvert and Audrey McLaughlin.

I talked about the grievances of hunters and people in his riding who cause him to oppose the registry so aggressively, and I explained that we have found a solution, an intelligent way to ensure that these people would not oppose it so aggressively, in the same way that I have no problem registering my car. Why would anyone be so adamantly against registering their weapon if they do not risk criminal charges?

That is what hunters told us. If we take away that element, the federal government need not be involved. I completely agree that the data should be transferred to the Quebec registry. I see no problem with the federal government passing responsibility for the registry on to the provinces and giving them the operating budgets necessary to manage them. Hunters will no longer feel like accused criminals. I have nothing against hunters. On the contrary, I have tons of friends who are hunters. Besides, many people among the 62% of the voters in Gatineau who elected me to this House are hunters.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to address my remarks to the member.

The cost of the gun registry is often discussed. We see that it costs between \$2 million and \$4 million. At the same time, we know that the government has hired 1,500 communications professionals. It must cost a great deal to employ 1,500 communications professionals. Obviously, the government must communicate with Canadians. But what contribution to society do 1,500 communications professionals make in real terms compared to the gun registry?

● (1255)

Ms. Françoise Boivin: Mr. Speaker, absolutely none, thank you.

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the member from Gatineau.

I would like to begin by thanking her for her speech because it is always interesting to listen to her. She is fascinating and inspires me in my work.

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She spoke a great deal about transferring the data to the provinces, and I believe that the new aspect of this bill is the total destruction of the data. I would like her to talk about the financial contribution of the provinces to this registry. Why destroy all the data without listening to the provinces that want the registry? Those provinces that do not want the registry will not have it. But why are they suddenly telling the provinces that want the data and want to maintain a registry, that it is out of the question?

The government is not listening to the provinces even though they helped pay to create the registry. I would like to hear what she has to say about this.

Ms. Françoise Boivin: Mr. Speaker, I will begin by saying that flattery will get you everywhere.

That being said, in terms of the transfer of the data, Robert Dutil, Quebec's public safety minister, was very clear when he appeared before the committee. I also think the facts are undeniable. We are talking about nearly 7 million entries from Quebec in the registry in question. Those millions of entries were paid for by the Quebeckers who registered their firearms. I think what Quebec is asking for makes perfect sense. The data were provided by Quebeckers and the province is prepared to take over the full cost.

During the last provincial and territorial public safety conference, the other provinces told Quebec they had no problem with this, provided the rest of the federation did not have to pay for the cost of this registry.

Why then does the minister rise with such hatred and say he wants to destroy the registry, when Quebeckers who paid for it are interested in maintaining it themselves?

The government is refusing to allow anyone to touch it, even though there are people who want to use it.

[*English*]

Mr. Ryan Leef (Yukon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is important that we clear up the record on one thing. It is not something the opposition has done throughout this debate, much of which I have been privy to.

I heard the hon. member say that we had heard testimony at the committee about a reduction in suicide rates. That is absolutely not the case. In fact, the expert testimony and evidence we heard at committee was that suicide rates had no correlation whatsoever with the long gun registry and had more in fact to do with the introduction of medications, the SSRIs.

For the member to stand up in the House and say that the long gun registry is correlated in any way with the prevention of suicide is just wrong. However, that is consistent with all of the other messages by the opposition.

I would like my hon. colleague to reiterate the testimony she heard directly linking declining suicide rates and the long gun registry. That is not what I heard and not what other members of the public safety committee heard.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Françoise Boivin: Mr. Speaker, I will cite two sources. The first one would be the people from the Association québécoise de

prévention du suicide. They spoke in French, but I imagine that the hon. member was listening to the interpretation. They said very clearly that the registry had an impact. Directors of Quebec's public health said that making it more difficult to access long guns had an impact. Statistics show that long guns had been used in most suicides. The registry makes it more difficult to access long guns.

As I said at the beginning of my speech, it is rather odd that these statistics have dropped since the creation of the registry. That is what the Association québécoise de prévention du suicide said in committee. I encourage the hon. member to consult the blues. It was extremely important, especially with Suicide Prevention Week coming up. Suicide is a scourge in Quebec, a big problem.

• (1300)

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Gatineau for her speech. I have a lot of questions to ask her. When I was elected in 1997, I voted against Bill C-68 to eliminate the firearms registry. I am from a rural area and I changed my position. I did not do a one-eighty but a complete three-sixty. For the people of my riding who are watching at home, I sincerely believe that the registry has saved lives. The registry costs \$2 million a year. The money that is going to be used to commemorate the War of 1812 could be used to maintain the registry for the next 35 years. All we have to do is not bother with that celebration; the war was fought in 1812. Let us forget those misfortunes and invest this money where it is needed.

The Commissioner of Firearms is the only person the Conservative government fired because he was not bilingual. It appointed unilingual judges to the Supreme Court and a unilingual Auditor General, but the Commissioner of Firearms, who supported the registry, was let go on the pretext that he was not bilingual.

Ms. Françoise Boivin: Mr. Speaker, I always love the enthusiasm demonstrated by the hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst, who is a strong supporter of francophones everywhere and of bilingualism.

The Conservatives are using the cost argument to abolish the firearms registry. We are not talking about the initial cost of \$2 billion to create the registry. We are talking about an amount between \$2 million and \$4 million. On the eve of a new budget that will involve millions of dollars in expenditures, if the Conservatives truly believed in public safety, if they respected those who survived the horror of the Polytechnique and Dawson College massacres among others and if they respected the police officers who want to keep the registry, they could find the money to do so. There are some dissenting voices, and I recognize their right to oppose the registry for their own reasons; however, in matters of public safety, it is better to be safe than sorry.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is the third time I have risen to debate this bill.

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Before getting to the heart of my speech, I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to three women, two of whom I have known since the 1990s. I am talking about Wendy Cukier and Heidi Rathjen, who, in the 1990s, spearheaded the movement to create a long gun registry. At the time, I was a political assistant to a member of the House, Clifford Lincoln, my predecessor. I did a lot of work with these two women, who obviously have continued the battle. However, their efforts are now taking a turn and are focused on protecting the gains we have made in the past 15 years or so.

The third woman I would like to pay tribute to is Suzanne Laplante-Edward, who also fought for the creation of the registry and who continues to fight to maintain it. Ms. Laplante-Edward, as we know, is the mother of Anne-Marie Edward, who was a victim of the massacre at École Polytechnique. I have gotten to know Ms. Edward in the past two or three years through the fight against the government's efforts to take this important public safety tool away from us.

I also have the honour of representing Ms. Edward in the House of Commons because she is one of my constituents. Ms. Edward is an iron lady in the best sense. She has a lovely personality, a tremendous heart and a strong social conscience, and she is as tenacious as a bulldog. I salute her work.

I want Ms. Laplante-Edward, Ms. Cukier and Ms. Rathjen to know that their efforts have not been in vain. Naturally, they must be discouraged to see the fruit of their labour destroyed. Still, like so many people across the country, I truly believe that, during its time, this registry no doubt saved lives that would have been lost to suicide or murder. Yes, lives were saved. Once again, I want to honour the work of these three women, but I should also point out that many others were part of this movement and made major contributions.

I would like to tackle what I would call the myths perpetuated by those seeking to dismantle the gun registry, or perhaps I should say, the false arguments advanced by some. The first myth, the first false argument, is that the long gun issue is relevant only to people living in rural parts of Canada and that the gun problem in urban areas is mostly about handguns.

Presenting the issue like that is cunning and very effective in terms of communications. I mentioned that the government had about 1,500 communications professionals on its payroll. That is very clever in terms of communications, but it is still a false dichotomy.

● (1305)

[*English*]

The government has been very shrewd in presenting this issue in very simplistic black and white terms, namely that the problem of guns in cities is a problem of handguns and that when we talk about long guns, we are talking about rural populations who need the long guns either to protect their agricultural operations or to pursue their traditional culture of hunting, as the hon. member across the way mentioned before. However, as I mentioned in my speech on second reading, this is a false dichotomy because more and more urban dwellers are buying long guns and replicas of guns they see in movies and video games. In fact, in the metropolis of Toronto alone, not a rural region but the great metropolis of Toronto, there are

287,000 non-restricted firearms registered. To say it is just a rural versus urban issue is a false argument.

The second myth or false argument is that all of these inquiries to the gun registry, some estimated to be as high as 17,000 per day, are a function of routine or perfunctory inquiries, for example, of a driver of a car who is receiving a parking ticket. In other words, all of these queries are said to be automatic and secondary to the rather routine and mundane primary queries. However, that is not what the committee heard from Mr. Mario Harel, chief of police of the Gatineau police service and vice-president of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, who told the committee:

There is truth to the fact that a number of these are what has been referred to as "auto-queries". However these cases are rare, which we believe is an endorsement of the fact that law enforcement views this information as a valuable tool, a bit of information that, when combined with other information, assists in assessing a situation an officer may face.

The third myth or false argument is the idea that the registry has not been proven to save lives. There was a study presented to the committee by Étienne Blais, Ph.D., and Marie-Pier Gagné, M.Sc., and Isabelle Linteau showing that the registry does save lives. Let us put that aside for a moment, because we can get into a battle of studies and the hon. member for Yukon will bring up Dr. Gary Mauser's study and others. We can get into these battles between studies, but let us look at this from a logical, practical or common sense point of view. I know the party opposite likes to focus on practical, common sense arguments.

It is very hard to prove that the registry saves a life. Theoretically, it makes sense. Practically, it is very hard to prove. For example, it is impossible to prove that I made it to Ottawa via the highway today and remained alive because of the 100 kilometre an hour speed limit, which, by the way, I respect. It is very hard to prove that is why I am here speaking to the House today. In fact, there will be no headline tomorrow saying that the life of the member for Lac-Saint-Louis was saved because of the 100 kilometre per hour speed limit. I will not be a statistic, but we know that this speed limit saves lives. It is something that makes sense and it is very hard to prove that someone is alive because of either this speed limit or the registry.

● (1310)

A fourth myth or false argument is the idea that people are still killed with long guns even though we have a registry. I would stress that there is no policy instrument that can fully prevent that which it aims to prevent. It can only control that which is socially undesirable.

This is what I would call an ironclad law of public policy. Public policy is almost always based on the findings and recommendations of social science which itself by definition comes with associated margins of error.

I can boldly predict based on this ironclad law of public policy that dog bites will continue into the foreseeable future even by dogs that have been registered with city hall. I can put my money on that. I will also predict that car theft will continue into the future even though cars are registered with the province.

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Unfortunately, it is clear to all of us that gun crimes will not disappear even should the registry by some miracle survive. There will be, unfortunately, future gun crimes, some of which will be quite heinous. It is unfortunate and this will happen even if the registry were to survive.

It is interesting that members opposite will say that registering guns just does not work because criminals do not register guns. I can see that point. Criminals do not register their guns. Therefore, that means criminals do not register their handguns. The only people registering handguns would be law-abiding citizens, as the members across the way like to invoke. As I said in my speech at second reading, the people in my riding who are gun owners are sterling citizens. They are the most active volunteers, conscientious and responsible, but that is not the point.

The point I am trying to make with respect to the handgun registry is that if the Conservatives were logical, they would say that registries do not work because criminals do not register firearms; therefore, they are getting rid of the long gun registry and they are getting rid of the handgun registry. Thankfully, they are not getting rid of the handgun registry. That points out the fundamental contradiction in their thinking on gun control.

The fifth myth or false argument is that the registry is wasteful and useless. I have heard that many times. We hear that from the Minister of Public Safety on a continual basis. We have evidence from the police, including the RCMP. If the government does not buy the RCMP's evidence, then there is a problem between the government and the RCMP. There is a lack of faith in the RCMP by the government. There is concrete evidence that the registry helps with police investigations.

I will quote Mr. Mario Harel, the chief of the Gatineau police service and vice-president of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, who said that the elimination of the gun registry will add significant costs to their investigations, costs which will be downloaded to police services and lead to crucial delays in gaining investigative information.

The word "downloading" seems to come up a lot with the government. It downloads costs of the prison agenda and all kinds of other things to the provinces. Here is an example where again the government will be downloading costs, in this case to provincial and municipal police forces.

One does not have to take Mr. Harel's word for it. One just has to listen to what Matt Torigian, the chief of Waterloo Regional Police, has said about the long gun registry's usefulness in police investigations. He has given a couple of concrete examples. One is real and the other is more hypothetical, but based on typical cases that the police are involved with. He said:

We came across a crime scene recently with a man who was obviously deceased by gunshot and a long gun was at the scene. Because of the registry, we were able to trace the weapon to the person who had just sold it to the man who was deceased. We determined it was a suicide and the investigation stopped there.

• (1315)

We know from this example that if there had been no registry the police would have thought that maybe it was a crime and would have

had to open up an investigation. Many hours of valuable police time would have been wasted looking for a perpetrator of a crime that was really a suicide.

Another example given by Chief Torigian is more hypothetical but no doubt commonplace. Say a group of thieves break into a farmhouse near Montreal and steal a shotgun. They saw it off to conceal it better under their clothes. They drive to Windsor, Ontario, where in the course of committing a bank robbery they drop the gun and flee the scene. Because of the registry, the police find out that the gun is owned by a Montreal man, a victim of theft. This might give the force a lot more leads to go on. For example, there might be witnesses to the break-in in Montreal. The registry would thus allow coordination of efforts between police departments in order to efficiently resolve the case and move on to something else.

There is more anecdotal evidence. The following example is from the 2010 RCMP firearms report, the one that was ready a while back but was only released on January 19 after the committee had finished its hearings on the bill:

A large municipal police force contacted CFP NWEST for assistance in recovering obliterated serial numbers on two firearms seized in a robbery and kidnapping investigation. After the serial number of one of the guns was restored, NWEST used the CFP's Registry database to determine that the gun was registered to one of the suspects and had not been reported lost or stolen.

In another example the registry helped police link a grandfather's gun to his grandson who had perpetrated a gun crime. Again, I quote from the RCMP report:

CFP NWEST was asked to assist in a shooting investigation. They confirmed, through the Canadian Firearms Information System, the firearm was one of seven registered to the same individual, and it had not been reported lost, missing or stolen.

RCMP investigators met with the registered owner who was able to account for only four of his seven firearms. The subject was interviewed in order to establish a possible link between him and the shooting suspects.

As a result of the interview, the owner's grandson was identified as one of the accused in the shooting, and all seven firearms were accounted for in the follow-up interview of the accused. Numerous firearms-related charges were laid in relation to this incident.

The police caught the grandson. If the police had not caught the grandson by using the registry, the grandson might still be wandering around with a gun. Who knows what might have happened.

This is another point I would like to make about those who want to dismantle the registry. They will not admit to possibilities, and this is a fundamental error when it comes to social science. It is all about probabilities and possibilities.

Government Orders

Dr. Gary Mauser made a fine presentation at committee. It was quite rigorous and he was a very agreeable witness. This is not an attack on Dr. Mauser. After I gave him some examples of how it was plausible the registry might have saved lives, I asked him, in his opinion, in the 10 years the registry has existed is it not possible that one life may have been saved. I was not even asking Dr. Mauser was one life saved; I was asking him if it is not possible in this universe of probabilities that one life may have been saved. His answer was a categorical, "It's impossible".

This is what we are dealing with. We are not dealing with open-minded thinking on this issue. We are dealing with categorical statements that actually are nonsensical when we really think about it. Ending the registry would be a mistake.

The Liberal Party in the last election campaign was quite cognizant of the fact that some legitimate law-abiding firearms owners feel criminalized by the system, that first-time failure to register not be a criminal offence, thereby compromising with one of the points the government is making. There was some movement on the issue. It would have solved the problem and it could have kept the registry. People would not have felt criminalized and Canada would be safer.

● (1320)

Mr. Ryan Leef (Yukon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have spoken to this bill a number of times. I would say to my hon. colleague that I certainly have never separated rural and urban Canadians' concerns around the long gun registry nor rural and urban Canadians' use of long guns. In fact, we are well aware that both rural and urban Canadians utilize long guns.

A good portion of what the member is saying makes sense, but I will tell him what the people in my riding and I have a hard time with. We never hear concerns that this legislation that has been brought in has criminalized Canadians. It is not for want or need of registering these long guns. A lot of times it boils down to errors made in the system which cause registrants, law-abiding Canadian citizens, to be not necessarily targeted but subjected to these crazy search and seizure provisions and criminal sanctions because of it. We are making Canadians into criminals because of paper errors. Nobody thinks that is an effective use of government legislation, Canadian taxpayer dollars, or police resources and time.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Mr. Speaker, I sit with the hon. member on the public safety committee. I would say that he has approached this serious topic with a very serious mindset. I was not suggesting that he has used this false dichotomy about rural versus urban. That is the communications strategy of the government. I would urge the hon. member to listen to some of the comments made by his colleagues, including the Minister of Public Safety, who are always invoking farmers and hunters, as if members on this side of the House somehow do not appreciate farmers and hunters. This is part of the government's communications strategy.

In terms of criminalizing, I understand that someone would feel criminalized, which is why we proposed decriminalizing the first-time failure to register. That was an appropriate common-sense very Canadian kind of compromise. However, a gun is a very dangerous thing. Let us not fool ourselves. The Supreme Court has said that gun ownership should be seriously regulated in this country.

● (1325)

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member raised a lot of cogent points in his presentation, an important one being the issue of costs.

When I met with the former chief of police of Edmonton and the head of the gun registry, they advised me that when the gun registry was originally established it was not being run in an efficient way, but once it was transferred over to the RCMP and local police departments to deliver, the costs plummeted. This talk of billions of dollars is a complete falsehood and should be corrected. I appreciate the hon. member raising that.

One matter that has concerned me is that it has taken the government six years to get serious about bringing forward the bill to dispose of the so-called long gun registry, which does not even exist. What troubles me is that in a six-year time span, criminal law provisions were not being enforced. It troubles me that that perhaps is sending the wrong message to those who might break serious laws like the Criminal Code.

I wonder if the member would like to speak to that. Perhaps that is why the list is insufficient.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Mr. Speaker, certainly that would contribute to the errors. I have no proof of this, but there was talk in the early 2000s that some people may have been sabotaging the registry by filling out the forms improperly and causing gum ups in the system.

One thing I take away from the constant refrain of the government is that gun owners are law abiding. I take that as a fact. I take the government at its word on that. One of the consequences of arguing that is to say that because they are law abiding, they will register. If there are few homicides committed with registered guns, maybe it proves that indeed our gun owners are law abiding and register and take their responsibility to store their weapons seriously. Maybe that is why a smaller number than we would expect of guns used in the commission of crimes are in fact registered.

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when Canadians wake up after the bill has gone through the Senate, they will find out that they still need an acquisition and possession card. The only call I get in my office is about an individual going past 30 days. If they have gone past 30 days, they need to pass the test. If they fail the test, they lose their gun. The only thing the bill would do is remove the numbers in the computer. We would still have the same law.

Am I right in saying that some Canadians will wake up in a month or two from now and find out that a letter came in the mail and they had to re-register their acquisition or possession card recall and, if they do not do it, they will lose their gun? If they have guns at home with no acquisition and possession card, they are doing something against the law and they will be charged under the Criminal Code. I do not believe that part has been removed.

Government Orders

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: That is an excellent point, Mr. Speaker, because the process of filling out forms for a firearms acquisition certificate is much more complex than for registering one's weapon.

The interesting thing is that almost everyone who came to committee to argue against the registry also said that we needed to get rid of firearms licensing. I asked some witnesses point blank if they thought we should get rid of firearms licensing as well and they said yes.

In fact, the statistical evidence that was presented at committee was with the regression lines. We always forget that within the regression lines are margins of error and within those margins of error are human lives. However, the people who came with the regression analysis said that this proves the registry does not save lives and it also proves that gun licensing does not save lives.

Why does the government stop halfway if it is really logical in its public policy-making? Thank God it has not but if it were logical it would.

• (1330)

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, throughout the debate today there have been some comments made by government members that the gun registry will not stop gang violence. No, it will not stop gang violence. I do not think it was ever believed that it could stop gang violence. However, it has had an impact on suicides. My colleague from Yukon argued that there was no testimony given. I did not sit on the committee but I sat in on a great number of witness presentations, and I am positive that the Canadian Mental Health Association attributed a decrease of 300 suicides annually because of the registry.

An individual tells his doctor that he has lost his job, lost his wife and is in debt up to his ears, that he has a gun at home and something will happen. That was the testimony we heard. The police are alerted and they take the gun out of that situation. The witnesses attributed a decrease of 300 suicides annually because of that.

Another statistic that has stood out is that, over the past decade, 71% of spousal homicides involved rifles or shotguns. As of 2009, the rate of homicides with rifles and shotguns has decreased by 62% from 1989.

How would Canadians be safer with the cancellation of the gun registry?

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Mr. Speaker, they are not safer. The fact remains that the people on the ground, the people who work with suicide prevention and women's shelters, know from experience that the registry helps prevent suicide and it minimizes the ability of someone with a firearm to intimidate a spouse.

We heard examples of people who keep their guns in the front vestibule closet just to intimidate a spouse. These are the people whose guns should be taken away because they are not being properly stored. However, how would we know if they have guns to begin with if we do not have the registry?

Mr. Dan Albas (Okanagan—Coquihalla, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Prince George—Peace River.

It is a privilege to contribute to this debate and to speak in support of Bill C-19, the ending the long-gun registry act.

My riding of Okanagan—Coquihalla is a very diverse one. There are large urban cities, such as Penticton and West Kelowna, resource communities like Merritt and Okanagan Falls, and many rural regions, such as Logan Lake, Meadow Valley, Faulder and Willowbrook. For rural residents, this is an issue of great importance to them. It is one that I hear about weekly, and sometimes even daily. They ask me when the government will fulfill its commitment to end the long gun registry and why has it taken so long. I expect that I am not the only member of the House to get these kinds of questions.

I believe it is important to share with the House the frustration that I hear from the rural residents in my riding. They are law-abiding citizens and they are taxpayers, and yet they are forced to comply with a system created out of Ottawa that does nothing but inconvenience the lifestyle they work hard to enjoy.

Everyone in the House knows that criminals do not register their guns. It is often a repeated point in this debate but it is the truth. However, more important, we need to recognize that there are times when a registered gun is used to take a life. Recently, in my riding, a family lost a loved one as a result of domestic violence. Did the registered gun stop the alleged murderer from pulling the trigger? Sadly, it did not. For those people in society who are capable of taking a life, the fact that a gun may or may not be registered means nothing to them. The simple fact of the matter is that the long gun registry has not stopped crime, nor is it saving lives.

I have also listened to the opposition arguments in favour of the long gun registry. The opposition suggests that its greatest contribution is that it provides law enforcement with a record of where guns are, and not just where they are but what kinds of guns they are.

Those who followed the committee hearings for Bill C-391 last year will know that members heard testimony from numerous respected and experienced police officers. Those experienced officers told us that the information provided by the long gun registry was not reliable. I have met with many front-line officers who have made it very clear that they cannot rely on the registry to confirm if a gun may or may not be at that address. In fact, if officers were to rely solely on the long gun registry, they would be putting their life and the life of their colleagues at risk.

We also know that there are long guns that have never been registered and those that have not been registered properly, and situations where model numbers or catalogue numbers were used instead of serial numbers.

The long gun registry has been in place for over a decade. What are the results? The registry has not stopped crime, nor has it saved lives. Millions of dollars were spent on the registry and what are the results for the taxpayers? We have a database that front-line officers tell us that they cannot depend on.

Government Orders

I understand that most members of the opposition choose to ignore how this registry has adversely impacted many taxpayers in rural Canada. However, I will recognize the opposition members for Thunder Bay—Rainy River and Thunder Bay—Superior North who have to date respected the wishes of their constituents.

This has been a difficult issue for many members of the opposition who come from rural ridings. It does not need to be difficult. Admitting that the long gun registry has been a failure is not an opinion, it is a fact. Rural Canadians know it and residents in my riding, who live in communities like Merritt, Logan Lake and Okanagan Falls, know it as well.

One of the challenges that many communities in my region are facing is an overpopulation of deer. On the surface it may not seem like a problem, however, deer destroy small gardens and can be aggressive to small animals and even adults. They also present a real danger to motorists. The reality is that fewer people are hunting these days, in part because of the burden and costs of dealing with issues like the long gun registry. In my riding, many residents have told me that they feel the quality of life in rural Canada is threatened. That is why I believe it is important we take action on their issue.

On May 2 of last year, Canadians made it clear that they were supporting a platform that would put an end to the wasteful spending of tax dollars on failed programs like the long gun registry. Therefore, let us instead work together on more effective gun control, like the requirement for people to have a licence before they can buy a rifle or a shotgun. We also need to ensure that before people get a licence they need to pass the Canadian firearms safety course. We also need to ensure that before people get a licence to own a rifle or a shotgun they must pass a background check. A background check involves things like a criminal record check and ensures that people are not under a court order prohibiting them from possessing a firearm.

● (1335)

I am proud to say that our government is now investing \$7 million a year to make the screening process for people applying for a firearm's licence stronger. Bill C-19 would not change any of those requirements. In fact, no one would be able to buy a firearm of any kind without passing the Canadian firearms safety course, the background check and without having a proper licence.

I support the bill because it would eliminate a law that places an unnecessary burden on law-abiding Canadians. The bill would also free up resources that could be better spent on anti-crime initiatives to help make our streets safer.

We need to be honest with ourselves about the real gun problem in Canada. It is not just the legally acquired shotguns and rifles in the hands of our farmers and hunters that is the problem. While we continue to penalize them, it may seem like a solution to some members opposite, but doing so does not stop crime. A failed registry and a flawed database is not an answer.

Between 2005 and 2009, police in Canada recovered 253 firearms that had been used in the commission of a homicide. Some of those guns were registered, most were not. However, we need recognize that the registry failed 253 times to prevent crime, much as it failed in my riding last year. As a result, I cannot support a process that

requires law-abiding, tax paying citizens to continue to dump money into a system that offers no tangible results.

Does it really makes sense to the opposition to continue to penalize rural taxpayers who often legally purchase a rifle for the protection of livestock or hunting game with family and friends? The long gun registry continues to penalize these citizens and yet it does nothing to address any of the real problems. We do have some real problems, such as the flow of illicit firearms being smuggled into Canada, and the firearms that are used as a commodity for criminal purposes.

I am convinced that we all want to reduce crime, especially gun crime, but the long gun registry is a failure and it is time we respect rural Canadians and admit it. That is why I speak in support Bill C-19. We need to invest in programs that are effective and eliminate those that do nothing.

● (1340)

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I heard the member's colleague from the Conservative Party this morning saying that registering a car does not save a life. However, in a hit and run situation it would be a way to find out who did it. That is what registries are all about.

I do not believe that if we put a registration number into the computer that it will stop a crazed person from killing somebody. I do not think anybody could argue that. However, we may find the person who did the crime. Also, if we knew that an unstable person had a gun and may commit a crime, we could take the gun away.

While the Conservative government says that the gun registry does not save lives but that it will register special guns and short guns, honestly, what is the difference? It is just the registration of guns and, even if the gun is registered, it does not stop somebody from using it to kill.

Why is there a difference between the two? Is it just that the government needs votes and that it convinced the hunters and farmers to vote for it? It has paid for good advertising but has it done this for votes and not out of real concern?

Mr. Dan Albas: Mr. Speaker, the member had a number of questions that are fair.

I think that provinces do what they do in order to serve the people. If a province decides that it wants to put together a car registry because it is in society's best interest that is certainly fine.

Government Orders

The thrust of my speech was that we have a case where most long guns are purchased and used for legitimate activities, such as hunting and looking after livestock in rural areas. We all know there is a process for restricted firearms, such as handguns, and we try, as best we can, to ensure that those guns are only put into the hands of people who need them for legitimate reasons and not criminal activity.

I would reiterate my support for continued gun control in those areas because those are the areas that we can make progress on fighting crime, not on penalizing those people in rural areas.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we hear in every government presentation that the legislation is designed to make rural gun owners criminals for non-compliance.

Would the Conservatives share one simple statistic with the House, with Canadians and with anyone following this debate. How many Canadians have been convicted of non-compliance with the gun registry? How many criminals have we made?

Mr. Dan Albas: Mr. Speaker, I think the member is suggesting that somehow, through my speech, I was alleging that it was punishing rural Canadians.

I think that rather than saying that it criminalizes, I would much rather say that it puts a burden that is not reasonable. That is, a system run by government that puts a burden without giving a reasonable public good, such as really preventing crime. I think we need to continue to look at all laws and ensure that the individuals have to do their part but no more than can be justified.

• (1345)

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to respond to the point just made by the member opposite. Perhaps the member can provide us with some comments.

I have had a number of constituents in my riding office over the last number of years who have come in, World War II veterans, for example, who have had their firearms confiscated for no reason other than forgetting to renew their registration. They had been registered. I have seen these people come into my office absolutely stricken, feeling that they were treated like criminals by a registry that was created by the former Liberal government.

Has the member heard of any of these people coming in, talking about how they were treated by officials who subjected them to these laws?

Mr. Dan Albas: Mr. Speaker, yes, I do receive quite a lot of complaints. People feel that if they are responsible, they have complied with all the safety requirements and they get the licence, they should not be subject to a very burdensome process.

However, by the same token, every time the RCMP gets called out to look into these cases, that is RCMP time that should be spent looking for real criminals.

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today and participate in the debate on the ending of the long-gun registry act. My constituents have consistently told me to abolish the long gun registry. As we finally

approach that goal, I am proud to support the repeal and the destruction of the registry.

Our Conservative government places a high priority on the safety and security of Canadians. However, we also place a high value on their freedom and ability to enjoy that safety. We have been working hard on initiatives and legislation to that end. Repealing the long gun registry is one of those efforts.

Supporters of the long gun registry often hold up the legislation as a key tool for keeping Canadians safe. In reality, it is nothing more than a costly database of information about law-abiding Canadians. It is essentially incapable of preventing any crime from occurring. I have yet to see a single piece of evidence that this has stopped a single crime or saved a single life. It is wasteful and it does not achieve its goals. It is time to get rid of it so we can focus on issues that will actually have a practical impact on the safety and security of Canadians.

The long gun registry has been expensive. This is an indisputable fact. The CBC, not known for its Conservative bias, has estimated a total cost of over \$2 billion over the 17 years of the registry. Let me remind members that the former Liberal justice minister, Allan Rock promised it would not cost a cent more than \$2 million. That is a hefty price to pay for an inferior product, as we can all agree. The \$2 billion could have gone a long way in other safety initiatives, including preventive action or rehabilitative programs.

Across this country, Canadians are working hard to provide for their families. They do not throw money away on items or services that are not beneficial or practical for them or for their families. It is time that we follow their lead and do away with the needless spending on the registry.

The long gun registry does a fine job of collecting the names of those using their long guns for sport and protecting their livestock. It does an awful job at stopping illegal activity, using guns that were never legally purchased or registered in the first place. That is because the people listed in the registry are individuals who have acquired and wish to use their long guns in legal ways.

They have followed their government's requirements. They comply because they wish to abide by the law. These people are not the ones committing gun crimes in Canada. This is the key reason that the long gun registry is an ineffective piece of legislation.

This is not a surprise to me, yet I suspect it will come as one to the opposition. Most criminal activity naturally operates outside of the law, hence its criminality. Guns used in crime are generally not legally purchased or registered. More often than not, they have been brought into Canada for criminal use and for that reason are never registered. This renders the registry useless in both tracking down criminals and protecting Canadians from harm.

Government Orders

The majority of Canadians have had enough of the long gun registry. I know that our government knows that. If my colleagues across the aisle were honest with themselves, they would be well aware of it, too. In fact, there are ridings all over Canada clamouring for this change regardless of the political party of the member they have elected to represent them.

I would like to focus on one riding in particular. The member for Western Arctic travelled across the Northwest Territories. He told all who would listen that he would stand up for northern values and vote to end the long gun registry. He even stood in a debate and said, "Vote for me, vote for the Conservatives. It is the same thing. We both will vote to end the long gun registry."

Well, it is clear that the electoral promises of that member do not mean a whole lot.

To all reasonable people, this bill should be a win, win situation. It would lessen the constraints on our fellow Canadians and allow hunters, farmers and sports shooters to continue their lawful activity in peace.

Having discussed the costly nature of the registry, the ineffective structure of the registry and the Canada-wide request to repeal the registry, the conclusion of this debate should be obvious to all. It is essential that the long gun registry come to an end, and that it happen soon.

We are looking forward to the day that law-abiding Canadians can relax and know that their information has been completely destroyed. That is why Bill C-19 also includes a provision to destroy all data collected by the registry in the last 17 years. This aspect is extremely important, as it is necessary to protect innocent citizens from ever being targeted by their government again.

Canadians gave their support for the abolition of the registry last May. Our government stands by our promise to remove it from the federal level forever.

This is not a new issue in the House of Commons. Throughout the debate the word "ideology" has been bandied about quite a bit. At the end of the day, this war of words leads us nowhere.

• (1350)

Let us ignore ideology for a moment and summarize the simple facts. The long gun registry has never stopped a single crime or saved a single life. Billions of dollars have been spent. Members of Parliament on both sides of the aisle have heard from Canadians that they want the registry to be gone. Now is the time to do what we came here to do and serve Canadians by abolishing the long gun registry once and for all.

I and our Conservative government made a promise to the Canadian people that the long gun registry would be repealed and all data related to it would be destroyed. We stand firmly behind that promise and are dedicated to seeing that through. I encourage all members, especially those from rural and remote ridings, including those across the way, to stand up and speak for their constituents and vote in favour of ending the long gun registry once and for all.

[Translation]

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the government member who just spoke. Since

the May 2 election, it has become clear that the current government really wants to increase public safety, considering the bills it has introduced, for instance. Wanting to destroy the information that already exists in the registry would appear to run counter to that, since destroying the data will not bring back the money that has already been invested in creating the registry.

Why does the government want to throw away billions of dollars' worth of information that Canadian taxpayers have already paid for, when the provinces and police forces are telling us that the registry helps enhance public safety?

[English]

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member across the way brought up one of the most misunderstood facts about the registry. She brought up questions about licensing. That is one thing this government would not change. It would be just as hard to purchase a weapon now as it has been in the past. That all has to do with licensing of firearms as opposed to the registration of law-abiding farmers and gun owners. It is an apples and oranges argument. We would not change licensing, it would be just as difficult as it was before. We would continue to provide safety for Canadians.

[Translation]

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to tell the member opposite that I did not appreciate his comment about the opposition members being honest with themselves. I would like him to know that during the election campaign in 1995, the people of my riding wanted to know how I planned to vote on the bill, which had not yet been introduced. I promised to vote in favour of it. I received a standing ovation and I have always voted in favour of it. That is what the majority of my constituents in Ottawa—Vanier want. Yet that member has the gall to say that we need to be honest with ourselves. His comment is unacceptable.

[English]

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Mr. Speaker, there are over 300 members in the House. Not everybody is going to agree with the opposition or with our party. My statement was to encourage the ones who have heard loud and clear from their constituents to remove the registry. For me, I heard it loud and clear. I know some of the opposition members heard it loud and clear, and those members who heard that need to be honest with themselves, to remember the vote Wednesday night and vote with their constituents as opposed to other forces that would have them do otherwise.

• (1355)

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to remind this House and inform the Speaker once again that the Conservative caucus has 13 members of police forces and law enforcement agencies from across the country. That side of the House has absolutely none.

So when members across the way mislead Canadians about how police officers feel, I as a police officer have to stand up and correct that. Police officers in this House have all voted in favour of abolishing this registry. It is a complete waste of money.

Statements by Members

The Liberals said it would cost \$2 million and it cost \$2 billion. What would happen in private business if that kind of exaggerated misinformation went on?

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Mr. Speaker, as a business model, \$2 million versus \$2 billion simply would not suffice. That decision would be made, not 17 years from that decision, but probably within 1 or 2 years. Obviously it is not something we can afford.

I would like to speak about the police. I was on the legislative committee that heard some statements about the effectiveness of the registry. We heard an example where one officer had been shot because she had relied on the information of the registry and it was not true. She went up to a door and anticipated that there was no gun behind it. The registry said there was no gun. However, there was and she paid the price for that with her life. The registry simply does not work.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Chambly—Borduas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to comment on what the Minister of Public Safety said when we were debating closure on Bill C-19.

He said that the House has been debating the gun registry for 17 years, or almost as long as some members have been alive. I believe that I am one of those members to whom that comment could apply. Nevertheless, it is interesting. I am the oldest of three sons, and my mother always told me that just because someone speaks up more often does not necessarily mean that they are right. That applies here. Just because it has been 17 years does not automatically justify closure or the government's current position.

I object to the idea that we are not qualified to speak to the bill and share the people's ideas if we have never been police officers. In the end, as MPs, we may not necessarily be representative of the various segments of the population that we represent. We stand up for seniors even though we are not seniors, we stand up for youth even though we may not be young, and we stand up for retirees even though we are not retired. The fact that there are 13 former or active police officers in the Conservative caucus is not adequate justification for diminishing the words and testimony of other police officers and police associations.

I would like to come back to a quote that is very relevant to this debate. After Barack Obama was elected President of the United States, the work he did with regard to the economy was the subject of great criticism. For example, the unemployment rate was not dropping. This is relevant to this debate because President Obama spoke to the media and said that prevention is never applauded because it is invisible and very difficult to measure. In that context, President Obama was talking about the fact that the United States did not experience another recession. To him, that meant success. However, we cannot talk about something that did not happen. I think that the same logic applies to this debate.

We cannot talk about all the deaths and all the problems that have been prevented because of the firearms registry for that very reason—they were prevented. They never happened. It is very important to keep this in mind when reading quotes. The hon. member for Gatineau made the same comment, and another member who spoke earlier made a similar comment when he spoke about the police officer who was unfortunately the victim of a crime and who was

shot despite the registry's existence. I believe that happened in Laval. We heard about it during testimony given before the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security.

Regardless of the measures we put in place, whether they be tax measures or economic measures, regardless of the work that a government can do, the system will never be perfect. So, to give an example where the result was tragic and did not meet the expectations we have of the system in place, once again, does not constitute a legitimate rationale in this case.

I will continue my comments a little bit later.

• (1400)

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The hon. member will have six minutes remaining when the House returns to this matter.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

PINK IN THE RINK

Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate the Owen Sound Attack and the Canadian Cancer Society for teaming up and hosting the inaugural and very successful Pink in the Rink event on Saturday night at the Harry Lumley arena in Owen Sound.

The rink was a sea of pink. Fans were decked out in pink T-shirts and waved pink rally towels. The goal of the event was to raise awareness and money for lifesaving breast cancer research, as well as to support local patients who utilize the programs and services offered by the Canadian Cancer Society.

The hockey game featured the OHL champion Owen Sound Attack against the visiting Peterborough Petes. Real men can wear pink and the home team sported new pink jerseys in honour of loved ones who had lost their courageous battle to breast cancer and in celebration of those who are still with us.

To top off the night, a sold-out crowd of fans saw the Owen Sound Attack soundly beat the Peterborough Petes 12:0 in arguably their best game of the season. What an exciting and memorable evening. Job well done.

* * *

[*Translation*]

BUSINESSES IN TERREBONNE—BLAINVILLE

Ms. Charmaine Borg (Terrebonne—Blainville, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today I would like to acknowledge the essential role that the small and medium-sized businesses of Terrebonne, Blainville and Sainte-Anne-des-Plaines are playing in my riding's economic recovery. These businesses share our Quebec values and are deeply rooted in my community. They have worked hard since 2008 to provide more jobs for families in the region.

Statements by Members

I would like to thank a number of business associations, including AGAB, CCITB, SODET, the Terrebonne chamber of commerce, CORDEV SADP, CLDEM, and the businesswomen's association. These organizations create a vital network of small and medium-sized businesses. Through them, I have had the opportunity to speak with the people who are helping my community flourish despite tough economic times.

I know that the owners of small and medium-sized businesses support the NDP's pro-small business platform. They agree that it is important to cut small business taxes, and they know that the Conservatives' poorly conceived plan, which helps only large corporations, undermines their competitiveness and fails to recognize their critical role in the economic recovery.

* * *

[*English*]**WILLIAM PEYTON HUBBARD**

Mr. Terence Young (Oakville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in recognition of Black History Month, I rise to pay tribute to one of our country's trailblazers, William Peyton Hubbard, the first African-Canadian to be elected to public office in a Canadian city.

William Hubbard's father was an American slave who escaped via the underground railroad to Canada. Born and raised in Toronto, William Peyton Hubbard originally worked as a baker, but after rescuing George Brown from the Don River one night, Hubbard found himself entering the world of politics.

With the support of his friend, George Brown, he was elected in 1894 as a Toronto alderman. This was the first of 15 terms in office. During that time he also served on the Board of Control and as acting mayor on occasion. He fought corruption, pushed for democratic reform and never failed to speak his mind.

Toronto still celebrates "Old Cicero's" accomplishments with the William P. Hubbard Award for Race Relations. I ask the House to join me in celebrating this extraordinary man's contribution to our country.

* * *

GEOFFREY PAWSON

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Saskatchewan suffered a great loss on January 30 with the sudden passing of Dr. Geoffrey Pawson.

Dr. Pawson was a respected pioneer in the critical field of caring for troubled kids. He started his first group home for six youths who needed his help when he was still in his twenties. That experience blossomed into Saskatchewan's renowned Ranch Ehrlo Society, which today serves 250 young people and their families across the province and beyond.

An inspirational leader, problem solver, change agent and builder of hope, Geoff Pawson earned the trust and affection of his colleagues, employees, board members, public officials and most of all, the families and kids whose lives he helped to mend. He truly left this world a better place.

We extend our heartfelt condolences and deep thanks to Barbara and his loving family for Geoff's lifetime of human achievement.

● (1405)

MENNONITE CENTRAL COMMITTEE

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren (Chatham-Kent—Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, since 1920 the Mennonite Central Committee has provided food for millions of people around the world.

Last week, I was invited by the committee in my riding of Chatham-Kent—Essex to Leamington for the annual meat canning fundraiser lunch at the United Mennonite Educational Institute. This year marked the 14th year that canning has taken place at the H.J. Heinz tomato grading station. Thirteen Mennonite churches take part in this event.

I could not begin to name all the volunteers, but let me mention Jack Tiessen, who will be turning age 90 but serves passionately with the hundreds of others who give so selflessly of their time and efforts to make this important initiative a great success. Let me congratulate them all as they follow the biblical command:

He who has two coats, let him share with him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise.

While I am up, I will also give an early Valentine's Day wish to my lovely wife, Faye, of 36 years.

* * *

[*Translation*]**HUMAN RIGHTS**

Ms. Paulina Ayala (Honoré-Mercier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last Friday, I took part in a meeting of elected members from eastern Canada, elected members from the different political parties and the different levels of government. Despite our political differences, the only focus of the meeting was the well-being of our constituents. That is true democracy: working together.

I must admit, I was very shocked to hear the Minister of Public Safety's comments about torture. Torture is a despicable and evil act. During the Pinochet dictatorship in Chile, my brother was tortured at a police station. He was handing out leaflets promoting the right to vote. That very sad event still scars him today.

The Chilean government at the time believed it was justified. It felt that national security was in jeopardy. History shows us that it was wrong. In a democracy, we cannot give the director of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, or any other official, the power to decide on the legitimacy of the use of torture. It is an attack on human dignity.

Canada cannot allow itself to denounce regimes that kill their citizens in the streets—

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. member for Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale.

Statements by Members

[English]

SCOUTS CANADA

Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, tomorrow is St. Valentine's Day, and although my seatmate stole my thunder, I also give my love to my dear wife Almut on this day and every day, of course.

Tomorrow is Scouts Day on Parliament Hill and so I would like to rise today to recognize Scouts Canada.

We salute the work of thousands of volunteers who make a very important mentoring, guiding and coaching impression on young Canadians.

In June, Scouts Canada will celebrate 104 years in Canada and 98 years since being incorporated in Canada by an act of Parliament.

Today Scouts Canada is a highly diverse, co-ed organization with over 100,000 members nationwide and programs in 19 languages. L'Association des Scouts du Canada also offers scouting activities for 17,000 francophone youth from coast to coast.

On behalf of Senator Con Di Nino, chair of the Scouts Canada Parliamentary Friendship Group, I would like to remind members of the reception tomorrow evening from 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. in Room 160-S. Please join us in recognizing inspiring, civic-minded youth and volunteers.

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CHAIR IN CLINICAL REHABILITATION

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this morning in Edmonton, the University of Alberta announced the appointment of the Canadian Military and Veterans' Chair in Clinical Rehabilitation, a first in Canada.

This creates a national research network dedicated solely to military rehab, while highlighting the real influence that university research chairs can have on national clinical practices. This new chair will improve clinical rehab for our soldiers and veterans, which will spin off into better rehab services for all Canadians.

Appointed to the position is Dr. Ibolja Cernak from the John Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory, who has had a 30-year career in the care and welfare of soldiers. Dr. Cernak has served on the battlefield as a first responder. She is one of the world's authorities on explosion-induced neurotrauma, and has built a highly respected international reputation in experimental and clinical research on war-related injuries.

Backing up Dr. Cernak as associate chair will be Dr. Jacqueline Hebert, clinical director of the adult amputee program at the Glenrose Rehabilitation Hospital, the gold standard for rehab in Canada.

I want to congratulate the University of Alberta on this milestone that will benefit all Canadians facing the challenges of rehabilitation. Well done, and I wish all the ladies a happy Valentine's Day.

● (1410)

[Translation]

SECOND CHANCE HOCKEY TOURNAMENT IN CHARLESBOURG

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last Sunday, I had the honour of attending an important sporting event that took place in my riding. For the past 10 years, Charlesbourg has hosted the second chance tournament in conjunction with the international peewee tournament that is currently being held in Quebec City.

In total, over 2,000 young hockey players are taking part. Eight Canadian provinces and about 15 other countries are represented. The second chance tournament allows the teams that lose their first games in the main tournament to compete, in order to return for the final round. This is a unique way to encourage determination and team spirit among the young players.

I would like to congratulate all the participants, who are pouring their hearts and souls into the competition, as well as the organizers of both tournaments: Michel Plante, president of the Quebec international peewee hockey tournament, and Nicole Villeneuve, manager of the second chance tournament and president of the Association du hockey mineur de Charlesbourg.

Thanks to dedicated volunteers like them, Charlesbourg has a chance to show its enthusiasm for our national sport every February.

* * *

[English]

IRAN

Mr. John Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Persian year is coming to an end soon. Now is the time that Persian Canadians are gathering to celebrate Nowruz and to take stock of this past year. It was a year when our Prime Minister and our Minister of Foreign Affairs fought hard for human rights and stood up to the Iranian regime's abysmal record.

Our government has focused on peace, democracy and human rights. We have also been clear that Iran cannot be allowed to develop nuclear weapons. To that end, Canada has imposed tough sanctions, along with other countries, against the Iranian regime in an attempt to dissuade it from following an unacceptable path.

As government liaison to the Persian and Iranian community, I am pleased that our government continually acknowledges the important contributions made by Canadians of Persian and Iranian background, many of whom are highly educated and skilled, and able business-people.

I look forward to working with the community to see how we can help it and its families in Canada and Iran feel more secure and less threatened by the Iranian regime.

*Statements by Members***A JOYFUL NOISE**

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a ray of hope is what Eva Bostrand, a very special Edmontonian, has gifted to incarcerated women. In addition to a successful career as a soloist with the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra and a University of Alberta voice instructor, Eva's renowned for establishing a very unique choir, A Joyful Noise. The only qualification is that its members want to sing, not that they can.

Since 2006, Eva has also been inspiring change through song for inmates at the Edmonton Institution for Women. Through the new beginnings program, Eva has recently gained permission for some inmates, under escort, to join A Joyful Noise in its community concerts. Many of these women were never applauded and it is their first opportunity to shine. Thanks to the Sing for Life Society, with support from Corrections Canada, inmates on release are offered scholarships to join choirs, or to continue voice or piano lessons.

Thanks to Eva's fundraising, the prison now has a new piano. This is a model for rehabilitation and healing worth replicating across the prison system.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for months our government has communicated its concerns over the apparently arbitrary and politically-biased nature of judicial proceedings against former Ukrainian prime minister Yulia Tymoshenko. Furthermore, we are concerned by reports that Ms. Tymoshenko has fallen ill during this ordeal.

In November, the Minister of Foreign Affairs conveyed to the House the government's readiness to offer Ms. Tymoshenko medical assistance. Since then, Canada has led the international community in working with the Ukrainian government on this initiative.

We are pleased with reports that three Canadian doctors have now arrived in Kiev to participate in the international medical commission being established by the government of Ukraine to independently assess the health of Ms. Tymoshenko.

Canada will continue to stand ready to work with Ukraine to help build a democratic, open and prosperous society. We hope that all outstanding issues can be resolved expeditiously to allow doctors access to Ms. Tymoshenko as soon as possible.

* * *

[Translation]

ALBERTA'S FRANCOPHONE COMMUNITY

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in early February, I returned to Edmonton to meet with the francophone community. I visited the St. Thomas Community Health Centre, which serves more than 4,000 patients; Campus Saint-Jean, a beacon in Edmonton's and Alberta's francophone community; the Centre collégial de l'Alberta, an important addition to Campus Saint-Jean; and the Centre de santé Saint-Thomas health centre which was built by and for Edmonton's francophone population.

However, there is a small problem at the latter facility because only five or six of the assisted-living beds are occupied by francophones. Something definitely has to be done about this.

Lastly, I visited the Cité francophone, where many organizations work side by side, including ACFA, which speaks for Alberta's francophones and provides dynamic, effective leadership for the community.

Edmonton's francophone community is optimistic, energetic and very talented. They truly want to live their lives in French.

Long live Alberta's francophone community.

* * *

● (1415)

EMPLOYMENT

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Saint Boniface, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians' resilience in the face of the economic turmoil of recent years has been admirable. Today, 610,000 more Canadians are working than in July 2009, a record in the G7.

Better yet, 90% of those jobs are full time and 80% were created in the private sector. However, there is still much to be done. Too many Canadians are still looking for work.

[English]

That is why we will remain focused on jobs and economic growth, implementing the next phase of Canada's economic action plan and preparing economic action plan 2012.

The good news is that *Forbes* magazine has rated Canada as the best place to do business and with additional business, comes additional jobs.

However, the tax and spend NDP does not agree. Its high tax, anti-trade NDP agenda wants to drive business away from Canada, spurn global investments here and take more and more money out the pockets of Canadians to fund its socialist big government schemes.

That bad news aside, I want to wish everyone a happy St. Valentine's Day, especially my husband Bruce and my kids at home.

* * *

ASBESTOS

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the best science money can buy has been used to justify and defend exporting a made in Canada asbestos epidemic throughout the developing world, but the Conservatives and their Asbestos Institute can no longer hide behind the phoney research they bought and paid for.

I rise today to condemn the Conservatives for their boosterism and cheerleading of the asbestos cartel and the human misery it causes. I condemn the scientists and researchers who compromise their professional integrity and the reputation of our great university.

Dante should have reserved a special level of hell for the charlatans and the fraudsters of the government-sponsored Asbestos Institute who knowingly and willingly conspired to hide the effects of asbestos exposure from the world. I denounce them in the strongest possible terms. I pray that some day their treachery and deceit leads to criminal charges of corporate manslaughter so they may face justice in this world as well.

* * *

OIL AND GAS INDUSTRY

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton—Leduc, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to celebrate the 65th anniversary of the oil discovery in Alberta, at Leduc #1.

Canada's modern oil industry was born on this day. What followed was a surge in economic growth and jobs that continues today, with benefits felt right across the country.

The oil and gas sector is responsible for hundreds of thousands of jobs in the skilled trades and in office work, in the manufacturing sector and the financial sector and in every region of Canada. The oil and gas industry pays an average of \$22 billion a year in royalties and taxes to support important social programs like health care, education and seniors' and family benefits.

Clearly, the development of Canada's diverse, rich and abundant natural resource sector is critical to our standard of living and our way of life. That is why our government supports the development of our abundant resources in a sustainable manner. We will continue to support Canadian jobs, while continuing to insist on stringent world-class environmental practices.

I ask all parliamentarians to join me in celebrating this great day in our nation's history.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives have finally hit the panic button on the F-35. Even they can no longer pretend that this \$30 billion boondoggle is on track or ignore what the NDP has said in the House for months. The U.S. is confirming it will delay its F-35 order. It is cutting orders and this will increase costs for Canadians yet again. The Government of Canada has now called an emergency international meeting on the F-35 fiasco.

Will the Prime Minister now finally reconsider Canada's involvement in the F-35 fiasco? For goodness sake, pull back from the brink.

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we believe the Royal Canadian Air Force deserves to have the best equipment possible for the men and women of the Canadian Forces who risk their lives on a daily basis on the missions that Parliament sends them out to do.

With regard to the NDP, the NDP has not just called for an end to the F-35 process. It has called for an end to all of our procurements

Oral Questions

that we have done, whether it is the national shipbuilding program or the F-35 program. It simply does not believe in ensuring that the Canadian Forces have the equipment they need to fulfill the missions that Parliament asks them to do. It is wrong and we are moving forward on the right track.

● (1420)

[Translation]

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let us look at the facts. The Pentagon has delayed its purchase of many F-35s. The British plan to cut their order and have cancelled their participation in one version. Turkey has cut its order in half. Australia is reassessing the purchase deadline. Italy is talking about major cutbacks. Norway has doubts. The Netherlands are delaying their final decision. The whole world has doubts, but not the Conservatives.

Why keep wasting billions on the F-35s? Why not put the real priorities of Canadians and their families first? Why not put resources where—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages.

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, those questions prove what I just said: the NDP always gets mad when we invest in the Canadian Forces. That is the real problem, not the F-35s or the Public Works and Government Services Canada process. Each and every time we invest in our army, they get mad. That is their problem, not ours.

* * *

PENSIONS

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are angry that the Conservatives are wasting taxpayers' money. That is why we are angry.

Everything is a matter of choices and priorities, and the F-35 is a bad choice. Of course, the other bad choice is the one to reduce Canadians' old age security benefits. Friday, the Minister of Finance confirmed that cuts are planned for 2020.

This brings us back to our question for the House. Does that mean that the 27 million Canadians who are 57 or younger will have to wait until they are 67 to retire, yes or no?

Some hon. members: Yes or no.

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member showed his true colours at the beginning of his question. He said that it is a waste of money to invest in the Canadian Forces.

*Oral Questions**[English]*

With regard to old age security, our government will continue forward with the commitment that we have made to Canadians. We believe that all Canadians, young Canadians, those who are currently retired and those who are planning their retirement, should have a strong social system that is there to protect them in their retirement years. That is why as a government we have moved forward. We have had the largest GIS increase in 25 years. We have had pension income splitting for seniors.

I will assure the House and all Canadians that when we move forward, we move forward in the same direction, which is to protect seniors.

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, first the Conservatives said that OAS was unsustainable and needed to be cut. On Friday the finance minister said that changes to OAS would be delayed until 2020 or 2025. Then a government spokesperson said that the finance minister was wrong. Seniors and families are worried. Canadians deserve straight answers so they can plan for their retirement.

Is the government going to change the eligibility for OAS from 65 to 67, yes or no?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us face it, old age security, if it continues on the current course, will become unsustainable. That is why we have to take responsibility as a government to ensure that we continue to take care of our seniors, whether they are current seniors who will not see any changes in the benefits they receive, or those near retirement who again will not see any changes. We also have to take a look at the future. We have to ensure that the OAS system is there for future generations, and we will do just that.

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister promised not to touch OAS, then he made up a false crisis and broke his promise. Then the Minister of Finance said OAS changes would not take place until 2020 or 2025. Then a government spokesperson said that the Minister of Finance is wrong.

How can Canadians trust the government when it clearly does not know what it is doing?

I will ask one more time, is the government going to raise the eligibility for OAS from 65 to 67 years, yes or no?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians do trust that their government will be there to look after them. That is exactly what we will do. We are not going to mislead them the way the NDP has been doing. We will not do that at all.

We are telling them that the current system is unsustainable in its given form and we will have to make adjustments, but we will do it in a fair way. We will make sure it is done in a responsible way.

We will make sure that those who are planning their retirement will have ample time to adjust their plans so that they too will be able to have OAS but also afford their own retirement.

● (1425)

THE ECONOMY

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think the growing issue in the country is really that we have two Canadas emerging. We have a Canada that is doing well, a Canada that is prosperous, a Canada that is succeeding, a Canada that is able to export, on the one side—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. I have asked members many times to hold off on their applause until the member has finished asking a question and I would appreciate their assistance.

The hon. member for Toronto Centre.

Hon. Bob Rae: Mr. Speaker, on the other side, we have a Canada that is falling further behind, a Canada that is worried in the face of the kinds of announcements made, even the announcement made by the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development today.

Could the minister who is in charge of answering today give us a categorical assurance that the next budget will in fact address the concerns of those who see unemployment going up and not down, for those who see insecurity rising and not going down?

Would he—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages.

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, his question started off so strong and then it zigged when I hoped it would zag, but there we are.

Since the end of the Christmas recess, our government has spent the month of January and this part of February consulting Canadians about what their priorities are for the coming budget.

Indeed, the concerns that the leader of the third party has raised are the government's concerns as well, which is why we have said from the return of this Parliament that our focus is on economic growth, jobs and the security of Canadians. That is what our focus will be. It has been the hallmark of our budgets in the past and will continue to be going forward.

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we judge governments based on what they do, not simply on what they say.

The government on January 1 in fact increased taxes. The government did not lower taxes. It increased taxes. How does the government possibly equate what is happening in the real economy for literally millions of Canadians with the fact that you have raised taxes on those very same Canadians?

How do you possibly equate those two things, Mr. Speaker? It makes no sense.

The Speaker: I just remind the hon. member for Toronto Centre to address his comments through the Chair, and not directly at his colleagues.

The hon. Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages.

Oral Questions

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, all Canadians know that our government has lowered taxes in every single one of our budgets.

The leader of the Liberal Party also forgets that on January 1 of this year, we also implemented the lowest corporate tax rate across this country at 25%, giving Canada a remarkable advantage on the international stage in terms of attracting investment and spurring economic growth.

We have lowered taxes for Canadian families, for small businesses, for seniors. We have done so in a responsible and effective way that has led to economic growth, where Canada is now leading the G7 in economic growth and job creation. We have the lowest net debt to GDP ratio in the G7. We are going in the right direction. We are doing the right thing.

[Translation]

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister mentioned the problem in his response: in fact, the Conservatives are giving gifts to corporations while threatening the security of the aging population. That is the government's position. The government is threatening the pensions of the future. At the same time, it is giving money to corporations, but no investments are being made for new employees. That is the problem.

The Conservatives are creating two Canadas: one Canada that works and one that does not. This is the division that the Conservative Party is creating, and that must change.

Will the minister finally commit to changing the government's policy?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is one Canada, which is on the best path in the world, throughout the entire world, to create jobs for Canadians and ensure that every Canadian benefits from economic growth.

What the leader of the third party here in the House is doing is dividing Canadians. However, we, as the Government of Canada, have the responsibility to develop policies and make commitments that will protect the interests of all Canadians.

These are the government's policies and we will continue in this direction.

[English]

The only division is in the Liberal Party. The only division we see in the House is in the opposition parties. Our government is focused on economic growth and going in the right direction.

* * *

[Translation]

PENSIONS

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am disappointed, but certainly not surprised that this government refuses again and again to answer our questions about old age security. With a shrinking job market and poor economic prospects, Canadians are asking what is in store for future

generations. They want security for seniors to be enhanced, not diminished.

Will the Minister of Human Resources finally spell out whether or not she intends to make Canadians work longer before they can retire?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada has a responsibility to ensure not only that the old age security system is viable for today's seniors, but that it is also viable for future generations. We take this responsibility very seriously. For that reason we are considering this issue and will ensure that there is an old age security system in future.

• (1430)

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, seniors are worried not just for themselves, but also for their children and grandchildren. The minister continues to say action will be taken with regard to old age security, but what action? We do not know. Now, the Minister of Finance is saying that changes will not be made for 10, 15 or 20 years, who knows when. However, the experts have been clear: old age security is viable in the long term.

Why does this government continue to fearmonger and cloud the issue? Will this government raise the eligibility age for retirement from 65 to 67, yes or no?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we want to ensure that the old age security system is viable not only for today's seniors, but also for future generations. Seniors currently receiving benefits will see no change. People approaching retirement will see no change. People planning for their retirement will have enough time to provide for their retirement.

* * *

[English]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Pentagon is slashing its purchase of the F-35s. This follows program cuts and concerns from Great Britain, Turkey, Australia, Italy, Norway and Israel. However, here in the House, the Conservatives are doggedly determined to say that everything is just fine.

The government is panicking and asking Washington for an emergency meeting, but here in the House it still will not tell Canadians the truth. The truth is the government does not have a plan B. Why can the government not bring that forward right now to protect our men and women who are serving in our military?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that premise is absolutely incorrect. The Royal Canadian Air Force plays an important role in protecting our sovereignty and developing the kinds of assets that are necessary in today's and tomorrow's predicaments.

Oral Questions

Canada's CF-18s are nearing the end of their usable life. The meeting the member referred to is not an emergency at all. It has been in the works for a long time among all of the members.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, even Conservatives have to give up their fantasy that their billion dollar boondoggle is still on track. The U.S. is confirming it will delay its F-35 orders and it is going to cut \$1.6 billion just as a start. The whole program is now in disarray, meaning higher costs for Canadian taxpayers. The Government of Canada has now called an emergency international meeting on the F-35 fiasco.

Will the government agree to finally apply common sense and put this matter out to tender for our men and women in the service?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, at the risk of repeating myself, there is no emergency meeting. However, the rhetoric and the untruths seem to prevail.

Let me assure the member opposite that we are working diligently with all of our partners to ensure that our men and women in the military are given the tools they need and deserve to do the job we require them to do in our country.

* * *

INFRASTRUCTURE

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in his report to Transport Canada, David Crombie recommended that all Oshawa port lands be handed to the city council. The city wants a clean and green development, with bike trails and cultural facilities, not an ethanol plant.

Instead of clean and green and civic pride, the Conservatives have taken over these lands. Why is the Conservative government trying to impose an ethanol plant against the wishes of the good people of Oshawa?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is quite the contrary. The hon. member should know that the transition team in place was already at the helm of the port commission before the announcement last week. All the partners of course are going to collaborate on working to make sure that the new port authority is a successful undertaking for the people of the community.

I would also remind the member that the creation of this port authority is excellent news for the local workers and the local economy in the community of Oshawa and the surrounding area. It is this government that has undertaken that initiative. There is an excellent member of Parliament who is working to create jobs there. The member should celebrate all of that.

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the City of Oshawa and the mayor want control of their own port lands. They have never been consulted about this port authority. The Conservatives said no to their control and created a federal port authority. Who got the plum job of setting up this port authority? The Minister of Finance's riding association president.

Did the Conservatives create another patronage board just to reward the minister's friend, or did they do it so they could impose

the refinery against the wishes of the people of Oshawa, or are they doing both?

• (1435)

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member knows much better than that.

The transition team in place was already at the helm of the port commission before the announcement last week. The partners of course are going to collaborate to put in place a successful new port authority. They are going to work with the city. They are going to work with community stakeholders. As part of our economic action plan for jobs and growth, they are going to continue to reach out and get the job done.

It is time for the NDP to get on board with this job-creating effort that we are leading in Oshawa and right across Canada.

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[Translation]

GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives were supposed to clean up Ottawa and put an end to patronage appointments, but we now see that their solution is to replace Liberal patronage with Conservative patronage. Another broken promise.

We have seen patronage at the Oshawa harbour and at the Port of Québec, where another defeated Conservative, Bernard Généreux, was appointed as the federal representative on the Québec Port Authority, even though he does not have the skills required for the job.

My question is simple: why are the Conservatives so generous with their friends who lost in the election?

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, quite the contrary. First of all, our government makes all appointments based on merit. Everyone appointed to those positions must have the qualifications needed to carry out their duties. In the case of ports across Canada, there is an appointment process in place and we will follow that process.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it appears that the main qualification needed is to be a Conservative.

The Conservatives have no respect for public money. They thank their cronies by handing out positions that are paid for using Canadian taxpayers' dollars.

Here is another example: the Prime Minister ordered a study on the orange wave. The Conservatives spent \$16,000 of public money to try to understand the electoral phenomenon that resulted in a strong NDP majority in Quebec.

Oral Questions

They did not understand it last May and they still do not understand it today: Quebeckers voted for the NDP because they are fed up with partisan politics, they are fed up with patronage, they are fed up with the Conservatives' old tricks and they are fed up with the misuse of public funds.

How—

The Speaker: Order. The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister.

[*English*]

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, since 2006, our government has been pursuing an open federalism that respects provincial layers of responsibility and recognizes the strength and contributions of each region of this great country.

We do so by staying connected to what is happening in the provinces and staying in tune with the developments and challenges our country faces. We make no apologies for making certain that the province of Quebec has the tools it needs to develop within a united Canada.

* * *

[*Translation*]

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Ms. Manon Perreault (Montcalm, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am deeply disgusted to see what the Conservatives have done with the accessibility fund.

Since 2007, 85% of the money has been spent in Conservative ridings, and less than 3% of the money has gone to Quebec. The accessibility fund is a good program that can truly help people living with functional limitations.

It is deplorable to see that once again, there are rules for the government and rules for everyone else. Will the Conservatives stop playing partisan politics at the expense of persons with disabilities?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, no other Government of Canada has done as much as ours to help persons with disabilities. We are very proud of the accessibility fund, which has helped make more than 600 buildings accessible to everyone.

The funds were distributed according to demand.

* * *

[*English*]

PENSIONS

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I met with hundreds of online viewers and 20 of the nation's greatest experts on pensions and services for seniors. We heard from advocacy groups, health care providers, occupational therapists, economists and everyday Canadians and they all agree that cutting the OAS is wrong-headed and a threat to Canada's future. So, the verdict is in. Cutting the OAS today or in the future hurts those who need our help the most.

Knowing this, and the government clearly has this information the same as I do, why does it insist on hurting those who are the most vulnerable, our Canadian seniors?

● (1440)

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not understand why the hon. member keeps misleading Canadians and why she keeps fear-mongering. The Prime Minister and I have been very clear in saying that no one who is currently collecting OAS will see any change and no one who is nearing retirement will see any change.

What we are doing is protecting the old age security so that future generations will be able to enjoy it as well. We will ensure that any changes to the system will be gradual and responsible and will allow enough time for those who are planning their retirement to do so successfully.

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is more baloney that we continue to hear. The problem with those tired lines that the minister is providing is that she knows they are false, just as the experts know it. We know the OAS is fully sustainable. The Conservatives are just choosing to pay for prisons on the backs of our seniors of today.

One of our experts today said that the OAS was the key income source for many Canadian women, especially those living in rural Canada, and that taking it away would be like throwing a drowning person a brick.

Why is the government so committed to hurting the most vulnerable in society? Will it not get a heart, given the fact that tomorrow is Valentine's Day?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my heart goes out to those who are being misled.

We want to ensure that seniors have access to a solid, stable, reliable and viable old age security system. There are several experts who agree that we need to make changes: professors at Carleton University, at the International Centre for Pension Management, at the OECD and at the Rotman Business Information Centres. These people all recognize that the upcoming demographic shifts will have an impact and that somebody needs to do something and do it now. That is how we are taking action to protect the old age security system.

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VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the personal medical file of yet another veteran has been violated for political reasons.

Harold Leduc, a veteran and now a member of the veterans appeal board, had his personal records searched by the Conservative government in order to harass him because he fights for veterans. Does that sound familiar? Yes, it has happened to Dennis Manuge, Sylvain Chartrand and, before that, Sean Bruyca.

Oral Questions

Last year, the minister said that there would be no more attacks on the privacy of veterans but it happened again. Will the minister support public committee hearings into this urgent matter?

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we believe that any privacy breach is totally unacceptable, especially for our veterans and their families. That is why we established a 10 point privacy action plan to tackle this issue. We have dealt with it with the Privacy Commissioner. We are on our way and we will update this program.

We cannot comment on any specifics but I can assure the member that any privacy breach is taken seriously and will continue to be.

* * *

[Translation]

GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Mr. Mathieu Ravnat (Pontiac, NDP): Mr. Speaker, while the government was here telling us that it wanted to cut spending, the Privy Council was paying for very expensive flights for top bureaucrats. When ministers use planes and helicopters as their own personal taxis, it is easy to see where money is being wasted.

The Conservatives are asking families to tighten their belts and forcing workers to delay retirement while they themselves live in the lap of luxury. This very government is about to cut billions of dollars in public services to Canadians, yet it wastes money left and right. How can we trust this government?

[English]

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, obviously, taxpayers expect government and government officials to conduct the business of the nation at a reasonable cost. This is something our government takes very seriously.

However, it strikes me as somewhat ironic that this question would come from a party that is unlikely to support any cost efficiencies that this government will be seeking to keep the costs of operating government low on hard-working Canadian taxpayers.

[Translation]

Mr. Mathieu Ravnat (Pontiac, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is unbelievable. Obviously, this is a “do as I say, not as I do” government. On the one hand, the Conservatives say that they want to cut travel spending, but on the other hand, no expense is spared for Conservative ministers and the Privy Council. Yet again, a double standard.

Will this government explain to families why it is asking them to tighten their belts while its ministers have carte blanche to waste public funds?

•(1445)

[English]

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am not sure where the member has been. This government has reduced the use of Challenger jets by 80%. We cut down on the cost of ministers' travel dramatically.

We expect members of the PCO to conduct their business at a reasonable cost. That is the message that we will be sending to them on behalf of hard-working taxpayers.

We also will be sending a message to Canadian taxpayers that we will do everything possible to ensure that this government runs as effectively and efficiently as it possibly can.

* * *

GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Mr. Robert Chisholm (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NDP): Mr. Speaker, members on this side want the government to lay off Canadian taxpayers and stop cutting their services. That is what we want.

The government is hacking and slashing away at public services and it is Canadian families that are feeling the impact. There is a backlog at EI and people are not able to get through to Service Canada. It is Canadians who are beginning to feel the impact.

We want the government to back off, to recognize what it is doing to Canadians and to reconsider what it is doing.

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what we are doing is trying to make services better for Canadians and to respond to their requests. We have enhanced our online services. We are working with employers to ensure that when they lay people off they file their records online. That will speed up the processing but it is a long process.

We are putting on extra staff to deal with the surges in demand because we want to give Canadians the services to which they are entitled.

Mr. Robert Chisholm (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NDP): Mr. Speaker, while the minister and her colleagues are patting themselves on the back, my constituents Dartmouth—Cole Harbour are calling me to ask when the government will stop.

Transport Canada is cutting \$22 million from aviation security and road safety. Citizen and Immigration Canada is slashing \$60 million. Public Safety Canada is slashing \$13 million. These are programs that directly affect Canadian families and yet the government is continuing to hack and slash.

Will the minister recognize the harm that these cuts are having, go back to the drawing board and back off Canadian families?

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian people gave this government a mandate to ensure we deliver excellent quality public services at a more accountable and better price to Canadians, and that is what we are doing. That is our mandate. That is why we want a low tax Canadian jurisdiction that delivers excellent services.

However, when we come to this place and put these proposals before this House to give better services, to do better things for Canadians and to lower taxes, they on that side of the House always vote against them.

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians gave our government a strong mandate to end the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry once and for all, and that is exactly what we are doing.

As many have said before, we are not the only ones who made that promise. Many NDP members from rural or remote areas said the very same thing to their constituents. Unfortunately, we are beginning to see the troubling trend of MPs caving to their leadership rather than standing up for their constituents.

Could the minister please update the House on the importance of Wednesday's vote?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his hard work to help our government stop the needless targeting of hunters, farmers and sport shooters.

The member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley aspires to lead his party. He said:

I have always said that when there was a clear opportunity to vote to scrap the long-gun registry I would do just that.

On Wednesday, the member will have a clear opportunity to show his true leadership skills, stand up to his big union bosses, vote the will of his constituents and vote to end the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry.

* * *

[Translation]

JUSTICE

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the difference between a Conservative and a New Democrat is that a Conservative turns a blind eye where a New Democrat is able to analyze the facts before making a decision.

Let us talk about bad decisions. The Canadian Bar Association is sounding the alarm, saying that the Conservatives' crime bill could free more accused criminals than it incarcerates. A minimum sentence means that more cases will have to go before the courts, which will increase the waiting time even more.

I have a very simple question for the minister: according to his department, how many cases will be dismissed for unreasonable delays, if this bill passes?

• (1450)

[English]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I got it straight from members of the NDP. Now they are worried that real criminals will not be going to jail under the bill.

I want to assure the hon. member that the right people will be going to jail. Those people who are in the business of drug trafficking and abusing children will go to jail. She can count on that.

[Translation]

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the thing I can count on is that this is a minister who speaks without any scientific evidence. Did he have any? No, he did not.

Oral Questions

As a lawyer, allow me to help the minister by giving him some legal information. In Ottawa alone, court delays are already six to seven months. After eight or 10 months, defence lawyers usually start to get impatient and ask for the proceedings to be stayed. The Conservatives can talk about being tough on crime, but the only things this bill is tough on are the legal system and taxpayers.

When will this government stop playing political games and start rethinking this disastrous bill?

[English]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that bill has been before Parliament for quite some time. I can tell members that it targets the individuals who are a danger to the public and certainly a danger to themselves. We are targeting the right people in terms of better protecting society.

One of the things I know we can always count on is that no matter what we on this side of the House do for victims, and we have always made it a priority, it will always be opposed by the NDP.

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ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canada's first nations are in court today to argue that the Canadian Human Rights Act should apply even when children live on reserve. For years, the government has continued to underfund the child welfare on reserve, leaving more children to be taken into care.

Why do first nations need to go to court just to get what every other Canadian child gets as a right? Why will the government not do the right thing and start providing equal funding for first nations children?

Hon. John Duncan (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is taking concrete steps to improve the quality of life for first nations communities across the country. Funding for family services has more than doubled over the past decade.

As well, the provinces and first nations have signed onto our enhanced prevention model. The model keeps first nations children in healthy environments in their communities and improves the quality of life for families on reserves.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when we apologize to someone, we commit to doing things differently. The government has offered nothing but empty words since the residential school apology.

Oral Questions

Today, more than three times as many first nations children are in care than at the height of the residential schools and yet the government believes they are not worthy of funding equal to other Canadian children. Instead, we are making first nations go to court to fight for basic human rights.

Will the government ensure it does not have to say sorry twice and commit today to equal funding?

Hon. John Duncan (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have child and family service agreements with six provinces that cover over two-thirds of first nations children across the country. These are models that the first nations and the provinces are very much in favour of. They have made a real difference. They have reduced apprehensions.

This is the way we would like to go and we will continue to move in that direction.

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government is preparing to read Canadians' emails and track their movements through cellphone signals, in both cases, without a warrant.

How can we trust the Conservatives with such sweeping powers when they use Facebook to keep law-abiding Canadians out of a public meeting? Is this 2012 or 1984?

How can we trust them not to use private information to intimidate law-abiding Canadians gathering, for example, to protest a pipeline or to protest pension cuts?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the opportunity to tell him that every province unanimously supported moving forward with the legislation, legislation that was introduced first under the Liberal government, by his party.

As technology evolves, many criminal activities, such as the distribution of child pornography, become much easier. We are proposing measures to bring our laws into the 21st century and to provide the police with the lawful tools that they need.

He can either stand with us or with the child pornographers.

• (1455)

[Translation]

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government is preparing to read Canadians' emails and follow their movements through their cellphone signals, without a warrant in either case. How could we extend such broad power to the Conservatives with any confidence when they used Facebook to keep law-abiding citizens away from public gatherings?

What guarantee do we have that the government will not use these new powers to intimidate Canadians who want to gather to demonstrate against a pipeline, for example, or against a decision to cut their pensions?

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, outrageous claims that private communications will be intercepted

without a warrant is a complete fabrication. It was the member's colleague Marlene Jennings who told us year after year to get this legislation passed.

This legislation would not allow access to private communications without a warrant. That being said, our message is clear. If someone uses technology to commit crimes, such as distributing child pornography, the police will apprehend the individual and he or she will be punished to the full extent of the law.

* * *

EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Dan Harris (Scarborough Southwest, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a new study has found that the number of working people in Toronto who cannot make ends meet is skyrocketing. We are talking about families with jobs who still struggle to pay the rent and buy groceries. Why? Because the only jobs available are low wage and part-time. They cannot support a family. This is the legacy of the failed Conservative jobs plan.

Why is the government ignoring Toronto families? When will it finally introduce a jobs plan that will work?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our focus as a government is on jobs and economic growth as well as the security of Canadians. That is why we brought in the economic action plan. So far, it has created over 610,000 net new jobs. Over 70% of those jobs are full-time.

We also are investing in Canadians so that they can get the skills and the training they need to get the good jobs, the jobs of today and tomorrow. So far, over 1.2 million Canadians have benefited from that. We hope to help more.

Mr. Dan Harris (Scarborough Southwest, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the fact is that Toronto has one of the highest unemployment rates in the country. Torontonians cannot get through to Service Canada because of your cuts.

The labour force is shrinking because people are losing hope. Those who do find a job wind up with low wage work that keeps them in poverty. Yet all the government has to offer is faulty job numbers and even more cutbacks.

When will the government get serious about helping Toronto and putting people back to work instead of sending millions of dollars to companies that abandon Canada?

The Speaker: I would remind the member to address his comments through the Chair, not directly at other members.

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I am sure the member opposite knows, since the end of the recession there are more than 610,000 net new jobs across the country.

Ontario was no doubt hit hard by the recession but is coming back, particularly in the auto sector and the financial services sector, through infrastructure projects across the province. We look forward to continued growth and more jobs in Ontario.

* * *

SHIPBUILDING INDUSTRY

Mr. Rodney Weston (Saint John, CPC): Mr. Speaker, following a fair and transparent process, Irving Shipbuilding was awarded the responsibility to build the new Royal Canadian Navy combat vessels. The work undertaken in Halifax will last for almost three decades. It will create jobs and wealth all across Atlantic Canada.

Could the Minister of State for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency update the House on the actions that our government will take to help our small- and medium-size enterprises in the Atlantic region take advantage of the shipbuilding procurement strategy?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of State (Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency) (La Francophonie), CPC): Mr. Speaker, this represents a historic occasion for our region.

This morning my colleagues and I were in Dartmouth to unveil the Atlantic shipbuilding action plan. With this plan, we will ensure that small- and medium-size enterprises throughout Atlantic Canada, all four provinces, rural and urban areas, are in the best position to seize all opportunities.

Our government will be helping Atlantic businesses understand the requirements to take part in shipbuilding as suppliers or subcontractors.

* * *

• (1500)

GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATIONS

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in December, the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration gave an administrative order on scientific integrity, telling its scientists to speak freely to the public and to the press about their research. Canadian government scientists do not have freedom of speech.

This week, the American Association for the Advancement of Science meets in Vancouver with a talk entitled bluntly “The Muzzling of Canada's Federal Scientists”.

Why is the government against free speech for scientists?

Hon. Gary Goodyear (Minister of State (Science and Technology) (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario), CPC): Mr. Speaker, we appreciate our scientists. That is why we share our research from our scientists in many publications throughout the year. We have great respect for our scientists and our scientific research. We do not do what the member says we do.

* * *

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on Friday, the Federal Court of Appeal upheld the ruling

Oral Questions

that the government must protect orca whales. The government stubbornly appealed the original decision, wasting taxpayers' dollars.

The minister was looking for loopholes to avoid taking responsibility. The courts have been clear. Canadians know it. The government just does not get it. There is nothing discretionary about protecting endangered species.

Will the minister stop wasting taxpayers' dollars, do his job and protect the orcas?

Mr. Randy Kamp (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can assure my colleague that our government is committed to the conservation of the Canadian population of killer whales. That is why we have greatly enhanced our programs and measures for their protection, including prevention against harassment and critical habitat identification and seismic protection protocols.

The Department of Fisheries and Oceans is implementing the court's decision and will be legally protecting critical habitat using the Species at Risk Act. The critical habitat for northern and southern resident populations of killer whales in British Columbia is already protected under section 58 of the species at—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Rob Clarke (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government has an ambitious pro-trade plan. While the Prime Minister was in China, our government concluded a new job-creating investment agreement. Due to our government's investment in the Asia-Pacific gateway, Canada's lumber exports to China are setting records.

One in five Canadian jobs is generated by trade. We understand that when we pursue trade opportunities, we create jobs for Canadian workers. Could the parliamentary secretary explain to the House how the Prime Minister's trip to China is creating jobs here in Canada?

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, our government's ambitious pro-trade plan is getting results. While the Prime Minister was in China, he announced an agreement on Canadian uranium exports. This will benefit Canadian workers and their families, but do not take my word for it. Listen to Lac La Ronge Indian Band Chief, Tammy Cook-Searson, who said, “This will mean more investment, job opportunities, business development and community support initiatives”.

Routine Proceedings

While we are focused on creating jobs, the NDP's reckless and irresponsible anti-trade agenda is a danger to Canadian jobs. It should listen to what Canadians are saying.

* * *

[Translation]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Ms. Charmaine Borg (Terrebonne—Blainville, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives' last bill on lawful access treated all Canadians like criminals. The personal information of any Internet user could be obtained without a warrant. The Canadian Privacy Commissioner and experts are already worried: this violates the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Will the minister correct his legislation, or will he continue to treat law-abiding Canadians like criminals?

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can assure the member that any outrageous claims that private communications will be intercepted without a warrant is a complete fabrication. Our proposed approach will not allow police officers to access private communications without a warrant. That being said, our message is clear. If people use technology to commit crimes such as distributing child pornography, the police will apprehend them and they will be punished to the full extent of the law.

* * *

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives claim that job creation is a priority for them. Perhaps it is also time they started caring about those who have lost their jobs. Maybe then they would realize that the unemployment rate is on the rise in Quebec, as the Mouvement autonome et solidaire des sans-emploi knows, and that nearly 40% of EI applications are taking two to three times longer to be processed than expected. This is affecting everyone. Every MP in every party has cases like this in their offices.

What is the government waiting for to fix this short-sighted management, which is leaving thousands of Quebec families that need financial support in the lurch for months? This is insurance; people pay in and they are entitled to receive it. What is the government doing?

• (1505)

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are trying to ensure that unemployed workers receive their benefits as quickly as possible. Unfortunately, in December and January, there was an unexpected increase in the number of applications. That is why we added several hundred employees to process the applications as quickly as possible.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

HUMAN RESOURCES, SKILLS AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE STATUS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the second report of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities in relation to Bill C-316, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act (incarceration). The committee has studied the bill and has decided to report the bill back to the House with amendments.

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CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. Parm Gill (Brampton—Springdale, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-394, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the National Defence Act (criminal organization recruitment).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am proud to introduce my private member's bill entitled An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the National Defence Act (criminal organization recruitment). The bill aims to protect the increasing number of innocent and vulnerable youth who are actively targeted and recruited by criminal organizations. The bill would provide the necessary tools for law enforcement officials and our justice system to hold these criminals accountable for their actions and protect our youth.

I look forward to having a debate on the bill in the House in the very near future.

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

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, as you know, the House has before it Bill S-5 that deals with the banking system. It has in it a sunset clause which is coming up later this spring, so we need to get the bill through in a timely basis. I noticed that all parties seem to be in support of it.

The member for Wascana says, "the legislation is rather routine".

The member for Brossard—La Prairie says, "We would definitely like to examine this bill more closely when it is sent to the Standing Committee on Finance".

Everybody seems to want to support it and get it to committee for as much study as possible and as quickly as possibly so we can respect our obligations. I have been trying to get an answer from the official opposition on what we could do.

In that spirit, again I offer the following motion about which we have had discussion. I hope this time we will have unanimous consent for this motion. I move: That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House, Bill S-5, An Act to amend the law governing financial institutions and to provide for related and consequential matters, shall be disposed of as follows: not more than one further sitting day shall be allotted to the second reading stage of the bill and at the end of government orders on the day allotted, the bill shall be deemed read the second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Finance, and if the bill has not been reported back to the House by Wednesday, March 28, 2012, during routine proceedings, it shall be deemed reported back without amendment; when the order for consideration of the report stage of the bill is called, the bill shall be deemed concurred in at report stage without amendment, and a motion for third reading may be made immediately, and not more than one sitting day shall be allotted to the third reading stage of the bill provided that the motion for third reading shall not be subject to amendment, and at the end of government orders on that day or when no further member rises to speak, the bill shall be deemed read a third time and passed.

I hope this time we will see favour for that motion.

• (1510)

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

* * *

PETITIONS

FOREIGN TAKEOVER

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition signed by over 500 Canadians.

The petitioners want to draw the attention of the House of Commons and parliamentarians to the following: that the purchase and conversion of over 125 Zellers stores in Canada by the foreign corporation called Target will result in the loss of over 5,000 jobs in 2012; that Target claims to have no obligation to recognize the seniority, wages or benefits of the workers of Zellers; and that many of these workers have dedicated their working life to Zellers, their families depend on these jobs and the loss of these jobs will have a detrimental effect on their community and neighbourhoods.

Therefore, they respectfully request that the House of Commons and Parliament review the sale of Zellers to Target with a view to ensuring that the jobs of these workers are protected and that Target is obliged to respect the seniority, wages and benefits of the workers of Zellers.

IMPORTATION OF INTOXICATING LIQUORS ACT

Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have been asked by the constituents of my riding of Niagara West—Glanbrook to present the following two petitions.

The first one calls on the House of Commons to support Bill C-311, An Act to amend the Importation of Intoxicating Liquors Act.

Routine Proceedings

With over 30 wineries in my riding of Niagara West—Glanbrook, this legislation is not only dear to my constituents, but also to me as well. Allowing interprovincial importation of wine for personal use will greatly benefit not only the hard-working men and women of my riding, but also Canadians from coast to coast will soon be able to experience the extravagant array of wines that are grown in the Niagara Peninsula and indeed from everywhere in Canada.

ABORTION

Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my second petition points out that Canada is the only nation in the western world without any laws restricting abortion. In this way, we are in the company of China and North Korea.

Canada's Supreme Court has also said that it is Parliament's responsibility to enact abortion legislation.

The petitioners therefore call upon parliamentarians to speedily enact legislation to rectify this.

MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition to file today signed by a significant number of people across the central part of Saskatchewan expressing their concern for Canadians who are suffering from chronic cerebral spinal venous insufficiency.

The petitioners call upon the Minister of Health to consult with experts who have the necessary background in this field. They urge the Minister of Health to proceed with phase III clinical trials on an urgent basis. They also urge the minister to require follow ups of patients so that their actual experience can be tracked.

What these petitioners are calling for is very much the same sort of issue that is contained in Bill C-280, which is presently before the House in the name of the member for Etobicoke North. I hope the House will receive this petition favourably and also receive the bill favourably because that bill is headed in the right direction.

ABORTION

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition that is signed by the minimum 25 people required to have a petition tabled in the House of Commons. Some of the signatories are from my riding of Hamilton Mountain.

The petitioners call upon the government to restrict abortion to the greatest extent possible. While the rules of the House do not allow me to endorse or oppose the call for action on any petition, I think it is important for all constituents in my riding to know that, as their member of Parliament, I fully support the right of all citizens to have their voices heard in this chamber through the petition process, even in cases where I do not support the content of the petition itself. I will always stand up for the democratic right of all Canadians to express their views directly to the House of Commons by petitioning Parliament.

ASSISTED SUICIDE

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have over 200 petitions from my riding supporting the Attorney General's strongest possible opposition to the legalization of euthanasia and assisted suicide. The petitioners are very strongly against the taking of people's lives before their time.

Routine Proceedings

MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present six petitions on CCSVI. Politics continues to be played with the lives of MS patients. I invited all MPs and senators from all parties to attend a breakfast tomorrow with leading doctors treating CCSVI.

Those living with MS waited on tenterhooks to see what politics would be played this week. The answer came Friday at 3:23 p.m., following the airing of the fair and balanced *MS Wars* documentary on the 9th.

The Minister of Health will provide an MS briefing to pre-empt my breakfast by a mere 14 hours.

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

• (1515)

PRIVACY RIGHTS

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the residents in my riding wish to add their voice to the over 80,000 Canadians who have signed an OpenMedia.ca petition expressing serious and grave concerns that the Canadian government protect their privacy rights as they go forward with their so-called lawful access legislation.

Therefore, the petitioners call upon the government to respect privacy rights. These privacy rights include concerns around the requirement that telecommunications companies collect and store personal information about their users. This is the important point. They hand over that information at the request of law enforcement without a warrant. This is what my constituents are gravely concerned about, as are 80,000 other Canadians who have signed the OpenMedia.ca petition.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition from people from all over Canada who are concerned about the proposed megaquarry in Melancthon township in Dufferin county, Ontario. It would be the largest open pit quarry in Canada at over 2,300 acres. They are concerned with a number of things. I will just state one of them. The proposed megaquarry would put at risk the drinking water of over one million Canadians.

The petitioners are asking the Government of Canada to conduct an environmental assessment, under the authority of the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, on the proposed Highland Companies megaquarry development.

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition on behalf of several residents of British Columbia who are concerned over cuts to the Department of Veterans Affairs. In this year alone there have been cuts to the Veterans Affairs budget of \$226 million. The petitioners are concerned about that as well as the cuts that are forthcoming and the previously announced loss of 500 jobs.

They call on the government to restore funding to the Department of Veterans Affairs.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions to present today. The first is signed by many residents of my own riding of Saanich—Gulf Islands, from Sidney, Brentwood Bay, Saanich and Victoria.

The petitioners call on the government to act for those legally binding targets that were passed in the 40th Parliament, which called for reductions of greenhouse gases by 25% below 1990 levels by 2020 and to move toward a transition away from fossil fuels, leading to 80% reduction below 1990 levels by 2050.

The time for action on climate change should have begun about 25 years ago, but we need to play catch-up and we need to move fast.

SHARK FINNING

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): The second petition is from residents primarily in the Vancouver area. This relates to the really serious species-wide impact of the practice of shark finning.

The petitioners call for an end to the transportation, distribution and possession of shark fins for use in Canada. We certainly do not allow shark finning in Canadian waters, but we need to do more.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to present a petition for a number of residents from beautiful Langley, British Columbia, my riding.

The petitioners say that the trafficking of women and children across the international borders for the purpose of sexual exploitation should be condemned and that it is the duty of Parliament to protect the most vulnerable members of society from harm, those being the victims of human trafficking.

They petition the government to continue its work to combat trafficking of persons worldwide and to develop and implement a comprehensive national action plan to combat human trafficking.

IMMIGRATION

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, back on November 4, 2011, the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration made an announcement in regard to the super visa, indicating that people would be able to apply for a 10-year multiple entry visa, creating a huge expectation. The people who have signed this—

• (1520)

The Speaker: Order, please. I think somebody has a cellphone turned on in the House. Maybe if I could get a page to bring it up to the chair, then whoever owns it can come and get it.

The hon. member for Winnipeg North can finish his petition.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, as I said, the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration made the announcement on November 4, 2011, about the super visa. Then on December 1, he came out with the details on it.

The petitioners have recognized a serious flaw in the super visa, turning it into more of a super disappointment. They call upon the government to recognize that the requirements need to be changed. In particular, the health insurance issue is preventing not hundreds, but thousands of people from being reunited with their parents at a time in which they want to celebrate the birth of a new child, or graduation services or so many other wonderful opportunities when families should be together.

* * *

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

[*Translation*]

ENDING THE LONG-GUN REGISTRY ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-19, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Firearms Act, be read the third time and passed.

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Chambly—Borduas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Vancouver East.

At the beginning of my speech, I said that I did not like the way the Conservatives, with their 13 former police officers, thought they had the right to shoot down every one of the arguments we made just because we do not have any police experience in our caucus.

The point of my reply was to explain that we represent the people, whether we have had the same experience or not. I have a letter here that Jocelyne Sauvé sent to my office. Ms. Sauvé is with the Montérégie health and social services agency. This letter is very important because it supports the remarks that my colleague from Gatineau just made. People in the health sector are talking about other aspects of this issue, not just about hunting or the very tragic, high-profile cases like the École Polytechnique and Dawson College. People are talking about situations in which health is a factor, such as suicide.

I would like to quote from her letter:

A number of studies have shown that a home where there are firearms is five times more likely to be the scene of a suicide and three times more likely to be the scene of a homicide or a firearm-related accident than a home without a gun.

The government claims that whether a firearm is registered or not changes nothing. However, the idea is to have a system that discourages the inappropriate use of a firearm by someone with that kind of problem. That is why Ms. Sauvé, the director of the

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Montérégie health and social services agency, supports our position on maintaining the gun registry. One example we often hear is that people have to register their cars. A registry would deter people who should not possess firearms from acquiring them.

A comment was made the last time I used the argument that we have to register our vehicles. We are talking about federal and provincial jurisdictions. In the case of the gun registry, it is the Criminal Code that applies. When we use the example of vehicle registration, it is for comparison purposes. There is a system in place to deter individuals who would use their vehicles inappropriately.

Let us get back to the tragedy of the female police officer in Laval, which was referred to at the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security. As with any governmental or social system, it is not perfect. We will never be able to prevent every tragedy. The fact that the system did not work in some cases is not sufficient argument to abolish the registry.

Some members represent rural ridings and regions where there are people—hunters—who comply with the law and who use their firearms for sporting purposes, including hunting. Even though I represent a riding where people do not necessarily hunt, some people there are still required to register their firearms. This means that I can understand the situation and have discussions with individuals in the same situation as the citizens represented by Conservative members.

• (1525)

It is very important to point this out. Back home, the reaction of those who must deal with this system is to wonder whether it is perfect. We NDP members say that it is not perfect. However, it is the best option right now, and we are very open to making improvements such as those that were proposed in the past, in 2010, by our party and by our former leader, Mr. Layton. That is the kind of proposals that we would put forward. Abolishing the system and destroying the data against the will of the provinces, particularly Quebec, and against the will of our fellow citizens and of NDP members is not the proper way to proceed. That is why I oppose Bill C-19.

[*English*]

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, early in his speech the member said that having 13 members of law enforcement in our caucus did not really make much difference. Actually, having these people really gives us depth and understanding of the reality of the gun registry.

Nonetheless, the member's main point was actually about time allocation and continuing the debate. As we have heard in this House, the NDP is not actually interested in voting but only in debating: it wants to continue debates without voting. I wonder if this member agrees with that principle.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Mr. Speaker, it is very simple. I agree that we should be able to continue the debate. That is our duty and that is our right as members of Parliament. I am not saying we should not vote. There is no question that we will get to that point eventually.

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I just want to touch on the first part of the hon. member's question. Incidentally, I thank him for the question, because it gives me an opportunity to say that I certainly do not overlook the expertise of those members of his caucus who were once police officers, and nor do I overlook the contribution they can make to this debate. I take exception to their comments to the extent that they use their own experience to reduce or downplay the value and quality of the testimony by other police officers and witnesses. I have a hard time with that. In addition to their personal experience, many opinions have been expressed in this debate, including some from people working in that same environment. Just because they share the same experience does not mean that what other police officers are saying is wrong.

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on December 6, 2011, which is the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women, a committee called "Ensemble contre la violence faite aux femmes" was established in the Quebec City region. It includes four groups of women from that region: the Centre de ressources pour femmes de Beauport, the Centre femmes d'aujourd'hui, Violence Info and Viol Secours.

What does the hon. member think of that committee, which says that destroying the registry poses a direct threat to women and public safety?

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

I think it is very problematic. In my riding, there are organizations working for the rights of women who are subjected to violence. One of them is the Centre de femmes l'Essentielle, in Beloeil. These organizations work very hard. Therefore, to disregard their testimony, their letters and their discussions with us on this issue is very problematic. It reinforces the fact that this is not a black and white issue. It is not merely a matter of annoying hunters with the legislation. There are really some very important social issues, including the situation of women. This is very important and it should be taken into consideration in this debate.

• (1530)

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I once heard a Conservative member of Parliament say that it was not necessary to listen to experts and work with the other parties, because it is often good enough to just talk to a few families.

I wonder if my colleague could give us his take on this comment. We talk about time allocation and restricting debates, but not about the Conservatives' willingness to hear dissenting opinions or to cooperate in committee to make changes to their bills.

I wonder if the hon. member could give us the names of some people who oppose abolishing the gun registry, tell us what their positions are and explain why, in his opinion, the views of these people were ignored.

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for her question. As I mentioned in my speech, I have a letter that was sent to me by Jocelyne Sauvé, the director of the Montérégie health and social services agency. She is opposed to this

bill because of the suicides that the firearms registry could prevent. The hon. member raises a very important point.

That is one of the reasons why we would like to continue the debate. There are people who are very concerned, and those concerns must be taken into account. As the NDP has pointed out numerous times, we want to make amendments to address the concerns of people who use the registry and to respect the opinions of experts and people who have spoken out against Bill C-19.

[English]

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, usually I say that I am pleased to rise in the House to speak to whatever bill we are debating, but today I have to say that when it comes to Bill C-19, which would end the long gun registry, I wish we were not debating this bill. I think it is a terrible bill. The whole process and history of the bill have been incredibly divisive in Parliament. I would be the first to say that we would do anything to keep the debate going so that we would not get to a vote and hopefully we could defeat the bill, but I do not think that is likely.

Yet again the government has brought in another gag order to limit debate on the bill and force it through to a vote, which is the government's right to do. However, it is just another indication of the well-established pattern of the government. The Conservatives would like to dismiss the parliamentary process as much as they can and rush bills through. That is certainly what is happening on this bill.

I do want to put on the record my concerns about the bill, my opposition to it and what I think the impact of the bill would be.

The bill would eliminate the requirement to register non-restricted firearms and it would also destroy existing long gun registration records. That is particularly offensive. The campaign that has been put out by the Conservatives strikes me as something that is particularly mean. It strikes me as something that is particularly destructive. It is one thing to say that politically they support the end of the registry and they want to eliminate it, and they have always been clear on their position from way back, but then they want to go further and destroy all of the existing records and eliminate any possibility that those records may be very important in the future. For example, Quebec likely will have a legal challenge and the question of these records will become very important.

The two aspects of the bill are very disturbing, one which is to eliminate the registry itself, and the other which is for the government to go even further and be hell-bent on getting rid of everything and destroying all of the records that go along with it. Even people who have questions about the registry would find it quite shocking that the government would go so far as to destroy all the records and preclude any potential use those records may have in the future.

My colleague mentioned the late Jack Layton. I also say that he did an incredible job of responding to this issue. The issue was put forward by the Conservatives in a way that divided Canadians, which often pitted rural and northern Canadians against Canadians who live in urban areas. Jack Layton rose above that. He understood the concerns of the long gun registry and sought ways to mitigate the problems and the concerns that existed.

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The NDP put forward a proposal and a bill that would have addressed some of the concerns that existed with the gun registry. That was Mr. Layton's leadership. He brought people together. He did not let it be a divisive thing not only in his own caucus, but also in broader Canadian society.

We have been very clear. We do want to address the legitimate concerns of rural and aboriginal Canadians, but also ensure that the police have the tools they need to keep our streets safe.

The fact is there are approximately seven million registered non-restricted firearms in Canada as of September 2011, and almost two million Canadians who are licensed firearms owners. We are talking about a not insignificant number.

To me the use of the registry is where the debate moves from what has been an ideological ground staked out by the Conservatives to the realities of everyday life. I always find it quite ironic that on the one hand the Conservative members are quick to rise and support the work of public safety officers, police officers and police chiefs, and yet when it comes to the registry, they somehow ignore the very substantive evidence of what the registry actually does in supporting and protecting public safety.

• (1535)

As of September 2011, the registry is accessed about 17,000 times a day. That is a very significant number. It tells us that this is something that is active. It is used by officers who are out in the field, following up calls and complaints, and who oftentimes go into very high-risk and dangerous situations. In a survey, 92% of general duty police officers responded that they use the firearms information centre. That is a very high number. It shows us that this is not just a figment of someone's imagination or a system that is sitting on a shelf gathering dust. This is a real tool that is being used by police officers every day as they carry out their work. It astounds me that somehow that information can be so ignored in the face of a political decision to get rid of the registry. Unfortunately, it is a pattern that we have seen with the government. The government tends to ignore evidence and to make decisions based on its political agenda and ideological beliefs as opposed to making public policy decisions on sound evidence and information that is readily available. This has been a sad story with this legislation.

One reason the gun registry is important is that it saves lives. There have been many studies done but one from the Institut national de santé publique du Québec estimates that more than 2,000 lives have been saved since the implementation of the Firearms Act.

Unfortunately, violence against women in our society is still very prevalent. It is a threat that women live with every day. On average one in three women who are killed by their husbands is shot and 88% of those are with legally owned rifles and shotguns. Since the introduction of the registry, gun-related spousal homicides have gone down 50%. This is very significant evidence to show that the terrible situation of violence against women and domestic violence are things to which we have to pay attention. The gun registry was not a panacea to that. We need to focus on all kinds of things, like education, criminal justice and safe shelters for women. However, the registry was a tool that could be used when officers were going into those domestic disturbance situations. They would know what

they were walking into. We should be aware that the registry had a real impact on the lives and safety of women in this country.

I would also say that I know there was mismanagement of the registry. I was in Parliament in 2005 when the costs came out and they were approaching \$1 billion. It was staggering. There was no question there were problems with the registry, but we should note that by 2010 the cost of the registry had stabilized to about \$4 million a year and was much more manageable and was doing the purpose for which it was brought in. There is a history of mismanagement and problems, but those things have also been addressed.

There are other issues to do with the registry. The NDP has been very clear in bringing forward proposals to fix those concerns in terms of ensuring that people are not criminalized, that the registration process is clear and simple.

It is a very sad day for this country that this registry will be abolished and the records destroyed, that debate in Parliament was shut down, and that the truth of evidence became part of what was left on the side to be discarded in this debate. I am proud that New Democrats did not do that. We understand the evidence. We understand the importance of this registry and the need to maintain it and ensure it works as a proper safety tool.

• (1540)

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague from Vancouver East for her defence of a sensible approach to public safety and gun control in our country.

I want to underline one point my colleague made, that in order to find ways in which we can come together as a country over divisive issues, the way forward is not to make those issues more exaggerated but to find ways to bridge the gulf. That is what our party has been committed to do. Certainly our late leader, Jack Layton, showed that kind of leadership on this issue.

My hon. colleague is from Vancouver East and I am from the riding of Davenport on the west side of the downtown core of Toronto. Could she speak to the importance of making gun control, whether they are long guns, short guns, handguns, a vitally important piece of public safety in our urban centres?

Ms. Libby Davies: Mr. Speaker, it is true that the member and I represent ridings that are very similar.

In Vancouver East where there is a lot of gang violence as a result of drug deals and so on, there are huge concerns about these deadly weapons. Unfortunately, there are stories almost every week in the media about the violence that goes on. People feel very strongly about the need to have strict gun control. In fact, I cannot see any legitimate reason to have guns in an urban environment. That should not exist.

We should be tackling some of the roots of this violence, such as drug prohibition, and recognize that with these shootouts that go on, sometimes civilians are caught up in them accidentally. This has a tragic impact on local communities. We need gun control and gun registration. We also need to look at the underlying issues of urban violence involving guns and address that as well.

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• (1545)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member commented on the cost of the long gun registry. Over the years I have found that many Canadians have heard from opponents of the gun registry that it costs billions of dollars. The point needs to be made that the annual operating cost of administering the gun registry, I have been told, is less than \$4 million. I wonder if the member would like to add further comment in terms of the value of that \$4 million given the service that it provides.

Ms. Libby Davies: Mr. Speaker, it was actually the auditor general's report in 2006 which revealed that the cost of the program had come to close to \$1 billion, some \$946 million, in 2005. That is obviously a significant cost. I agree with my colleague that the cost stabilized to about \$4 million of the total \$76.5 million for the Canadian firearms program.

There is a lesson to be learned here. I know the member was not here then, but the Liberal government of the day should have addressed those issues much earlier on. I think it added fuel to the debate and gave the Conservatives, excuse the pun, ammunition to eliminate the gun registry. If it had been properly managed, they probably would have done it anyway, but I think it gave them much more leverage to say that the whole gun registry was just a boondoggle and was mismanaged.

It was mismanaged. There were problems and they needed to be addressed. This is very much a part of the proposals that the NDP submitted as a way to get through this very divisive debate. We said that the registry could remain and we could address the concerns that rural and aboriginal Canadians have. We could have good public policy on this.

Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Crowfoot.

It is with great pleasure that I rise today to acknowledge the nearing end of the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry. For too long, the voices of law-abiding hunters, sports shooters and farmers have not been heard.

It is fair to say that people have talked about the looming end of debate on this. However, when I ran in 2004, one of the things I committed to as a party member if elected was to end this ineffective long gun registry. If we look back to 2004, 2006, 2008 and then 2011, I would suggest that eight years has been more than enough time to debate this issue. Quite frankly, the debate started long before I arrived in 2004.

I do want to pay special tribute to the member for Yorkton—Melville, because it was with his help, diligence and hard work that the waste of this long gun registry was uncovered. He has long been a proponent of trying to deal with it. Therefore, I want to recognize him as I start my speech today.

Another person I want to recognize is my colleague, the member for Portage—Lisgar, who introduced private member's Bill C-391, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Firearms Act (repeal of long-gun registry) two years ago. It was defeated by a mere two votes in our last parliament, against the express wishes of responsible Canadian gun owners.

Once again, although the opposition have suggested that we have not had a chance to discuss this issue, I can assure them and all Canadians that if they look at private members' bills and campaign promises like mine 2004, there has been plenty of debate on the issue. Today we are one step closer to renewing their faith in a Canada, that it will not discriminate against them simply for legally possessing a simple piece of property.

Members on this side of the House continue to move forward as a unit to abolish the registry, which only divides law-abiding Canadians. We are standing up for our constituents by eliminating red tape and putting money back where it belongs.

Since it was created, the long gun registry has cost Canadians close to \$2 billion, as has been noted. The Auditor General mentioned that it was over \$1 billion and that the costs have continued to rise. The net annual cost of the program alone for the 2010-11 fiscal year was \$66.4 million. This money should instead be invested into putting more police on our streets, looking at trying to fight organized crime, introducing mandatory minimum penalties for serious gun crimes and combatting drug smuggling.

The long gun registry was never, nor could it ever be, a viable or valuable tool to help reduce gun crime in Canada. For example, the majority of homicides committed in all of Canada do not involve long guns at all. Statistics have shown that long guns are not the problem. In reality, they are not the weapons of choice for criminals. What good is a registry of legally owned long guns held by their law-abiding owners when it is very clear that the real problem is criminals acting outside of the law.

Unfortunately, gun crimes happen all too frequently. Yes, there have terrible incidents where dangerous people have used long guns to cause harm to others. However, there seems to be a misconception that by keeping the long gun registry we will somehow prevent these horrible things from happening. The truth is that these incidents happened despite the long gun registry being in place. Our government does believe that the right gun control laws save lives. Our government will continue to take action to make our streets and communities safer.

Canadians have given our government a strong mandate to do away with the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry. We have answered their cries in the form of Bill C-19, Ending the Long-gun Registry Act. Millions of dollars will now be better spent on more efficient and useful public safety tools. This means more front-line police officers and better resources for our men and women in uniform. It means better support for those who put their lives on the line to ensure the safety of the Canadian public. It is the bravery, selflessness and personal sacrifice of these men and women that prevent crimes from being committed, not the existence of an electronic database that identifies the law-abiding Canadians who own a long gun.

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• (1550)

A database would not have stopped the tragedy at École Polytechnique. The man responsible was a criminal, not a law-abiding hunter or farmer. That is why we need police to make sure that criminals do not get their hands on guns, and not focus on a registry composed of law-abiding citizens. The guns used in crimes are not the legally owned hunting rifles or shotguns anyway. Crimes are committed with guns that come into this country, usually illegally. Furthermore, hunting and sports shooting are not crimes, so why should we stand behind a registry that has done nothing but make law-abiding gun owners feel like criminals? Why should they be subject to the same treatment as criminals who use illegal firearms to commit crimes?

The long gun registry alone does not make anyone safer. The long gun registry focuses on the issues of licensing and registering firearms, and there has been no evidence detailing if or how the registry's activities have helped minimize risks to public safety. There was, however, a survey conducted in August 2010 that revealed that 72% of Canadians believe the long gun registry has done nothing to prevent crime.

We have an ongoing gun crisis across Canada, including firearms-related homicides, and a law for registering firearms has neither deterred nor helped solve any of the crimes. None of the guns used were found to have been registered in the registry and more than half of them have been smuggled into Canada from the United States. In the words of the former Ontario provincial police commissioner and the current member for Vaughan:

We have an ongoing gun crisis including firearms-related homicides lately in Toronto, and a law registering firearms has neither deterred these crimes nor helped us solve any of them. None of the guns we know to have been used were registered, although we believe that more than half of them were smuggled into Canada from the United States. The firearms registry is long on philosophy and short on practical results considering the money could be more effectively used for security against terrorism as well as a host of other public safety initiatives.

My constituency office has received a countless number of letters asking us to do away with the long gun registry. I have personally received phone calls and had many people approach me supporting the abolition of the registry. Citizens across this great country have elected a strong, stable Conservative majority government and have asked us to abolish the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry, a process we are witnessing here today.

The issue of destroying the long gun registry's database remains contentious. One of the reasons we want to scrap this registry is that we do not believe that all of the data are even correct and we certainly do not want to enable provincial governments to move forward to make this happen. Once it is gone, it should be gone for good. Licensing information of registered weapons would be maintained and be available to police forces, but not in the manner these weapons were registered in the long gun registry.

The registry is not a valuable tool for combating crime. Many front-line police officers across Canada do not use the registry because they cannot count on it.

John Hicks, an Orillia area computer consultant and webmaster for the Canadian Firearms Centre, once said that anyone with a home computer can easily access names, addresses and detailed shopping

lists, including the makes, models and serial numbers of registered guns belonging to licensed firearms owners. He also stated that despite the database costing some \$15 million to develop, he managed to break into it within 30 minutes.

Our government stands with law-abiding farmers, duck hunters and rural Canadians in every region of this country. We have long opposed the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry and are now on the eve of its eradication. By eliminating the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry, we will instead focus our efforts and time on more effective measures to tackle crime and to protect families in communities.

I would like to extend an invitation to the opposition to vote with us in putting an end to the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry once and for all. We must stop the wasteful and ineffective registry. This is what the Canadian people have asked us to do. We have made Canadians a promise and we shall deliver on our promise.

• (1555)

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his speech, a familiar one that we have heard from a few other members.

We could probably continue all day quoting people who appeared before the committee, who are probably very valid sources, or we could try to find someone who is for or against any law that comes before the House. One of my colleagues who spoke previously on this bill, the member for Vancouver Kingsway, quoted the Toronto chief of police and past president of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, who said:

The registry gives officers information that keeps them safe. If the registry is taken from us, police officers may guess, but they cannot know. It could get them killed.

That opinion was also endorsed by Chief Daniel Parkinson, president of the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police, and Sue O'Sullivan, Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime. The government repeatedly says that the NDP picks on victims and yet it is about to rescind a law that the very ombudsman for victims says should be in place.

I ask the member, on the balance of convenience, does he want to turn to those who would like to rescind the law because they own a gun or would he like to turn to police officers who rely on this mechanism to protect their officers?

Mr. Dean Allison: Mr. Speaker, we can continue to go through the facts that have been stated before, but 13 former members of the police community sit in our caucus, a number of them former police chiefs, who do not believe that.

Once again, I will quote some testimony from committee:

The police have not been able to show that they have solved a single murder by tracing a firearm using the long-gun registry. Nor has the long-gun registry proved useful in solving police killings. Since 1961, 123 police have been shot and killed. Only one of these murders involved a registered long gun, and it did not belong to the murderer. It is a truism that the most dangerous criminals have not registered their firearms. Unsurprisingly, serving police officers say the registry is not useful to them.

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Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, during the debate earlier today I wanted to put a question to the member for Okanagan—Coquihalla, who made some good points about the need to do more on gun safety. He spoke as though the government intended to bring forward measures requiring guns to be registered at point of sale. Measures would be brought back requiring anyone who had a licence for a gun and wanted to use one to take a Canadian firearms safety course. A range of safety measures were put forward in the speech by the member for Okanagan—Coquihalla.

I would like to ask the member for Niagara West—Glanbrook if he is aware of when the government plans to bring in these measures, because I certainly would support them.

• (1600)

Mr. Dean Allison: Mr. Speaker, a number of these measures are already in place.

I do not have a licence but my son has gone through this process. My son has spent a couple of days trying to get certified on safety issues and learning how to handle guns properly, and so I know there are a number of safety requirements already in place.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the member could comment on this particular quote from the RCMP final approved report of 2010, which reads:

A survey of CFRO users showed that 81% of trained police officers supported the statement, "In my experience, CFRO query results have proven beneficial during major operations."

Does the member believe that the RCMP report is inaccurate or is there some merit to what the RCMP is officially saying in its report?

Mr. Dean Allison: Mr. Speaker, there have been a number of quotes and a number of different surveys along both sides of these things. I have heard instances where over 70% of policeman do not support the registry. The member and I will have to agree to disagree on this one.

What we do know for a fact is that our constituents have been telling us that they do not believe it is fair or reasonable, and that it targets law-abiding citizens.

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to stand in this House and add my voice to the debate on Bill C-19, the ending the long gun registry act.

This is not the first time that I have spoken on the topic of the gun registry. Over the last 11 years, this has been one of those issues that I have been able to lend my voice to perhaps as much as or more than many other issues. The reason I say that is, that in the 11 years that I have served as member of Parliament for Crowfoot, I do not know if I have heard from my constituents on any other issue more than I have heard from my constituents on the issue of the long gun registry.

Every once in a while we have the opportunity to stand on long-stated policy within our party, which is the case here. Other times, we can stand and debate based upon our own opinions and our own sense of right and wrong. Again, in this case, I am proud to say that I really believe the government is doing the right thing here.

However, what makes this case so special is that, although there is a handful of people from my riding who have contacted me basically issuing NDP form letters, the majority of people in my riding believe that the long gun registry has to be put to an end.

I am pleased to announce to them that it would appear we are on the home stretch of ridding Canada of this long-standing thorn in the sides of most people in the country. It is a thorn for a number of reasons. First is the high cost of developing and maintaining the registry but also the sense of property rights and the sense of being very invasive in that way.

I thank my colleague who sits in front of me, the member for Yorkton—Melville, for taking this issue and dealing with it for a long time, as well as former members of Parliament. I am thinking of individuals like Myron Thompson, Jack Ramsay and others who made this into a very strong cause because they knew what their constituents believed.

Since the long registry was put in place in 1995 by the previous Liberal regime, and continues today, we have witnessed exhaustive debates in this House and across the country on the issue. We have been able to host these types of discussions at town hall meetings in our constituencies and have debated it many times here in the House. We have heard about it from the media and from Canadians right across the country. People on both sides of the debate have been given ample time to discuss and contribute their opinions.

Furthermore, this is not the first time that our government has introduced similar legislation to eliminate the long gun registry. Since coming to power in 2006, our Conservative government has introduced three bills to repeal the long gun registry: in June 2006, in November 2007 and in April 2009. We also have seen two private members' bills introduced in this House that called for the same action. As has already been mentioned, the parliamentary secretary to the minister and member of Parliament Portage—Lisgar brought forward a very strong private member's bill, Bill C-391.

Suffice it to say that the historical record will show that there has been plenty of time for debate on this registry. Our policy is clear. As mentioned by the previous speaker, for the past six elections Canadians have known our stand on this issue.

It is unfair to suggest that our government is cutting off debate on this topic. It is clear that the issue of effective gun control is an important one and that is why we have seen such fiery and passionate debates on the long gun registry. Our government is firmly committed to effective gun control. However, what we are not committed to is a wasteful and ineffective long gun registry that pretends to be gun control.

• (1605)

I am confident that all members will agree that keeping our citizens safe is the paramount consideration of any government. I would suggest to the opposition that it would be very disingenuous to say that the government on this side does not believe in keeping our streets and our citizens safe in our communities and across this country.

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I am also hopeful that all members are committed to the principles of balance and common sense. Ending the long gun registry is what this is all about. It is about ensuring we continue to preserve and enhance those measures that do work to reduce crime and protect Canadians. However, it is also about ensuring we do not unnecessarily penalize millions of honest, law-abiding citizens with rules that have little effect on crime prevention or on reducing gun crime but give some a feel safe attitude that is not warranted.

We need to look at what Bill C-19 would do. The legislation before us today would end the need for Canadians to register their non-restricted firearms, such as rifles and shotguns. We know for a fact that rifles and shotguns are commonly used by farmers, hunters and residents in rural Canada. They use these non-restricted firearms to protect their livestock, to hunt wild game or, in some cases, even among our first nations, earn a living.

We have been very clear in saying that Bill C-19 would not do away with the need for these individuals to obtain a proper licence for their long guns. They will still need a proper licence.

We have also been very clear in saying that Bill C-19 would not do away with the requirements for the owners of prohibited or restricted firearms, such as handguns, to obtain a registration certification, as well as a licence. That registry continues. The handgun will still be registered and it will still need a licence. Nothing will change in this respect. They will still be in charge of handling the registration of restricted and prohibited firearms, including all handguns and automatic firearms.

Under Bill C-19, all law-abiding Canadians would still need to go through a licensing procedure. Under Bill C-19, all law-abiding Canadians would still need to pass the required Canadian firearms safety exam in order to obtain a licence.

The leader of the Green Party was wondering if the safety courses would continue. Yes, that will still be necessary. Gun owners will still need to show that they are in compliance with proper firearms storage and transportation requirements. They will still need to pass a background check performed by the Chief Firearms Officer or their representatives who employ law enforcement systems and resources to ensure that people have never committed a serious criminal offence. If they have, they will not get the licence to own any type of firearm. They would also ensure that the individual in question does not have a history of mental illness associated with violence. If they did they could not have a firearm. They would also ensure people are not under a court sanctioned prohibition order for firearms and do not pose a threat to public safety.

While Bill C-19 would do away with the need for honest and law-abiding citizens to undergo the burden of registering their non-restricted rifles or shotguns, it would ensure that we keep the current licensing requirements for all gun owners.

The legislation would make another important change. It would allow for the destruction of all records related to the registration of non-restricted firearms. Some have claimed that destroying the long gun registration data is unnecessary, that it will eliminate all the data the long gun registry has. Others have suggested that we should simply divide up the data by the territory and ship it off to those jurisdictions so they can create their own long gun registry.

Both of those suggestions are non-starters. We are opposed to the long gun registry. We are not simply saying that we are opposed to our federal government administering it. We believe that it is invasive and that it is a waste of money. We believe that it is a non-effective way of fighting crime. For that reason, I stand in this place proud to speak in favour of Bill C-19, which would get rid of the long gun registry.

• (1610)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have here several letters that I may share with the House later. For now, I will simply read the last part of one of these letters. I am addressing my remarks to the members opposite, and to the Speaker, obviously. The letter reads as follows:

Mr. Harper: You have the power to maintain the firearms registry and even broaden—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): I apologize for interrupting the hon. member.

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day: I said the name of the Prime Minister, Mr. Speaker. Would it be okay if I said “Mr. Prime Minister” instead?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Yes.

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day: I will therefore take his name out of the letter. I did not write it, obviously. I will continue reading:

Mr. [Prime Minister]: You have the power to maintain the firearms registry and even broaden its scope. Mr. Prime Minister, you have a duty to ensure public safety. You also have a duty to consider my requests, which support those made by a social movement that is concerned about the safety of women. As a Canadian, I am writing to ask you to keep the firearms registry.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Sorenson: Mr. Speaker, we listen to all Canadians. We know there are some police chiefs who say that the long gun registry is used. However, there are many police chiefs who suggest that it is ineffective or that it is not the best use of money.

I spoke with a sergeant this past weekend and he laid out very clearly that when police officers enter homes they assume there are firearms within those homes. They would never use the registry to make an assumption that because firearms are not listed on the registry there would be none in the home. The fact is that criminals do not register their firearms. The criminal entity in this country does not use this registry.

Therefore, how effective is it? We care about the lives of our RCMP officers. We care about all those who enter into difficult circumstances and put their lives on the line to maintain the peace in this country and this has not been effective at all.

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•(1615)

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Crowfoot for all the work he has done on this issue. When he talks about wasteful, taking a program that was costed at \$2 million and is now \$2 billion would be one good reason. Another one is that the Auditor General actually said that it was unreliable and flawed. Now we have people saying that we should give this to the provinces. The reality is that it would leave a false sense of security.

Is the database not the gun registry?

Mr. Kevin Sorenson: Mr. Speaker, the registry is flawed. I know there are many people across this land who have never bought into this whole registry and have never complied with the law. Even though we may encourage people to comply with the law and we will change the law, many people have not. Therefore, the integrity of the registry is not there.

He mentioned the cost. This originally was going to cost \$5 million. It became \$80 million, \$385 million, \$790 million, \$1 billion, \$1.2 billion and it goes on. Most reports now suggest that it is \$2 billion.

What could that \$2 billion have done? It could have put more officers on the streets and more resources into the hands of those officers to fight crime. It could have cut down on the illegal guns that are coming across from United States and other countries. It could have been put toward fighting gangs and the criminal element that uses those firearms for perpetrating crime. It is a deep hole. A lot of money that has gone into it but it is something that we will bury and move on.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Before we resume debate it is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP), Service Canada; and the hon. member for Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Employment Insurance.

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am going to be splitting my time with the member for Scarborough Southwest.

I rise today to give voice to people at risk in my riding of Trinity—Spadina. Their lives may be at risk every day. They face a terrible threat. The risk they face will be even worse if the House proceeds with this piece of legislation. Let us be clear. If the House scraps the firearms registry and destroys the vital information that has been collected, more people will be in danger. More people will be at risk and the risk will grow.

Every one of us in the House, every member of every party has a solemn duty to protect these people at risk and to ensure the safety of all Canadians. Public safety is our responsibility. It does not seem possible that the government and the House would jeopardize safety for no reason at all.

Let me talk about some of the people at risk in my riding because they are like too many other people in every riding in this country. Let me give voice to their fears and concerns. Let me speak on their behalf.

I speak for the women at Interval House in my riding of Trinity—Spadina. Interval House is one of our desperately needed shelters for battered women and their children. These women have been victims of domestic violence. They are at risk of physical violence from their spouses. Let us face facts. These women fear for their lives and the lives of their children. They are vulnerable. They are at risk and they need protection from violence. It is our duty to protect them.

If we scrap the registry, we will turn our backs on these women and children at risk. That is not rhetoric, it is a clear fact. One out of three women who dies at the hands of an abusive spouse is shot. Almost all of the guns are legally owned rifles and shotguns. They are long guns. Those are the weapons that place these women at risk. That is a fact. It is also a fact that since the introduction of the gun registry, the risks have gone down.

More women have been protected. Gun-related deaths in domestic violence have gone down by 50%. That is 5 out of 10. The gun registry has saved women at risk from guns. That is a fact. We have helped protect the vulnerable. Why would we put them at risk again?

Let us look at others at risk. In my riding we have many youth at risk, many students and many children of immigrants who may face bullying because of their colour, religion or ability to communicate in English. We have many youths who may be gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgendered, and many young girls who face hatred in their culture just because they are female. These young people are at risk of suicide. The guns that are most often used in suicide, particularly by youth, are rifles and shotguns. These long guns put vulnerable youth at risk. This is a fact.

Here is another fact. Gun-related suicide declined in Canada from over 300 in 1995, to under 125 in 2005, after the registry was put in place. That is a drop of over 60%. The risk to youth has gone down. How could any member of the House even contemplate putting these young people's lives in more danger again? We must work to protect them more, not make them more vulnerable. I fear that the Conservative government may turn deaf ears to the voices of these people at risk, even though it is our duty to protect them.

•(1620)

It is not only vulnerable women, children and young people, who are at greater risk if we scrap the registry. It is not only the powerless. It is also the most powerful, and those who are empowered to protect us all. I am speaking of the police, the law enforcement officers and front-line people who have a duty to protect every Canadian.

I am speaking of those who must protect the Prime Minister and every member of this House. I am speaking of those who must protect all Canadians. This bill puts the police at greater risk.

Today, as well as giving voice to vulnerable women and children, I am giving voice to police officers and emergency workers in my riding of Trinity—Spadina. This is not some NDP partisan issue, believe me. Let me read into record the words of Police Chief Bill Blair of Toronto, who is also the president of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police. These are not my words; they are his:

The registry gives officers information that keeps them safe. If the registry is taken from us, police officers may guess but they cannot know. It could get them killed.

The police chief of Toronto said that scrapping the registry could get police officers killed. That is terrible.

The Conservative government and the Conservative Prime Minister who claim to support the police and be big on law and order will put the police at risk if they proceed with this bill. I am not sure the members opposite could hear me because they said, "One more time." It is true that if this registry is taken away and all the information is scrapped, the officers could be harmed. They could even be killed.

It is not just Chief Bill Blair, it is also Chief Daniel Parkinson, president of the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police. He said:

Scrapping the federal Firearms Registry will put our officers at risk and undermine our ability to prevent and solve crimes.

The police say they will be more at risk. Our duty is clear. We must protect the police. We must help them protect the vulnerable. We must not scrap the registry. We must make it better, fix the problems and make it stronger. We must not destroy the information that has been collected. We must let the police use it to reduce the risk of firearm deaths of police officers, of women and children, and of all Canadians.

How can the government and the House even contemplate putting people at risk? How can the House contemplate putting a single police officer at risk? These police officers risk their lives for us every day. It is a fact that the registry, even with its flaws, has helped protect our society.

The government is hiding behind the great big prisons it wants to build for many more billions of dollars than the gun registry has cost. The women of Interval House will not feel safer when the prisons are bigger. Bigger prisons will not keep them safe, and they will not keep the police safe.

We can keep them safe. Let us do our duty. Let us save the gun registry, fix it, strengthen it and work to protect the people we are elected to serve.

● (1625)

Mr. David Wilks (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to say that as a former police officer the registry is not what saved my life. What saved my life was assuming there was always a gun in the residence. As long as police assume there is a gun in the residence, they will keep their wits about them.

My question to the hon. member is, what does she believe the registry brings to the police that they do not already know?

Ms. Olivia Chow: Mr. Speaker, the chief of police and the president of the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police have a lot of experience. They would want to know what kind of a person has what kind of gun and how many. They could assume a person has only one gun but he or she may have several. They need to know what kind of firepower a person has. It would be useful to know a person's history and gun collection.

All of this data is in the gun registry. In fact, we are not spending an extra dime in having the registry protected. The Conservatives

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would destroy information that is already collected and used by police officers every day as they go into houses.

Knowledge is very important. The police could guess, but how would they know how many guns or what kind? I think it is important to have knowledge and not just guesses.

Mr. Robert Chisholm (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I applaud my colleague for her intervention in this debate. I want to focus on what she quoted Chief Blair as having said, as well as the president of the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police.

We heard from members of the government that they have 12 police officers on their benches who support getting rid of the gun registry. That is all that really matters to them. We continue to bring forward people like Chief Blair and Chief Frank Beazley from Halifax. Yet the Conservatives keep saying that they are police officers and they know best.

Could the member comment on the fact that the government seems to be valuing the words of its own members rather than those of the tens of thousands of police officers across the country who do not agree with them?

● (1630)

Ms. Olivia Chow: Mr. Speaker, before Chief Blair became the chief he had 20 or 30 years of experience on the streets of Toronto. He was the superintendent in the area of Regent Park in Toronto and in some of the project areas where there are higher rates of crime and gun crime. He and many other officers are not just speaking hypothetically, they are speaking from experience. That is why they are the chiefs. They became chiefs because they have their own experience and that the front-line officers.

By and large, when we ask the front-line officers, chiefs, superintendents and inspectors, they tell us that they need this registry. They want to know precisely what is in the houses they enter. They say that if they do not know it could get them killed. Putting officers at risk undermines the ability to prevent and solve crimes.

Mr. Dan Harris (Scarborough Southwest, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will follow-up on my hon. colleague's point. It behooves us that we would take tools away from police officers rather than give them more to fight crime and keep Canadians safe.

If the government is so adamant about the ineffectiveness of the gun registry, why has it been hiding a report that shows the public safety value of the long gun registry for two years in a row? It is not enough that the Conservatives are going to destroy a tool that police use thousands of times a day and all the data along with it, but they have also been holding back crucial information from the committee that has been examining the bill.

A lot of talk was had both in committee and in the House suggesting that law enforcement was not consulting the registry, but rather consulting CPIC, which has registry information on it. That is where the spin was given.

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The RCMP report dated November 2011, which was signed by previous RCMP Commissioner William Elliott, was not released until last month. It was not made available to the committee examining the bill and the House did not ask for it. However, it was made available to the Minister of Public Safety.

The report outlines just how often police officers refer to the registry for inquiries. This raises at least two issues. First, does the report show how useful the instrument is for police forces across the country? Second, why is the government not disclosing important information, a part of a larger pattern?

It would seem that the Conservatives do not want people to know the facts because they do not want the facts to get in the way of the baseless arguments they keep making time and time again. This is yet another example of the government choosing ideology over fact.

Destroying the existing information in the registry will not bring back the money spent to set it up. Why is the government going to have a billion dollar bonfire with the data Canadian taxpayers have already paid for, especially when provinces and police forces are telling us that it does have public safety value?

Let us consider some facts. Approximately 1.9 million Canadians are licensed firearm owners. The number of registered non-restricted firearms in Canada as of September 2011 was 7,137,386. As of September 2011, the Canadian firearms registry was accessed an average of 17,402 times per day. That does not sound ineffective or wasteful to me.

In one survey, 92% of general duty police officers said they used the Canadian firearms information system and 74% said that query results had proven beneficial during major operations. We know that 15 officers serving on the government benches make up part of that 8% minority of general duty officers who disagree and the 26% who do not think it is very useful.

•(1635)

[*Translation*]

A study conducted by the Institut national de santé publique du Québec estimates that 2,100 lives have been saved since that legislation came into force. One-third of women killed by their spouses are killed by a firearm. Nearly nine out of 10 of these women, or 88%, were killed by a long gun, or a legal, registered hunting rifle. Since the registry was created, firearms-related domestic homicides have decreased by 50%. Make no mistake about this: it works.

[*English*]

Furthermore, rifles and shotguns are the guns most often used in suicides, particularly those involving youth. These types of suicides had decreased 64% in the last nine years, from over 300 in 1995 to 121 in 2005, suicides that were prevented as we were not able to find any evidence of substitution with other methods. Experts in the field of suicide will certainly back up that often when people's first attempts are thwarted they do not look for an alternative.

Lastly, long guns were used in the killing of 10 of the 13 police officers killed in the last 10 years.

Rather than getting tough on crime, the Conservatives are taking away precautions that have proven to keep our communities safe. If the Conservatives want to state that the registry is a waste of money and exaggerate the costs, they should at least get their facts straight. We recognize that while there were significant cost overruns in the initial phase of the registry setup, as highlighted by the Auditor General's 2006 report that revealed that the costs of the Canadian firearms program hit \$946 million by 2005, by 2010 the cost of the registry had stabilized to about \$4 million of the total \$76.5 million annually spent on the Canadian firearms program.

Let us also not forget that registration is a one time only procedure. It is free and never expires unless registrants transfer their firearms to new owners. Registrations or transfers are done over the phone or online in a matter of minutes. In fact, 97% of firearms transfers are completed within 30 days. If only Service Canada could say the same about processing claims for EI.

In a quote from the 2010 RCMP evaluation of the Canadian firearms program, it states:

Canadians are receiving value for their tax dollars from the CFP. Overall...[it] is cost-effective in reducing firearms-related crime and promoting public safety through universal licensing of firearms owners and registration of firearms in Canada.

As my colleague for St. John's East pointed out a few days ago, there is no such thing as specifically a long gun registry. We have a registry of guns, which consists of various types of guns and rifles. There are prohibited weapons, restricted weapons and then all other types. Swept up in the all other types are the guns that the Conservatives have been referring to for years. They talk about the long gun registry as if it were a separate registry that makes law-abiding hunters and farmers feel like criminals.

I can honestly say that in my family there has been a great deal of debate over the years about the registry. My family likes to camp and we own a property together. Many of my family members are hunters and anglers. We have had a great many difficult discussions about the registry and disagreements, frankly, between my point of view and often many of theirs. However, not once has any of them thought that they were being treated like a criminal because they had to register their firearms.

Rather than working on fixing the problems and the anomalies that occurred as a result of the failed implementation by the Liberal Party, the Conservatives want to scrap a program that has been a crucial policing tool for provinces and communities.

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The Conservatives like to go on ad nauseam that the registry does nothing to catch criminals, prevent gun violence or keep our communities safe. On the contrary, implementing Bill C-19 would risk public safety by treating all non-registered, non-restricted and non-prohibited weapons the same. We are talking about semi-automatic rifles, assault rifles, sniper rifles, guns that are very dangerous and can threaten our public safety. Gun shops, sporting goods stores, Canadian Tires and so on were required to keep a record of to whom they sold rifles, shotguns and even ammunition. That provision lapsed when the gun registry was brought in because it was deemed unnecessary since all guns had to then be registered. By removing the requirement for all non-restricted or non-prohibited guns to be registered, there will be no record. The government has not reinstated the requirement for gun shops, sporting goods stores and the like to keep records of their sales.

• (1640)

I will close by blowing some holes in the argument that the registry cannot help catch criminals. Last week in the House the member for Yukon said that the committee heard evidence that the RCMP had heard that a manual search conducted discovered that 4,438 stolen firearms were successfully re-registered. Talk about being asleep at the switch. That is practically aiding and abetting criminals and legitimizing their activities.

What I would like to know is how many of those re-registered stolen firearms were found, confiscated, how many criminal investigations this triggered, how many convictions ensued and how many of these weapons ended up back in the hands of their law-abiding owners? More important, why did the government only find out during committee hearings on the bill and not before that?

That is why I say the Conservatives are asleep at the switch. They have such an ideological hatred of this law that they cannot see the good that could come of it.

Mr. Brian Jean (Fort McMurray—Athabasca, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to rise. My position on the gun registry and eliminating the need for the long gun registry is well known, but I noticed earlier that the NDP had claimed two falsehoods, or at least misleading to some degree.

The first was that the minister had the opportunity to table the report from the RCMP well in advance. That is just not the case. The Minister of Public Safety received the report on December 16 at the end of the day. As we know, the House adjourned shortly thereafter. The minister actually tabled that on December 21, which would have been the first opportunity to do so because the House did not sit again until January 30. I would suggest that that is more than adequate time. The minister did table the RCMP report very quickly.

Second, Bill Blair has not been the president of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police for some period.

I will ask the member three very quick questions. First, how many rifles does own? Second, how many times has he tried to register those rifles, because it does take numerous tries? Being from northern Alberta, with a lot of rifle owners, I can say that. Third, how does he respond to the statement that criminals do not register their firearms and will not register their firearms, so it cannot be of any help to any of them?

Mr. Dan Harris: Mr. Speaker, I did address the issue of criminals registering their firearms. A manual search found that over 4,400 stolen firearms were re-registered. They did come back and register those firearms. Whether that is criminals, or law-abiding citizens who accidentally got a stolen firearm through various sales, the question is why has none of that been tracked back? Why has there not been any legwork done there? What is the police doing with that information?

The government has had stewardship of this registry for six years and it has sat on its thumbs. It does not agree with the law, so therefore it chose to let it go by the wayside. That is not how the government is supposed to work. We are supposed to be here to uphold the laws of the land. The government has not been doing that because it disagrees with the law. Now, six years later, it is finally, potentially, going to be getting rid of the law. However, up until now it should have been upholding the law and it has not. That is shameful.

• (1645)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I wish to congratulate my hon. colleague from Scarborough Southwest on his excellent speech. He gave us a lot of information.

I wonder if he could describe for us how eliminating the firearms registry will affect his riding and the greater Toronto area.

Mr. Dan Harris: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for the question.

There is no doubt that, in an urban riding, the firearms issue is an important one, and so is public safety. The fact that the police will have one less tool at their disposal worries me, because I already think that the police are not given all the tools they need to do their job.

Certain incidents have occurred in my riding: people have stolen weapons from other people. This happened before the registry was created. As a result, the police did not have all the information on all the stolen weapons. It did not have enough information to find the weapons and to bring the thieves to justice. That is what we now have thanks to the registry, and what we will lose when the Conservatives scrap it.

[*English*]

Mr. Jay Aspin (Nipissing—Timiskaming, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Don Valley West.

I am pleased to rise today to debate Bill C-19, the ending the long gun registry act. I am so pleased to speak to this bill, because frankly, our government's taking the steps to end the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry is an important reason that I am here today. My constituents in Nipissing—Timiskaming are good salt of the earth people. They work hard, pay their taxes and raise their families. All they ask from their government is to allow them to quietly enjoy the fruits of their labour and to protect them from those who wish to do harm to law-abiding Canadians.

The long gun registry is the antithesis of that statement. It is the ultimate depiction of the nanny state in Canada.

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Most of my constituents have never had any experience with the criminal justice system, save a speeding ticket or two. They are largely law-abiding Canadians. This may come as a shock since I come from a rural area, but some even have the temerity to own firearms. Some of them like to hunt and participate in sports shooting. They are harming no one and yet, thanks to the previous Liberal government, they are made to feel like criminals. They are required to submit to a rigorous process to register their firearms, which has never been proven to stop a single crime or save a single life. How could it? The registry by design only targets those who are predisposed to following the law and regulations. Do people think murderers, gangsters and drug dealers are going to be too concerned with filling out some paperwork to ensure that the guns they are using for their next drive-by shooting conforms to all legal standards? Obviously not. To assume so is patently ridiculous.

No, the only people who this was ever meant to target are law-abiding hunters, farmers and sports shooters. On this side of the House, we do not believe we should be focusing our scarce resources on targeting those who are predisposed to comply with the law. We believe we should go after criminals. I am not sure whether it was through negligence, incompetence or malfeasance that we were cursed with the long gun registry. The justice minister at the time, Allan Rock, said that it was his firm belief that only police and the military should have firearms. That should tell us all we need to know, but I digress.

I said earlier that one of the reasons I am here is our Conservative government's position on the long gun registry. I would like to expand on that. My Liberal predecessor, Mr. Anthony Rota, was told by his political bosses that he had to listen to them over the wishes of his constituents or he would be in big trouble. I guess the folks back home had some other ideas. He betrayed his constituents, something I will not do.

What is troubling is that rather than learning from the poor example set by the Liberals, the NDP seems to be following them down this terrible path. Member after member is flip-flopping and turning his or her back on constituents in order to listen to the big union bosses in the office of the Leader of the Opposition. First, the member for Timmins—James Bay flipped over even though he said the registry was useless. He was the original flipper dipper.

The member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley wants to be the leader of his party and maybe even prime minister some day. He cannot even manage to keep a promise to the hunters in his northern riding. He flip-flopped and voted with the big bosses over the little guy.

Last but not least is the member for Western Arctic. If there is any riding in the country where people have been up in arms about the long gun registry, it is in the beautiful Northwest Territories. The member even said in an all candidates debate last spring, “Vote for me or vote for the Conservatives. It is the same. We will bootstrap the registry”. Unbelievably, mere months after voters put their trust in him, he smugly turned his back.

● (1650)

Greg Farrant of the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters, OFAH, had it right when he said that the NDP MPs “have abandoned their principles” and “betrayed their constituents”.

I hope the gentlemen I have just mentioned will take a lesson from the courage and conviction of the members for Thunder Bay—Superior North and Thunder Bay—Rainy River and stand up and vote the will of the people, even if it means the big bosses coming down on them like a ton of bricks.

I would encourage all hon. members to vote to stop the \$2 billion boondoggle, vote to stop the unnecessary targeting of law-abiding hunters, farmers and sports shooters, vote to focus our crime-fighting efforts on things that make us really safe and not on things that only make us feel safe. I ask members to stand with me, the Conservatives and the Prime Minister and vote to end the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry once and for all.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc-André Morin (Laurentides—Labelle, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I just have a small problem with the debate on Bill C-19. I would like the member for Nipissing—Timiskaming to explain what he means by a law-abiding citizen. I thought I was one because, when the bill was passed, I registered all my guns. I keep them under lock and key in my home and I obey the law.

I bought a rifle in December and it is registered. Many people did the same thing. Is the law-abiding citizen the person who, like me, registers his guns, or is it the person who is told to not register his guns because the registry will be abolished and we are going to get rid of this law?

I would like to know who is the law-abiding citizen: the person who obeys the Conservatives or the person who obeys the law?

[*English*]

Mr. Jay Aspin: Mr. Speaker, law-abiding citizens are those hunters and enthusiasts who enjoy the sport. Why target these law-abiding citizens? We should be targeting criminals, those who commit crime, not those who follow the law. The \$2 billion the registry cost has simply been a waste of money. It has not targeted criminals.

● (1655)

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, earlier today we heard an astounding speech from the member for Yorkton—Melville, a Saskatchewan riding. He has been working on this issue for years. Before I was elected I phoned him. He was working on the long gun registry at that time because it was costing a lot of money, \$5 million and then \$300 million and it went into a deep hole.

I started examining it myself. There are many mistakes in the long gun registry. It is not accurate. The registry does not have the number of hits that people say it has. Every time a police officer inquires about a licence plate or an address, those hits are counted.

Could the member expand on the misleading information on the long gun registry that has come forward this afternoon from the members opposite?

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Mr. Jay Aspin: Mr. Speaker, clearly, that is the case. I sit on the committee that has closely scrutinized the legislation for the past number of months. The registry is ineffective. It is inaccurate. That is why we do refer to it as being wasteful and ineffective. Not only that, it has wasted \$2 billion of taxpayers' money. Clearly, criminals do not register firearms. In addition, the registry is clearly redundant. We have a licensing process in place which we are going to keep to ensure safety.

As I said in my remarks, the registry really has not saved a single life in all the years it has been in existence. It has been a total waste of taxpayer money.

Mr. John Carmichael (Don Valley West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise today to add my voice to this important debate on Bill C-19, the Ending the Long-gun Registry Act.

I want to thank my colleague from Nipissing—Timiskaming for sharing his time with me today and for the work he has done on the bill at committee.

I would also like to thank my other colleagues who have worked very hard to have this legislation developed and introduced in the House, fulfilling a long-standing promise to Canadians that we would repeal the long gun registry. In particular, I would like to congratulate the member for Portage—Lisgar, who has fought tirelessly to represent the wishes of her constituents and millions of Canadians by making sure this legislation goes forward once and for all.

I would like to thank every Canadian who has taken the time to write to his or her MP, to attend town hall meetings, to organize rallies and just generally to discuss this important matter with fellow Canadians.

As we are all aware, this is not the first time that legislation has been tabled in this House to eliminate the long gun registry. This is not the first time we have discussed and debated the topic of the long gun registry here or in committee or in consultations with Canadians.

Since it came into force in 1995, and particularly since our government first came to power in 2006, the long gun registry has been the focus of much debate. There comes a time, however, when debate must end and action must be taken. That time is now. Our government is firmly committed to passing this legislation. We told Canadians that we would eliminate the long gun registry. That is exactly what Bill C-19 would do.

The legislation is in fact quite simple. First, it ends the requirement for long gun owners to register their firearms. Second, it ensures that we protect the privacy of individual Canadians by destroying the long gun data currently held in the registry. Canadians can rest assured that our government will not share their personal information with other organizations or government bodies.

It is not a complicated piece of legislation, but as I said, it has generated much discussion. Throughout these debates and during our extensive consultations right across the country with Canadians from a wide cross-section of demographics, we have heard opinions on both sides of this issue.

Unfortunately, over the past several years we have heard ongoing fallacies and myths perpetuated about the long gun registry. We have

heard it said that the long gun registry reduces gun crime, as we heard again today. On the face of it, that sounds like a great fact, one that has been trotted out by many members opposite and by the media and organizations across Canada in their desperate bid to save the registry. The reality is that there is no evidence that the long gun registry has stopped a single crime or saved a single life.

Supporters of the long gun registry have also said that it promotes responsible gun use. This is insulting for two reasons. First, it implies that anyone who is opposed to the registry is somehow, by default, promoting a wild west scenario where guns are everywhere and violence is rampant. Second, it implies that long gun owners are irresponsible by nature and can only be held accountable if they fill out the proper paperwork and register their guns. Both of these claims are patently false.

Supporters also claim that the long gun registry is important because it provides a proper record of where guns are located, the number and type of guns in Canada and who owns them. Again, this is a myth. The architects of the long gun registry set an impossible goal of registering and documenting every single long gun in Canada.

● (1700)

Many front-line police officers told us that the information in the registry was inaccurate and that reliance on it is both dangerous and foolish. One detective from the Saskatoon Police Service testified that:

—it's acknowledged by persons within policing, the firearms centre, and the recreational firearms community that there are, at minimum, in excess of one million firearms in Canada that have not been registered. The registry does not indicate where firearms are stored or who may have control of the firearm, nor does it denote ownership. Tens of thousands of firearms are registered inaccurately using patent numbers and catalogue numbers in place of serial numbers or model numbers. Many firearms in the registry have multiple registrations for the same firearm.

Clearly there are issues with the accuracy of this data.

Some of my colleagues in the NDP like fearmonger and trot out the idea that somehow the abolition of the gun registry will increase gun violence. The reality is that the most effective gun control tool in this country is our current gun licensing system and the bill makes no changes to that system.

Currently, every person must undergo a process of training and background checks before obtaining a licence to possess or to acquire any firearm. They must pass the required course on Canadian firearms safety. They also face a screening process to ensure that they have not committed a serious criminal offence and are not prohibited by a court sanction to own firearms and do not pose a risk to society. Also, under the current system, all restricted and prohibited firearms, including handguns, must be registered.

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We have been clear that under Bill C-19 these controls will not change. Individuals will still need to go through the proper checks and training to obtain their non-restricted firearms. They will still be required to renew their licence periodically. They will still have to follow the rigorous rules that control prohibited and restricted firearms. These checks and balances are effective tools and we are not proposing any changes to this current system.

Our government has clearly demonstrated that it is serious about getting tough on crime, especially gun crime. However, we also need to ensure that we have a system of gun control that is effective and efficient. That is why the government has undertaken a number of initiatives to enhance compliance with public safety while easing administrative burdens on lawful firearm owners. Our government believes that gun control should target criminals, not law-abiding citizens. It should promote safety on our streets, not frustrate hunters in the bush.

Since May 2006, the government has put key measures in place to protect owners of non-restricted guns from criminal prosecution and to encourage compliance with laws and regulations. First, we introduced an amnesty period to give owners of non-restricted firearms an opportunity to register those firearms and renew expired licences without fear of prosecution. Second, we waived fees for the gun owners who renewed or modified a firearm licence. Finally, over the last number of years, we took steps to enable eligible holders of expired possession only licences to apply for a new POL to bring themselves back into compliance with firearms legislation.

The reason we have taken these steps is quite simple. The measures we have implemented have helped to protect Canadians by making sure that as many gun owners as possible are properly and lawfully licensed and therefore subject to continuous eligibility screening. These measures have been complemented through enhanced resources to strengthen the screening of first-time firearm licence applicants.

• (1705)

Since 2007, our government has committed \$7 million annually for enhanced screening of individual licensees. Our approach to gun control is based on common sense. It is about an approach that does not penalize law-abiding citizens, particularly those in rural areas. It is about an approach that will truly reduce gun crime and keep Canadians safer.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Giguère (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is unfortunate that I am unable to convince my colleagues opposite to change their minds. I would simply like to say to them that there is an emotional side to this law because of the victims. There are too many and they cannot be forgotten.

I would like to know what they are going to say to the families of the École Polytechnique victims. Before killing 14 women, Marc Lépine was an honest and respectable citizen. That is the problem. People are killed and become the victims of people who were totally innocent. Such people are depressed, or have financial or marriage problems, and they decide, at some point, to turn to violence. The police officer who enters that home would like to know if he can remove guns in order to prevent a suicide or a murder.

[*English*]

Mr. John Carmichael: Mr. Speaker, like my colleague, I too mourn the loss of life in that horrific situation, as does every member of our government.

The issue is emotional but when there is loss of life, particularly from gun crime, this government is standing up for victims. We are eliminating the long gun registry because it is ineffective and inaccurate and does not protect people from gun crime and because, at the end of the day, it is a duplication. As I just said in my speech, all of the licensing required to protect people in this country is in fact already in place and need not be replicated, thereby prolonging the inefficient use of taxpayer dollars.

• (1710)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): It would appear that some member has a phone ringing in the chamber. I would remind all hon. members that phones should be turned off when they are brought into the Chamber.

Questions and comments.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I just have a couple of questions for the member.

He argued so fiercely against the idea of registering guns, I am wondering why the member thinks that the handgun registry is effective while the long gun registry is not, since, as the member has said, criminals do not register their guns and many criminals use handguns. I do not understand the contradiction in the member's argument.

In my speech I read a quote from the RCMP's 2010 firearms report, where it said that the registry was used to apprehend the grandson of a gun owner. The grandson had stolen the gun owner's gun. Through the registry, the RCMP found out that it was indeed the grandson who had the gun and it was able to take the gun away from him.

Is our country not safer because that grandson is without a weapon today as a result of the registry?

Mr. John Carmichael: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague opposite for his question. I heard his presentation earlier and acknowledge his passion on this issue. Obviously this is an emotional issue.

At the end of the day, we have licensing procedures in place for those who are purchasing guns, whether a long gun or a handgun, in this country. Those procedures will continue to ensure that our Canadian population, our constituents, the people in my riding of Don Valley West and those of my colleague in the riding of Nipissing—Timiskaming are safe and that those who are using the guns properly register them. That is the non-criminal element.

As we heard from the member for Scarborough Southwest, with all of these guns being registered and re-registered, we know that the data are flawed.

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At the end of the day, we also know that criminals do not register guns. Many of the guns in my area, in Don Valley West and in Toronto, for those colleagues from the GTA, are stolen weapons. They are not registered weapons. They are a problem. We still have to find a much more secure way of eliminating that threat on our city streets.

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise this afternoon and speak on behalf of the citizens of my riding of Davenport on this important element of public safety, justice and transparency. We cannot forget that we are also speaking about financial transparency.

I want to bring up one small element of the argument put forward by my hon. colleague from Don Valley West. That is the same member who last week moved a private member's bill in the House that would have criminalized retirees who were volunteers on boards of condos and apartment buildings if they followed the municipal code and told residents that they could not fly the Canadian flag on their balconies.

That member introduced a private member's bill that contained an element that would have necessitated people going to jail for that. Yet today he stood and essentially blew up an important piece of public safety legislation because his party's big bosses put a muzzle on him and on every GTA MP on the government side who voted for the bill. The legislation has absolutely nothing to do with public safety in the GTA. My hon. colleague knows very well that we have a serious issue around gun control in Toronto. To take one brick out of the foundation of gun control in the country weakens the entire framework of gun control.

There is no question that the gun registry had some significant problems. The fact that the Liberals blew \$1 billion to set it up defies any kind of logic. It is one reason why they occupy that little corner over there today.

In the tabling of the legislation in the first place, the regions, aboriginal people, our hunters in the north were not properly brought into the process. That is another issue which our friends in that corner did not properly address.

I was swept up in the emotion of the debate, Mr. Speaker, and I forgot to apprise the House that I would be sharing my time with my hon. colleague from Alfred-Pellan.

Given what I just said about some of the flaws in how we arrived here, I want to remind the House that it was our late leader Jack Layton who took pains to build bridges in this debate. Anything the government wants to say about our members not following our understanding and beliefs about what is right in gun control legislation amazes me. Our late leader took pains to bring this debate to a sensible, mature place, when we spoke to the issues that were important to rural and urban Canadians, first nations and all those people in rural Canada who used long guns for sport.

We have to sit here day in and day out and listen to the bologna coming from the other side of the House. My hon. colleague from Don Valley West knows better than that. He knows that the preponderance of gun crimes in the city of Toronto are committed with guns that at one point were legal and were registered and yet those members want to blow up the registry. When police officers

collect those guns, they will have no way of tracking where they came from.

• (1715)

The hon. member across the way knows that, as do all members from the GTA. They know that a large percentage of illegal activity with the use of guns involves guns that were stolen from legal gun owners. We have a huge problem with stolen guns, stolen guns that were, at one point, legal and were registered. This is a way in which police officers are able to track down criminals.

Canadians hear the government day in and day out talk about how tough it is on criminals and how great it is with victims. However, when we get right down to it, the government is allowing organized crime in big cities like Toronto to essentially carry on their activities with less oversight, with less concern that they will ever be caught. That is part of what is going on with the ending of the registry.

On our side, we tried to address some of the most egregious elements of the registry to satisfy those who had problems with it. That is why many of our members were able to work with their constituents around this issue.

However, from my perspective, representing the people of Davenport, I have two things to say about this.

We recognize that there are people in Canada who, due to their lifestyle, use long guns. They use long guns for sport. They use long guns to protect their property from bears and from other animals that may create some danger. They do some hunting and trapping. I think there are many of goodwill and understanding in urban Canada who accept that rural culture also includes the ownership and, at times, the use of guns.

What troubles me about the debate, and certainly listening to it today, is I am waiting to hear a sensible voice from somebody on the other side who recognizes that we have a problem with this in urban Canada. I would like to hear that. I was waiting for my hon. colleague from Don Valley West to actually speak to the fact that in urban Canada we are very concerned about gun control. Any party in the House that aspires to true national leadership is going to build bridges between those cultures instead of what we hear today, which is pitting one region against the other, sowing seeds of doubt and disunity in our country. That is not leadership. That is certainly not the kind of leadership that Canadians need and it certainly not the kind of leadership we are getting from the government.

The last element I want to address is this. On the one hand, we have the government talking about protecting the privacy of Canadians and therefore it is going to do a billion dollar burning of records. On the other hand, it is going to collect the personal digital identifiers of anyone on the Internet. I am talking about lawful access. In other words, we are collecting all this data on the one hand and we are burning it on the other. The government is utterly confused about where it is on privacy issues and on civil liberty issues.

I look forward to my hon. colleague from Alfred-Pellan to carry on this conversation and I look forward to questions.

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• (1720)

Mr. Gordon Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to get up today and ask a question of my hon. colleague. I think he is very thoughtful about what he is putting forward. He is a new member and I congratulate him for getting up and speaking about the issue.

He mentioned that the government was in fact pitting urban Canadians against rural Canadians. I come from a very rural riding. I have a lot of hunters, farmers and sport shooters in my riding. They saw this as an attack on rural Canada brought in by the Liberal government of former Prime Minister Jean Chrétien back in the 1990s. They have been fighting to get rid of this gun registry since that time. They want to see it gone. They are very happy that we are now approaching the final vote on this.

However, my question for the hon. member is this. Does he not see the original introduction of the long gun registry as an attack on rural Canada, pitting rural Canadians against urban Canadians?

Mr. Andrew Cash: Mr. Speaker, that is an excellent question for a Liberal member of the House. I am not going to pretend to imagine what was going on in the minds of the brain trust over there, but our party, and certainly under the leadership of Jack Layton, accepted the fact that rural Canadians had an issue with the gun registry. That is very clear.

I would like you to attempt to understand that when you weaken the framework of gun control in our country, it is seen as an attack on urban Canada. We need to work together to strengthen gun control and not have a \$1 billion bonfire.

• (1725)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): I would remind hon. members to direct their comments and questions through the Chair.

The hon. member for Winnipeg North.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in the spirit of wanting to continue the dialogue on this issue, I think the Progressive Conservative Party had a different twist on gun registry years back. In fact, to go back to December 5, 1991, people might be surprised, but it was actually the Conservative Party that first came up with the idea of having a gun registry. Bill C-17 passed the Senate. Legal and constitutional affairs, chaired by Senator Nathan Nurgitz, wrote to the minister, at the time Kim Campbell, advising her to look carefully at the regulations and registration of all firearms.

Does the member believe there might still be some Progressive Conservatives out there who would still support it? We know the Conservatives do not support it, but what about progressive-minded Conservatives?

Mr. Andrew Cash: Mr. Speaker, I have only been here for a few months. I never expected on the one hand to be asked to speak for the Liberal Party and then on the other hand have to speak for the Conservatives. I do not know what I have done. It must be the sweater vest or something.

There was a time in Canadian society when there was an understanding that we endeavour to control the proliferation of weapons in our society, guns, handguns, long guns. I think at one point there was widespread buy-in from all parties. Unfortunately,

the ideological drift of the current government has blown a lot of that conversation away.

Mr. Robert Chisholm (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the member on doing a great job.

The NDP caucus in 2010, and subsequently, brought forward some very substantive amendments to try to deal with the concerns that had been expressed by government members and people across the country. Would the member suggest that was a constructive way to deal with this situation and something to which the government should have paid attention?

Mr. Andrew Cash: Mr. Speaker, the only way that we as a Parliament and the Canadian people can move ahead on these very significant public policy, public safety issues is through dialogue and the consideration of the real grievances on both sides.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is truly an honour for me to rise in the House to speak to Bill C-19 on abolishing the firearms registry. It is an honour for me as a woman, as a person from Laval, as a Quebecker and as a Canadian. It is also a great honour for me to tell my colleagues what the people of Alfred-Pellan think about abolishing the firearms registry.

The Conservatives often use demagogic terms and bogus contexts to get across their message on abolishing the firearms registry.

The members opposite often say that by abolishing the registry, hunters and farmers will no longer be viewed as criminals. I really did not know that the Conservatives viewed the farmers of Alfred-Pellan as criminals.

I will say a few words about the people of the riding I represent. Alfred-Pellan is a riding located on Laval Island, very near the greater Montreal area. One of the rather unusual characteristics of this eastern part of Laval is that it is 80% farmland. Many farmers and hunters live in my riding. No one thought to ask them what they really think about the firearms registry.

I know most of my neighbours, having lived in their community for 28 years now. Most of them want to keep the firearms registry. We all agree that changes need to be made, but the NDP has proposed some changes to the firearms registry and that is what we must continue to work on.

I would like to remind the members opposite that I too am a hunter and my family has been hunting for many generations. My cousins, my uncles and my father are all hunters and they all register their firearms. It is their pleasure to do so. They have no problem with that.

Are my colleagues on the other side of the House not indirectly treating members of my family as criminals? We must realize that the gun registry is very important to them. They have families; they respect the work of police officers across Canada; and they want them to have the tools to do a good job.

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Does this government really believe it can fool Canadians by spouting such nonsense and demagoguery? At times, it is sad to see how weak some of the Conservatives' arguments are in certain matters. It is also appalling to see this government lump everyone together. I would like to point out that not all the men and women who hunt and farm think like the members opposite.

This also proves that they are completely out of touch with the Canadian reality and that they do not understand the complexity of the problem before us. The Conservatives often tell us that, in any case, the gun registry data are outdated and inaccurate. I would like to remind the House that it was this government's responsibility to maintain the quality of the existing gun registry. The Conservatives failed to fulfill this responsibility and now they are telling us that the data are no longer up to date. Furthermore, in 2006, this government declared an amnesty on gun registration. The amnesty was renewed every year, which sadly weakened enforcement of the Firearms Act. Rarely have we seen such bad faith from a government in power.

I would also like to remind my colleagues that on May 2 last year, the current Prime Minister promised to work for all Canadians, no matter what their political affiliation or where they live. Unfortunately, it is clear that he has not kept his promise.

I would like to remind all MPs that, on six separate occasions, Quebec's National Assembly unanimously voted in favour of maintaining a universal firearms registration system. This registry is an extremely useful tool in my province. Among other things, it helps prevent crime. Police officers rely on it as they carry out their daily duties.

Does this government respect Quebeckers' position and choices? I do not think so. Let us talk about the information in the registry and why it is so important to the thousands of police officers who use it every day. They use it to find out how many firearms an individual owns so that they can respond accordingly. It is very important for anyone entering the home of a violent person to know how many firearms that individual owns.

• (1730)

The registry can also provide a starting point for an investigation. For example, if a firearm is found at the scene of a crime, the criminal responsible could be tracked down through the registry.

The members opposite talk about how most firearms are illegal and not registered because they are bought on the black market. I would like us to focus on the fact that some registered firearms are used to commit violent crimes. In the case of registered guns, the police can sometimes prevent crimes, and of course they can investigate and find the criminal involved.

Domestic violence is another interesting situation that often involves long guns. Long gun registration has reduced the number of crimes against women who are victims of domestic violence. The number of these crimes has dropped by about one-third since the long gun registry came into effect. The police can find out if an altercation involves a violent spouse who owns a long gun.

I would like to take the time to quote Robert Dutil, who testified before the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security on November 17, 2011. He spoke about another extremely important thing about the data in the firearms registry.

It also contributes to protecting individuals with mental health problems and their loved ones. Universal registration enables the chief firearms officer of Quebec to determine whether the weapons are in the possession of people under an application for an order to confine them to an institution, or calling for a psychiatric assessment.

In the second paragraph, he refers to Anastasia's Law. Before I continue, I would like to explain this law to the House. It is a Quebec law that was implemented after the Dawson College massacre, where Anastasia DeSousa was unfortunately killed. It bans the possession of firearms in educational institutions at all levels, in day care centres, and in public and school transportation. It also requires people to report any behaviour that could be a public safety concern.

Mr. Dutil continues by saying:

Under Anastasia's Law, the chief firearms officer is systematically informed of these applications. Between January 1, 2008 and November 1, 2011, 18,661 applications for orders were reported to him, and consultation of the registry made it possible to conduct more than 1,000 interventions to ensure the safety of persons. I am convinced that many lives were saved because of this. Abolishing the registry will limit the application of Anastasia's Law.

My colleagues and I have spoken a lot about prevention. As the hon. member for Chambly—Borduas mentioned, it is very difficult to measure prevention because we do not see the results. However, we are convinced that Anastasia's Law and the long gun registry are excellent preventive measures.

In order to unite all the different positions across Canada, the NDP has proposed several amendments to the long gun registry that should be taken into consideration. We are very aware that, since its implementation, the long gun registry has received its share of both praise and criticism. We agree. In addition to the delays and the significant cost overruns under the Liberal government, there are also other serious weaknesses in the registry.

The NDP is proposing, for instance, that the registry be modernized and adapted to current Canadian realities. Yes, preserving the data is possible. We can respect the aboriginal and rural populations while still providing police forces with the equipment they need to do their job. Here are the changes we propose: decriminalizing the failure to register a firearm for first-time offenders and issuing a ticket instead; indicating in the legislation that long gun owners would not have to pay registration costs; prohibiting the disclosure of information about firearms owners, except for the purpose of protecting the public or when ordered by a court or by law; and finally, creating a legal guarantee to protect aboriginal treaty rights.

I could continue for quite a while, but I see my time is up. I would be pleased to answer any questions from members.

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● (1735)

[English]

Mr. Greg Rickford (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, for the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for bringing a thoughtful perspective to this debate. Some of the points she raised had not necessarily been visited, so I appreciate that.

I want to back to an earlier discussion from another member and say that one of the most important things that happened in this place for me personally was when the defence critic for the opposition stood and said that no party should capture a specific grip on the rich military history of this country. I agreed with him and I told him that. It was in the context of the Veterans Affairs debate.

Similarly, I want to make it completely clear that, when it comes to the École polytechnique and those tragedies, we collectively mourn them. Nobody disputes that on this side of the House.

The Quebec registry is an interesting issue. I have no problem with the Quebec registry. What I have a problem with is the fact that my obligations as a citizen, even if I were not from Quebec, are to submit to federal legislation. Who in their right mind would expect somebody to allow the federal government to transfer information to the province without having any say in it? We have had a referendum and a Supreme Court of Canada decision which show that the people need to speak on that. Do not tread on me. My rights are to that federal legislation, not to the Province of Quebec.

● (1740)

[Translation]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question and for his compassion for the women killed at the École Polytechnique. I would remind the member that as federal representatives, we represent all Canadians. Among those Canadians are Quebeckers, who unanimously oppose the federal government, because they want to have the data from the firearms registry. Taxpayers paid millions of dollars for that database, only to be told that they cannot have it. It is unthinkable. It is very sad that the Conservatives cannot consider the vision of a united Canada and respect the other provinces that absolutely want to have the data.

[English]

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member presents a very cogent case. I appreciate that she has reminded the House of the alternatives that we brought forward to this House, which, regrettably, the government did not give due consideration to. The main argument that we have heard over and over from that side of the House has been that the law was criminalizing ordinary citizens, and yet when we proposed that we would decriminalize, the Conservatives were not willing to consider that change.

I would like the member to speak to that and speak to the fact that she is standing in this House as a person who is law-abiding. She and her family registered their guns. Could she elaborate on that and on the kinds of changes to that law that would make her constituents happy?

[Translation]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for that excellent question. As I was saying in my speech, we all agree that the face of Canada is changing. We have to update existing programs. We cannot just cut them. We are talking about decriminalizing the failure to register a firearm. The problem with the firearms registry is that failing to register a firearm is considered a crime. Respecting hunters would change things and make things easier. Then we could keep the data for the police to use to prevent acts of violence.

[English]

Mr. Lawrence Toet (Elmwood—Transcona, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Huron—Bruce.

It gives me great pleasure to speak in support of Bill C-19, the ending the long gun registry act. I would like to thank my hon. colleagues who have presented strong arguments in favour of the legislation that will finally end a measure that has had no clear benefit and many downsides.

The legislation before us, as with many bills we have introduced, is straightforward and to the point. We tell it like it is, plain and simple. There is no confusion as to what the bill will do. Just to ensure that my hon. colleagues are clear, however, I will briefly explain what the bill is all about.

First, it would eliminate the requirement to register long guns. Second, it would allow for the destruction of the registration information for non-restricted firearms that is in the Canadian firearms registry and under the control of the chief firearms officer. This is the extent of Bill C-19.

With the countless hours of debate and discussion that have taken place regarding this legislation and proposed bills that have come before it, one would think it is a far more complicated issue. In fact, I would argue that of all the words that have been written, spoken and perhaps sometimes even yelled in this House and in the media on this topic, the most important one is “wasteful”. This is a strong word, but it is the only accurate word to describe the long gun registry.

What do we mean by wasteful? The dictionary defines wasteful as using or spending too much. That is the perfect way to describe the long gun registry. It has used up a tremendous amount of time and energy for millions of Canadians. This includes the time wasted by millions of law-abiding long gun owners to go through the unnecessary registration process.

In fact, up until 2006 when our government made amendments to the rules, Canadians were expected to provide physical verification of their rifles and shotguns. We can only imagine what this adds up to in terms of wasted time and energy on the part of these individuals.

Even with the changes put in place in 2006, individuals registering their rifles and shotguns must still answer a series of questions by phone. We must ask ourselves, is this truly an effective form of gun control? Do we really believe that criminals will go through the registration process, diligently sitting through a telephone conversation to ensure their non-restricted firearm is properly registered? The answer is no. The individuals wasting their time registering their firearms are the law-abiding hunters, farmers and sports shooters in Canada, in other words, ordinary Canadians who are doing their best to comply with the heavy-handed registration system.

The long gun registry has also proven to be a waste of time for the police officers it was originally purported to protect. We have heard the testimony of several police officers who appeared before committee and told us the registry is inaccurate and unreliable. One Saskatoon police officer who testified in committee put it this way:

For officers using the registry, trusting in the inaccurate and unverified information contained therein, tragedy looms around the door.

Knowing what I do about the registry, I cannot use the information contained in the registry to swear out a search warrant. To do so would be a criminal act. Thus I cannot in good conscience tell any officer, junior or senior, to place his faith in the results of a query of the Canada firearms registry online.

This is a chilling indictment of the long gun registry. Not only is it a waste of time for police to rely on the data contained in the long gun registry, it also creates a false sense of security that could lead to deadly consequences for our brave police officers.

It is impossible to put a price tag on the amount of time Canadians have wasted on this long gun registry over the course of the last 16 years. What we can do, however, is put a price tag on the second part of the definition of wasteful, that which refers to spending too much. The state broadcaster has done just that. The CBC has estimated that the long gun registry has cost Canadians in excess of \$2 billion. This is an affront to Canadian taxpayers.

● (1745)

Worse still is the fact that despite our government's ongoing efforts since 2006 to pass legislation that would eliminate the long gun registry, it still remains in place today, costing millions of dollars each and every year. This wasteful spending is an insult to ordinary citizens who place their trust in their government to spend their taxes wisely on policies and actions that keep them safe.

We know that Canadians are willing to pay for effective crime prevention measures. They understand and accept the need to follow reasonable and fair regulations as part of a nation that adheres to the rule of law. In return, they deserve nothing less than a government that is careful with their money, while taking into consideration the need to invest in areas that will build a better, stronger and safer Canada.

It has always been our government's commitment, first and foremost, to keep our streets and communities safe. In the matter of gun control, this responsibility translates into making the right decisions on how to best prevent violent gun crimes. It has been shown empirically that the current gun licensing system is one of the best tools at our disposal, and it is a system that is widely accepted by gun owners as a necessary and fair measure. That is why Bill C-19 will not make any changes to this system. Obtaining a valid

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firearms licence will still require individuals to undergo the Canadian firearms safety course and background checks to determine their eligibility to own a firearm. Further, we will make no changes to the regulations in place regarding restricted and prohibited firearms.

This legislation is the work of a responsible government that is committed to focusing our resources and efforts on what works rather than pouring money into an ineffective measure that does not. It is the work of a government that stands by its commitment to Canadians.

When we first came to power more than six years ago, we told Canadians that we would crack down on crime, put the rights of victims first, and strengthen our police forces. We have delivered on that pledge. Over the past six years we have introduced legislation that gives victims a voice at parole board hearings and which ensures that offenders cannot pull out of their parole board hearing at the last minute. We have passed legislation to crack down on violent gun crimes and to make sure that those who commit serious crimes face serious consequences. We have passed legislation that gives our police officers better tools to do their jobs, tools that are actually effective. Even if we had a well run long gun registry that remained within its estimated budget, it still would not prevent violent gun crimes. It still would not change the fact that criminals do not register their firearms.

In conclusion, the time for endless words and debate is over. Now is the time that we must take action and eliminate the long gun registry. I call on all hon. members to look at the facts and listen to their constituents, particularly those in rural and remote areas of Canada. I call on all members to make the responsible choice and support this bill.

● (1750)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am trying to understand the various Conservative members who have already spoken. We just heard once again that a gun owner must take a course—or perhaps this was said by a previous speaker—and obtain a permit to use a gun. When these two requirements are fulfilled, the owner is registered somewhere.

It is like buying a car: we are registered right away and we are in the registry. It could be very easy to create this registry, it could be very easy to develop it and very easy to maintain it, if there were goodwill. Could the member comment on this?

[*English*]

Mr. Lawrence Toet: Mr. Speaker, that is very much the reason behind why the long gun registry is so wasteful. I talked about waste. It is a duplication of a process that is already in place. There are measures to protect Canadians. There are measures to make sure that those who have guns should be able to have them. They have to go through a licensing process. They have to go through a background check, as I mentioned in my speech.

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Those processes are already there. Why would we add a very costly, to the tune of a billion dollars, system to enhance something that is already there? That is the reason we need to scrap the long gun registry.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the debate continues, it is important that we get to the truth and the nub of the debate.

Earlier there were comments made by members that there was no testimony with regard to the impact the registry has had on suicide rates. I would like to read into the record some testimony and get a comment from the member. The Quebec suicide prevention association told the committee that the long gun registry, combined with licensing of owners and safe storage regulations, has been associated with a dramatic reduction in the number of gun deaths, on average 255 suicides and 50 homicides annually. That information was gleaned from a study that was done by the Quebec public health institute.

I wonder if the member from the government side understands that the gun registry was never intended to stop gangs. That is a lot of Canadian lives, 255 suicides and 50 other gun-related deaths, that the association believes were reduced by the gun registry.

Does the member not agree that that has had a tremendous impact?

Mr. Lawrence Toet: Mr. Speaker, the impact the gun registry has had is to deal with looking at citizens, our farmers, our sports shooters, and our hunters, as if they created a problem with the long guns. To tie in these members of the public and say that they are part of the problem with suicides is a very unfair thing to do. They are not part of the problem. They are not contributing to the problem.

We need to understand that the safeguards are in place already, as we have said, with the registry, the background checks. Those are the things that really, truly deal with the issues of people who may be prone to using guns in an inappropriate manner. That has already been covered off.

• (1755)

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am struck by how different today's NDP is from the old NDP. Back in the days of the fight over Bill C-68, NDP premiers in Manitoba and Saskatchewan at the time were adamantly opposed to the long gun registry.

Could my hon. friend talk about how disconnected today's NDP is from the needs and aspirations of law-abiding citizens?

Mr. Lawrence Toet: Mr. Speaker, definitely we see a disconnect. We hear it constantly on the streets. I hear it in my riding. I hear this question at least once a week as to what the purpose of this long gun registry is and has it had any effect or impact.

We also hear it from police officers. I have friends who are police officers, who can very clearly attest to the fact that they have no trust or confidence in the registry. It does not give them the feeling that they have some information they can rely on when they go to a door. In fact it scares them because the information is so unreliable it actually works counter to what they are trying to accomplish.

There is definitely a disconnect between what citizens are saying to us and what we are hearing from the other side of the House.

* * *

FINANCIAL SYSTEM REVIEW ACT

BILL S-5—NOTICE OF TIME ALLOCATION MOTION

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Bill S-5, the financial system review act, is a very important and generally uncontroversial bill.

The NDP member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour has even said that his party would be supporting it at second reading, probably even at third reading. The hon. member for Wascana has described it as routine.

It is very important that the bill pass by April 20, so that Canada's financial system can continue to operate and be the world's soundest banking system.

To accommodate sufficient time for committee study, which members in debate so far have said is their most important priority, I have attempted to seek an agreement with the other parties, including two offers made right here in the House. Unfortunately, it appears that the New Democratic Party is simply looking to run up the score and force as many time allocation motions as possible, even on routine bills it says it will support.

For that reason, I am compelled to advise that agreement could not be reached under the provisions of Standing Order 78(1) or 78(2) with respect to the second reading stage of Bill S-5, An Act to amend the law governing financial institutions and to provide for related and consequential matters.

Under the provisions of Standing Order 78(3), I give notice that a minister of the Crown will propose at the next sitting a motion to allot a specific number of days or hours for the consideration and disposal of proceedings at the said stage.

* * *

ENDING THE LONG-GUN REGISTRY ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-19, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Firearms Act, be read the third time and passed.

Mr. Ben Lobb (Huron—Bruce, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise today with respect to Bill C-19, the ending the long-gun registry act. It is no secret that our government places a high priority on cracking down on crime and making our streets safer.

Since day one, we have been very clear that we have worked hard to ensure victims are respected, offenders are punished and law enforcement officials have the tools they need to do their jobs. It is also no secret that when we say we will do something, we follow through on it.

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Over the last six years, our government has passed several pieces of legislation to tackle violent crime. We passed mandatory prison sentences for gun crimes, as well as reverse bail provisions for serious offences, a lot of changes that the Canadian public has felt were long overdue. Our government has also passed legislation that, among other things, created a new broad-based offence to target drive-by and other intentional shootings that involve the reckless disregard for the life or safety of others.

Those convicted of such acts are now subject to a mandatory minimum sentence of four years in prison with a maximum period of imprisonment of 14 years. If these acts are committed by or for a criminal organization, or with a restricted or prohibited firearm, such as a handgun or an automatic weapon, the minimum sentence is increased to five years.

However, our work does not end there. We have told Canadians that we would waste no time introducing legislation to repeal the long gun registry and this is exactly what we have done. With Bill C-19, we are making good on another commitment to Canadians.

I will start by noting that the issue of effective firearm control is an important one, one that has been debated in this country for years. All of us see the fallout from gun related crimes in Canada. The media headlines remind us almost daily of the tragic consequences of violent gun crime. Sadly, in some places people do not feel safe in their neighbourhoods or, worse, in their own homes. In this light, it is imperative that we have effective ways of dealing with crime.

As I said at the outset, our government has been committed to making our streets and communities safer for all Canadians for the past six years. We followed up that commitment with concrete and tangible initiatives to get tough with offenders and to help prevent crime before it happens. This is why I hope that hon. members will consider this legislation with an open mind and with a view of moving forward on this long overdue change to our law books.

We all want to ensure that guns do not fall into the hands of offenders or are used to commit grievous crimes. I believe that we are all committed to the principles of balance and common sense. That is really what the bill before us today is all about.

It is about ensuring that we continue to preserve and enhance those measures that do work to reduce crime and protect Canadians. However, it is also about ensuring that we do not unnecessarily penalize millions of honest and law-abiding citizens with rules that absolutely have no effect on crime prevention or on reducing gun related crime.

Our government has said many times that the long gun registry unfairly treats owners of rifles and shotguns like criminals, like so many of the residents in my riding of Huron—Bruce. We stand behind these law-abiding Canadians and we are telling them that we will no longer make them feel like criminals.

We have also said many times that the long gun registry is wasteful and ineffective. First, it is definitely a waste of taxpayer dollars, and we have known this right since day one. The CBC estimates that the long gun registry has cost in excess of \$2 billion. That is money that could be better used to support crime prevention, like we so often hear, and give police more tools to do their jobs.

Second, it is ineffective because there is no evidence that the long gun registry has ever stopped a single crime or saved a single life. In fact, in committee hearings, some of the policing community have said themselves that they find the registry inaccurate and ineffective. That is why we are moving ahead the legislation before us.

What does that do to Bill C-19? First and foremost, the legislation before us today removes the need to register non-restricted firearms, such as rifles and shotguns, tools that people use on any farm from coast to coast. These are not generally the guns used to commit homicides.

● (1800)

That said, Bill C-19 would not do away with the need to properly license all firearms owners. All businesses and individuals will still need to possess a valid firearms licence in order to legally purchase a firearm. To obtain a licence, they must be able to pass the required Canadian firearms safety course and to comply with firearms safe storage and transportation requirements. They will also need to pass a background check performed by the chief firearms officers or their representatives who employ law enforcement systems and resources to review individuals' criminal records. Any history of treatment for mental illness associated with violence or history of a violent behaviour against another person will be taken into consideration.

Bill C-19 would retain licensing requirements for all gun owners while doing away with the need for honest, law-abiding citizens to register their non-restricted rifles or shotguns, a requirement that is unfair and ineffective.

What else would this legislation do? Bill C-19 includes a provision for the complete destruction of all records related to the registration of non-restricted firearms that is currently contained within the Canadian firearms registry. This would ensure that the private information of millions of Canadians who have registered their non-restricted firearms in good faith is not distributed to other entities. They did not sign up for that.

These law-abiding long gun owners provided their personal information in good faith to our government for one reason, and one reason alone: to be added to the national long gun registry; nothing more, nothing less. We cannot simply provide this information to other organizations or governments without the express consent of each one of these citizens. Therefore, we must and we will ensure that records are destroyed.

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We have heard loud and clear from Canadians who own non-restricted rifles and long guns that they want the long gun registry eliminated. I can say that virtually every weekend I have been home since I was elected, and even before then, this is what I have heard from the constituents of Huron—Bruce. They want to ensure that their private information is not distributed to other entities.

What is proposed under Bill C-19 is, therefore, not a fundamental overhaul or a scrapping of the entire licensing and registration system. Rather, what is proposed are changes that would do away with the need to register legally acquired and used rifles and shotguns that are largely owned by Canadians living in rural or remote areas. This would ensure that scarce government resources can be directed toward initiatives that make our streets safer.

As the Prime Minister has noted, we want to ensure that what we do is actually effective. Certainly, in today's economic climate, every dollar must be accounted for. This includes putting more police on our streets, fighting organized crime at its source and combating gun smuggling. The government has already done a lot in this regard. Our goal is to do a lot more by directing our efforts to where they can be most effective in the fight against crime and gun crime in particular.

Our government is determined to maintain an effective firearms control system while, at the same time, combating the criminal use of firearms and getting tough on crime. This again is really what the bill before us today is all about. It is about ensuring that we invest in initiatives that work and that we continue to protect the safety and security of Canadians without unnecessarily punishing people because of where they live or how they make a living.

Now is the time to support the legislation before us today and stop penalizing honest, law-abiding citizens, just like the honest, law-abiding citizens of Huron—Bruce.

• (1805)

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to ask my hon. colleague for some comments on what I am about to read. On February 6, a week ago today, the member for Fort McMurray—Athabasca said in the House, “an individual could raise more money by speaking about ending the long gun registry in politics than any other issue in my riding”.

Has my colleague opposite used the long gun registry to raise money in his riding? How many of his colleagues have used the long gun registry to raise money in their ridings? Does he think that is an appropriate way to honour all the vulnerable Canadians who have suffered at the hands of criminals who used guns, whether it be long guns or short guns, to perpetrate crimes?

Mr. Ben Lobb: Mr. Speaker, I will go back to a statement the member from Timmins made a couple of years ago when talking about costs. I think that is what we are all concerned about today, the balance between cost and public safety. On November 6, 2009, the member from Timmins said:

What rural people were concerned with is wasting money tracking down your grandfather's 20-gauge rifle, as opposed to putting money into urban gun violence.

I think that statement speaks for itself.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when the Conservative members of Parliament stand up, they are

very clear in terms of their belief that the gun registry has been completely useless. My question is actually fairly simple and straightforward and I would ask for the best answer the member can come up with.

Does the member believe that the gun registry, in any way, indirectly or directly, has saved a life in Canada? Does he believe that could possibly have occurred even once because of the gun registry?

• (1810)

Mr. Ben Lobb: Mr. Speaker, the member should not take my word for it. He should take the word of the experts who testified at committee. They did not believe that it had.

I would also like to talk about what happens here with property rights. A former RCMP officer stated:

Many Saskatchewan residents have been charged with a criminal offence simply because they forgot to renew their licence. As a former police officer, I cannot support convicting farmers who need to use a firearm for pest control, and I submit to you that some of these same people were veterans, who should not have their freedom, paid for in blood, vanish with the stroke of a bureaucrat's pen.

Unfortunately for the member, it was his party that did this to people such as—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Questions and comments. The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs.

Mr. Greg Rickford (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, for the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's contribution to this debate. From the outset, we have been in the same intake class and it has been great to work with him on this matter.

With the exception of the two NDP MPs from Thunder Bay who stand shoulder to shoulder with us on this issue and understand the government's record, the emphasis of the debate from the other side of the House ought to be placed on the process whereby someone actually gets a possession and acquisition licence and the screening that is involved. That, in fact, prevents a lot of the unfortunate accidents, as small a percentage as they are of total gun crimes.

Would the member talk about this government's record and commitment to that part of gun ownership here in Canada?

Mr. Ben Lobb: Mr. Speaker, with respect to the member's point, the important thing to focus on is the licensing part of it and what is involved for people who may not have a licence today, or young people coming up through the ranks who want to participate. There are over 12 hours of training via a certified instructor who will provide not only a written test but also a physical test to ensure they are competent. In addition to that, they will need to apply for their acquisition licensing, which is where the chief firearms officer will come into place and that is where the screening takes place.

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It is unfortunate that the members of the opposition have overlooked all of that. They missed that in the debate. They focused on the headlines instead of the actual fact that it is preventable on paper.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to inform you that I will be sharing my time with the member for Winnipeg North.

I am pleased to take part in today's debate on Bill C-19, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Firearms Act, which seeks to remove the requirement to register firearms that are neither prohibited nor restricted. It also provides for the destruction of existing records, held in the Canadian Firearms Registry and under the control of chief firearms officers, that relate to the registration of such firearms. This bill is based exclusively on the Conservatives' right-wing ideology rather than on facts.

Police officers say that the registry is effective. It is an essential tool used by the police in implementing preventive measures and enforcing prohibition orders. It is used to ensure that any firearm can be taken from a person should the situation warrant it. It facilitates police investigations. When the police find a firearm at the scene of a crime, they can trace it back to its rightful owner. On a number of occasions, offenders have been found guilty of aiding and abetting murders or other crimes, partly because a registered firearm was left at the scene of the crime.

The registry allows the police to determine whether a firearm is legal or illegal. Without information on the people who legally own firearms and the firearms that they possess, the police cannot charge anyone with illegal possession. The registry allows the police to easily trace firearms, which assists in police investigations of illegal trafficking. The registry reduces the possibility of finding legal firearms on the black market.

We know that the Conservatives do not like evidence, but Statistics Canada recently reported a drop in the number of firearm-related homicides, mainly due to a drop in the number of shotgun- and rifle-related murders. Firearms were involved in 32% of murders last year, which is slightly higher than the proportion of stabbing deaths at 31%. Handguns accounted for approximately two-thirds of the firearm-related homicides, while long guns accounted for 23%. The remaining murders involved sawed-off shotguns, automatic weapons or other firearm-like weapons.

According to the RCMP's 2002 data, long guns are the most commonly used firearm in spousal homicides. Over the past decade, 71% of spousal homicides involved shotguns and rifles.

• (1815)

[*English*]

The Liberal Party joins Canada's police chiefs and the majority of Canadians in the belief that scrapping a tool used over 20,000 times a day by our police forces is not in Canada's best interest.

Unfortunately, the gun registry is set to become the latest casualty of the Conservative government's ideological attack on facts and evidence. There is no respect for last year's vote that definitely said

we should not abolish the gun registry. However, the Conservatives have just brought the issue back up.

Some provinces have expressed interest in maintaining provincial registries to keep their citizens safe. Quebec has been notable in this regard. It has not just asked for it but demanded and pleaded for it on many occasions. For this reason the data collected over the last 16 years should be preserved so that provinces can salvage this important policing tool, which has been paid for by taxpayers over and over again.

We are also concerned about the reports of increasing pressure being put on the government by the gun lobby to scrap the licensing of firearm owners in addition to eliminating the registry completely. We are already preparing for the next battle. The Conservatives must be prepared to stand up for the interests of public safety and resist the call for complete deregulation.

Under Bill C-19, the registrar of firearms would no longer issue or keep records of registration certificates for non-restricted firearms, commonly known as long guns. As registration certificates would no longer be required to possess a non-restricted firearm, certain offences under the Firearms Act would be amended and repealed. The Criminal Code would also be amended so that failure to hold a registration certification for a non-restricted firearm would not give rise to any of the offences related to unauthorized possession of a firearm. Therefore, police could no longer seize these non-restricted firearms.

Although Bill C-19 would remove the need to hold a registration certificate for non-restricted firearms, it does not change the requirement that people need to hold a licence in order to possess a firearm and undergo a background check and pass a required safety course. However, while the licensing process screens gun owners for risk, a one-time registration holds gun owners accountable for their guns. If passed the bill would allow a licensed individual to acquire an unlimited number of guns without raising any flags. Members should try to figure out the consistency of that.

The bill would also remove mandatory licensing checks required when transferring gun ownership from a person or business. Currently, the licence has to be verified in the electronic system or through a phone call to the registry office before someone can buy a gun. However, Bill C-19 proposes that gun shop owners should simply visually check a gun licence, which, like other types of cards such as health cards and drivers' licences, can be forged.

Verifying gun licenses has been a factor in different crimes. Victims have been shot by offenders who had been under a prohibition order and had their licences cancelled. Although the licenses were removed from the offenders' possession, they were still able to purchase a gun legally, as the seller was not required to ensure that the licence was valid.

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Finally, as a consequence of the registry's repeal, a gun merchant is not obliged to keep records of gun sales. In 1977, Canada passed legislation requiring gun merchants to keep a record of gun sale transactions. The obligation was removed with the introduction of the Firearms Act, as guns would be registered to the owner at the point of sale. What will happen now?

This is where the controversy stems. There has always been a history of gun control in Canada and this is to what we defer. Gun control in Canada dates back to the 19th century. It has been required that all handguns be registered since 1934 and a central registry for restricted firearms was established and operated by the RCMP in 1951. A classification system consisting of prohibited weapons, the most severe classification, and restricted and non-restricted weapons has existed since 1968. However, the classification system has not been updated since 1995.

Prohibited weapons, including handguns, automatic weapons, rifles and shotguns, have been adapted by either sawing or cutting. If so, what are we to make of certain measures classified in the legislation, wherein individuals could possess a prohibited firearm if it were registered when the firearm became prohibited and if they had continually held a valid registration certificate since 1998? The firearms legislation refers to these firearms as having been grandfathered.

Therefore, although the Conservatives say they are saving money by eliminating the gun registry, they are actually adding to the confusion. Now people do not know what they can or should register and which firearms are grandfathered. Restricted firearms are allowed only for approved purposes such as target shooting, or as part of a collection. Firearms that are neither prohibited nor restricted, such as hunting rifles or shotguns, are referred to as non-restricted firearms, or long guns.

• (1820)

The Firearms Act was passed by Parliament in 1995 and came into force in 1998. It was established in response to the shooting deaths of 14 women at École polytechnique in Montreal in 1989. It requires both a licence for the owner and a registration certificate for all firearms. This is not a big deal. All transfers of firearms require approval so that a new registration certificate can be issued to the new owner. Again, this is not a big deal. Instead, the registration requirement is eliminated under Bill C-19. We have seen that crimes have gone down as a result of long guns being registered.

[*Translation*]

In May 2006, the Auditor General of Canada issued a report that examined the Canadian firearms program. In the report, she criticized not only the cost of the registry, but also the quality of the data and how the registry was being maintained. Since that time, several of those flaws have been corrected, because oversight and administration of the registry were assigned to the RCMP in 2006.

The Auditor General confirmed that the cost of developing and implementing the program was \$1 million over 10 years. However, that money has now been squandered and we can never get it back. The RCMP estimates that the current cost of maintaining the firearms registry is less than \$2 million a year, that is, less than 15 cents per Canadian per year. According to the RCMP's external

report, eliminating the firearms registry will save only a few million dollars.

[*English*]

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was not going to rise but so many things that were said by the member opposite are not true. If he had been at committee when we received testimony in regard to the reduction in homicides using firearms, he would have heard experts at the committee who pointed out to us that there is no connection between the gun registry and a slight drop in murders. The murder rate in Canada has been dropping since the 1970s. This is due more to changing demographics in Canada's population, and our higher proportion of seniors, than anything else. And we heard that the homicide rate in the U.S. is dropping more rapidly than in Canada. If the gun registry were responsible for this, why would it be dropping in the U.S. more rapidly than in Canada? We have a serious disconnect here. This member should address that.

There are other bogus claims made, such as the police using the registry 20,000 times a day. This was addressed at the standing committee. It was clearly pointed out that this is a bogus claim. Also, that the gun registry helps them get rid of guns in a home where there might be a—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please.

The hon. member for Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: Mr. Speaker I have to remind the member that this is the Parliament of Canada. He is pandering to U.S. lobbyists when he makes comparisons to U.S. statistics that indicate that the U.S. crime rate has gone down. I was not even at committee and I have a report here that says that the Quebec suicide prevention association told committee that the long gun registry combined with licensing of owners and safe storage regulations have been associated with a dramatic reduction in the number of gun deaths, on average, 255 suicides and 50 homicides annually.

I am not making this up. It is word for word from *Hansard*. I could table it. I am not sure what the member was listening to. Perhaps he was listening to some debate happening in the United States but this is the Parliament of Canada. He should have been paying attention to the proper committee affiliated with this bill.

• (1825)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Paulina Ayala (Honoré-Mercier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government's interference in provincial matters is unacceptable. It is one thing to no longer invest in this registry, but is quite another to unilaterally decide what the provinces would do with the data for which Canadians have paid. What are we to make of this intrusion into the decisions by certain provinces to keep collecting data? How far will this ideology go? Where will this denial of provincial jurisdictions end? What does the hon. member think?

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Mr. Massimo Pacetti: Mr. Speaker, it is not necessarily a question of provincial or federal jurisdiction. The data are already at the federal level. I would like the data to stay there because people move firearms from one province to another. I have constituents who have transferred their firearms from Ontario to Quebec, then from Quebec to Ontario. I would like us to have all the data.

Quebec would like to have the data from the registry. I do not see why the Conservative government could not transfer the existing information for which Canadians have paid. It would save lives. We have the proof.

[*English*]

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I did not have an opportunity to hear all of the testimony during the course of the hearings that were held on the bill. However, at the meetings that I did attend, I was really taken by the lack of push-back by the gun lobby on it. I know that the chief of police in Calgary had said that he did not think it really served any purpose. Beyond that, he added that if we do have one, it should be provincial and there should be no charge for it. That is about as aggressive testimony as I heard during the sessions I attended.

I did hear a lengthy list of witnesses, such as the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, the Canadian Police Association, the Police Association of Nova Scotia, the Nova Scotia Chiefs of Police Association, and medical health experts, including the Canadian Medical Association, suicide prevention agencies and transition homes, all of whom stood and said, yes, there is a good purpose for the registry.

To quote the former leader of the Bloc, Gilles Duceppe, a party that I do not really quote a lot, he made a good point in this particular case. He said that it costs a lot upfront, but it is like renovating a house: if the costs go over budget, we do not burn the house down.

Would my colleague agree that by casting the information aside, the government in this case is really scorching the earth with it?

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for Cape Breton—Canso because I know he has worked extremely hard on this file.

The Liberal questions are always the hardest questions to answer, but I will try.

Basically, more information is better than no information. That is what we see in this case. I do not see how the police forces could say they do not need the information. If they have the information, they are saying they can use it.

Obviously, the Conservative government has not done a good job in conveying the information, and that is what it is now using as an excuse in saying that the information is incomplete. A couple of cycles of registration could be provided free to gun owners and they would be more than happy to register their guns, from what I am hearing.

As my hon. colleague mentioned, the RCMP is also in favour of the registry because the cost of keeping it would be less than \$2 million a year.

[*Translation*]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—INVESTMENT CANADA ACT

The House resumed from February 9 consideration of the motion.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): It being 6:30 p.m., pursuant to order made Thursday, February 9, 2012, the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion of the hon. member for London—Fanshawe relating to the business of supply.

Call in the members.

And the bells having rung:

● (1855)

(The House divided on the motion, which was negated on the following division:)

(*Division No. 124*)

YEAS

Members

Allen (Welland)	Andrews
Angus	Atamanenko
Aubin	Ayala
Bélanger	Bellavance
Bennett	Benskin
Blanchette	Blanchette-Lamothe
Boivin	Borg
Boulerice	Boutin-Sweet
Brisson	Brousseau
Caron	Casey
Cash	Charlton
Chicoine	Chisholm
Choquette	Chow
Cleary	Coderre
Comartin	Côté
Cotler	Crowder
Cuzner	Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Davies (Vancouver East)	Day
Dion	Dionne Labelle
Donnelly	Doré Lefebvre
Dubé	Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	Dusault
Easter	Eyking
Freeman	Garneau
Genest	Giguère
Godin	Goodale
Gravelle	Groguhé
Harris (Scarborough Southwest)	Hassainia
Hsu	Hughes
Hyer	Jacob
Julian	Karygiannis
Lamoureux	Larose
Latendresse	Laverdière
LeBlanc (Beauséjour)	LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)
Leslie	Liu
Mai	Marston
Martin	Masse
May	McCallum
McGuinty	Michaud
Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)	Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)
Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)	Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)
Murray	Nantel
Nicholls	Nunez-Melo
Pacetti	Papillon
Patry	Péclet
Perreault	Pilon
Plamondon	Quach
Rafferty	Ravignat
Raynault	Regan
Rousseau	Sandhu
Savoie	Scarpaleggia
Sellah	Sgro

Government Orders

Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor)
 Sims (Newton—North Delta)
 Sitsabaiesan
 Stewart
 Thibeault
 Trudeau
 Valeriotte — 115

St-Denis
 Stoffer
 Tremblay
 Turmel

Weston (Saint John)
 Williamson
 Woodworth
 Young (Vancouver South)

Wilks
 Wong
 Young (Oakville)
 Zimmer — 148

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion lost.

* * *

[*English*]

COPYRIGHT MODERNIZATION ACT

The House resumed from February 10 consideration of the motion that Bill C-11, An Act to amend the Copyright Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the motion that this question be now put.

The Speaker: The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the previous question at the second reading stage of Bill C-11.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Speaker, if you seek it I believe you would find agreement to apply the vote from the previous motion to the current motion, with the Conservatives voting yes.

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent to proceed in this fashion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Ms. Chris Charlton: Mr. Speaker, NDP members will be voting no.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: Mr. Speaker, Liberal members will be voting no.

Mr. Louis Plamondon: Mr. Speaker, the Bloc will be voting no.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, the Green Party votes no.

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Goldring: I vote yes.

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(*Division No. 125*)

YEAS

Members

Ablonczy	Adams
Adler	Aglukkaq
Albas	Albrecht
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)	Allison
Ambler	Ambrose
Anders	Anderson
Armstrong	Aspin
Baird	Bateman
Benoit	Bernier
Blaney	Block
Boughen	Braid
Breitkreuz	Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)	Brown (Barrie)
Bruinooge	Butt
Calandra	Calkins
Cannan	Carmichael
Carrie	Chong
Clarke	Clement
Daniel	Davidson
Dechert	Del Mastro
Devolin	Dreeshen
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	Dykstra
Fantino	Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)
Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)	Flaherty
Gill	Glover
Goguen	Goldring
Goodyear	Gosal
Gourde	Grewal
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)	Hawn
Hayes	Hiebert
Hillyer	Hoback
Hoepfner	Holder
James	Jean
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Kent
Komarnicki	Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lake	Lauzon
Lebel	Leef
Leitch	Lemieux
Leung	Lizon
Lobb	Lukiwski
MacKenzie	Mayes
McColeman	McLeod
Menegakis	Menzies
Merrifield	Miller
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	
Moore (Fundy Royal)	O'Connor
Nicholson	Oda
Obhrai	Paradis
Oliver	Paradis
Payne	Penashue
Poillievre	Preston
Raitt	Rajotte
Rathgeber	Reid
Rempel	Richards
Richardson	Rickford
Ritz	Saxton
Schellenberger	Seeback
Shea	Shipley
Shory	Smith
Sopuck	Sorenson
Stanton	Storseth
Sweet	Tilson
Toet	Toews
Trost	Trotter
Truppe	Tweed
Uppal	Valcourt
Van Kesteren	Van Loan
Vellacott	Wallace
Warawa	Warkentin
Watson	Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)

Ablonczy
 Adler
 Albas
 Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
 Ambler
 Anders
 Armstrong
 Baird
 Benoit
 Blaney
 Boughen
 Breitkreuz
 Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
 Bruinooge
 Calandra
 Cannan
 Carrie
 Clarke
 Daniel

Adams
 Aglukkaq
 Albrecht
 Allison
 Ambrose
 Anderson
 Aspin
 Bateman
 Bernier
 Block
 Braid
 Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
 Brown (Barrie)
 Butt
 Calkins
 Carmichael
 Chong
 Clement
 Davidson

Government Orders

Dechert	Del Mastro
Devolin	Dreeshen
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	Dykstra
Fantino	Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)
Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)	Flaherty
Gill	Glover
Goguen	Goldring
Goodyear	Gosal
Gourde	Grewal
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)	Hawn
Hayes	Hiebert
Hillyer	Hoback
Hoepfner	Holder
James	Jean
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Kent
Komarnicki	Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lake	Lauzon
Lebel	Leef
Leitch	Lemieux
Leung	Lizon
Lobb	Lukiwski
MacKenzie	Mayes
McColeman	McLeod
Menegakis	Menzies
Merrifield	Miller
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	
Moore (Fundy Royal)	
Nicholson	O'Connor
Obhrai	Oda
Oliver	Paradis
Payne	Penashue
Poillievre	Preston
Raitt	Rajotte
Rathgeber	Reid
Rempel	Richards
Richardson	Rickford
Ritz	Saxton
Schellenberger	Seeback
Shea	Shipleigh
Shory	Smith
Sopuck	Sorenson
Stanton	Storseth
Sweet	Tilson
Toet	Toews
Trost	Trotier
Truppe	Tweed
Uppal	Valcourt
Van Kesteren	Van Loan
Vellacott	Wallace
Warawa	Warkentin
Watson	Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to
Sky Country)	
Weston (Saint John)	Wilks
Williamson	Wong
Woodworth	Young (Oakville)
Young (Vancouver South)	Zimmer — 148

NAYS

Members

Allen (Welland)	Andrews
Angus	Atamanenko
Aubin	Ayala
Bélangier	Bellavance
Bennett	Benskin
Blanchette	Blanchette-Lamothe
Boivin	Borg
Boulerice	Boutin-Sweet
Brisson	Brosseau
Caron	Casey
Cash	Charlton
Chicoine	Chisholm
Choquette	Chow
Cleary	Coderre
Comartin	Côté
Cotler	Crowder
Cuzner	Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Davies (Vancouver East)	Day
Dion	Dionne Labelle
Donnelly	Doré Lefebvre
Dubé	Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	Dusseau

Easter	Eyking
Freeman	Garneau
Genest	Giguère
Godin	Goodale
Gravelle	Groguhé
Harris (Scarborough Southwest)	Hassainia
Hsu	Hughes
Hyer	Jacob
Julian	Karygiannis
Lamoureux	Larose
Latendresse	Laverdière
LeBlanc (Beauséjour)	LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)
Leslie	Liu
Mai	Marston
Martin	Masse
May	McCallum
McGuinity	Michaud
Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)	Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)
Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)	Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)
Murray	Nantel
Nicholls	Nunez-Melo
Pacetti	Papillon
Patry	Péclet
Perreault	Pilon
Plamondon	Quach
Rafferty	Ravignat
Raynault	Regan
Rousseau	Sandhu
Savoie	Scarpaleggia
Sellah	Sgro
Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor)	
Sims (Newton—North Delta)	
Sitsabaiesan	St-Denis
Stewart	Stoffer
Thibeault	Tremblay
Trudeau	Turmel
Valeriote — 115	

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

● (1900)

The next question is on the main motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.**Some hon. members:** No.**The Speaker:** All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.**Some hon. members:** Yea.**The Speaker:** All those opposed will please say nay.**Some hon. members:** Nay.**The Speaker:** In my opinion the nays have it.*And five or more members having risen:*

● (1905)

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

*(Division No. 126)***YEAS**

Members

Ablonczy	Adams
Adler	Aglukkaq
Albas	Albrecht
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)	Allison

Adjournment Proceedings

Ambler	Ambrose	Boulerice	Boutin-Sweet
Anders	Anderson	Brisson	Brousseau
Armstrong	Aspin	Caron	Casey
Baird	Bateman	Cash	Charlton
Benoit	Bernier	Chicoine	Chisholm
Blaney	Block	Choquette	Chow
Boughen	Braid	Cleary	Coderre
Breitreuz	Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Comartin	Côté
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)	Brown (Barrie)	Cotler	Crowder
Bruinooge	Butt	Cuzner	Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Calandra	Calkins	Davies (Vancouver East)	Day
Cannan	Carmichael	Dion	Dionne Labelle
Carrie	Chong	Donnelly	Doré Lefebvre
Clarke	Clement	Dubé	Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Daniel	Davidson	Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	Dusseault
Dechert	Del Mastro	Easter	Eyking
Devolin	Dreeshen	Freeman	Garneau
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	Dykstra	Genest	Giguère
Fantino	Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)	Godin	Goodale
Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)	Flaherty	Gravelle	Grogulé
Gill	Glover	Harris (Scarborough Southwest)	Hassainia
Goguen	Goldring	Hsu	Hughes
Goodyear	Gosal	Hyer	Jacob
Gourde	Grewal	Julian	Karygiannis
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)	Hawn	Lamoureux	Larose
Hayes	Hiebert	Latendresse	Laverdière
Hillyer	Hoback	LeBlanc (Beauséjour)	LeBlanc (LaSalle—Énard)
Hoepfner	Holder	Leslie	Liu
James	Jean	Mai	Marston
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)	Martin	Masse
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Kent	May	McCallum
Komarnicki	Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	McGuinty	Michaud
Lake	Lauzon	Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)	Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)
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Leung	Lizon	Nicholls	Nunez-Melo
Lobb	Lukiwski	Pacetti	Papillon
MacKenzie	Mayes	Patry	Péclet
McColeman	McLeod	Perreault	Pilon
Menegakis	Menzies	Plamondon	Quach
Merrifield	Miller	Rafferty	Ravignat
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)		Raynault	Regan
Moore (Fundy Royal)		Rousseau	Sandhu
Nicholson	O'Connor	Savoie	Scarpaleggia
Obhrai	Oda	Sellah	Sgro
Oliver	Paradis	Sims (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor)	St-Denis
Payne	Penashue	Sims (Newton—North Delta)	Stoffer
Poilievre	Preston	Sitsabaiesan	Tremblay
Raitt	Rajotte	Stewart	Turnel
Rathgeber	Reid	Thibeault	
Rempel	Richards	Trudeau	
Richardson	Rickford	Valerioté — 115	
Ritz	Saxton		
Schellenberger	Seeback		
Shea	Shipley		
Shory	Smith		
Sopuck	Sorenson		
Stanton	Storseth		
Sweet	Tilson		
Toet	Toews		
Trost	Trottier		
Truppe	Tweed		
Uppal	Valcourt		
Van Kesteren	Van Loan		
Vellacott	Wallace		
Warawa	Warkentin		
Watson	Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to		
Sky Country)			
Weston (Saint John)	Wilks		
Williamson	Wong		
Woodworth	Young (Oakville)		
Young (Vancouver South)	Zimmer — 148		

NAYS

Members

Allen (Welland)	Andrews
Angus	Atamanenko
Aubin	Ayala
Bélangier	Bellavance
Bennett	Benskin
Blanchette	Blanchette-Lamothe
Boivin	Borg

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried. Accordingly the bill stands referred to a legislative committee.

(Bill read the second time and referred to a committee)

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

● (1910)

[English]

SERVICE CANADA

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is no surprise that I once again raise issues around cuts to Service Canada.

Adjournment Proceedings

When I last raised this issue in the House, the minister's response was that the government was automating service so Canadians could get better service and get it faster. I want to bring to the minister's attention some statistics that point to exactly the opposite.

The government's call centre data shows that in the last five years the number of Canadians able to reach service agents on the phone to discuss their EI claims fell from 58% to 32% and call-back timelines had been increased from two days to five days because staff were so busy, and even those goals are very hard to reach.

Call centre staff were told not to give out the toll-free number for a complaint centre set up to help with overdue claims unless clients specifically asked for it by name. Many people simply do not know about the client satisfaction number.

The so-called modernization is not working for seniors either. In the last week of September alone, half of the people calling about the Canada pension plan or old age security simply got a busy signal.

In last Monday's *La Presse*, an article talked about the fact that there was 80,000 EI requests that were still facing serious delays. At the end of December, more than 20,000 recent unemployed workers were waiting 40 days to receive their government cheque, while government standards for new employment insurance claims were supposed to be dealt with within 28 days.

The delays are even worse for the unemployed who are requesting adjustments to their employment insurance benefits. In December 22,250 requests had a waiting period of 123 days, while normally this kind of a request took 21 days to be treated.

Another group of unemployed workers who were waiting for an extension on their employment insurance benefits had to wait more than 128 days.

Twelve thousand three hundred and eighteen people who committed an error on their EI request or who were being investigated for other reasons had been waiting 424 days until the end of the investigation.

Another article in *La Presse* said that 20,000 of the 75,000 new employment insurance claims that were to be processed were not being responded to in the normal time of 28 days. This represented more than a quarter of employment insurance claims.

In case people wonder what the impact of that is, it means that people have a tough time paying their rent, or meeting their mortgage payments, or buying their groceries or paying for their child care. It is not a minor detail that people are waiting excessive periods of time just to collect the money they have actually paid into the fund.

I remind Canadians that employment insurance is a fund that has been paid into by workers and employers. That fund should be available to workers when they lose their employment through no fault of their own in a timely way.

Once again, I have to come back to the government and ask this. What is it going to do about not cutting those services to employment insurance and to Service Canada so workers can access those benefits in a timely manner?

I know many of our offices have been hearing from Canadians from coast to coast to coast about the fact that they simply cannot get through. They cannot access those services. Once again, I call on the government, asking for its plan to help ensure these claims are processed in a timely way.

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to reply to the hon. member for Nanaimo—Cowichan on the subject of Service Canada's modernization of employment insurance services.

While Canada leads the G8 in job recovery and growth, we still face the reality of a fragile economic time. Despite creating over 610,000 net new jobs, EI claims were higher than expected.

To address this increase in claims, we have added and redeployed over 400 staff resources within Service Canada to assist in processing. We are shifting part-time employees to full-time status to provide additional support. We are also taking steps to reassign staff to assist with claims processing during peak periods.

• (1915)

[*Translation*]

In time, we are optimistic that we can improve services to Canadians with our 13-year modernization exercise.

[*English*]

We are taking action to ensure those Canadians in need of EI receive the benefits to which they are entitled, and we are doing this through our three year EI modernization initiative.

Automation is speeding up the processing of EI claims. Our goal is to increase the automation level from 44% to 70% over the next three years. We still have work to do, but we are making significant progress.

In the meantime, we have taken measures to assist with current high volumes of EI claims. We are working hard on behalf of Canadians to improve the services we deliver. This is government worker smarter.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, I would encourage the minister to look at the year over year claims that come in for employment insurance. I can tell the minister that every year they spike in the wintertime, every year. This is not new information. In addition, this modernization process has been going on for a number of years. The numbers that I just quoted demonstrate that this modernization process clearly is not working. In addition, at least half the claims that are filed need human intervention. The computer system all by itself will not deal with it.

The government's strategy clearly is not working. When is it going to put the resources in place at Service Canada to ensure that claims are processed in a timely manner so that people get their employment insurance cheques and their communities do not suffer?

Adjournment Proceedings

Ms. Kellie Leitch: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member seems to have forgotten all the progress that has been made over the past few years to improve service to Canadians. She has focused on a temporary situation caused by high call volumes. She is also ignoring the fact that the telephone is only one channel to obtain service from Service Canada. Clients have access through many channels: in person, by fax, by mail or courier, and through the Internet at servicecanada.gc.ca, in addition to contacting specialized call centres.

We are currently taking steps to ensure that Canadians receive the EI they deserve. We have reassigned staff from non-core areas of the EI business lines to EI processing in order to address the current peak demands. We have hired additional temporary staff to support EI processing. We are shifting part-time employees to full-time status.

Modernizing our services will mean changes in the way we currently do business, but ultimately we will be doing it better, faster and more cost-effectively for Canadians. With increased automation, Service Canada will be better able to serve Canadians in a timely and cost-effective manner.

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is the exact same issue regarding the processing centres for employment insurance and I had a lot of the statistics brought forward by the member for Nanaimo—Cowichan. I will not repeat them, but she did a great job in referring to them. Everyone tuned into the debate will realize what kind of a contrast we have here and what kind of a message we are giving.

I want to put a human face on this for a moment. Never in my six or seven years of doing this job have I seen the volume of calls that I have seen come into my offices, particularly the one in Gander, the one in Grand Falls—Windsor, regarding how long it takes people to receive their first cheque after their claim has been filed.

The first employment insurance cheque is actually only half of what it should be because that is the way it is set out in the legislation. In essence, there are two things.

First of all, there is the inability for Service Canada to deliver the cheques promptly. We are talking about over two months in some cases. That is two payments: two bill payments, two mortgage payments. That is a lot to shoulder in a period of time when an unemployed person does not receive any money.

The second element is the processing centres themselves, and this gets to the specifics of my question, which is 120 processing centres being shut down to accommodate for 20. One hundred twenty centres are being reduced to 20. Every time we try to question this, every time we make an inquiry, every time the media addresses this, we are greeted with a statement that the opposition is just fearmongering, that it is not that bad. How bad really is it?

In a place like Gander or Grand Falls—Windsor there is so much uncertainty as to where these jobs are going to be. These are not average jobs that pay minimum wage; they are jobs with great benefits, federal jobs. How are these people supposed to plan the rest of their lives with the uncertainty that surrounds them? Will their jobs move or will they be eliminated? When is this going to take place? There is a great deal of uncertainty.

The member for Labrador indicated to the people of Goose Bay that they will not have to leave. What does that do to the other centres in the case of Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, or Corner Brook?

The member mentioned some statistics and automation. I would like her to get away from the automation part of it for a moment and to get away from the talking points, because I can go to the website and read what she just said. Could she drift away from the notes for a moment and talk about whether these jobs will remain or not? If she cannot answer that question, could she at least talk about the issue of where the vision lies with Service Canada as to the processing centres, but specifically just those centres?

● (1920)

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to respond to the question raised by my colleague from Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor with respect to modernization and the actual wait times for EI processing.

The speed of service standard for claimants who receive first EI payments and notification of non-payments is within 28 days 80% of the time. However, we are experiencing challenges with seasonal fluctuations as individuals apply through Service Canada for their EI benefits.

Canada has recovered reasonably well from the economic downturn reported by most countries and compared to most countries. However, we continue to be affected by events in the global economy. The short-term outlook is uncertain and our economic recovery remains fragile.

It is important to keep in mind that these are difficult times. Even so, I want to underline that we have taken action to ensure that citizens get the benefits they need as fast as possible.

As of December 1, additional temporary staff have been assigned to processing high volume EI claims. Currently, there are over 400 additional staff helping process claims. We are shifting part-time workers to full-time worker status for additional support. We are also taking steps to reassign staff from non-core functions within Service Canada business lines to assist in claims processing during these big seasons.

I assure my colleague that we are not sitting with our arms folded waiting for things to happen. Canadians have told us that they want responsible government and that means reducing spending, balancing the budget and improving services we deliver. Those services can best be delivered by improvements in automation.

We are particularly proud of the advances we have made in the submission of records of employment. As more employers sign up online, there will be less cumbersome paperwork and this will lead to faster or more cost-efficient processing of EI claims. Increasing the number of employers who submit ROEs electronically will free up additional work staff to focus on the priorities in EI processing. Automation is helping the way we do business.

We remain determined to ensure that EI benefits are delivered efficiently and in the best interests of those Canadians who need temporary assistance while they are making this transition in their lives.

Mr. Scott Simms: Mr. Speaker, I never asked a question about automation. I never asked a question about everything that I can read on a website. I am just asking for some direction as to where Service Canada sees itself as far as the employees are concerned. Do these people need to move? Will these people have a job? Will there be enough people to supply the cheques in a time that is reasonable?

The member's answer about automation does not answer, because if something goes out of whack, if there is one slight mistake, it falls out of the automated system and, therefore, they must wait that much longer.

The minister gave me a response of "28 days 80% of the time". That is not even close. We are not even getting to that point. The government throws out numbers but the problem is that it keeps throwing out these percentages based on so many cases or on a select few, the few it feels are necessary to get its point across.

Adjournment Proceedings

Will these jobs remain in the sub-centres? Everyone should watch this because she will read a speech that was written for her by the department. There is not much debate in that.

• (1925)

Ms. Kellie Leitch: Mr. Speaker, I want to reassure my colleague opposite that Canadians who lose their jobs through no fault of their own and who cannot find work will have the support of employment insurance. That means getting EI benefits to them as quickly as possible. Right now we are dealing with higher volumes of claims because of economic uncertainty, which is putting a significant amount of pressure on the system.

To improve services, we have reassigned staff from non-core areas to core areas for processing.

With the increased automation, Service Canada will be able to better respond to Canadians in a more timely and cost-effective manner.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:26 p.m.)

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