



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

# House of Commons Debates

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OFFICIAL REPORT  
(HANSARD)

**Wednesday, February 5, 2014**

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**Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer**

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# HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, February 5, 2014

The House met at 2 p.m.

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*Prayers*

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● (1400)

[*English*]

**The Speaker:** It being Wednesday, we will now have the singing of the national anthem led by the hon. member for Bourassa.

*[Members sang the national anthem]*

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## STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

### TYPHOON HAIYAN RELIEF FUNDRAISER

**Mr. Corneliu Chisu (Pickering—Scarborough East, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Harmony Martial Arts and Fitness Centre in my riding organized a relief fundraiser on November 24 last year in support of the victims of super Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines.

The owners, Helen and Raymond Ata, along with Margarita and George Gonzales and other members of the club, worked diligently to plan this event. They encouraged families, friends, and members of the Philippine community to come and join them to help the victims of this natural disaster. They asked everyone to open their hearts and give generously. Throughout the day, people had time for socializing and enjoying the music, food, each other's company, and a live auction. All of the auction items were donated by generous members, friends, and their families.

The event was a great success. A total of \$9,000 was raised, which was matched by the government dollar for dollar, for a total amount of \$18,000, which will be donated through Ancop International Canada.

I take this opportunity to congratulate my constituents for their generous gesture and giving hearts.

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]

### WINTER OLYMPIC GAMES

**Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Beauharnois—Salaberry, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games start on

Friday. This is an opportunity to support sports and our athletes, who have worked so hard to make it to Sochi.

Everyone can count on Jean-Luc Brassard, a great source of pride for my region, to motivate our Canadian athletes. He won gold in freestyle skiing at the Lillehammer Games and has been named Canada's assistant chef de mission.

I would also like to point out that two other people from my riding of Salaberry-de-Valleyfield are part of Team Canada. A young woman by the name of Mélodie Daoust, who is 22 years old, was named player of the year at the university level and will play on the women's hockey team in their quest for another gold medal.

I also invite my colleagues to keep an eye out for Corporal Dominic Larocque on the ice in Sochi. Injured in Afghanistan in 2007, he is looking to win gold with the sledge hockey team.

Mélodie, Jean-Luc and Dominic, I wish you every success. Your perseverance and dedication are an example for all. The people of Salaberry-de-Valleyfield are behind you all the way. Good luck.

\* \* \*

● (1405)

[*English*]

### UKRAINE

**Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, today Canada and the free world watch in shock and disbelief at the tragic events taking place in Ukraine. Ukrainian Canadians from all over Canada, including in my home riding of Oshawa, stand in solidarity with people facing violence and intimidation at the hands of their own government.

Canada and Ukraine share common bonds. Ukrainians played a pivotal role in shaping our great nation, especially in my home riding of Oshawa. Canada was the first western nation to recognize Ukrainian independence in 1991.

Ukrainians remember all too well their anti-democratic Soviet past, and they have no desire to go back down that road. Ukrainians have made it known that they want to stand with the western democratic free world.

I call on the Ukrainian government to end the violence and intimidation and to respect the democratic rights of its citizens.

*Statements by Members***FOGO ISLAND INN**

**Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am proud today to rise and congratulate the Fogo Island Inn, on beautiful Fogo Island, for winning the National Cultural Tourism award at the Canadian Tourism Awards on December 3.

In Canada, tourism is an \$82-billion industry that generates \$17 billion in exports every year. This industry employs over 600,000 creative Canadians, like the team at Fogo Island Inn, and work hard to make Canada an exciting and welcoming country.

The Fogo Island Inn was created by the Shorefast Foundation, a registered Canadian charity, though the beneficial owners are the people of Fogo Island and Change Islands. All operational surpluses belong to the community itself. From its very inception, the inn was conceived as a place that fortifies local culture and helps articulate the identity of place.

Congratulations, Fogo Island Inn.

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**DEMOCRATIC REFORM**

**Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, on December 3, last year, the reform act was introduced, a bill that offers realistic and real reforms to strengthen Parliament. The reform act proposes three simple reforms to strengthen the role of the people's elected representatives by empowering members of Parliament and giving them the tools they need to better represent their constituents in Ottawa.

Since its introduction, there has been unprecedented public support for the bill. Here is just one example. The Canadian Association of Retired Persons, CARP, surveyed some of its 300,000 members across Canada and asked them what they thought of the reform act. Seventy-five per cent of them said they support the reform act, 72% said the proposals would significantly change Parliament, and 62% said the proposals would improve accountability.

This poll and others like it make it clear that Canadians want to see parliamentary reform. The reform act is the vehicle for that reform.

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**CANADA POST**

**Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, this past weekend, I hosted two well-attended town hall meetings on Canada Post's ill-conceived plan to end door-to-door mail delivery. It is obvious that the Conservative government and Canada Post's well-paid executives do not understand the enormous negative consequences of their plan for a large number of vulnerable Canadians.

A woman who attended one of my meetings shared a compelling personal story. Her 28-year-old daughter is severely autistic and is unable to communicate verbally. For this young woman, door-to-door mail delivery really is a lifeline. She not only interacts with her letter carrier on a daily basis, an important part of her day, but she receives, through the mail, twice-a-month therapy resources for her condition. Unfortunately, neither this woman nor her family have the

ability to hire someone to collect these necessary resources from the community mailbox.

This is just one example of what would be lost with the end of a service that Canadians like this young woman and her family rely upon.

By allowing Canada Post to go ahead with its decision, the Conservative government is turning its back on these Canadians.

\* \* \*

• (1410)

**WINTER OLYMPIC GAMES**

**Mr. John Carmichael (Don Valley West, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, in less than 48 hours, the eyes of the world will be on Sochi, as Canada's best compete in the 22nd winter Olympic games.

On behalf of all residents of Don Valley West, I wish to recognize and congratulate eight Torontonians as they compete for gold as members of Canada's winter Olympics team.

Michael Lambert will compete in two alpine snowboarding events, while Katie Tsuyuki will represent Canada in women's half-pipe. Lenny Valjas will compete in cross-country skiing, and Philip Brown will compete in alpine skiing events.

In figure skating, Patrick Chan will compete in the men's singles, Dylan Moscovitch will compete in the pairs event, and Piper Gilles and Paul Poirier in ice dance.

NHL superstar P.K. Subban will represent his hometown of Toronto as he plays on the Canadian men's hockey team.

As a former board member of the Canadian Olympic Committee, I truly could not be more proud of these young athletes as they demonstrate excellence to the world. I wish them, and indeed all of Team Canada, the greatest of success in Sochi.

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**MINING**

**Mr. Richard Harris (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Cariboo-Chilcotin area of B.C. has been devastated by the mountain pine beetle plague. Jobs in the forest industry and related industries have been lost, and the economy has suffered a huge blow in Williams Lake and 100 Mile House. Sawmills have cut back on their operations, businesses have closed, and people have left their homeland because there are no jobs.

Now we are presented with a once-in-a-generation opportunity to restore a vibrant economy to this area. We must not miss this opportunity to allow the New Prosperity gold mine to move forward to the provincial permitting stage.

I, my colleague from Kamloops, and 85% of the people of the Cariboo-Chilcotin call on this government to allow this project to move forward. The government can do that by attaching a list of conditions that would satisfy the mitigation of environmental impacts.

We cannot, we must not, miss this opportunity.

*Statements by Members*

[Translation]

**2014 WORLD CONGRESS OF ACADIANS**

**Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I urge you and all parliamentarians to block off August 8 to 24 so you can all attend the fifth World Congress of Acadians.

This celebration of Acadian pride will take place in Madawaska, New Brunswick, Aroostook, Maine, and Témiscouata in my riding. The cultural spokesperson for the event will be none other than Roch Voisine.

A variety of gatherings will take place during the congress: the Grand rassemblement jeunesse for youth, the Women's Summit, and most importantly, the family reunions that 122 families have already signed up for, including the Caron family, of course.

I would also like to salute the hard work of Témiscouata's board of directors, Guylaine Sirois, Serge Fortin, Marielle Landry, Denis Landry and Samuel Moreau, and the tireless work of the president of the congress, Émilien Nadeau, who is from Dégelis.

I would also like to thank the members of the board of directors from New Brunswick and Maine and all of the volunteers and organizers.

I hope that everyone will join us in celebrating Acadian heritage in the heart of Acadia of the lands and forests.

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[English]

**VETERANS**

**Mr. Parm Gill (Brampton—Springdale, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our government is dedicated to ensuring that veterans and their families have the support they need, when and where they need it, from coast to coast to coast.

I would like to share one of the many letters recently received by the Minister of Veterans Affairs:

It states:

Dear Minister [...]

I am a Veteran of the...Royal Canadian Navy. I have struggled with hearing problems since serving.... By last year, my hearing loss had become so pronounced, I could no longer hear birdsong at all.

[I visited the Veterans Affairs Office in Edmonton]...upon arrival we were... treated like Royalty! There we completed a[n]...interview and presented the Hearing Tests from an Audiologist.... We mailed the completed forms in late November.

...we received a phone call from Veterans Affairs to inform us that my application had been approved, that [benefits would be paid] for the hearing loss...plus the hearing aids would be paid by Veterans Affairs!

Minister [...] I have to tell you that we expected nothing in all these years since my service in the early 1960's.... Kudos to Veterans Affairs! They have been amazing....

Gratefully Yours,

[A Canadian Veteran]

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**DR. GARSON ROMALIS**

**Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honour the memory of Dr. Garson Romalis, who passed

away on January 30. Dr. Romalis was a courageous champion of women's reproductive rights and an ardent supporter and provider of safe abortions.

He received his medical degree from UBC in 1962, prior to the legalization of abortion in Canada. At that time, he treated many women suffering from septic shock in the aftermath of "back-alley abortions". After Canada's abortion laws changed, Dr. Romalis built his practice on the belief that women have the right to choose when and if they become pregnant.

Dr. Romalis survived two violent terrorist attacks in Vancouver in 1994 and 2000. Despite these attempts on his life, he remained steadfast in his work and belief in a woman's right to choose. His deep compassion and care have helped countless women and saved lives.

New Democrats offer our deepest sympathy to his family, and we thank them for sharing this great doctor and his life's work with Canadians.

\* \* \*

● (1415)

**CONSUMER PROTECTION**

**Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House, we have taken decisive action to put families first by cutting taxes an incredible 160 times. That means over \$3,000 more every year for the average Canadian family because of our government.

Sadly, the New Democrats want to play Big Brother when it comes to consumer needs. Their plan includes creating more bureaucracy, a whole department to monitor and dictate what is best for Canadians. Not only that, but the NDP has voted against all of the following consumer-protection measures since 2006.

The New Democrats voted against protecting consumers with new credit card rules that will require consent for credit limit increases, against bringing in a code of conduct for the credit and debit card industry to help small businesses deal with unfair practices, against requiring greater disclosures of mortgage repayment charges, against making mortgage insurance more transparent and understandable, and against banning unsolicited credit card cheques.

While the opposition parties vote against measures to help consumers, our government has acted and will deliver for Canadians.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**CARBON MONOXIDE**

**Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, an incident last December involving a building in the riding of Ottawa—Vanier could have been fatal had it not been for the rapid and judicious response of the medical staff at the Montfort Hospital, namely Dr. Charles-Antoine Breau, Geneviève Falardeau, Yan Bruneau and Marjolaine Eckert.

### Oral Questions

Yesterday, in partnership with the hospital, the federal government announced an initiative to raise awareness about the dangers of carbon monoxide. I congratulate the government and the hospital on that initiative.

However, I cannot resist pointing out the irony of the fact that a government that includes three former ministers from the Mike Harris government, which wanted to close the Montfort Hospital, would now choose to use it to launch such initiatives. It is also interesting that the Conservatives did not have the courtesy to inform my colleague, the hon. member for Ottawa South, the riding where the announcement was made, or myself, since that hospital is located in my riding. This, of course, comes as no surprise to this side of the House, as the Conservatives have simply remained true to form.

\* \* \*

[English]

### SPECIAL OLYMPICS

**Ms. Wai Young (Vancouver South, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, with the 2014 Winter Olympics just around the corner, Canadians will be watching with pride as our athletes represent Canada on the world stage.

I would like to take a moment to speak of another source of pride for many: our Special Olympians and Special Olympics Canada. For those not familiar, Special Olympics Canada enriches the lives of Canadians with intellectual disabilities through sport, including 37,000 athletes who are supported by 17,000 volunteers and 13,000 trained coaches.

This is why I am proud to note that our government will now provide ongoing long-term support for Special Olympics Canada, with \$1 million in annual funding. This will maintain the organization's funding from Sport Canada at more than \$2.8 million. This stable funding will help our Special Olympians get the support they need to excel in their sport and achieve their dreams.

This is why I look forward to this summer's Special Olympics Canada Summer Games, which will be held July 8-12 in my city, Vancouver.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

### THE SENATE

**Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the police have laid charges against Mac Harb and Patrick Brazeau and are continuing to investigate Duffy, Wallin, Gerstein and Stewart Olsen. The Conservatives appointed fraudsters who were not even living in the provinces they were supposed to represent, but they say that it is not their fault.

While the police are busy dealing with a number of criminal senators, the Liberal leader is trying to fool everyone by putting lipstick on a pig. We no longer have Liberal senators. We have senators who are Liberal. What a change. Those who have seen the Elvis Gratton movies from Quebec will remember the main character saying that he is not a Quebecker, he is a French-Canadian, French-speaking Quebecker. These so-called independent senators are going

to end up making piles of money campaigning for their party, all at taxpayers' expense.

The Conservatives and the Liberals defended their fraudster senators. "Harb will be welcome back in caucus when he has paid back his expense claims", said the Liberal leader. "Brazeau is working hard in the Senate", said the Prime Minister. Canadians deserve better than the lack of judgment coming from these two party leaders who are defending an undemocratic institution.

\* \* \*

● (1420)

[English]

### DEMOCRATIC REFORM

**Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday the democratic reform minister introduced a sweeping bill designed to protect the fairness of federal elections. The fair elections act would make it harder to break elections law. It closes loopholes to big money, imposes new penalties on political impostors who make rogue calls, and empowers law enforcement with sharper teeth, a longer reach, and a freer hand.

I believe it is important to share the positive feedback we are hearing regarding this bill. The Canadian National Institute for the Blind said, "Voting is a democratic right for all Canadians", and, "We are happy to have the opportunity to work hand in hand with government representatives to increase accessibility and awareness of election amongst the blind and partially sighted." The former CEO of Elections Canada, Jean-Pierre Kingsley, said that if he were dealing with a masters student, he would give it an A minus, and that "Overall, it looks like a good bill".

I am pleased to be working with the minister on this legislation and look forward to debating it here in the House.

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## ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

### DEMOCRATIC REFORM

**Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, does the Prime Minister agree that impersonating an election officer to induce a person not to vote is already an offence under Canadian law?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, obviously I will leave the details of the fair elections act to the minister. However, I would say that what the law before us does, the fair elections act, is it looks at various offences, strengthens the hand of law enforcement in that regard, and provides new tools for use when people do break the law or clearly intend to break the law.

**Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, are we to understand that the Prime Minister cannot tell the Canadian people that voter suppression and impersonation of an electoral officer are already illegal in Canada? Could that be because yesterday's supposed changes are more about giving cover to what the Conservative Party did in 2011 than anything else?

*Oral Questions*

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as the court ruled, the Conservative Party did no such thing. On the contrary, we are aware, as many people are aware, of some clearly inappropriate and probably illegal activities in Guelph. We want to make sure that those type of activities are not allowed to happen again and that they are thoroughly investigated and prosecuted.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, what is clear is that the Conservative Party made thousands of fraudulent calls. In at least 56 of the ridings involved, nearly 1,000 formal complaints have been filed.

Can the Prime Minister stand and state unequivocally that the Conservatives' voter suppression tactics in 2011 were, and still are, illegal in Canada?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the NDP and their allies have brought those accusations before the courts, but they were dismissed.

[*English*]

Of course, nothing should be clearer from the truth. What the NDP fails to accept is that the reason it lost the election is Canadians recognize that when it comes to their vital economic interests, their jobs and their economic futures only one party stands up for that. That is the Conservative Party. As long as the NDP does not get that, we will be—

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

**The Speaker:** Order, please. The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

**Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, “clearer from the truth”; now there is one for the prime ministerial archives.

[*Translation*]

In 2011, about 100,000 Canadians who did not have ID, including aboriginal peoples and seniors, were able to vote if someone vouched for them. Exactly how many people who were not entitled to vote were prosecuted during the last election? We know that 100,000 were able to vote. How many of those were actually illegal votes? Two or three?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to note that this proposal, the fair elections act, arms Elections Canada with methods of providing more information about when and where the voting is taking place and about the voting process. Elections Canada needs to be able to do its work. This legislation helps it do just that.

• (1425)

[*English*]

**Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, do the Conservatives really want to help people to vote? The bill is more about suppressing the vote than helping people to vote.

Elections Canada has confirmed that there are no irregularities with the overwhelming majority of people who vote with the help of the current vouching system. If there are problems with the system,

why not fix them? Why is the Prime Minister removing tools that actually help people to vote?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the opposite is true. The fair elections act lays out specifically the jobs of Elections Canada to make sure it informs people, where, when, and how to vote, and what ID specifically to use at a vote.

Many of these reforms are long overdue. They will sharpen law enforcement, strengthen the reach of law enforcement personnel, and correct many of the deficiencies that were well documented in the review of the last election campaign.

As long as the NDP sinks into conspiracy theories and rejects the verdict of Canadians in the last election, we will be happy to receive continued mandates from them.

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**TAXATION**

**Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, last year's budget introduced millions in new taxes on imports, ranging from saris to wigs for cancer patients. With the lower dollar, these tax increases on Canadians will cost us even more. Will the government repeal its tax increases on middle-class Canadians in next week's budget?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, of course, nothing would be further from the truth. What the government did do is to make sure that Canadian producers were on a level playing field with some specific countries, emerging economies that are very powerful economies that had special tax preferences. Obviously, that is not appropriate. Our government remains committed to balancing the budget and rejecting all of the various tax increases proposed by the hon. member and his party.

**Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, a math teacher should not have to explain to an economist the impact on import tariffs when the dollar falls.

[*Translation*]

Last year's budget did nothing for the middle class. Instead, it contained absurd taxes on imports such as tricycles and toothbrushes.

The lower dollar makes these tax hikes on imports even more expensive.

Will the government eliminate these tax increases for the middle class in next week's budget?

[*English*]

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I certainly look forward to seeing the day where the leader of the Liberal Party does explain his positions to various economists.

[*Translation*]

The Liberal Party regularly proposes tax increases that affect Canadian consumers and taxpayers. That is not something that our party supports.

The Liberal Party defends special exemptions for Chinese industries. That is not acceptable.

*Oral Questions*

[English]

**THE BUDGET**

**Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the IMF reports that our economy grew only 1.6% last year. It also projects that Australia, New Zealand, Sweden, Norway, and the U.S. will all grow faster than us this year. This Prime Minister has the worst economic record on growth since R.B. Bennett in the depths of the great depression. After eight years of anemic growth, will we see anything new in next week's budget to help Canada's middle class?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Canadians and economic experts around the world, including the OECD and the IMF, recognize that Canada has gone through the recession and come out of the recession with among the strongest growth and employment rates and records in the developed world. The prospects for continued growth going forward, according to all of these experts, are very strong and the government is, in almost every case, following the various recommendations that these organizations suggest.

On all these things, I am sure I could suggest any number of people who could walk the leader of the Liberal Party through it.

\* \* \*

• (1430)

**ETHICS**

**Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, a year ago in the House, the Prime Minister said, "Mr. Speaker, all senators conform to the residency requirements" in the Constitution. That, of course, now, is absolutely false. The audits of Senators Wallin, Duffy, and others made it clear that some senators never met the requirements in the first place.

Would the Prime Minister now admit what every Canadians knows, that his senators never met the residency requirements to begin with?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as I have said repeatedly, there are various standards that have to be met to be appointed to the Senate. It is a matter of fact, as we know, that members of Parliament in both Houses more often than not maintain two residences. The fact that a member maintains two residences is not at issue here. What is at issue is the improper, and in some cases fraudulent, claiming of expenses. The government has been very clear that is not acceptable, that there would be consequences. Those senators are now seeing those consequences.

[Translation]

**Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the problem is that, according to the police, Nigel Wright informed the Prime Minister that the very scheme used by Mike Duffy was also being used by others, such as Senators Brazeau, Wallin, Stewart-Olsen, Kinsella and Ringuette.

Why are some being charged while others are not? Why is there a double standard? What is the explanation for that?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is the RCMP's responsibility to conduct the investigations.

The RCMP has been clear about who is and who is not being investigated. Obviously, what the Leader of the Opposition has said is not factual.

[English]

**Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, actually, it is there in the police report. The Prime Minister was warned by Nigel Wright that other senators did not meet the residency requirements, so why did the Prime Minister insist that they did? The answer to that, we suspect, is also in the police report.

Is it because that was part of his deal with Mike Duffy? Yes, or no?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, clearly what the Leader of the Opposition says are not the facts. The RCMP has been very clear in terms of the matter between Mr. Duffy and Mr. Wright that I was not informed of that. The RCMP has been crystal clear on that.

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**DEMOCRATIC REFORM**

**Mr. Craig Scott (Toronto—Danforth, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, 100,000 people had their votes vouched for in the last campaign. This includes aboriginal citizens, low-income people, new Canadians, students, and people with disabilities.

The question is, why is the government making it harder for these Canadians to exercise their right to vote?

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we are not; we are making it easier, by requiring Elections Canada to advertise to these very people which types of identification are required to vote.

The Leader of the Opposition gave false information earlier when he said that Elections Canada indicated there were no mistakes. In fact, according to Elections Canada's own commissioned report, there was a 25% error rate. The audit showed that errors are made in the majority of cases that require the use of non-regular processes. This is such a non-regular process.

The reality is that vouching is not safe; it is not secure. After the fair elections act is passed, it will not be allowed.

**Mr. Craig Scott (Toronto—Danforth, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the Supreme Court said there was no evidence that any of those irregularities occurred with people who did not have the right to vote, so this is an absolute red herring.

On another issue, the elections commissioner is moving to the Director of Public Prosecutions and away from the Chief Electoral Officer. The Chief Electoral Officer is appointed to and is responsible to Parliament, but the DPP is appointed by the Attorney General. Why is the government removing parliamentary oversight from the elections commissioner?



**Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I recommend that the hon. member read the Director of Public Prosecutions Act. If he did, he would know that he and every single member of the House has the responsibility to vote on removing a Director of Public Prosecutions. The government cannot fire him by itself. That is the responsibility of Parliament. In fact, his very appointment has to be approved by a committee that has members from each political party, two senior public servants, and a member of the law society, and then his appointment is approved by an all-party committee at Parliament.

That is accountability and it is also independence.

• (1435)

[Translation]

**Ms. Nycole Turmel (Hull—Aylmer, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Minister of State for Democratic Reform told the House that one of the reasons why people do not vote is because they do not have information.

If that is the case, why does his new bill prevent Elections Canada from advertising and giving voters information?

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the New Democrats should read the bill.

We are doing the exact opposite. We are requiring that Elections Canada advertise so that Canadians have information on how, where and when to vote, as well as the different options and the types of identification required to vote. We are creating a requirement.

Furthermore, we will require that Elections Canada inform disabled people about the special tools that will be available to them to help them vote.

**Ms. Nycole Turmel (Hull—Aylmer, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, this bill also states that fundraising from individuals who have donated to a political party in the past will no longer be calculated as an election expense.

Could the minister explain why he inserted this measure that clearly puts the Conservative Party at an advantage?

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the rule will apply to all parties.

[English]

The reality is that campaigning is distinct from raising funds to run a campaign. We are acknowledging that parties have a responsibility to reach out over 10 million square kilometres across this vast country of ours, and that requires them to raise money. However, the act of raising money is not synonymous with the act of actually spending it on a campaign. Therefore, those costs associated with fundraising will be excluded from the spending cap under the Canada Elections Act.

[Translation]

**Ms. Nycole Turmel (Hull—Aylmer, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the power to compel witnesses to appear is a right that even parliamentary committees have. However, the Conservatives have refused to include this right in their reform of the Elections Act. That is a strange coincidence since we know that the Conservatives have refused to co-operate with Elections Canada on the investigation into the fraudulent calls.

### Oral Questions

Why have they refused to include the power to compel witnesses to appear in the reform of the Elections Act?

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, witnesses are already required to testify in court once formal allegations have been made. That is how our legal system works.

Elections Canada has the same investigative powers as police services. Those powers are in place, and we will increase them by introducing a new penalty for those who obstruct an investigation or provide inaccurate information to investigators.

[English]

**Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, Elections Canada has been working to get people without fixed addresses registered and voting. It has been doing outreach to young people and engaging first nations communities to increase voter turnout, but the Conservatives new bill slams the door on all of that very important work.

The minister claims his bill would target special interests, but in reality it would reduce Elections Canada's powers and remove its ability to do public education. Why? Does the minister believe that Elections Canada is now a special interest?

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, half of youth in this country are unaware that they can vote by three different methods prior to election day. That numbers 73% among aboriginal youth. If a youth is busy on election day with studies or work, that individual is not even aware of the other opportunities to cast a ballot.

The way to fix that problem is to focus Elections Canada's advertising on providing people with information on when they can vote: advance ballots, special vote, voting by mail. Even if they were busy on election day, younger people would have an opportunity to cast a ballot, if they were aware of these extra methods. The fair elections act would ensure they get that information.

\* \* \*

• (1440)

### THE BUDGET

**Ms. Chrystia Freeland (Toronto Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, this month, IMF economists warned that the declining competitiveness of Canada's non-energy exports is "something that concerns us". The IMF pointed to a widening productivity gap that has "eroded Canada's external competitiveness, particularly in...manufacturing". Middle-class Canadians know this. They are feeling the effects in their paycheques.

Will next week's budget finally do something to address these problems and help Canada's struggling middle class?

*Oral Questions*

**Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Minister of State (Finance), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, thanks to Canada's economic action plan, Canada has enjoyed the strongest economic performance, both during the recession and after, in the recovery. Over one million net new jobs have been created in this country, nearly 90% are full-time and 80% in the private sector.

Both the IMF and the OECD project that Canada will be among the strongest economies in the G7 in this upcoming year.

[Translation]

**Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the International Monetary Fund has warned us that Canadians should expect to see little economic growth. Young Canadians have 264,000 fewer jobs than before the recession. The economic recovery does not apply to young people. An empty budget will not solve the problem.

Will the government finally include a jobs plan for young Canadians in next week's budget?

[English]

**Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Minister of State (Finance), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our government is focused on what matters most to Canadians: jobs and economic growth.

Under the action plan taken by our Conservative government, Canada will continue to have one of the lowest youth unemployment rates in the G7. In fact, since 2006, our government has helped 2.1 million youth obtain skills, training, and jobs.

The answer is in education. The answer is in training. The answer is in skills. This government understands it. This government will continue to support jobs and growth.

**Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, last year's budget launched a phony jobs grant that still does not exist. It wasted millions on pointless government advertising. It cut services to veterans and vulnerable Canadians. It increased taxes on the middle class, payrolls, consumer goods, small business owners, and credit unions. It produced the worst job creation since the recession, and economic growth was down from the year before, which was down from the year before that, which was down from the year before that.

Is there anything the government plans to do differently this year?

**Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Minister of State (Finance), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we will continue in the same direction we have been going. We will continue to build jobs. We will continue to help—

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

**The Speaker:** Order, please. The hon. Minister of State has the floor.

**Mr. Kevin Sorenson:** Mr. Speaker, we will continue to push forward with skills training and making certain we are moving young people ahead into a position where they can find a job when they leave school.

We also realize that the Liberal way of increasing taxes is not the direction we will go. We will keep taxes down, build jobs, and do what is right for this economy.

[Translation]

**Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the government's response is obviously "no". Economic growth has stalled. Nearly 1.4 million Canadians are unemployed. Last year, barely 5,000 full-time jobs were created in the entire country.

Instead of tabling another austerity budget that will eliminate tens of thousands of jobs, will the Conservatives finally encourage job creation by proposing a tax credit for businesses that hire young people and by reinstating the eco-energy retrofit program?

[English]

**Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Minister of State (Finance), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, this government has the best job creation in the G7. Our government will continue to be focused on what matters to Canadians, and that is jobs; that is making certain they are prepared, going forward with economic growth.

Even though the global economy remains fragile, which we have said from the very beginning of the recession—that the recovery is fragile, especially in the United States and Europe—our economic policies have helped protect Canada.

Over a million new jobs have been created. We will continue to bring forward progressive programs that build jobs—

● (1445)

**The Speaker:** The hon. member for Parkdale—High Park.

**Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the reality is that Conservatives' economic mismanagement is raising red flags around the globe.

The IMF is now raising serious concerns about Canada's investment levels and our slumping exports. It is sounding the alarm on escalating household debt that could "amplify" any economic downturn.

Will the Conservatives listen to the NDP and use their budget to get household debt under control by supporting job creation and by cracking down on things like payday lenders?

**Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Minister of State (Finance), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, every year the NDP demands that we raise taxes and spend, spend, spend. Again the answer this year is no, no, no.

With economic action plan 2014, we will continue to create jobs and growth for all Canadians while keeping taxes low. We will have a balanced budget in 2015. We are building toward a balanced budget, despite the NDP's demands to raise taxes and spend, spend, spend.

*Oral Questions***NATIONAL DEFENCE**

**Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, apparently it has taken the Conservatives eight years to realize that their so-called military procurement strategy is nothing but a boondoggle. From the F-35s to the Cyclone helicopters to the close-combat vehicles, the Conservatives have left a trail of delayed, over-budget, and underperforming equipment for our military.

Today's announcement now spreads oversight of this mess over four ministers. Can the Minister of National Defence explain how more bureaucracy with no single line of accountability will do anything to fix the Conservatives' abysmal procurement record?

**Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, in fact, the opposite is true. We have had several successful military procurements, including heavy-lift aircraft, the LAVs, the main battle tanks, new heavy artillery, unmanned air surveillance capability, and many more.

What we are doing now is making sure that, going forward with the new Canada procurement strategy, we are going to maximize benefits for Canada while creating jobs and supporting Canadian industry in its exports of Canadian defence products.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Élane Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it took eight years and the Department of National Defence had to be put under supervision, but the Conservatives are finally realizing that their military procurement process is a failure. Our troops need the proper equipment to carry out their missions, and Canadians want to be sure that resources are not being wasted. The Conservatives have clearly demonstrated that they are incapable of making either of those things happen.

Since the F-35 procurement secretariat has not yielded any results, why do the Conservatives think that a new secretariat and more red tape are a viable solution?

**Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, that is not at all true. We have procured helicopters, LAVs and trucks for all of our troops. However, the NDP voted against all of these procurements that support our military.

With the new defence procurement strategy, we are making procurement more efficient while supporting Canadian industries at the best price for taxpayers.

[*English*]

**Mr. Lawrence Toet (Elmwood—Transcona, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, after a decade of darkness from the previous Liberal government, our Conservative government is making unprecedented investments in our Canadian Armed Forces to ensure that our men and women in uniform have the equipment they need to get the job done.

Our government previously committed to leveraging that military spending to benefit Canadian companies while creating high-skilled, high-paying jobs right here at home.

Can the Minister of Public Works and Government Services please inform the House of what our government is doing to meet this commitment?

● (1450)

**Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, today the Minister of National Defence and I were very proud to launch Canada's new defence procurement strategy. This strategy is about getting the equipment that our men and women in uniform need at the best value for taxpayers while at the same time maximizing benefits to our Canadian economy and to Canadian industries here at home. It is about doing more for our armed forces, more for Canadian jobs, and more for continued prosperity. That is what we pledged to Canadians and that is what we are doing.

\* \* \*

**INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS**

**Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, behind the grim job statistics are real people struggling to find work, yet Conservatives want to claw back \$300 million that provinces use to help the most vulnerable people get jobs and get back on their feet.

Conservatives proposed an unworkable plan and then spent \$2.5 million advertising it. When will the government finally drop the pretense and concede that it cannot run roughshod over the provinces and our most vulnerable workers?

**Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I had a very good discussion with the provincial counterparts yesterday, and we continue to have fruitful discussions about how to implement a job grant, which is supported by the Building and Construction Trades Department of the AFL-CIO, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters, the Canadian Construction Association, Information Technology Association of Canada, the Canadian Welding Bureau, Engineers Canada, the Progressive Contractors Association of Canada, Polytechnics Canada, the Association of Canadian Community Colleges, and on and on.

Why is the NDP against common sense?

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives' approach has been counterproductive from the start.

They decided to confront the provinces instead of consult them. That led to delays, and workers are paying the price. I hope they will learn from their mistakes. Worker training is important for economic growth and development.

Will the minister accept the provinces' counter-offer?

*Oral Questions*

**Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we have had good talks with the provinces about the Canada job grant, which has the support of Polytechnics Canada, the National Association of Career Colleges, the Building and Construction Trades Department of the AFL-CIO, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters, the Canadian Construction Association, the Information Technology Association of Canada, the Canadian Welding Bureau, Engineers Canada, the Progressive Contractors Association of Canada and many other organizations.

These organizations know that employers have to be involved in training the workforce.

\* \* \*

**PENSIONS**

**Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the whole issue of old age security is another example of the Conservatives' refusal to work with the provinces.

The Bank of Montreal just said that 89% of Canadians are going to depend on the Canada pension plan and QPP and that the provinces and experts agree that those plans need to be improved.

Instead of sitting back and doing nothing, will the Minister of Finance work with us to give all Canadians retirement security?

[English]

**Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Minister of State (Finance), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Canadians simply do not want to pay higher taxes, whether that is payroll taxes or any kind of taxes.

That is why we brought forward ways in which we can help them save. We have brought forward ideas like pension income splitting. We have brought forward pooled registered pension plans and tax-free savings accounts that are now benefiting more than nine million Canadians.

Despite the NDP's reckless, high-tax plans, we continue to take action to put more money back into the pockets of Canadians. We are going to continue to do that.

**Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, let us get back to reality.

The Bank of Montreal reports that fully one-third of Canadian seniors are planning to rely on the Canada pension plan and the QPP in their retirement. That is going to be around \$600 a month.

Let us face it; seniors cannot retire on about \$600 a month. It is just not on. The provinces, the economists, and the experts agree that increasing the CPP is the most practical and the most reliable way to ensure Canadians have enough to retire.

When will the minister pull his head out of the sand?

●(1455)

**Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Minister of State (Finance), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, again, Canadians simply do not want to pay higher CPP payroll taxes.

We have heard this from Canadians. We have heard it from small business. We have heard it from owners of small businesses. We have heard it from provinces.

The NDP's plan to double CPP would kill up to 70,000 jobs and cost a typical Canadian household as much as \$2,600 per year. In this fragile economy, Canadians simply cannot afford the NDP's high taxes and high spin.

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**NATIONAL DEFENCE**

**Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, after years of insisting everything was fine, the Conservatives, today, finally admitted their record of economic incompetence on defence procurement, and they sidelined the Minister of National Defence.

Since 2006, the Conservatives have bungled every military equipment competition they have touched. That is eight lost years, lost jobs, and lost economic opportunities. Worse still, Canadian Forces members have been betrayed.

Given this record of failure, how can the minister pretend that rearranging the deck chairs will save this ship?

**Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member forgets her history.

It was her Liberal government that cancelled the EH-101 contracts to replace our aging Sea Kings. That was 20 years ago. It had 13 years in power. There was a 10-year decade of darkness when it came to supplying the military with the equipment it needs. That is what happened under the Liberals.

We had a program. We have had several successful procurements, including heavy-lift aircraft, LAVs, new heavy artillery, heavy-lift helicopters, and many more.

Now we are going forward with a new defence procurement strategy that will benefit our men and women in uniform while also maximizing benefits to Canadian industry.

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**DEMOCRATIC REFORM**

**Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the Chief Electoral Officer asked that the elections commissioner be given the power to apply to a judge to compel the provision of information relevant to an investigation, and the commissioner agreed, of course. Despite what he said earlier, why would they be asking if they had that power already. Conservative stonewalling is the single biggest issue here. The minister would know this if he had really consulted this past summer about this bill he has brought forward to the House.

Will the minister support the Liberal amendment to give the commissioner this particular power so that he will actually have some real teeth?

*Oral Questions*

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, judges can already compel testimony. It is called a subpoena. That happens all the time and is a regular course in matters of law enforcement. He would know that if he watched any number of television shows involving policing.

The reality is that the elections commissioner currently has all the same investigative powers of police officers who are investigating the most serious violent, heinous crimes. We are giving new powers and sharper teeth to the commissioner, and that will help improve law enforcement.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**QUEBEC BRIDGE**

**Mr. Denis Blanchette (Louis-Hébert, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, as everyone knows, the Conservatives have a habit of abandoning Quebec's regions. This is particularly true of the Quebec City region. When the Prime Minister goes to Quebec City tomorrow, he will have the opportunity to admire the magnificent architecture of the Quebec Bridge.

His government has spent nearly \$400,000 in legal fees regarding that bridge, rather than investing in its maintenance.

Will his government stop the legal battle, which is not achieving anything, and invest money in this infrastructure that is so important to the region?

[English]

**Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Transport, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as I have indicated in the House before, the Quebec Bridge that he refers to is actually owned by CN, which has the responsibility to maintain it. We have already inspected the track, as we should, and it is safe. However, CN is not living up to its end of the bargain. That is why we are in court. We are protecting taxpayers' dollars.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**HEALTH**

**Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, once the Prime Minister has crossed the Quebec Bridge in our fair city, perhaps he will see the cloud of nickel dust coming from the Port of Québec. By the way, that port is the responsibility of his Minister of Transport.

If he is an observant person, he will see the cloud settling on top of the people of Limoilou and causing health problems for my constituents.

Does the Prime Minister intend to take the issue of public health seriously during his trip to Quebec City or is he just going there for another photo op?

• (1500)

[English]

**Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Transport, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as the member knows, the Port of Québec is an arm's-length organization and is responsible for the leasing of land in and around the Port of Québec. Indeed, it is a great responsibility that it has

because it increases the economic viability of this great city and does great things to increase the amount of jobs there. In this case, the Port of Québec is working with its tenant to ensure that it is respecting the will of the community and working as best it can with the Ministry of the Environment on the matter, and that is what we expect them to do.

\* \* \*

**TELECOMMUNICATIONS**

**Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, over the last 20 years, wireless services have grown into something Canadians rely on daily. As a result, we are seeing new cell towers being constructed in our communities. Their placement in my riding has been a very divisive issue. I believe Canadians deserve a say on how and where new cell tower locations are identified.

Can the Minister of Industry please tell the House what our government is doing to ensure that local voices are heard?

**Hon. James Moore (Minister of Industry, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, there are over 18,000 cell towers all across this country. Four hundred new ones were built last year, and far too often those cell providers are not doing direct consultation with communities. The announcement that our government made today will force cell providers to engage directly with everyday Canadians and consult directly with municipalities all across the country before cell towers are built. We want cell towers to be built, but not without due consultation directly with Canadians, directly with communities.

We want Canadians to have the best technology possible and high download rates, and all that, but of course it has to be done with the consent of everyday Canadians, and that is why we have made these changes. We have listened to everyday Canadians, we have acted responsibly, and these new rules will protect communities.

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**FISHERIES AND OCEANS**

**Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Cardigan, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the government is closing seven of nine fisheries libraries and, in its own words, "culling" material at the other two. In response to my recent order paper question, the minister indicated that her department does not have the ability to determine the number of items that have been digitized, and she has no idea what has happened to most of the library materials.

Can the minister explain this mess? What information does the government want to destroy, and why?

**Hon. Gail Shea (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Fisheries and Oceans Canada has respected the Library and Archives of Canada Act as well as the Surplus Crown Assets Act. The written consent of the librarian and archivist was granted to Fisheries and Oceans in 2011 to dispose of publications that are surplus to the department's requirements. Library and Archives Canada was offered a number of publications and selected 79 titles, which were shipped to it back in November 2013.

Library users are asking for digital information, which is clear when our libraries average between 5 and 12 in-person visits per year.

*Oral Questions***FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

**Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the EU and U.S. are pulling together a plan for short-term financial aid for Ukraine, contingent on reform and democratic transition. Canada should be working closely with our international partners and the people of Ukraine in resolving the unrest. Time is running out and Ukraine is sliding further and further into crisis.

Has the minister offered Canada's support for this package and if not, why not?

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, there is no package, but we have had discussions with our American colleagues and the European Union on what we can do working together to try to change the course of the trend going on in Ukraine.

This government, this Prime Minister, and Canada will continue to play a leadership role to ensuring that Ukraine takes the right steps toward peace, prosperity, and democracy.

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**WINTER OLYMPIC GAMES**

**Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi are just days away and it is a good time for all Canadians to come together to support our athletes as they represent Canada on the world stage and go for gold in Russia.

I wonder if the Minister of Canadian Heritage could please tell the House what this government is doing to support Canadian athletes as they go to reach their dreams and make all Canadians proud.

**Hon. Shelly Glover (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our Canadian athletes are a great source of national pride. That is why I am proud that our government is the largest single contributor to amateur sport in Canada. In fact, compared to the lead-up to the 2006 games, our funding levels for winter Olympic sports have more than doubled, and direct support for those athletes has increased by over 120% in the last decade.

While I am on my feet, no better cheerleader has gone to Sochi than our colleague, the Minister of State for Sport. I wish him the best of luck.

Go Canada go!

\* \* \*

•(1505)

[Translation]

**ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS**

**Ms. Francine Raynault (Joliette, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I have asked the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development a number of times about the intolerable situation facing the Attikamek students in Manawan. Now that a serious flood has destroyed 75% of the Masko-Siwin health centre, people have to travel two and a half hours to Joliette to get treatment.

Can the minister commit the necessary funds quickly in order to rebuild the crumbling infrastructure in the Manawan community?

**Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I believe the hon. member is referring to the Simon P. Ottawa school in Manawan.

The students have returned to their classes, but some facilities are still off limits as a health and safety precaution. We are certainly still concerned about the health and safety of residents in the communities. We will continue to take measures to keep them safe.

\* \* \*

[English]

**CANADA-U.S. RELATIONS**

**Mr. Brent Rathgeber (Edmonton—St. Albert, Ind.):** Mr. Speaker, we are less than five months away from the implementation of the U.S. Foreign Account Tax Compliance Act. This law will compromise Canadian privacy laws and cost all Canadians, as banks will bear significant compliance costs. Meanwhile, dual citizens, even accidental dual citizens, will have their registered disability and registered educational savings plans and their tax-free savings accounts deemed offshore trusts and subject to U.S. capital gains taxes.

What is the government doing to protect Canadians and their assets from the cash-starved Obama administration?

**Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Minister of State (Finance), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, after lengthy negotiations we have reached an agreement with the United States related to FATCA. FATCA has raised a number of concerns in Canada, both among dual Canadian citizens and Canadian financial institutions. The agreement addresses those concerns. In our negotiations we obtained a number of concessions, including exempting certain accounts like RRSPs, RDSPs, TFSA's, et cetera, from the FATCA reporting. To be clear, the agreement will not impose any new or higher taxes and CRA will not assist the IRS in the collection of U.S. tax moneys.

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**ELECTORAL RETURN FOR SELKIRK-INTERLAKE**

**The Speaker:** I wish to advise the House that I have today received a letter from the Chief Electoral Officer informing me that the member for Selkirk—Interlake has provided a corrected return as required by the Canada Elections Act. I am making copies of the letter available to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, which is currently studying a question of privilege related to this matter.

The hon. member for Scarborough—Agincourt is rising on a point of order.

**Hon. Jim Karygiannis:** Mr. Speaker, I am rising on a point of order.

After conferring with the Clerk, I was told that a question and an answer should be 35 seconds. I would ask of you, sir, if you could please time the answers that we received today from the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, the Minister of Canadian Heritage, and the Minister of State for Finance and get back to us on the time.

**The Speaker:** It does not sound like a point of order.

**Hon. Jim Karygiannis:** Mr. Speaker, would you undertake to get back to this House as to the times that ministers took in order to answer?

**The Speaker:** I will not.

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## ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

### INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

**Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1), I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian delegation of the Canada-Europe Parliamentary Association respecting its participation in the fourth part of the 2013 Ordinary Session of the Parliamentary Assembly at the Council of Europe held in Strasbourg, France, from September 30 to October 4, 2013.

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• (1510)

### COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

#### ACCESS TO INFORMATION, PRIVACY AND ETHICS

**Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it is with some reluctance that I have the obligation to present, in both official languages, the first report of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics. It is entitled “Statutory Review of the Conflict of Interest Act”.

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

#### CANADIAN HERITAGE

**Mr. Gordon Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the second report of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage. It is entitled “Keep the Momentum Going: Canada’s Preparations for the 2014 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games in Sochi”.

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

This gives me an opportunity to wish all of our athletes in Sochi the best of luck in bringing home lots of medals.

#### ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

**Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the second report of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development, entitled “Terrestrial Habitat Conservation in Canada”.

The committee requests that the government table a comprehensive report to this report.

[Translation]

**Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present the NDP’s supplementary opinion on habitat conservation.

### Routine Proceedings

First of all, I would like to thank all the witnesses who appeared before the committee for this study. According to these witnesses, climate change is the greatest threat to our ecosystems and habitat conservation. However, surprise, surprise, that is not even in the official report.

A truly national conservation report would recognize the interdependence of aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems, not just terrestrial ecosystems, and would set out stronger legislative measures. The recent amendments to the Fisheries Act, the Navigable Waters Protection Act, the Species at Risk Act and the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act have left gaping holes in Canada’s protections for its ecosystems and habitats. We must remedy this situation immediately and strengthen these laws as quickly as possible.

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[English]

### INTERNATIONAL MOTHER LANGUAGE DAY ACT

**Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP)** moved for leave to introduce Bill C-573, an act to establish International Mother Language Day.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to be tabling a bill today calling upon the federal government to recognize February 21 of every year as International Mother Language Day.

On that day in 1952, five students of the University of Dhaka who were protesting the imposition of Urdu on the Bengali population were killed by police. They became the martyrs of the Bengali language movement.

In 1999, UNESCO recognized February 21 as International Mother Language Day.

Every year, I host an International Mother Language Day event in my riding. I do so in part because I see in it something fundamentally Canadian, because what allowed us to be and what keeps us as one is a respect for the importance of our mother languages, because the culture of our first nations is carried forward on this land in the form of over 60 distinct languages, and because we are home to languages spoken all over this world, including Bengali, the preservation of which inspired a day that, through this bill, we can make Canadian.

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

• (1515)

[Translation]

**The Speaker:** The hon. member for Pontiac on a point of order.

**Mr. Mathieu Ravignat:** Mr. Speaker, a report of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics on the Conflict of Interest Act was presented.

I rose to ask to present the official opposition’s dissenting report and I was not recognized. Therefore, I am asking for your consent to do so right now.

*Routine Proceedings*

[English]

**The Speaker:** I will allow the hon. member to present the dissenting report.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE**

## ACCESS TO INFORMATION, PRIVACY AND ETHICS

**Mr. Mathieu Ravnat (Pontiac, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, as the official opposition, the New Democratic Party is disappointed that the committee missed an important opportunity to make recommendations that would strengthen the Conflict of Interest Act.

Canadians are frustrated to see more and more rules being bent, broken and ignored in Ottawa. The Conservative Party was supposed to make changes in response to the Liberals' corruption and it passed the Federal Accountability Act.

However, in the seven years that the Conservative government has been in power, we are seeing more and more corruption and evidence of a culture of entitlement, as a result of legal exemptions and loopholes. However, the committee received a number of important recommendations that were not recognized.

The NDP would like to strengthen the Conflict of Interest Act. We see this as an opportunity to renew our commitment to create an open, transparent and accountable government.

[English]

**Mr. Craig Scott:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to request the unanimous consent of the House to move the following motion: that, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House, immediately after the reading of the order of the day for second reading of Bill C-23, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act and other Acts and to make consequential amendments to certain Acts, a motion that the said bill be referred forthwith to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs be deemed moved and be subject to provisions of Standing Order 73(1).

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

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Some hon. members:** No.

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

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**PETITIONS**

## SEX SELECTION

**Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present two separate petitions, both from the area of my riding, Kitchener—Conestoga, as well as from the surrounding area.

The petitioners are calling on Parliament to condemn the discrimination against females that is occurring through sex-selective pregnancy termination.

## HEALTH INSURANCE FOR RETIREES

**Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to submit this petition today. It signed by several thousand Canadians who are asking the federal government to keep its promise to retired public servants, military, and RCMP members, and to immediately stop any plans that could double the cost of federal retirees' health insurance plans.

[Translation]

Retired public servants worked hard their entire careers to serve Canadians. The Government of Canada should fulfill its promise and abandon the changes that could jeopardize the retirement income security and health care benefits of federal retirees.

[English]

The NDP is proud to stand with our federal retirees.

## ROUGE NATIONAL PARK

**Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am presenting a petition on behalf of hundreds of Canadians who are vitally concerned about Rouge national park. They want this irreplaceable 100-square-kilometre land assembly with a healthy and sustainable Rouge park. They want the park to implement the plans and the ecological vision of various plans from 1994 through to 2001, 2005, and 2008. They also want a 600-metre-wide protected woodland as an ecological corridor.

This is an area of vital interest to many constituents in my riding and the surrounding GTA.

● (1520)

## SEX SELECTION

**Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have a petition signed by hundreds of people from my riding in communities like Parksville, Qualicum Beach, Coombs, Errington, and Nanaimo. They are drawing the attention of the House to what was exposed by a CBC documentary, that being that in Canada ultrasounds are being used to tell the sex of an unborn child and then expecting parents may choose to terminate the pregnancy if the unborn child is a girl.

The petitioners call upon Parliament to condemn the discrimination against females that is occurring through sex-selective pregnancy termination.

[Translation]

## THE ENVIRONMENT

**Ms. Manon Perreault (Montcalm, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the people of Montcalm and Mascouche would like to draw to the attention of the House the fact that the current government spends over \$1.3 billion a year on subsidies to the oil and gas industry. They feel that those subsidies are incentives for energy sources that produce high levels of greenhouse gas emissions and discourage investments in green and renewable solutions. Accordingly, they think this money would be better spent on renewable energy, clean technologies and improvements to energy efficiency to address climate change.



*Routine Proceedings*

CANADA POST

*[English]*

**The Speaker:** Order, please. I see several members rising. I will just remind members that under the practice of the House we normally provide just a brief and succinct explanation of the petition.

The hon. member for Edmonton—Strathcona.

CANADA POST

**Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I will definitely try to be succinct. I have two petitions.

The first petition is from residents of Alberta in Spruce Grove, Edmonton, and Fort McMurray. It is calling upon the Government of Canada to reverse the cuts to Canada Post and to not cut door-to-door delivery and close post offices.

EXPERIMENTAL LAKES AREA

**Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the second petition is from citizens of Alberta who are asking the government to return the previous funding to operate the Experimental Lakes.

INTERNATIONAL MOTHER LANGUAGE DAY

**Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, in support of the bill I just tabled calling upon the federal government to recognize February 21 as international mother language day, I also have the privilege of tabling a petition signed by hundreds of citizens in and around my riding calling upon the Government of Canada to designate February 21 as international mother language day in recognition of the value of linguistic and cultural diversity and multilingualism.

VETERANS AFFAIRS

**Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I have the honour of presenting petitions from over 500 constituents opposing the closure of the Windsor and Essex County veterans office. They are signed by Afghanistan, World War II, and Korean War veterans and peacekeepers. They are calling upon the government to reverse this decision.

ROUGE NATIONAL PARK

**Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present a petition on behalf of a good number of constituents in support of Rouge national park, and in particular the proposition that the park be substantially larger than the plan that the government has put forward.

*[Translation]*

VIA RAIL

**Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the people in my region, from Bathurst all the way to Campbellton, have signed a petition entitled “Save our Trains!”.

Rail service is one of the most affordable and environmentally friendly modes of transportation. These people are urging the Government of Canada to take all the necessary steps to set up a daily VIA Rail return service between Montreal-Quebec City and Halifax, Nova Scotia, with stops in Campbellton, Bathurst and Miramichi, New Brunswick.

**Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions to present. They come from my riding and the neighbouring riding of Sherbrooke and have to do with the services being eliminated by Canada Post.

The petitioners are urging Canada Post to reverse its decision, which is a direct attack on the safety of seniors and people with disabilities and will also eliminate jobs for letter carriers, who provide an invaluable service to the community. They are also calling on Canada Post to come up with new ways of generating revenue, such as offering financial services.

VIA RAIL

**Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I also have a petition that deals with safeguarding VIA Rail service in eastern Canada. It has been signed by over 24,000 people, and I represent only a small portion of those people.

We could lose all VIA Rail service in eastern Canada. This is only the beginning. There will be other kinds of pressure. The government should pay attention.

● (1525)

*[English]*

CANADA POST

**Mr. Ryan Cleary (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I stand today to present a petition on behalf of constituents in my riding of St. John's South—Mount Pearl. The petition contains 1,551 signatures of people calling on the Conservative government to reverse recent cuts to Canada Post services, including home delivery, and to look instead for ways to modernize operations.

The signatures were gathered in a two-and-a-half hour blitz on January 25 and reflect my riding's overwhelming support of a treasured public service.

*[Translation]*

MARC MÉNARD

**Mr. François Pilon (Laval—Les Îles, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be in the House today to present a petition with nearly 7,000 signatures gathered in just a few days. The petitioners are calling on the Canadian government to turn to Interpol in the case of the disappearance of one of my constituents. Marc Ménard went missing in Mexico in March 2013, and the Ménard family has had no news from the Mexican police authorities since May 2013.

I want to thank all the petitioners and assure them and their families of my full support.

*S. O. 52*

[*English*]

PUBLIC TRANSIT

**Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to submit petitions from thousands and thousands of Canadians from coast to coast. Petitioners want the government to provide long-term, predictable, and non-partisan funding for public transit. They note that Canadians deserve fast, reliable, and affordable public transit, that road congestion is costing the GTA economy \$6 billion a year in lost productivity, and that the average daily commute time is over 80 minutes. Investing in public transit is good for the Canadian economy, good for families, and good for the environment.

INCOME TAX ACT

**Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition in support of a bill introduced by the member for Hamilton Mountain. Bill C-201 would allow tradespeople and apprentices to deduct travel and accommodation expenses from their taxable incomes when they secure and maintain employment at a construction site more than 80 kilometres from their homes.

VETERANS AFFAIRS

**Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present two petitions. The first one is from hundreds of Canadians from Windsor Essex County who urge the government to cancel its planned closure of the Windsor District Veterans Affairs office.

SHARK FINNING

**Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the second petition is from thousands of Canadians who are urging the government to take measures to stop the global practice of shark finning and to ensure the responsible conservation management of sharks. They call on the Government of Canada to immediately legislate a ban on the importation of shark fins to Canada.

UKRAINE

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I present a petition signed by Canadians who are very much concerned about what is happening in Ukraine. They believe a truly democratic society should promote freedom and responsible speech and expression and that people should never have to fear violence and imprisonment simply because they feel passionate enough to peacefully rally their opposition.

The people of Ukraine have become outraged with the ongoing protests that have proven to be violent and deadly. Petitioners are calling on the House to be supportive of the general feeling of the people of Ukrainian heritage and others here in Canada about what is happening in Ukraine today.

[*Translation*]

NAVIGATION RESTRICTIONS

**Mr. Marc-André Morin (Laurentides—Labelle, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition from constituents in my riding, Laurentides—Labelle, and several other regions in Quebec.

The petitioners are calling on the House to support my motion, Motion No. 441, which we will vote on this evening.

They feel that it is important to simplify the regulations and that bureaucracy and red tape prevents their municipalities from taking action. The champions on the other side should wake up and realize that this motion would be a good thing for Canadians.

\* \* \*

[*English*]

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.

\* \* \*

MOTIONS FOR PAPERS

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

**The Speaker:** Is that agreed?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

\* \* \*

REQUEST FOR EMERGENCY DEBATE

GRAIN TRANSPORT

**The Speaker:** I am in receipt of a notice for a request for an emergency debate from the hon. member for Sydney—Victoria and I will hear him now.

**Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am sure that you, as an MP from the Prairies, are well aware of the grain bottleneck out west. We have heard from many Prairie farmers who are frustrated about the delay in shipping.

I visited Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta in November, and I witnessed first-hand the mountains of wheat and other crops that are building up outside jammed grain elevators. Much of that crop is stored out in sheds or under tarps, and it is deteriorating. As a result, grain prices have dropped 40%. The problem we are hearing about from farmers is that no cost-benefit analysis and no business plan has been done to manage transportation.

The Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food even defended the railroad last fall, stating that the performance was adequate, which it is clearly not. Promises were also made by the minister to bring forward new legislation to rectify the imbalance in the market power between farmers and railroads to enable shippers to get a decent level of transportation service.

Federal legislation introduced last June did not deal with the situation and does not help farmers. Many Prairie farmers agree that the legislation needs to be amended to make it easier to hit railroad companies with fines for the transportation bottleneck.

Over 95% of Canada's export grain is shipped by rail. Canada is the world's top producer of canola and the second largest exporter of wheat. Almost 100 million tonnes of grain have been produced this year.

The nation's two major carriers, CN and CP, each provide 5,500 cars a week, but that is not enough for even half. Twenty vessels in Vancouver and five ships in Prince Rupert were waiting for grain on October 31. Today between 30 and 40 vessels are waiting to be loaded in Vancouver. Ships have been idling for as long as six weeks in Vancouver waiting for grain, at a cost of \$12,000 to \$20,000 per day in demurrage and penalties, and farmers are going to be paying for that. Canadian-based grain companies have been charged more than \$20 million in fees.

I could go on about the many issues facing grain farmers.

I ask you, Mr. Speaker, for the sake of all grain farmers out west who are facing the loss of their valuable crop, to let the House have an emergency debate tonight to talk about this transportation crisis.

• (1530)

#### SPEAKER'S RULING

**The Speaker:** I thank the hon. member for raising the issue. I am inclined to grant this request, so I will order it to be held at the normal hour of adjournment today.

## GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

### FAIR ELECTIONS ACT

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC)** moved that Bill C-23, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act and other Acts and to make consequential amendments to certain Acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, yesterday I introduced the fair elections act. It keeps everyday citizens in charge of democracy by pushing special interests out of the game and fraudsters out of business.

The bill would make it harder to break the law and easier to vote. It would close loopholes to big money and would impose new penalties on political impostors who make rogue calls. It would empower law enforcement with sharper teeth, a longer reach, and a freer hand.

The fair elections act would make our laws tough, predictable, and easy to follow. Life would be harder for election lawbreakers and easier for honest citizens taking part in democracy.

Law enforcement begins with the Commissioner of Canada Elections. The fair elections act would give him sharper teeth, a longer reach, and a freer hand. Sharper teeth means allowing the commissioner to seek tougher penalties for existing offences. Longer reach means empowering him with more than a dozen new offences to combat big money, rogue calls, and fraudulent voting. It would let him get to the truth by making it an offence for anyone to deceive or disrupt his investigation. Finally, a freer hand means the commissioner would have full independence, with control of his own staff

### Government Orders

and his own investigations, and a fixed term of seven years, which means he could not be fired without cause.

Consistent with separating the administration from enforcement, the fair elections act would house the commissioner with the Director of Public Prosecutions. He would maintain his powers and functions but gain status as a deputy head, allowing him to make his own staffing decisions and to direct his own investigations. Although the two would be housed in the same office, the director would have no role in the commissioner's investigations.

To ensure impartiality of the position, those individuals who have previously been a candidate or an employee of a political party, a minister, Elections Canada, or an MP's office would not be eligible to serve as commissioner. The referee should not be wearing a team jersey.

The fair elections act proposes that the current commissioner, Yves Côté, and his staff would remain in their roles, and all existing investigations would continue uninterrupted.

One of the responsibilities of the newly empowered watchdog would be to prevent impostors from making rogue calls. The fair elections act would do this by providing a mandatory public registry for mass calling. It would impose prison time for impersonating elections officials, and it would increase penalties for deceiving people out of their votes.

However, it is just as bad to vote illegally as it is to deny someone else's vote. Each fraudulent vote cancels out an honest one. To avoid this, we currently have identification requirements under the Canada Elections Act. Voters can choose from one of 39 acceptable forms of ID. When they fail to bring any of those, someone can vouch for their identity.

Elections Canada commissioned a study last year that found irregularities in one in four cases where vouching was used. Having irregularities 25% of the time constitutes an unacceptable risk.

I want to spend some special time on this particular issue, because these are the findings of the Neufeld report, which was commissioned by Elections Canada. According to that report, as I said earlier, there was a 25% error rate in the use of vouching. That means that every four times Elections Canada used vouching, there was an irregularity once. I will quote directly from the report:

...the audit showed that errors are made in the majority of cases that require the use of non-regular processes.

Vouching is a non-regular practice. It went on to say:

...inadequate or ineffective training carries significant negative implications for procedural compliance.

That is on page 21. Furthermore, and I quote directly from the report at page 26:

Public trust is at risk if the rate of error is not significantly reduced by the next... election.

*Government Orders*

Finally:

Without amendments to the Canada Elections Act, procedural compliance cannot be significantly improved in the 42nd general election.

If I can quote one more time:

Identity vouching procedures are unquestionably the most complex “exception” process administered at polling stations. The level of irregularities for vouching averaged 25 per cent.

• (1535)

It goes on. In a review entitled “A Review of Compliance with Election Day Registration and Voting Process Rules”, this audit showed that errors are made in the majority of cases that require non-regular processes. Then it takes a global view of Canada and the practices that happen in the 308 ridings. It says the following, “Averaged across 308 ridings, election officers made over 500 serious administrative errors per electoral district on Election Day”. That is 500 serious administrative errors per riding, and multiply that by the 308 ridings across the country.

To quote from the report again, “Obviously, this is unacceptable. Aside from legal concerns, public trust in proper administration of the electoral process is at serious risk if these error rates are not addressed”. And address them, we will. The fair elections act would put an end to the use of vouching on election day.

Similarly, Elections Canada recently experimented with the use of the voter identification cards as a form of ID. Before these pilot projects, Canadians voted for years without using cards to identify themselves, and for good reason. A report by Elections Canada recently showed that roughly one in six eligible voters does not have a correct address on the national registrar of electors, which is used to produce the voter information card. In other words, one out of six electors may get a card with the wrong address. That allows some to vote in a different riding than they live in, or to potentially vote more than once.

In fact, the Quebec comedy show *Infoman* did an interesting exposé on this. Two Montrealers received two voter information cards each, so they both went and voted twice each. They called it the “two-for-one special by Elections Canada”. This level of error, one in six, is also too high. As a result, the fair elections act would end the use of the voter information card as an acceptable form of identification.

To protect against fraud and to uphold the integrity of our electoral system, the fair elections act would not only instill these new rules, but it would also require in law that Elections Canada inform Canadians, through the advertising function, of the required forms of identification. In other words, embedded in the law would be a provision by which Elections Canada would be obliged to inform electors of the following:

(b) how an elector may have their name added to a list of electors and may have corrections made to information respecting the elector on the list;

(c) how an elector may vote under section 127 and the times, dates and locations for voting;

(d) how an elector may establish their identity and residence in order to vote, including the pieces of identification that they may use to that end;

That is the basic information that Elections Canada should advertise, so that when people get to the voting booth they already know what identification they will be required to present. The good

news is that there would continue to be roughly 39 different pieces of identification that would be acceptable. That number presents Canadians with plenty of options, as long as Elections Canada educates them of those options.

It is just as important, though, for political parties to follow the rules, as it is for voters. With a 370-page Canada Elections Act, much of the challenge is determining what those rules are. All parties fail at that from time to time, often while trying their best to comply. Since the last election, the commissioner has had to sign 15 different compliance agreements with those who have breached elections law. Some are due to honest mistakes.

Members of all parties have complained that the rules are unclear and complicated. Complicated rules bring unintentional breaches and intimidate honest, law-abiding people from participating in democracy. The fair elections act would make the rules clear, predictable, and easy to follow. Parties would have the right to an advance ruling and interpretations from Elections Canada within 45 days of a request, a service that the Canada Revenue Agency already provides. Elections Canada will also keep a registry of interpretations, and consult and notify parties before changing them.

• (1540)

However, even with clearer rules, members of Parliament and the Chief Electoral Officer will sometimes disagree on an MP's election expense return. When that happens, the Canada Elections Act provides that an MP can no longer sit in the House of Commons until the expense return has been changed to the CEO's satisfaction.

Now, remember, the removal of a member of Parliament from the House of Commons overturns the democratic decision of tens of thousands of electors: Canadian citizens. No one person should have the power to do that without providing due process. To that end, the fair elections bill will allow an MP to present the disputed case in the courts and to have judges rule on it quickly, before the CEO seeks the MP's suspension. Expedited hearings and strict timelines will ensure that these cases do not drag on.

Free speech is the lifeblood of democracy. The government is therefore following through on its commitment to repeal the ban on the premature transmission of election results. According to the Supreme Court, this ban is an infringement on freedom of expression. It is also completely impractical to suggest that merely banning broadcasting of results from eastern Canadian constituencies to the west will prevent that information from travelling westward. We live in a modern era where everyday Canadians have the ability to transmit information via social media and other means, so this provision is unenforceable, even if it were not a violation of our basic principle of free speech.

Voting is to democracy what free speech is to liberty. Unfortunately, Canadians are doing less voting these days. Since Elections Canada began promotional voter participation campaigns, turnout has plummeted, from 75% in 1988, to 61% in 2001. A Library of Parliament analysis shows that between 1984 and 2000, right in the middle of which Elections Canada began mounting its promotional campaigns, voter turnout among youth plummeted by 20 percentage points. Somehow this is not working.

Why is it happening? The truth is that there are many reasons, but some of them are actually very practical. Elections Canada's own report on the last election said that in 2011, 60% of non-voters cited everyday issues as the reason for not voting. These included being too busy and lacking basic information.

The same report showed, "The most important access barrier [to youth voting] was lack of knowledge about the electoral process, including not knowing about different ways to vote..".

The national youth survey revealed that nearly half of all Canadians aged 18 to 34 were unaware of the three options for voting other than on election day. That means that roughly half of our youth in this country do not know that they can vote at advance polls, by mail, or through special ballot. Students who happen to be busy on election day, studying or working, do not have the knowledge right now that they can vote in other ways. That level of awareness is incredibly low, and it is much lower amongst aboriginal youth, whose turnout we need to see increased. Therefore, we are proposing an increase in the information that voters receive about the options available for them to cast their ballot.

There is more evidence, though, to support the view that that is the kind of information they need. The survey that I just cited indicated that roughly a quarter of young non-voters expressed that not knowing where, when, or how to vote played a role in their decision not to cast the ballot. That is why Elections Canada correctly listed its top priority on youth turnout to be, "increasing awareness about when, where and how to vote, by providing information in formats suitable for youth".

The job of informing voters is even more important for the disabled. Consultation and data show that Elections Canada does a good job of providing the tools that special needs voters require, such as wheelchair ramps, sign language, and braille services. Where the agency falls short is in making these tools known to those who need them.

To address all of these problems, the fair elections bill will bring better customer service to voters, with an extra advance voting day and more elections officials to relieve congestion at voting stations.

• (1545)

The bill goes further than that. The bill would amend section 18 of the Canada Elections Act to focus all of Elections Canada's promotional campaigns on two purposes: informing people of the basics of voting, where, when, and what ID to bring; and informing disabled people of the extra tools available to help them vote. It would be left to aspiring candidates and parties to give people something for which to vote and to reach Canadians where they are in their communities.

I look to the example set by our former immigration minister, now Minister of Employment and Social Development, who went out to new Canadians who perhaps were not entirely familiar with our democratic process because they came from countries that did not share those processes. He exposed them to democracy, and interested and inspired them in the process. We have seen similar activities that have been done by President Obama, who inspired a whole generation who did not traditionally vote to come out and cast a ballot. All of this shows that political candidates who are aspiring for

### *Government Orders*

office are far better at inspiring voters to get out and cast their ballot than our government bureaucracies, which is exactly how we will change the law.

However, that costs money. We live in the second biggest country in the world, with 10 million square kilometres. We are a nation that is twice the size of the entire European Union, and 95% of the countries in the world have a greater population density than we do. That means we have to travel long distances to reach our fellow Canadians. To do that, Canadian political parties and candidates spent \$120 million in the last election in total. It sounds like a lot, until one considers that we spend \$2.5 billion on cosmetics and fragrances in one year. Our nation spends 20 times more on products like cologne and makeup every year than we spend contesting democratic elections once every four years.

It is fair to say that special interest groups can use big money to drown out the voices of everyday Canadians, but that is why our nation's laws try to block that money. During campaigns, parties should rely on the money of small donors, not powerful special interest groups. Donations, like power, should be dispersed among the many rather than concentrated with the few.

As a result, the fair elections act would ban politicians from using unpaid loans to evade donation limits and maintain the absolute interdiction on corporate and union money. It would also allow a modest increase in the spending and donation limits while imposing tougher audits and penalties for those who exceed those limits. At the same time, the goal of the elections act is to allow small donors to contribute more to democracy through the front door and to block illegal big money from sneaking in the back door.

I would like to take this moment to thank the now Minister for Multiculturalism, who played a seminal role in crafting the proposals that I have brought before this House today. He and his staff have done tremendous work and have served their country well. I am very proud; in fact, I am very privileged, to have inherited that work.

We have before us a fair elections act that would further protect the basic principles that guide our democracy: that power should be dispersed in the hands of the many rather than concentrated in the hands of the few; that Canadians should be in charge of their democracy; that special interest groups should be on the sidelines; and rule-breakers should be out of the game altogether.

This is yet another occasion for us to celebrate the democracy that has brought us to where we are as a country today, to make it better, to further instill it in the foundation of our country, and to move forward into the future of Canadian democracy.

*Government Orders*

• (1550)

**Mr. Craig Scott (Toronto—Danforth, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the minister for an extremely well-prepared speech. It is obvious that in recent days he has also taken this file to heart and that he understands the bill inside and out. However, I would like to challenge him on the question of invoking Mr. Neufeld's report as a reason for getting rid of vouching and also voter IDs. That report said the following:

It should be noted that this decision [the first decision in the Etobicoke Centre case] was made on the basis that important procedural requirements had not been met, and not due to evidence indicating that ineligible voters had been permitted to vote.

This was also emphasized by the Supreme Court when it talked about the problems of disenfranchisement by using irregularities as a reason to annul the election of our colleague from that area.

I want to then ask, why has the minister gone that route rather than taking the Chief Electoral Officer up on his request that the Chief Electoral Officer could now recruit election workers on his own, well in advance of the dropping of the writ, and thereby be able to train workers better, so that what happens on election day does not have irregularities to the same extent that the studies have shown?

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question and for the very good meeting we had well before the introduction of this legislation. He is very passionate about these subjects, and I am sure Canadians will benefit from his input at committee when the bill arrives there.

The Neufeld report not only specified that there are immense rates of irregularities in the use of vouching, but it also said that even when there was increased supervision over the practice of vouching, those irregularities were not prevented. In fact, they only dropped by four percentage points. Normally, vouching has a rate of irregularity of 25%, extraordinarily high. When extra supervision is provided, the rate of irregularities is 21%. That is still one in five instances. It is far too high; it is an extremely complicated way to validate someone's identity; and because of that complication, it leads to incredible levels of inaccuracy that risk the integrity of our system.

• (1555)

**Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I want to pick up on that for just a moment. I want to echo the comments that were made by my colleague, by the way, and congratulate the minister on his hard work on this, as he has met with me in the past as well. I appreciate that very much.

I was going to ask about something else, but I want to stick with the issue of vouching for just a moment because this is very important. In my riding and in many rural ridings across this country, disenfranchisement is actually happening and has happened in the past little while, and the reason for that is that a lot of seniors in rural areas do not have the identification that is being asked for. For example, there are anomalies in certain provinces. In Newfoundland and Labrador, the health card does not have a photo attached to it. I understand there are 39 ways this could be done, but without that basic registration, a lot of this would not count.

I ask this in all sincerity. Would the minister be willing to look at an option provided through Elections Canada to make sure people who are vulnerable, ideally seniors, a lot of them rural, would be

able to take advantage of a vouching system that would be acceptable to Elections Canada and cut down on the number of cases of fraud?

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his question and for the valuable input he provided when we met earlier. He is a worthy critic and will also serve Canadians well in the committee that reviews this bill.

Right now, photo identification is actually not required under the act. It is a possibility. One can use photo ID, but one does not have to. I have here the list of 39 different forms of ID that are available for people to cast a ballot.

I want to raise that point, though, because the leader of the Green Party posted a public letter in which she said that photo ID was required. She is an extremely well-informed parliamentarian and she was under the incorrect impression that photo ID was required. That suggests to me that we need to do a better job of informing Canadians which ID is actually required and which is not. That is why we want to amend section 18 of the Canada Elections Act to require the agency to advertise aggressively about the real photo identification requirements, because clearly there is a knowledge gap, even among our most informed citizens. If Canadians are aware of what ID is required and all the 39 options that are available to them, they will be more likely to show up with that ID, so we do not have this problem at the polling stations.

**Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the minister might touch on some of the provisions in the bill that would help avoid the unfortunate circumstances where political parties and candidates in the past have suggested that the rules of the game have changed during an election or after an election, which has brought into question some of the issues surrounding Elections Canada and some of the disputes that all political parties and candidates have had over the last number of years.

I wonder if the minister would touch on that a bit.

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** Mr. Speaker, all parties have had compliance problems with Elections Canada, and many of them have said that is the result of unclear rules. Some of these rules do change, and they change suddenly without notice. Sometimes they are just not written down at all.

The fair elections act would create an easy-to-follow system. It would allow parties to ask Elections Canada for either an advance ruling on a hypothetical fact situation or an interpretation of the law. Elections Canada would then provide that within 45 days, it would be in a public registry, and it would apply equally to absolutely everyone. It would also be binding on both Elections Canada and the commissioner, so that if the parties carried out the practice that Elections Canada authorized, the agency and law enforcement could not then prosecute them for following the rules they were told to follow.

*Government Orders*

As well, when Elections Canada wanted to change the rules, we would create a mandatory consultation and notice period that would allow the advisory committee of political parties to put their input to the agency so that the rules are practical, are fair, and come with reasonable lead time.

**Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to put a question to the hon. member about the decision to move the investigative enforcement wing of Elections Canada under the public prosecutor's office. It seems very strange, given that in a common law system, generally speaking, the mandate of the prosecution office is simply to hear the evidence presented by the investigators and then make the decision whether or not to proceed with the prosecution. That is normal for judges and prosecutors in a civil law jurisdiction.

Why is the government making an exception for Elections Canada that does not apply to any other agency at the federal level?

• (1600)

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** Mr. Speaker, we carefully considered whether it was appropriate to house investigations and prosecutions in the same office, and we concluded that it was, firstly because it has already been done. Not only were those two functions housed in the same office before 2006, but they were housed in the hands of the same person. The Commissioner of Canada Elections used to be responsible for both investigations and prosecutions under the Canada Elections Act.

The Federal Accountability Act moved the prosecutorial function to the director of public prosecutions, who is an independent prosecutor who can only be removed by Parliament. Now, with the fair elections act, we would make the commissioner independent of Elections Canada as well.

The reason we believe that the commissioner must be independent is that any watchdog who enforces law must be independent. That independence means the ability to choose one's own staff, direct one's own investigations, and serve a fixed term without the possibility of being fired without cause. Right now, the Commissioner of Canada Elections has none of that independence. None of those attributes of independent governance exist within the office of today's commissioner.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Lise St-Denis (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I imagine that electoral reform legislation takes years to develop. Why is there nothing about electronic voting?

The parties already use electronic voting for their leadership races. Did the government look at that possibility? Even if it does not happen this year, it will probably be very important at some point and would fix a number of problems.

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her question.

The fair elections act will ensure that Canadians are always in charge of our democracy. It includes several elements.

First, we are making the commissioner responsible for investigating allegations under the Canada Elections Act more independent. The commissioner will be able to investigate without being influenced by other authorities. Second, we are addressing the issue

of fraudulent voting. Lastly, we are addressing the issue of fraudulent calls.

These three steps will help strengthen the integrity of our democracy and ensure that Canadians remain in charge of our system.

[*English*]

**Mr. Craig Scott (Toronto—Danforth, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to follow the minister with a reply. I would note that, in some serious respect, the odyssey of the bill began in March 2012 with a motion in this House that was unanimously adopted by all the parties. It was sponsored by the former critic for democratic reform, the member from Hamilton. It was supposed to have produced a bill on the subject matter of the motion, which was heavily focused on better enforcement measures for Elections Canada and measures to combat the kinds of fraud that had become known, through the media, as having occurred in 2011.

That bill was supposed to have been tabled in September 2012. We are now about 16 or 17 months from there. There have been serious delays, and in the course of that time I will acknowledge there have been expansions in the scope of the bill, which unfortunately have let the bill stray well away from what needed to be its core focus and, I also fear, have allowed the injection of an agenda that is very problematic, which I will address.

The minister does like to say that he has talked to this person and that person, but I am not sure how any of the conversations he has had amount to the kind of consultation that is needed on such a fundamental change to such a fundamental law in our country.

The tradition used to be that all parties would be heavily involved at the drafting stage, so that when it hit the House, there would not be any kind of serious problem on key provisions, and at the very least, the Chief Electoral Officer would be intimately involved. We all know that has not been the approach.

That is one reason why I moved and asked for unanimous consent to take this bill, after first reading, to committee, which in our system, would allow a bit more freedom—a lot more freedom, in fact—for Parliament to look at all the elements and not be stuck with the principle of the bill as it has come forward, without consultation.

However, as we all know, the vote went against the motion.

Unfortunately, the way the bill has been rolled out, and I say this with some regret because I do respect the acumen of the minister and the time he has put in since he became minister, it smacks of a “my way or the highway” approach to what is in the bill.

There are good things in it, but I will not be spending my time on the good things. We will hear more about them from different members.

There is absolutely no doubt that there are things in here that nobody is going to have any problem with, that would tighten systems, and that would respond to some of what I call basic reform requests that have come since 2010 from the Chief Electoral Officer around the functioning of the system.

*Government Orders*

However, “some good points” pale in comparison to what I would actually call “some very awful points”. For that reason, after spending a good part of the last 24 hours reviewing and consulting on the bill, as it was only tabled yesterday, I have come to the conclusion that it is so flawed on these key half dozen points that I will be voting against the bill at second reading, now that the opportunity for an earlier committee process has been rejected.

Allow me to, first, state generally why the bill is, in my view, so deeply problematic before then elaborating a bit further on four or five of the problems.

I would emphasize that if those problems disappeared at third reading, the vote would look different. The problem is that they are there and they are so serious that I cannot recommend to my colleagues that we vote for it.

**Mr. Erin O’Toole:** It got an A minus.

**Mr. Craig Scott:** Mr. Speaker, that is a very good point. I think the former chief electoral officer is, unfortunately, an extraordinarily easy grader.

•(1605)

All of Canada knows that the imperative behind this bill eventually appearing and the central challenge was to rein in the kinds of election fraud discovered in 2011. There were the fraudulent election calls and other kinds of fraud that we know occurred in 2006 with what we called the in-and-out affair.

Instead, the Conservatives, through the minister, launched a kind of Alice-in-Wonderland detour by turning this exercise into some kind of indirect and sometimes rather pointed flogging of the institution that has been trying to rein in electoral fraud, against considerable Conservative Party resistance and manipulation. That includes Elections Canada and the Chief Electoral Officer, with his associate, the Commissioner for Elections Canada.

This whole exercise started with the unanimous vote in March 2012, and now that trajectory has either been submerged, or to some extent hijacked, in order for the Conservative Party, through the government, to start to portray itself as a victim of a non-partisan agency. The metaphor of “not wearing a team jersey” was carefully chosen and has been repeated by the minister. We all know what is intended by that. We all know the tarnishing of the institution that was intended by that, for Elections Canada and in particular the Chief Electoral Officer. Marc Mayrand and Elections Canada are being portrayed as non-neutral players on some team versus being the neutral referees that we all know they are. This inversion then drives the so-called logic behind so much of what is in Bill C-23.

On top of that, there is a second, rather topsy-turvy move in Bill C-23. After years of examples of fraud and constant brushes between the law and the Conservative Party—when I say the law, I mean Elections Canada as the embodiment of seeking to enforce the law—what we get from the minister and the government in the bill is a focus on ordinary Canadians as somehow the main concern when it comes to fraud. The government has removed two means of voter identification.

The first is the voter’s ID card, which can be presented along with another piece of identity, which has been developed on a kind of

rolling pilot project basis by Elections Canada to enfranchise more Canadian voters. The second one is the practice of vouching, for which there were 100,000 Canadians in the last election. Effectively, the government wants to lure, or to some extent sucker, the press and Canadians into thinking this is somehow about fairness and preventing fraud.

This has to be called what it is: voter suppression. These tactics have been building over the past decade, since around 2006, when changes to the law made it harder and harder to prove one has the right to vote in our country. Colleagues of mine will provide overviews of this trajectory and also examples of real-world impacts and who would be disproportionately excluded by these changes. Voter suppression is the result, but I personally will need to be assured that this is not also, frankly, the intention, an intention informed by the deliberate strategies patented south of the border by the Republican Party.

A third feature of this upside-down world is how the government engages in the kind of night equals day, war equals peace, doublespeak by claiming that it gets big money out of elections with Bill C-23, when there are cumulatively a number of measures that keep big money in play in ways that are likely to benefit one party most. I will leave it to everyone’s imagination to know which party I am referring to.

Fourth, Orwell would be smiling now—maybe smiling with a grimace, but smiling—if he were listening to the minister talking about adding “enforcement teeth” to the Canada Elections Act, when the single most important measure requested by both the commissioner and the Chief Electoral Officer, the power to compel testimony in the face of delay and recalcitrant witnesses, was omitted.

•(1610)

Mr. Speaker, let me now turn to more detail on these very general points, all the while noting, and this is important, that my colleagues, in the days and weeks to come, will deeply elaborate on every one of these points. The caucus is extraordinarily engaged with the problems relating to this bill, and a lot of expertise will be brought to bear that I hope the minister will listen to and that will inform the committee stage.

I will first comment on my concern and claim that the result is voter suppression. We have to know of, and put into context, an active effort by Elections Canada, which in the last election used voter identification cards in a number of different contexts to try to increase enfranchisement of people in our society who, as the minister rightly pointed out, tend not to vote in greater numbers than others: aboriginal voters on reserves, youth on campuses, and seniors in residences. The method that is now being abolished, the voter identification cards along with another piece of ID, was used successfully in this experiment with an extraordinary amount of positive feedback.

I will move on to the vouching issue. I think that the minister wants to tap into some intuitive problem Canadians might have with one person vouching for another. However, we live in a society that would not function without certain bonds of trust and a degree of procedural stricture.



*Government Orders*

What happens with vouching is this. There were 100,000 people vouched for in the last election. A person who is already confirmed as a legitimate voter at the poll in question may vouch for one person. If that vouching is believed by the election-day worker, then that person may vote.

Here is an example. Two parents show up with two teenagers, who in a previous election were aged 16 and 17, but when the last election came, they were missed by the enumeration. That is a process that almost does not exist any more. They show up at the poll and do not have the right kind of ID, or may well have it but have not brought it with them. Each parent can vouch for one of the teenagers, who are at least age 18 at this point in the story, and both teenagers can vote. It happens a lot with seniors, persons with disabilities, and other groups.

The minister wants us to understand that somehow or other vouching, and some of that evidence came out of the Etobicoke Centre case, suggests that irregularities are kissing cousins to some kind of massive fraud, or that there is a serious danger of it. However, there is no evidence of that. Even the 25% figure of irregularities does not come close to proving that the people who were not sworn in properly or for whom the vouching was not done properly did not have the right to vote. The Supreme Court of Canada emphasized exactly that. It will be important for us to hear from expert witnesses on that at committee stage. Indeed, I would love to see any reports, or other information I do not know about, tabled by this minister as real evidence that there is a problem.

Here is an example of why I think there likely is not a problem. In 2006, before we went to the newest system, which requires more ID than ever before, there was a controversy. One party claimed that because 11,000 people had registered to vote on election day in the riding of Trinity—Spadina, it somehow meant that something was amiss, that there had to have been all kinds of problems, and that surely a bunch of those people could not have been valid voters. Elections Canada took that concern seriously. It hired a whole team in order to track every one of the people who had registered on election day through a couple of different methods at the time. By knocking on doors, it found all but two. It found no evidence that anyone had voted who was not entitled to vote.

If that was the case before we got into this system, I am not exactly sure why we should have any serious concern that the methods being taken away now, the voter identification card with another piece of ID and vouching, are somehow tied to the risk of fraud, let alone fraud itself.

• (1615)

This is why I want the minister to understand that the result is voter suppression, and it needs to be looked at in that light in terms of who will be affected. My colleagues will go into more detail on this aspect.

With regard to big money, I am not sure that big money is going to be taken out of this. The biggest problem we have in the bill, and there are three or four other points on the big-money point, is that there is a new head-scratching provision. It basically says, as the minister said in the House, that any money spent through communications, including most email, mail, electronic communications, and phone calls, to raise money from existing donors who

have given as little as \$20 in the last five years is not an expense during the election period.

Any party that has an extensive database system, has the capacity to phone ad infinitum, and has a huge donor base would benefit from that measure. They would also be able to invest the money up front to pay for that excludable expense. It would also add, de facto, to the overall spending limit, which already is going up 5%, and thereby would also benefit any party that is raising a lot of money.

Here I have a grave concern. This could turn into an end run around the expenses involved in the whole pulling-the-vote exercise. All that might have to happen, in the current wording of this provision, is that a phone call is made, saying “We hope you are still interested in voting for us; we understand that you have indicated that. Do you have any questions? By the way, we know you are a donor; could you possibly also donate \$50 more during this thing?” That whole exercise then gets shoved into another expense universe and does not get counted as an election expense. The potential for abuse of this provision is huge.

Also, \$5,000 donations by candidates are now permitted. How is that getting big money out? The \$1,200 limit on donations has now been increased to \$1,500. That may seem small to many people in the House. To average Canadians, \$1,200 is already a lot. Adding \$300 is a huge amount. Who can afford to do that when there is no consequential amendment increasing the tax credit? The tax credit stays at the level it was before, so that extra \$300 is only for people who can afford it without worrying about any portion of it as a tax credit.

I will not get into the problems in bringing forward the old political financing act bill that creates an impediment on getting loans to start up a campaign for somebody who does not have even \$5,000 of their own. They would have to go out and get \$1,200 or \$1,500 guarantees from other people to back any loan that they now can only get from a bank.

I know a conscientious effort was made by the former minister, and I am assuming by the current minister, to try to make the political loans systems as fair as possible, but this also will potentially have a serious detrimental effect on any candidates who do need to borrow versus those candidates who do not need to because of fundraising or because the party transfers money to them.

No new powers to compel testimony is a huge issue. The Competition Act provides a clear example, and that is all that is being asked for by the Commissioner of Elections Canada and by the Chief Electoral Officer: the ability to compel testimony in this regulatory context with safeguards that also include that one cannot be charged for whatever one's testimony is.

*Government Orders*

This has been ignored and I fail to understand why, when we have a working example with the Competition Act. What is good for clean competition should be good for clean elections. It is really befuddling to me that the single most important change that would allow better investigation of what happened with the fraudulent election calls scandal in 2011, the single most important change that would allow that to be investigated better against all kinds of obstruction that has occurred on behalf of the Conservative Party and indeed even its lawyers, would be this amendment, this reform.

If it were included, it would apply retroactively, because it would be a procedural provision that had nothing to do with any new crimes. There are already enough crimes listed in the Elections Act and in the Criminal Code to cover this. We do not need a new crime of impersonation or obstruction to cover, as my leader said in the House today, under the existing act. Enhancing procedural powers could reach back in time and reinvigorate the Elections Canada investigations that are looking to be stalled.

•(1620)

Finally, one way or the other, whether it is a certain philosophy or antipathy toward the office, this is an attack on the Chief Electoral Officer. The gutting of the public education and promotion of democracy function, especially for disadvantaged sectors of the population, found in section 18 of the current act, and replacing it with a very workmanlike technical role of signalling how to vote, et cetera, is a serious undercutting of the function of the Chief Electoral Officer.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for his very good speech. I look forward to working with him in committee on studying the measures contained in the fair elections act.

The national youth survey indicates that close to half of Canadians aged 18 to 34 knew of no other way to vote than to go to the polling station on election day. That means that half of all young people are unaware of the voting methods that are available before election day, when many of them are working or at school.

Why does the hon. member not support the measure we are proposing, which would require Elections Canada to provide more information on voting methods to all Canadians?

•(1625)

**Mr. Craig Scott:** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for the question.

This is not about rejecting amendment 18. We can consider it, as it is worded in the reform, while preserving the rest of the Chief Electoral Officer's mandate in the area of public education. We do not have to choose one or the other. Nor am I saying that the measure presented by the minister to inform young people is not good. I take issue with the exclusion of the rest of the mandate.

[*English*]

**Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, this legislation would take away spending limits on fundraising activities. We know this type of activity often includes negative messaging, political messaging, particularly from the Conservative

Party. We also know that this kind of messaging actually turns off voters.

I would like to quote from a Conference Board of Canada report on voter turnout, which concluded by saying that "...without fundamental changes in the way in which politics is conducted in Canada, these are goals that could well remain out of reach for some time".

Would my hon. colleague conclude like me that this legislation would only serve to suppress the youth vote rather than result in a larger youth voter turnout?

**Mr. Craig Scott:** Mr. Speaker, although it is difficult to predict these kinds of things with any certainty, I agree that the result will be that youth will be detrimentally affected, to the extent that they are among the sectors of our population who most benefit from the voter ID experiment pilot project and from vouching.

I will give one thing to the minister, although it is not at all clear whether this is intentional in the legislation, because it is so indirectly worded, that if it turns out to be true that the bill would allow for e-registration of voters, and going online to then change an address and everything else, something the Chief Electoral Officer has asked for, then that might help. There is a provision in the bill that seems to suggest that whatever the Chief Electoral Officer deems as an adequate signature for purposes of registration is sufficient. If that is meant to include electronic registration, then that would be a countervailing factor that I would give to the minister as something that might actually help if it sends a message to our youth as a means to get them to register.

**Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the member talked about the minister's comments about not wearing a team jersey.

When talking about the election commissioner, the bill states that appointees who hold the position will hold it for a non-renewable seven-year term and, to maintain the integrity of the position, those individuals who have previously been a candidate, an employee of a registered party, exempt staff of a minister or a staff member of a member of Parliament, or employee of Elections Canada, will not be eligible for the appointment to commissioner.

My first question is this. Would the hon. member agree that those individuals who have been identified previously as partisan should not hold a position where they would in essence be passing judgment on candidates and, in particular, members of Parliament who do hold partisan positions?

*Government Orders*

The second question is further comment on the vouching issue. The member talked about a couple of situations where vouching was a good thing. However, there are many situations, especially for those of us in urban areas, where we have seen problems with vouching, where our official agents or the scrutineers we have at the polls are not able to challenge people who are being vouched for and whom we know are not eligible to vote. I can provide a specific example from 2006 for the member. As a scrutineer at a poll, I was shocked to learn that my mother had voted. She had actually passed away in 2005, and when I asked the person why her name was checked off the list, she assured me that my mother had been in earlier in the day to vote. When I explained to her that was not possible, I was ushered out of the polling station. For every good there is always a bad, and the integrity of elections is always paramount in any decision that we make going forward.

Could the member comment on those two things?

• (1630)

**Mr. Craig Scott:** Mr. Speaker, it is important to return to some of the wisdom in the Supreme Court of Canada's judgment in the case involving Etobicoke Centre, in which it said that we had to be extremely careful about disenfranchising voters, especially in the name of procedural irregularities. In fact, that rationale and reasoning obviously benefited in a fair way one of our colleagues in the House, because he kept his seat for the reasons the court gave.

I would simply say in response to individual anecdotes like the member gave that if there were evidence of a scientific sort or an even more generalized anecdotal set of evidence that this is a serious problem, then it has to be presented at committee so that we can understand it. At the moment, we are looking at a rampant anecdotes that do not seem to correspond with the sense of people in the system. I would also say that my colleague, the democratic reform critic for the Liberal Party, did ask a straightforward and important question about whether reworking and trying to figure out better ways to vouch would not be better than, to use a worn-out cliché, throwing the baby out with the bathwater.

**Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise and ask my colleague some questions on this file.

The minister suggested that 25% of those being vouched for had something wrong about them, when in fact the Neufeld report does not say that anywhere. In fact, the Neufeld report suggests widening the use of the voter information card as a valid piece of address information, yet the government has ignored that part of the report and is now suggesting the elimination of the use of the voter registration card.

The whole notion of vouching allows 120,000 people to vote who otherwise might not be able to vote, and the government would like to remove that. However, this report did not ever recommend it. Could the member comment on that, please?

**Mr. Craig Scott:** Mr. Speaker, it is an important piece of information that goes back to what I said would be important at committee. We have to get down to the level of evidence. The minister, I will concede, is very good at presenting the case as he understands it, but we have to ensure that it is grounded in evidence of the kind that would justify infringing on a constitutional right, the

right to vote, which drove the Supreme Court's reasoning in the Etobicoke Centre case.

**Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I want to commend the minister and the critics today for the quality of the debate.

I have a question about a potential gap in the legislation. I understand that there will be penalties now for impersonating elections officials. However, in my case in the last election someone impersonated my campaign manager and sent a voter across town to an incorrect polling place. I wonder if that penalty for impersonating elections officers could be extended to cover that case, where someone actually impersonates a campaign manager.

**Mr. Craig Scott:** Mr. Speaker, that is a very interesting example, another important anecdote. Society is built upon anecdotes like that.

However, I think the important answer is that we do not need to amend the act to catch that. There are already at least two provisions in the Canada Elections Act that deal with the criminal illegality of trying to divert people from voting.

Adding the impersonation offence is a matter of adding specificity to something that is already there in generality. This is also what my colleague, the Leader of the Opposition, was getting at with his questions in question period today, making sure that the government side understands that nothing in the bill, in terms of newly framed crimes, means that the existing act does not already cover the kind of behaviour cited by my colleague.

\* \* \*

• (1635)

**GRAIN TRANSPORT**

**Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, there have been consultations and if you seek it you will find unanimous consent for the following motion:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House, during the debate tonight pursuant to Standing Order 52 later today, no quorum call, dilatory motion or request for unanimous consent shall be received by the Chair.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** Does the hon. member for Peace River have the unanimous consent of the House to propose the motion?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

\* \* \*

**FAIR ELECTIONS ACT**

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-23, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act and other Acts and to make consequential amendments to certain Acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

*Government Orders*

**Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind-  
sor, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, first of all I would like to thank the House and all the members within it for elevating debate over the past hours. As my colleague for Kingston and the Islands has pointed out, there have been some very interesting facts put out there, and it has been a very good debate. We have talked a fair amount about how we would fix the problems we have seen in the news headlines over the past three or four years and how we would address these issues. I want to thank all members, including the Minister of State for Democratic Reform.

I want to start with a summary of what the bill proposes, as it is quite extensive in many respects.

Bill C-23 would protect voters from rogue calls and impersonation. There would be mandatory public registry for mass calling, prison time for impersonating election officials, and increased penalties for deceiving people out of their votes.

The bill would give law enforcement sharper teeth and allow the commissioner to seek tougher penalties for existing offences. The commissioner would have full independence, with control of his or her staff and of investigation, and a fixed term of seven years so that he or she could not be fired without cause.

The bill would also crack down on voter fraud by prohibiting the use of vouching and voter information cards as replacements for acceptable ID. Studies commissioned by Elections Canada demonstrate mass irregularities in the use of vouching and high rates of inaccuracy on voter information cards.

According to legislation, there are 39 forms of identification. However, a question earlier talked about how some identification does not have the required information on it, such as addresses. We have experienced this problem in some rural areas, and many seniors especially do not have the right amount of information. I am hoping that the government would accept an amendment that would allow the practice of some sort of vouching in an official manner to take place. I guess we will have to study that in committee, if indeed the bill manages to get to that stage.

The bill would also make rules easy to follow for all, which was pointed out earlier as being in section 18. The commissioner has had to sign 15 different compliance agreements with those who have breached election laws, some due to honest mistakes. Members of all parties have noticed that the rules can be unclear.

Complicated rules bring unintentional breaches and intimidate everyday people from taking part in democracy. As my hon. colleague pointed out, this relates to youth engagement, those with disabilities, and others.

Of course, in this particular case, there are people who find themselves disenfranchised from the entire system of voting and feel that their vote is not necessary or does not mean much in the long run, but I would say to the government that we need to come up with a plan to bring out the best in our democracy, which is to say that we need to bring up the turnout rate.

It used to be high many years ago. I have to admit that in my own riding, the voter turnout was at a dismal 44%, which was the second-lowest in the country. We managed to finish just ahead of the Fort

McMurray area. That is often the case where we have transient workers.

In many respects, I agree with what the minister is saying, because we need to reach out to transient workers who may not be aware that they are able to vote in other ridings. The facilities are there for them to do that. The only problem is that some of these people work in oil fields and that sort of thing. However, they can, even in their own ridings, vote at any time whatsoever. They can go to the returning officer and do that at any point. That, to us, proved to be the most effective way to communicate to people who travel a lot, and not just to the oil fields in western Canada, but those who work in oil and natural gas fields around the world.

The bill would also increase the level of donations from \$1,200 to \$1,500. I am not really sure if that would go a long way, other than allow some people who can afford it a little more room. I do not see anything wrong with the measures that were currently in place, the \$1,200 and the incremental formula that was already there. In the meantime, I must say that with the personal contributions, there are some positive steps in the right direction when it comes to the election and the leadership.

• (1640)

The Commissioner of Canada Elections is the one that has been causing some headaches within our party as to how we are deal with the independence that is being bandied about by the government. I would like to talk about how this works in the sense of the commissioner himself.

Several of the requests that the commissioner made to Elections Canada were basically that he wanted to have the power to go to a judge to get people to comply with the seeking out of information. At the time, we thought that it was a reasonable thing to ask, given what has happened over the past little while, certainly when it comes to some of the byelections that we have witnessed and the general election before that.

However, I am not certain whether the Commissioner of Canada Elections' investigative tools have been increased within this, so I do not know if the effectiveness has increased for that particular person. That concerns us. If we make this person independent, that is one thing, but if we do not give the increased ability to seek out the information he is looking for in order to conduct his investigation, all we are really doing is shuffling the offices. I will get to that part in just a moment.

The commissioner did endorse the recommendation made by the CEO that the Commissioner of Canada Elections be given the power to apply to a judge for an order to compel any person to provide information that is relevant to an investigation, which is what I just spoke of. There was some debate today as to whether he does have those tools or not. Throughout the course of this debate, I hope that more light will be shone on that subject and that it will perhaps come up again in this debate at second reading.

*Government Orders*

Regarding the lack of flexibility when dealing with the conventions of the Canada Elections Act, the commissioner suggested that more tools are needed to deal with the breaches of the Canada Elections Act that are too severe to be handled through compliance agreements but not serious enough to be dealt with through prosecutions. The commissioner pointed to recommendations contained in the CEO's report on the 40th general election: candidates and political parties that exceed their authorized expense limits should see a dollar-for-dollar reduction in their elections expense reimbursement, and when a candidate or political party fails to file a report by the applicable statutory date, they should forfeit up to 50% of their nomination deposit.

All of this is to say that some of this stuff has been addressed, and we applaud the minister for putting these measures into the bill.

However, let me just go back to one of the key tenets of this, which is the ability of the commissioner to do his or her job. In this case, it is his job. If we look at the chain of command and look at the commissioner himself, by this route, through Elections Canada, he is ultimately answerable to Parliament.

A flag went up for me when I looked at all of the testimony and news stories that dealt with election irregularities and possible and actual violations over the past three or four years. A lot of this work was discovered by auditors. A lot of the violations were discovered by people on the ground within Elections Canada. What they were able to do was advise the commissioner on a continual basis because they were within that sphere. They simply went down the way and told the commissioner what was going on. The commissioner, if given the right tools, would have been able to investigate that further, we believe, in a more effective way. Separating those people and putting them in a different office altogether, in public prosecutions, makes the gap just a little too wide for the information-sharing process that was taking place. That is what I fear.

I know the government will argue that these people had the ability to go to whomever they wished, but being together in that one area certainly would have allowed a freer flow of information that would have allowed the commissioner to do a better job, given that he had the tool that was suggested about compliance.

•(1645)

When it comes to public prosecutions, they are ultimately answerable to cabinet, so certainly we have reservations about that as well. I am sure the minister will address that also. I am hoping he will convince us it is not necessarily the case.

What is causing a great unease among us is the ability of the commissioner to do that investigation. If sharper teeth are required to do an effective job, I am not sure the teeth the Conservatives are seeking would be obtained within this legislation.

A code of conduct for political entities was also suggested some time ago, after the 41st general election. Then there is the idea of extension of the application of privacy protection principles to political parties and new requirements governing telecommunications with electors. If I could go to that point for just a moment, the robocalls, as we affectionately call them around here, have been a topic of discussion for quite some time. They have certainly been a topic of derision for some time as well.

Judge Mosley said in his judgment, seemingly, that it was obvious to him that the origins of some of these robocalls that are called into the question of nefarious activities point to the database that is used exclusively by the Conservative Party, known as the CIMS database. There is no relation.

I want go back to the robocalls situation. We feel some of the measures will be quite effective, and we applaud the minister for them. As an example, the bill says:

The Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission shall, on the request of the Commissioner, disclose to the Commissioner any document or information that it received under this Division that the Commissioner considers necessary for the purpose of ensuring compliance with and enforcement of this Act, other than this Division.

We agree. We are into an electronic age. Robocalls, as we call them, have proliferated in every aspect of society, not just politics but in commerce and marketing as well. Therefore, the legislation needs to keep up to standard. A lot of this goes a certain way, so we commend the Conservatives for that.

Every person or group that enters into an agreement with a calling service provider under which voter contact calling services are provided shall keep, for one year after the end of the election period,

(a) a copy of each unique script used in live voice calls [...]

(b) a recording of each unique message conveyed by an automatic dialing-announcing device [...]

This is great for the investigative tools necessary in order to cut down on this practice. We commend that as well. It is certainly overdue as far as updated legislation is concerned.

I also want to talk about contributions. I touched on this point briefly earlier, the \$1,200 to \$1,500, but also, subject to proposed subsection 405(4.2), contributions that do not exceed \$5,000 in total would be permitted to be made by a candidate for a particular election out of their own funds for their own candidacy, and for leadership it would be up to \$25,000. Some of this is necessary to be updated.

The bill also says that contributions made under proposed subsection 405(4.2) do not have the effect of limiting the amounts that the candidate or leadership contestant, as the case may be, may contribute under proposed subsection 405(1) to the other candidates.

I would say that updating this legislation is necessary. I do not know why the contribution limit went up to \$1,500. I think the current regulations and rules in place certainly do suffice.

I talked about the commissioner and about some of the other instances that took place over the past little while that raise alarm over how we need to fix our system. The in-and-out scandal took place. The Conservative Party admitted to election overspending and submitting inflated election returns and had to pay the maximum fine under the Elections Act. There were fraudulent election robocalls, which I just touched upon.

We know of individuals such as Peter Penashue, formerly of this House, who also over-contributed. Whether he was actually asked to leave or quit before all that happened, there was a huge fuss about it altogether. He did not seem to know the rules of the game.

*Government Orders*

• (1650)

How do we get out there and tell society that we want to explain to people the rules of how to function in elections when we have trouble bringing that information to our own candidates? It is somewhat ironic, but nonetheless that is water under the bridge, as some people say.

As for increased fines for Elections Act violations, Liberals are supportive of raising the fines for violations of the Elections Act. My hon. colleague from Beauséjour put forward legislation in the House that did just that and was voted on, Bill C-424, so we agree with that as well.

One of the other things we are in agreement with is the additional advance polling day. I live in a rural riding, as I mentioned, and a lot of people commute back and forth. I commute within my own riding to vote, which is two or three hours away, and the extra day is certainly advantageous. Of course, there is the premature transmission of election results, which is also necessary given the fact that everybody has the Internet, if I could use a colloquial expression.

In summary, there is a lot of unease about this bill, despite some of the elements of it that Liberals fully support. For us, the unease is created from things such as what is happening at Elections Canada, with the commissioner in particular; and other measures within this bill certainly cause unease to the point where accepting this bill in principle would be difficult for us to do.

I hope that over the course of the next little while the debate will be elevated to the point where, if this bill passes, is accepted in principle, and goes on to committee, the government would be accepting of some of the amendments we have discussed here today. Until we reach that point, I am thankful for this time.

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would first like to answer a question of the member's Liberal colleague from Kingston and the Islands, who asked whether the bill would address the impersonation of a candidate or a candidate's representative. I am happy to report that, in fact, the fair elections act would create a new offence for impersonating a candidate or a candidate's representative. Likewise, it would be an offence to impersonate a registered party or association. Of course, as the member for Kingston and the Islands acknowledged, it would be an offence under the fair elections act to impersonate Elections Canada. That answers the question the member for Kingston and the Islands posed earlier to the NDP critic.

As for the speech that the Liberal critic just presented, he expressed a concern that there might be a barrier of information flow between Elections Canada and the newly independent commissioner, who would be the law enforcement watchdog. I want to assure him that we thought very carefully about that problem and that is why there is nothing in the fair elections act that would prevent Elections Canada from sharing information with the independent commissioner or to prevent the commissioner from sharing information with Elections Canada. There would be no barriers to communication between them, merely a separation of power between them.

My question to the Liberal critic is this. What additional legal assurances would he need inserted in the bill to give him comfort on this point?

**Mr. Scott Simms:** Mr. Speaker, the obvious answer to that is, if that particular commissioner would not have the power to go to a judge to get more information and be in compliance, then I would say to him that I do not know why, in the beginning, they would make the person in that position as independent as they say he or she is going to be.

I think what the government would have done is send that person to a different office without giving him or her a different set of tools by which he or she could exercise the job. I always thought that being closer to the agency that gets all the reports, the vast majority of them anyway, whether they are auditors or deputy returning officers, allowed a lot of the allegations and violations that were detected over the past three or four years to come through that process.

I understand what he is saying about the fact that there would be a free flow of information. I am rather suspicious as to whether, in practice, that would happen.

• (1655)

**Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, my colleague has been in the House as long as I and went through this in 2006 through the debate on the photo ID bill. I do not remember the particular title that the Conservatives gave the legislation back then, so I will characterize it as that.

Through that process a problem was identified with respect to voting, and that problem was not well articulated by the Conservatives. It does not bear up under the examination of ridings, such as we heard from my colleague about Trinity—Spadina.

What is the problem we are dealing with here by taking away another form of identification for people? Does my colleague still hold to the position that his party took at that time, that the requirements of fraud were so onerous that we needed to put restrictions and conditions on people going into a voting booth? Does he still hold to the position that we have actually improved Canadians' ability to vote over these last eight years of Conservative management, or have we created more problems for people who want to vote?

**Mr. Scott Simms:** Mr. Speaker, my colleague has brought up a good point.

I mentioned earlier to the Minister of State for Democratic Reform that a lot of seniors in rural areas were disenfranchised over the past little while because they did not have the proper identification, such as a post office box instead of a street address, that sort of thing. I remember having a fairly good conversation with the current House leader about it. We discussed how, in many ways, it is not a one-size-fits-all solution for people who want to be identified at the polling booth and exercise their democratic right.

I am assuming the member is talking about the voter's card being taken away. That could be problematic. I know many people who still believe that all they have to do is show up with that one card and they can vote. We all know what happened in the last couple of elections when people needed more than an address. Some of the 39 cards identified do not have an address written on them in order for someone to do that.

*Government Orders*

That being said, I do understand where they are coming from in the sense that a lot of fraud did take place in the last election and it has to be addressed. If this legislation passes second reading, I hope we will get a chance to address that within the committee structure.

**Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we seem to be talking a lot about identification. The Minister of State for Democratic Reform, in answer to an earlier question, talked about the types of identification that could be used, such as a library card, a utility bill, a bank card statement, a hospital bracelet worn by a resident of a long-term care facility, and so on. The list is quite extensive.

In addition, the bill states on page 25:

If the address contained in the piece or pieces of identification provided under subsection (2) does not prove the elector's residence but is consistent with information related to the elector that appears on the list of electors, the elector's residence is deemed to have been proven.

In addition, clause 2.1 of the bill, just above that, would provide the Chief Electoral Officer with some additional authorities to put additional items on the list for identification purposes.

Earlier on, the bill says a committee of registered political parties would be able to make recommendations to the Chief Electoral Officer.

Would my colleague not agree that all of these mechanisms would allow us to ensure that the people who are actually voting are allowed to vote, that the proper identification has been presented to Election Canada officials, and that Canadians can have confidence that the vote that has been undertaken in each polling station across the country is a valid vote.

• (1700)

**Mr. Scott Simms:** Mr. Speaker, I understand where he is coming from, in the sense that there are all sorts of alternatives that could be utilized to identify the person.

However, I want to illustrate the point, through experience. As I said, if people, mostly seniors in rural areas, do not have the basic identification that is pointed out at the very beginning, chances are they would not have a lot of the rest. The reason visual identification of someone is beneficial is that the person felt, whether or not it was necessary to show up at the poll with any type of ID whatsoever, they plainly knew who they were, so the concept of visual identification could still be applied, I believe, without making it too lenient so that it would be abused greatly.

I understand where he is coming from, but it is not just a straightforward answer when it comes to some of the smaller regions that I talk about. We discovered that some time ago when we talked about different types of addresses, as my colleague from the Northwest Territories pointed out, and we had to address it at that time, and one of the things concerned visual identification.

First, I want to say that an egregious error happened to him, and I appreciate the story he brought to the House about his mother, several years ago. That is the type of thing that I hope would be addressed by legislation such as this.

**Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, on election day in 2011, a fraud was perpetrated in more than 200 ridings across

Canada. The Supreme Court has dealt with some of those circumstances and found that fraud was perpetrated by someone who had access to the Conservative information management system, called CIMS.

One of the difficulties that has arisen in the prosecution of that fraud and the reason the only charge that has been laid has been laid against only one person is that the Elections Canada did not have the teeth or the tools it needed to do proper investigation, like seizing documents and compelling witnesses to give testimony, so that it could dig into the case.

I am hearing from a lot of people in Guelph who are concerned about this legislation because it would really give Elections Canada no teeth to investigate.

Would the hon. member speak to me about the need for teeth and the absence of teeth in the legislation?

**Mr. Scott Simms:** Mr. Speaker, at some point, when I look at this legislation to try to seek out sharper teeth, I find myself staring at a loose set of dentures, for the most part, if I could carry that analogy further.

As he points out, if we ensconce commissioners in a different building, answerable to cabinet, not to Parliament, then the problem becomes that they lose the knowledge that is contained within that area. I know he says they can go back and forth, but I do not think it is as easy as that.

The other part about it is that the very information, the very ability, and the tools necessary, asked for by the Chief Electoral Officer, endorsed by the commissioner, would not be provided here. They consulted, but the one thing they asked for, which they thought was important to address the concerns that my colleague from Guelph brings up, is not contained within this.

BILL C-23—NOTICE OF TIME ALLOCATION MOTION

**Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to advise the House that an agreement could not be reached under the provisions of Standing Order 78(1) or Standing Order 78(2), with respect to the second reading stage of Bill C-23, an act to amend the Canada Elections Act and other acts and to make consequential amendments to certain acts.

As a result, 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.

**Some hon. members:** Shame.

• (1705)

SECOND READING

**Mr. Blake Richards (Wild Rose, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill C-23, Fair Elections Act, which has been introduced by the Minister of State for Democratic Reform.

In the most recent Speech from the Throne, our government committed to bringing forward changes to Canada's election laws that would clearly uphold the integrity of our voting system.

*Government Orders*

The fair elections act would make our laws tough, clear, and easy to follow. It would make life harder for election lawbreakers and put the focus back on honest people taking part in democracy.

The bill implements 38 of the Chief Electoral Officer's past recommendations, and it also brings to light concerns raised by Canadians, by various groups and think tanks, Elections Canada, and parliamentarians.

The fair elections act would ensure that everyday citizens are in charge of democracy by putting special interests on the sidelines and rule breakers out of business. The bill also makes it harder to break elections law. It closes loopholes to big money and imposes new penalties on political impostors who make rogue calls. It empowers law enforcement with sharper teeth, a longer reach, and a freer hand.

The fair elections act would give more independence to the Commissioner of Canada Elections, allowing him or her control over their staff and their investigations, empowering him or her to seek tough new penalties for existing electoral offences, and providing more than a dozen new offences to combat big money, rogue calls, and fraudulent voting.

Let me expand a bit on some of those tough penalties and new offences. What the fair elections act proposes is tougher criminal penalties for elections offences, such as setting a maximum fine of \$20,000 on summary conviction, or imprisonment for up to one year; and \$50,000 on indictment, or imprisonment for up to five years, for the following offences: obstructing an election officer, voting more than once, offering a bribe, making false statements to have a person deleted from the register of electors, or applying for a ballot under a false name.

It is also very important to note that candidates or official agents who are convicted of these offences would be prohibited from being a member of the House of Commons or holding any office in the nomination of the crown or of the Governor in Council for seven years.

It increases the maximum fines for the more serious election offences, such as taking a false oath, or making a false or erroneous declaration to election officials. It increases the maximum fine for all strict liability offences, such as failure to appoint an agent or an auditor. It increases the maximum fine for third parties that are groups or corporations that fail to register as a third party.

It also increases the maximum fines for offences applying primarily to broadcast corporations, such as advertising during a blackout. It increases penalties for political financing offences that do not require intent, and also severely increases those offences, such as failure to provide a quarterly return or a financial transactions return.

It also provides for a number of new offences, which I will highlight. One of them relates to registration on the list of electors. These are things like compelling, inducing, or attempting to compel or induce, any other person to make a false or misleading statement relating to their qualification as an elector. It relates to political financing rules, such as knowingly making indirect loans, or registration on polling day, such as registering when not qualified to vote.

It relates to non-compliance with the proposed voter contact registry, such as failing to keep the scripts and recordings used in the provision of voter contact calling services. I will focus on some of those provisions in a little more detail further on in my speech.

It also proposes new offences relating to voter deception. There are actually no provisions in the current act that would make it an offence to impersonate political agents or elections officials. The bill would amend the Canada Elections Act to add the offence of impersonating or causing another person to impersonate a candidate, a candidate's representative, a representative of a registered party or registered association, the Chief Electoral Officer, a member of the Chief Electoral Officer's staff, an election officer, or a person authorized to act on behalf of the Chief Electoral Officer.

● (1710)

There are some very serious new provisions in the bill in relation to getting tough on those who would look to cheat and defraud our election system.

It also cracks down on voter fraud by prohibiting vouching or voter information cards from being used as acceptable forms of ID. The Neufeld report, which was commissioned by Elections Canada relating to administrative deficiencies at the polls in the most recent 2011 election, indicated that there were irregularities in 25% of the cases where vouching was used.

What the fair elections act would do, as I indicated already, is that it would end vouching and require that Elections Canada communicate what forms of ID would be accepted at polling locations, so that voters would know before they head to the polls what they need to bring.

As I have already said, it would prohibit the use of voter information cards as a form of acceptable identification. However, it would very clearly outline what forms of ID are acceptable. This would allow Canadians to continue to have 39 authorized forms of ID to use when voting. There is a very comprehensive list of ID options that could be brought to the polls. That would be very clearly communicated to voters so they are well aware of what those forms are for identifying themselves in order to exercise their voting rights.

It would also make the rules for elections clearer, more predictable, and easier to follow. Complicated rules can often bring unintentional breaches. Unfortunately, that could intimidate people from taking part in democracy. That is why the fair elections bill would make the rules for elections more clear, more predictable, and easier to follow.

In order to follow the rules, parties must know what they are. That means the fair elections act would seek to ensure that the Chief Electoral Officer provides a 30-day comment period to members of the advisory committee of political parties that would be established under the act before publishing a proposed guideline or interpretation note.



*Government Orders*

Following a comment period, an additional 30 days would then be provided, in terms of notice for regulated entities, of the new interpretation. After both the comment and the notice period, which is a total of 60 days, the CEO would then formally issue the guideline or the interpretation note. It would also publish a proposed advance ruling or written interpretation of any question related to the Canada Elections Act within 45 days of a request from a registered party, and then provide a 30-day notice period before it is formally issued as well.

The advance ruling would be issued by the CEO and would be binding on him and on the commissioner. This is very important. It would also maintain an online registry, which would be available to the public, of the complete text of final guidelines and interpretation notes that have been issued, as well as of any written opinions containing advance rulings that have been issued. That would allow access by parties and individuals of interpretations and guidelines so they could be applied equally and fairly to all involved.

The fair elections act would also ban the use of loans that have been used in the past to evade donation rules. It would repeal the ban on premature transmission of election results, which would uphold free speech. It would provide better customer service to voters and establish an extra day of polling.

In the case of disagreements over election expenses, it would allow an MP to present the disputed cases in the courts and to have judges quickly rule on it before the CEO seeks the MP's suspension.

It would also protect voters from rogue calls, with a mandatory public registry for mass calling, prison time for impersonating elections officials, and increased penalties.

• (1715)

What I will do now, Mr. Speaker, is devote the remainder of my time to describing these particular measures, beginning with the creation of a registry for voter contact services.

In respect to telemarketing and automated dialing that would take place during an election period, the fair elections act would take the very important step of creating a new registry for voter contact services. The bill would require registration with the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, the CRTC. Telephone service providers that are engaging in voter contact, or any other person or group engaging in the use of telephone service for voter contact purposes, would be required to register in the voter contact services registry contained at the CRTC. Moreover, any person or group using internal services to make automated calls for voter contact purposes, would also have to register with the CRTC under this legislation.

The bill would require any person or group using a telephone service provider for voter contact purposes, or making automated calls for these purposes, to have their identity verified by providing identification to both the CRTC and to the telephone service provider. Third parties who are groups or corporations would have to register with the CRTC for any calls that they make as well.

In addition, the bill provides that registrations would be made publicly available 30 days after polling day, and that registrations must be available to the CRTC officials within 48 hours of a call being made for voter contact purposes. The bill would also require

recordings of messages that are sent by using automated calls and scripts of live messages used by telephone service providers to be kept for one year from the date of the election. The dates of these calls would also have to be maintained in that registry.

In addition to the strict requirements of the new registry, the disclosure requirements for political parties, candidates, and electoral district associations with respect to expenses incurred for voter contact services by telephone would also be strengthened. In particular, the bill provides a new obligation for political entities to specifically identify expenses for voter contact services by telephone, and to include the name of the company and the amount of the costs incurred on their election returns. The proposed amendments would enhance transparency and consistency in reporting such expenses, and would have the further advantage of assisting with enforcement of the Canada Elections Act.

To encourage compliance with the rules, the fair elections act would strengthen the penalties regime by first increasing, by 10 times, the penalties for preventing or attempting to prevent a voter from voting. Penalties for doing so would increase from \$2,000 currently, to \$20,000 on summary conviction; and from \$5,000 currently, to \$50,000 on indictment. It would also increase the maximum fines for the more serious election offences, such as taking a false oath or making an erroneous declaration to election officials, again, from \$2,000 to \$20,000 on summary conviction, and from \$5,000 to \$50,000 on indictment.

The fair elections act also proposes tough new offences, including a new offence for impersonating election officials or political entities. It would be an offence for a person to falsely represent that they are a candidate, a representative of a candidate, a representative of a party or a riding association, a chief electoral officer, Elections Canada, or any other election officer. The maximum penalty for this offence, if prosecuted on indictment would be \$50,000, five years in prison, or both. This is in line with other increased penalties provided for in the bill. It would be considered a corrupt practice if the offence was committed by a candidate or an official agent. A person who is found guilty of a corrupt practice would be prohibited for seven years from being elected or sitting in the House of Commons, or holding any office in the nomination of the crown or the Governor in Council.

In addition, the fair elections act proposes other new offences, including for providing false information to an investigator, or obstructing an investigation, and for non-compliance with the proposed voter contact registry, including for providing false information or failing to provide identification when registering.

• (1720)

I would also note that the fair elections act proposes a further measure to assist elections officials with their important work relating to the potential misuse of automated telephone calls. It will clarify in law that neither Elections Canada nor elections officers make unsolicited calls to voters.

*Government Orders*

At this point, it would be appropriate for members to recall that on March 29, 2012, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs heard the Chief Electoral Officer, Marc Mayrand, on allegations of misuse and abuse of auto-dialed calls during the 41st general election. During that meeting, the Chief Electoral Officer expressed the view that the enforcement mechanisms provided for by the Canada Elections Act could be improved. That is precisely what the fair elections act would achieve.

I would also like to quickly highlight the fact that the fair elections act would provide for better customer service for voters. Many people in the House and elsewhere have often expressed their concern about our voter turnout levels. One of the things that most non-voters told Elections Canada in its survey was that there were practical reasons preventing them from voting in the last election. For example, 17% said it was due to the fact they were travelling; 13% said it was their work or school schedule; 10% said they were simply too busy; and 7% cited lack of information. That is just to name a few of the reasons. I believe that better customer service would help to remove some of those practical obstacles expressed by voters.

For example, one of the things the fair elections act would do is to provide more voting days by increasing the advance polling days. It would help to reduce congestion at the polls by providing for more elections officers to be appointed, and by appointing liaison officers to facilitate communication between his office and returning officers in the riding. The act would also allow registered parties and electoral district associations, rather than simply candidates, to recommend names for elections officer positions at the polls, and those nominations would be required to be earlier to allow more time for training, which hopefully would allow better customer service and more efficient voting at the polls.

Obviously our government is fully committed to addressing the current shortcomings in the Canada Elections Act that stand in the way of cracking down on the misuse of mass calls. The proposed changes I have mentioned are significant measures that would help clean up such alleged abuses and prevent potential future abuses. The proposed new rules would be enhanced by the additional requirement to outline expenses incurred for voter contact services by telephone, and by strengthened enforcement of the Canada Elections Act through strong penalties for violations of the act, and by tough new offences. Additionally, our government's proposed voter contact registry would be an essential tool to investigate any telephone calls that attempt to obstruct the electoral process, and would comply with the March 2012 House of Commons motion calling for action on this very subject. These important measures represent a clear move forward in strengthening Canada's election system by helping to ensure that elections officials have the necessary tools to both investigate effectively and to punish appropriately any abuses of automated telephone calls in our electoral processes.

The initiatives in this bill would also encourage greater compliance with the rules of the electoral regime, thereby helping to restore any loss of confidence in the integrity of our elections system.

For the reasons I have described today, I believe that the reforms proposed in this legislation would have positive effects for our

electoral system, and I call on all members to support the swift passage of the fair elections act.

• (1725)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I listened very carefully to my colleague's speech.

While he was talking, I was reading the introduction of the bill. The fascinating thing is that the government has decided to introduce a massive bill that deals with a whole host of issues. That takes me back to when I was a member of the Standing Committee on Finance in 2013 and the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights.

I find it quite absurd that the government keeps hammering away at repression. It claims it wants to deter illegal acts. However, it proposes repressive clauses, while stripping Elections Canada of the tools it needs to take action and correct certain shortcomings. Clearly, the government is trying to divert attention from its own inadequacies and shortcomings.

How can the member justify this hodgepodge of measures that might not be enforceable or enforced?

[*English*]

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Mr. Speaker, I notice that the member is celebrating the Quebec Winter Carnival and is wearing the appropriate attire today for the occasion. I compliment him on that. It seems as though we often have exchanges in the House of Commons, which I always enjoy.

I find it unfortunate that the member and the New Democratic Party do not seem to see the value in some of the things we are talking about doing here, such as protecting voters from rogue calls with a mandatory public registry; giving more independence to the Commissioner of Canada Elections; cracking down on voter fraud; and simply making the rules for elections clearer, more predictable, and easier to follow. These measures would make the electoral process more efficient, make it harder for people who seek to break the elections rules, and make the electoral process more attractive and feasible for the honest people looking to take part in democracy, whether candidates or voters.

I find it unfortunate that the NDP will not support measures that would make our election laws fairer, simpler, clearer, and more transparent, and that would give better customer service to voters. These all seem to be very laudable goals. The fair elections act would go a long way to achieving all of them, and so it is unfortunate that the NDP is not supporting them.

**Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I again have to say that the quality of the debate has been quite high today. I am happy about that, but I am now disappointed that the government wants to cut off debate.

On behalf of my constituents in Kingston and the Islands, I ask if the government would budget money to explain to voters that there would be no voter card and that there would be an extra day of advance polls? From my experience, it is very important to have the resources to supply that information; otherwise, it is the political campaigns themselves that have to supply that information, and then whichever campaign has the most money can get to the most voters.

I wonder if the government would budget for explaining to voters the changes in this legislation.

**Mr. Blake Richards:** Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to make it clear to the member that there would still be voter contact and the voter information cards that voters receive. I would like to make that clear to him so that misinformation is not out there. However, these voter card could not be used as an acceptable form of identification at the polls.

I would also point out that there would still be 39 different forms of ID that will be accepted at the polls. They would be very clearly outlined in the act. Elections Canada would communicate with voters about what those acceptable forms of ID are, how and where they are to vote, and all of the other things that have been identified as important for voters to be aware of so that we can enable them to participate in voting and encourage greater voter participation more generally through better knowledge of the acceptable forms of ID, along with where, when, and how they can vote.

I hope I have cleared up the member's misconceptions.

• (1730)

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** I am sure hon. members will be delighted to know that the hon. member for Wild Rose will have five minutes remaining for questions and comments when the House next returns to this particular motion.

## PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[Translation]

### ELECTION OF COMMITTEE CHAIRS

The House resumed from January 29 consideration of the motion.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** It being 5:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on Motion No. 431 under private members' business.

Call in the members.

• (1810)

[English]

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(Division No. 50)

#### YEAS

Members

Ablonczy  
Adler  
Albas  
Alexander  
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)

Adams  
Aglukkaq  
Albrecht  
Allen (Welland)  
Allison

Ambler  
Anders  
Andrews  
Armstrong  
Ashton  
Atamanenko  
Baird  
Bélangier  
Bennett  
Benskin  
Bemier  
Bezan  
Blanchette-Lamothe  
Block  
Boughen  
Brahmi  
Breitkreuz  
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)  
Brown (Barrie)  
Butt  
Calandra  
Carmichael  
Casey  
Charlton  
Chisholm  
Chong  
Chow  
Clarke  
Comartin  
Cotler  
Cuzner  
Davies (Vancouver East)  
Dechert  
Dewar  
Dionne Labelle  
Doré Lefebvre  
Dubé  
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)  
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)  
Dykstra  
Eyking  
Fantino  
Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)  
Flaherty  
Freeland  
Fry  
Gallant  
Garrison  
Genest-Jourdain  
Gill  
Godin  
Goldring  
Goodyear  
Gravelle  
Groguhé  
Harris (Scarborough Southwest)  
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)  
Hayes  
Hoback  
Hughes  
Jacob  
Jones  
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)  
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)  
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)  
Kerr  
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)  
Lamoureux  
Larose  
Lauzon  
Lebel  
LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)  
Leitch  
Leslie  
Lizon  
Lukiwski  
MacAulay  
MacKenzie  
Mai  
Martin  
Mathysen  
McCallum  
McGuinity  
McLeod

Ambrose  
Anderson  
Angus  
Ashfield  
Aspin  
Ayala  
Bateman  
Bellavance  
Benoit  
Bergen  
Bevington  
Blanchette  
Blaney  
Boivin  
Boulerice  
Braid  
Brosseau  
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)  
Bruinooge  
Byrne  
Calkins  
Carrie  
Cash  
Chicoine  
Chisu  
Choquette  
Christopherson  
Clement  
Côté  
Crockett  
Davidson  
Day  
Devolin  
Dion  
Donnelly  
Dreeshen  
Dubourg  
Duncan (Etobicoke North)  
Dusseau  
Easter  
Falk  
Fast  
Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)  
Fortin  
Freeman  
Galipeau  
Gameau  
Genest  
Giguère  
Glover  
Goguen  
Goodale  
Gourde  
Grewal  
Harper  
Harris (St. John's East)  
Hawn  
Hillyer  
Hsu  
Hyer  
James  
Julian  
Karygiannis  
Kellway  
Kent  
Komarnicki  
Lake  
Lapointe  
Latendresse  
Laverdière  
LeBlanc (Beauséjour)  
Leef  
Lemieux  
Leung  
Lobb  
Lunney  
MacKay (Central Nova)  
Maguire  
Marston  
Masse  
Mayes  
McColeman  
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)  
Menegakis

*Private Members' Business*

Michaud  
 Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)  
 Moore (Fundy Royal)  
 Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)  
 Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)  
 Mulcair  
 Nantel  
 Nicholls  
 Norlock  
 Obhrai  
 O'Neill Gordon  
 O'Toole  
 Patry  
 Pécelet  
 Pilon  
 Poilievre  
 Quach  
 Raitt  
 Rankin  
 Ravnignat  
 Regan  
 Rempel  
 Rickford  
 Saganash  
 Scarpaleggia  
 Scott  
 Sellah  
 Shea  
 Shory  
 (sor)  
 Sims (Newton—North Delta)  
 Sopuck  
 Stanton  
 Stewart  
 Storseth  
 Sullivan  
 Thibeault  
 Toet  
 Trost  
 Truppe  
 Uppal  
 Valeriotte  
 Van Loan  
 Wallace  
 Watson  
 Sky Country)  
 Weston (Saint John)  
 Williamson  
 Woodworth  
 Young (Oakville)  
 Zimmer— 275

Miller  
 Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)  
 Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)  
 Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)  
 Mourani  
 Murray  
 Nash  
 Nicholson  
 Nunez-Melo  
 O'Connor  
 Opitz  
 Papillon  
 Payne  
 Perreault  
 Plamondon  
 Preston  
 Rafferty  
 Rajotte  
 Rathgeber  
 Raynault  
 Reid  
 Richards  
 Rousseau  
 Saxton  
 Schellenberger  
 Seeback  
 Sgro  
 Shipley  
 Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor)  
 Smith  
 Sorenson  
 St-Denis  
 Stoffer  
 Strahl  
 Sweet  
 Tilson  
 Toone  
 Trottier  
 Turmel  
 Valcourt  
 Van Kesteren  
 Vellacott  
 Warkentin  
 Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to  
 Wilks  
 Wong  
 Yelich  
 Young (Vancouver South)

## NAYS

Nil

## PAIRED

Nil

**The Speaker:** I declare the motion carried.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

## INCOME TAX ACT

The House resumed from January 30 consideration of the motion that Bill C-201, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (travel and accommodation deduction for tradespersons), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

**The Speaker:** The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at second reading stage of Bill C-201 under private members' business.

● (1820)

[English]

(The House divided on the motion, which was negated on the following division:)

*(Division No. 51)*

## YEAS

## Members

Allen (Welland)  
 Angus  
 Atamanenko  
 Bélanger  
 Bennett  
 Bevington  
 Blanchette-Lamothe  
 Boulerice  
 Brosseau  
 Casey  
 Charlton  
 Chisholm  
 Chow  
 Comartin  
 Cotler  
 Davies (Vancouver East)  
 Dewar  
 Dionne Labelle  
 Doré Lefebvre  
 Dubourg  
 Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)  
 Easter  
 Fortin  
 Freeman  
 Gameau  
 Genest  
 Giguère  
 Goodale  
 Grogulé  
 Harris (St. John's East)  
 Hughes  
 Jacob  
 Julian  
 Kellway  
 Lapointe  
 Latendresse  
 LeBlanc (Beauséjour)  
 Leslie  
 Mai  
 Martin  
 Mathysen  
 McGuinty  
 Michaud  
 Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)  
 Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)  
 Mourani  
 Murray  
 Nash  
 Nunez-Melo  
 Patry  
 Perreault  
 Plamondon  
 Rafferty  
 Rathgeber  
 Raynault  
 Rousseau  
 Scarpaleggia  
 Sellah  
 Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor)  
 Sims (Newton—North Delta)  
 St-Denis  
 Stoffer  
 Thibeault  
 Turmel  
 Stewart  
 Sullivan  
 Toone  
 Valeriotte— 126

Andrews  
 Ashton  
 Ayala  
 Bellavance  
 Benskin  
 Blanchette  
 Boivin  
 Brahmi  
 Byrne  
 Cash  
 Chicoine  
 Choquette  
 Christopherson  
 Côté  
 Cuzner  
 Day  
 Dion  
 Donnelly  
 Dubé  
 Duncan (Etobicoke North)  
 Dusseault  
 Eyking  
 Freeland  
 Fry  
 Garrison  
 Genest-Jourdain  
 Godin  
 Gravelle  
 Harris (Scarborough Southwest)  
 Hsu  
 Hyer  
 Jones  
 Karygiannis  
 Lamoureux  
 Larose  
 Laverdière  
 LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)  
 MacAulay  
 Marston  
 Masse  
 McCallum  
 McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)  
 Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)  
 Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)  
 Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)  
 Mulcair  
 Nantel  
 Nicholls  
 Papillon  
 Pécelet  
 Pilon  
 Quach  
 Rankin  
 Ravnignat  
 Regan  
 Saganash  
 Scott  
 Sgro  
 St-Denis  
 Stoffer  
 Thibeault  
 Turmel

## NAYS

## Members

Ablonczy  
 Adler  
 Albas  
 Alexander  
 Allison  
 Ambrose  
 Anderson  
 Ashfield  
 Baird  
 Adams  
 Aglukkaq  
 Albrecht  
 Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)  
 Ambler  
 Anders  
 Armstrong  
 Aspin  
 Bateman

*Private Members' Business*

Benoit  
Bernier  
Blaney  
Boughen  
Breitkreuz  
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)  
Bruinooog  
Calandra  
Carmichael  
Chisu  
Clarke  
Crockatt  
Dechert  
Dreeschen  
Dykstra  
Fantino  
Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)  
Flaherty  
Gallant  
Glover  
Goldring  
Gourde  
Harper  
Hawn  
Hillyer  
James  
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)  
Kent  
Komarnicki  
Lake  
Lebel  
Leitch  
Leung  
Lobb  
Lunney  
MacKenzie  
Mayes  
McLeod  
Miller  
Moore (Fundy Royal)  
Norlock  
O'Connor  
Opitz  
Payne  
Preston  
Rajotte  
Rempel  
Rickford  
Schellenberger  
Shea  
Shory  
Sopuck  
Stanton  
Strahl  
Tilson  
Trost  
Truppe  
Valcourt  
Van Loan  
Wallace  
Watson  
Sky Country)  
Weston (Saint John)  
Williamson  
Woodworth  
Young (Oakville)  
Zimmer — 149

Bergen  
Bezan  
Block  
Braid  
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)  
Brown (Barrie)  
Butt  
Calkins  
Carrie  
Chong  
Clement  
Davidson  
Devolin  
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)  
Falk  
Fast  
Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)  
Galipeau  
Gill  
Goguen  
Goodyear  
Grewal  
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)  
Hayes  
Hoback  
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)  
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)  
Kerr  
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)  
Lauzon  
Leaf  
Lemieux  
Lizon  
Lukiwski  
MacKay (Central Nova)  
Maguire  
McColeman  
Menegakis  
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)  
Nicholson  
Obhrai  
O'Neill Gordon  
O'Toole  
Poilievre  
Raiitt  
Reid  
Richards  
Saxton  
Seeback  
Shipley  
Smith  
Sorenson  
Storseth  
Sweet  
Toet  
Trottier  
Uppal  
Van Kesteren  
Vellacott  
Warkentin  
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to  
Wilks  
Wong  
Yelich  
Young (Vancouver South)

(balanced representation), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

**The Speaker:** The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at second reading stage of Bill C-473. The question is on the motion.

● (1825)

[*Translation*]

(The House divided on the motion, which was negated on the following division:)

(*Division No. 52*)

## YEAS

## Members

Allen (Welland)	Andrews
Angus	Ashton
Atamanenko	Ayala
Bélanger	Bellavance
Bennett	Benskin
Bevington	Blanchette
Blanchette-Lamothe	Boivin
Boulerice	Brahmi
Brosseau	Byrne
Casey	Cash
Charlton	Chicoine
Chisholm	Choquette
Chow	Christopherson
Comartin	Côté
Cotler	Cuzner
Davies (Vancouver East)	Day
Dewar	Dion
Dionne Labelle	Donnelly
Doré Lefebvre	Dubé
Dubourg	Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	Dusseau
Easter	Eyking
Fortin	Freeland
Freeman	Fry
Gameau	Garrison
Genest	Genest-Jourdain
Giguère	Godin
Goodale	Gravelle
Groguhé	Harris (Scarborough Southwest)
Harris (St. John's East)	Hsu
Hughes	Hyer
Jacob	Jones
Julian	Karygiannis
Kellway	Lamoureux
Lapointe	Larose
Latendresse	Laverdière
LeBlanc (Beauséjour)	LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)
Leslie	MacAulay
Mai	Marston
Martin	Masse
Mathysen	McCallum
McGuinty	McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Michaud	Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)
Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)	Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)
Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)	Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)
Mourani	Mulcair
Murray	Nantel
Nash	Nicholls
Nunez-Melo	Papillon
Patry	Pécelet
Perreault	Pilon
Plamondon	Quach
Rafferty	Rankin
Ravignat	Raynaut
Regan	Rousseau
Saganash	Scarpaleggia
Scott	Sellah
Sgro	Simmis (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind-
or)	
Sims (Newton—North Delta)	St-Denis
Stewart	Stoffer
Sullivan	Thibeault
Toone	Turmel

## PAIRED

Nil

**The Speaker:** I declare the motion defeated.

\* \* \*

## FINANCIAL ADMINISTRATION ACT

The House resumed from February 3 consideration of the motion that Bill C-473, An Act to amend the Financial Administration Act

*Private Members' Business*

Valerioté — 125

## NAYS

## Members

Ablonczy  
Adler  
Albas  
Alexander  
Allison  
Ambrose  
Anderson  
Ashfield  
Baird  
Benoit  
Bernier  
Blaney  
Boughen  
Breitkreuz  
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)  
Bruinooge  
Calandra  
Carmichael  
Chisu  
Clarke  
Crockett  
Dechert  
Dreeshen  
Dykstra  
Fantino  
Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)  
Flaherty  
Gallant  
Glover  
Goldring  
Gourde  
Harper  
Hawn  
Hillyer  
James  
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)  
Kent  
Komarnicki  
Lake  
Lebel  
Leitch  
Leung  
Lobb  
Lunney  
MacKenzie  
Mayes  
McLeod  
Miller  
Moore (Fundy Royal)  
Norlock  
O'Connor  
O'Neill Gordon  
O'Toole  
Poilievre  
Raitt  
Rathgeber  
Rempel  
Rickford  
Schellenberger  
Shea  
Shory  
Sopuck  
Stanton  
Strahl  
Tilson  
Trost  
Truppe  
Valcourt  
Van Loan  
Wallace  
Watson  
Sky Country)  
Weston (Saint John)  
Williamson  
Woodworth  
Young (Oakville)  
Zimmer — 151

Adams  
Aglukkaq  
Albrecht  
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)  
Ambler  
Anders  
Armstrong  
Aspin  
Bateman  
Bergen  
Bezan  
Block  
Braid  
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)  
Brown (Barrie)  
Butt  
Calkins  
Carrie  
Chong  
Clement  
Davidson  
Devolin  
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)  
Falk  
Fast  
Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)  
Galipeau  
Gill  
Goguen  
Goodyear  
Grewal  
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)  
Hayes  
Hoback  
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)  
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)  
Kerr  
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)  
Lauzon  
Leaf  
Lemieux  
Lizon  
Lukiwski  
MacKay (Central Nova)  
Maguire  
McColeman  
Menegakis  
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)  
Nicholson  
Obhrai  
Oliver  
Opitz  
Payne  
Preston  
Rajotte  
Reid  
Richards  
Saxton  
Seeback  
Shipley  
Smith  
Sorenson  
Storseth  
Sweet  
Toet  
Trottier  
Uppal  
Van Kesteren  
Vellacott  
Warkentin  
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to  
Wilks  
Wong  
Yelich  
Young (Vancouver South)

Nil

**The Speaker:** I declare the motion defeated.

\* \* \*

● (1830)

## NAVIGATION RESTRICTIONS

The House resumed from February 4 consideration of the motion.

**The Speaker:** The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on Motion No. 441 under private members' business.

● (1835)

(The House divided on the motion, which was negated on the following division:)

*(Division No. 53)*

## YEAS

## Members

Allen (Welland)  
Angus  
Atamanenko  
Bélangier  
Bennett  
Bevington  
Blanchette-Lamothe  
Boulerice  
Brosseau  
Casey  
Charlton  
Chisholm  
Chow  
Comartin  
Cotler  
Davies (Vancouver East)  
Dewar  
Dionne Labelle  
Doré Lefebvre  
Dubourg  
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)  
Easter  
Fortin  
Freeman  
Garneau  
Genest  
Giguère  
Goodale  
Grogulé  
Harris (St. John's East)  
Hughes  
Jacob  
Julian  
Kellway  
Lapointe  
Latendresse  
LeBlanc (Beauséjour)  
Leslie  
Mai  
Martin  
Mathysen  
McGuinty  
Michaud  
Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)  
Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)  
Mourani  
Murray  
Nash  
Nunez-Melo  
Patry  
Perreault  
Plamondon  
Rafferty  
Rathgeber  
Raynault

Andrews  
Ashton  
Ayala  
Bellavance  
Benskin  
Blanchette  
Boivin  
Brahmi  
Byrne  
Cash  
Chicoine  
Choquette  
Christopherson  
Côté  
Cuzner  
Day  
Dion  
Donnelly  
Dubé  
Duncan (Etobicoke North)  
Dusseault  
Eyking  
Freeland  
Fry  
Garrison  
Genest-Jourdain  
Godin  
Gravelle  
Harris (Scarborough Southwest)  
Hsu  
Hyer  
Jones  
Karygiannis  
Lamoureux  
Larose  
Laverdière  
LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)  
MacAulay  
Marston  
Masse  
McCallum  
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)  
Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)  
Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)  
Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)  
Mulcair  
Nantel  
Nicholls  
Papillon  
Péclet  
Pilon  
Quach  
Rankin  
Ravignat  
Regan

Rousseau  
Scarpaleggia  
Sellah  
Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor)  
Sims (Newton—North Delta)  
St-Denis  
Stoffer  
Thibeault  
Turnel

Saganash  
Scott  
Sgro  
Stewart  
Sullivan  
Toone  
Valeriote— 126

## NAYS

### Members

Ablonczy  
Adler  
Albas  
Alexander  
Allison  
Ambrose  
Anderson  
Ashfield  
Baird  
Benoit  
Bernier  
Blaney  
Boughen  
Breitkreuz  
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)  
Bruinooge  
Calandra  
Carmichael  
Chisu  
Clarke  
Crockatt  
Dechert  
Dreeshen  
Dykstra  
Fantino  
Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)  
Flaherty  
Gallant  
Glover  
Goldring  
Gourde  
Harper  
Hawn  
Hillyer  
James  
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)  
Kent  
Komarnicki  
Lake  
Lebel  
Leitch  
Leung  
Lobb  
Lunney  
MacKenzie  
Mayes  
McLeod  
Miller  
Moore (Fundy Royal)  
Norlock  
O'Connor  
O'Neill Gordon  
O'Toole  
Poilievre  
Raitt  
Reid  
Richards  
Saxton  
Seeback  
Shipley  
Smith  
Sorenson  
Storseth  
Sweet  
Toet  
Trottier  
Uppal  
Van Kesteren  
Vellacott  
Warkentin

Adams  
Aglukkaq  
Albrecht  
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)  
Ambler  
Anders  
Armstrong  
Aspin  
Bateman  
Bergen  
Bezan  
Block  
Braid  
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)  
Brown (Barrie)  
Butt  
Calkins  
Carrie  
Chong  
Clement  
Davidson  
Devolin  
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)  
Falk  
Fast  
Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)  
Galipeau  
Gill  
Goguen  
Goodyear  
Grewal  
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)  
Hayes  
Hoback  
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)  
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)  
Kerr  
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)  
Lauzon  
Leef  
Lemieux  
Lizon  
Lukiwski  
MacKay (Central Nova)  
Maguire  
McColeman  
Menegakis  
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)  
Nicholson  
Obhrai  
Oliver  
Opitz  
Payne  
Preston  
Rajotte  
Rempel  
Rickford  
Schellenberger  
Shea  
Shory  
Sopuck  
Stanton  
Strahl  
Tilson  
Trost  
Truppe  
Valcourt  
Van Loan  
Wallace  
Watson

## Private Members' Business

Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)  
Weston (Saint John)  
Wilks  
Wong  
Yelich  
Young (Vancouver South)

Williamson  
Woodworth  
Young (Oakville)  
Zimmer— 150

## PAIRED

Nil

**The Speaker:** I declare the motion defeated.

[*English*]

**Mr. Jim Hillyer:** Mr. Speaker, I want the record to show that we wish Don Cherry a happy 80th birthday.

**The Speaker:** That is not a point of order.

It being 6:35 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

\* \* \*

## PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

The House resumed from November 28, 2013, consideration of the motion.

**The Speaker:** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for York South—Weston has three minutes left to conclude his remarks.

I will ask hon. members to take their conversations outside the chamber so that we can finish up with private members' business.

The hon. member for York South—Weston.

**Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to finish my remarks.

As members will recall, the member for Brant's motion asks the government to endorse the recommendations of a panel that recommended changes in the way the government deals with private sector employers and recommended that these private sector employers be encouraged to change the way they hire persons with disabilities.

In his motion, he suggested that we look at government initiatives. That is one of the areas where, in fact, the government has failed persons with disabilities.

Persons with disabilities have depended on the fact that the government ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in March 2010. That ratification required the government to actually do things to make persons with disabilities have easier lives, better lives, and more employable lives. At the end of two years, the government was to have given the UN a report card on just what it had done in providing these additional supports to persons with disabilities.

March 2012 came and went. March 2013 came and went. We are now approaching March 2014, and there has been no report card. That speaks volumes about the government's real commitment to persons with disabilities.

*Private Members' Business*

In addition, in the last budget, the Conservative government made it much more difficult for agencies that deal with persons with disabilities by granting them access to employment and by employing them directly. Some of those agencies are now going to fold. They are now going to close, losing the employment of hundreds of persons with disabilities at the same time. These agencies actually directly employ these people, and now they are being forced to close.

The government claims that the money is still there, but these agencies now have to compete with universities, with hospitals, and with agencies that have huge and deep pockets and the ability to prepare the applications for funding in a much more systematic way than the smaller agencies can. As a result, those agencies are losing their funding, and persons with disabilities are actually losing their jobs.

That is something the government needs to pay attention to. The current government has not paid attention to persons with disabilities in the way it should have. That is but one of the examples.

There are also other examples. The government has heard testimony from persons with disabilities who have said that the income support structures and the disability support structures that exist in this country are not conducive to their working. The EI system cannot deal with disabilities that are not continuous. The health benefits system, in all of the provinces, fails persons with disabilities, and the federal government has not stepped up to the plate to fix that system.

While we applaud and encourage this particular panel's report, and we encourage the government to endorse it, there is so much more the government should and can be doing to support persons with disabilities being employed.

• (1840)

**Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I have spoken to the motion before, and I am supportive of the motion, because people who have disabilities need to be accommodated. That is extremely important.

I will not speak for my full time. I will just say that from my perspective, because I do not have the motion in front of me, I am supporting the member in his quest to pass the motion.

**Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is my privilege to rise in the House. I know there may not be too many occasions when my colleague from Malpeque and I will agree. However, on such an auspicious motion as was brought forward by the member for Brant, I certainly appreciate his support.

It is with pleasure that I rise tonight to speak to Motion No. 430 on strengthening employment for Canadians with disabilities. This motion hits very close to home for me in the fact that my son, Tim, has a disability in regard to mobility as well. He and my colleague, the member for Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia, have become very good friends, having met at my swearing-in just a week ago. Therefore it is with some personal experience that I speak in the House in regard to the situation that has arisen in our own home.

My son is now employed, part-time at least, with a company in Alberta, and he had an opportunity to teach flight aviation in the

simulator program at Mount Royal University after his initial accident, which took place over nine years ago.

This motion could not come at a better time, given the skills mismatch looming in many sectors of our economy today. Too many employers are having a hard time finding enough employees, given the candidates for the high-paying, high-quality jobs that are out there today. Something is seriously out of whack when we have people without jobs at the same time as we have jobs without people. Employers in my riding are telling me that the skills mismatch is their number one challenge in many areas. Employment in southwest Manitoba now is at a very minimal level. It is certainly an issue we have dealt with in our community colleges and universities by trying to upgrade in the trades. People should be able to fill the jobs that are there.

This is not just an abstract statistical problem. Not being able to find enough skilled people is holding many businesses back from growth. All too often, applicants for available jobs cannot meet the necessary skill requirements, which means that jobs go unfilled, projects do not get off the ground, and Canada's economy suffers.

This problem is exacerbated by the aging of our population. Older workers are retiring in greater numbers, and that will leave a void in our labour force.

The supply of skills in the workforce is not enough to meet the demand, and this situation is only going to continue to grow. The inability of companies to find the qualified workers they need obviously has a huge impact on their ability to innovate and compete globally. If we do not find a solution, we will miss out on many rich opportunities, and our standard of living will inevitably suffer.

This brings me to the motion before us today. People with disabilities are one of the largest untapped sources of talent in the country. Not too many people know this, but more than 4.4 million people in Canada are defined as having disabilities. That is one out of every seven Canadians, fully 14% of the population. With an aging population, this number will continue to grow.

There are approximately 800,000 working Canadians with disabilities who are employable but are still jobless. Almost half of them have a post-secondary education. In an economy in which some sectors are experiencing skills shortages, and we have people without jobs and jobs without people, this just does not make sense. What does make sense is encouraging businesses to hire more people with disabilities and ensuring that the training programs lead to guaranteed jobs for persons with disabilities.

We know that people with disabilities are significantly under-represented in the workforce. I can affirm that. Just under 60% of people with disabilities are in the workforce compared to 80% of other working-age Canadians. These are statistics members from all parties must work hard to change. First and foremost, people's mindsets, including those in the private sector, have to change.



*Private Members' Business*

•(1845)

I am proud to be part of a Conservative government that has delivered results in encouraging the hiring of persons with disabilities. We have seen that in many of the communities I represent, where work programs have taken place and where they have been encouraged to find more work for persons with disabilities in local communities.

We will negotiate an improved version of our flagship training program, the labour market agreements for persons with disabilities, worth \$222 million a year, in conjunction with the provinces and territories. That is just one of the ways the government is starting to improve. Current agreements will be replaced by reformed agreements that will be demand-driven to better meet the skills and labour needs of Canadian businesses. They will improve the job opportunities for persons with disabilities.

The opportunities fund for persons with disabilities is being extended, with a budget of \$40 million per year, starting in 2015-16. More importantly, it is being improved to provide more demand-driven solutions for persons with disabilities and to provide even better outcomes for persons with disabilities so that they have the skills needed for the jobs that are available.

It is our Conservative government's goal to ensure that all Canadians have the opportunity to have good-quality, well-paying jobs so that they can achieve long-term prosperity. I am proud of our government's record of supporting programs and supports that help persons with disabilities receive training and support to improve their outcomes in the labour market. That is why it is so easy for me to stand in support of such a well-thought-out and important motion regarding improving opportunities for persons with disabilities, as brought forward by my colleague, the member for Brant, and seconded by the member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke.

I have only been in the House a short time, but I am proud of the leadership the member for Brant has taken on this important issue. I am very much looking forward to working with him and the Minister of Employment and Social Development on continuing our government's strong record of improving the lives of persons with disabilities.

•(1850)

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Motion No. 430 regarding employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. This motion refers to measures that are needed in order to give persons with disabilities improved access to stable employment. This means considering constraints related to their disability and recognizing their skills.

It is particularly important that we take the time to discuss this motion because it is related to what is happening in certain areas of my riding where it is increasingly difficult to fill available jobs. For example, there was a mining boom in my region recently, although there has been somewhat of a downturn as of late. Sometimes there are too many jobs available for the number of people who live in these areas. It is sometimes very difficult to fill certain jobs, so companies look to immigration.

It is becoming increasingly clear that we need to look to non-traditional pools of workers, including persons with disabilities, if we want to address this economic challenge in my riding. If we are successful at integrating persons with disabilities into the labour market, perhaps we will overcome the economic challenges in my region.

Integrating persons with a disability into the labour market requires a pan-Canadian strategy and therefore the collaboration of the provinces, territories and first nations. Unfortunately, the government did not include the collaborative approach in its proposals, depriving us of expertise that would help us integrate persons with disabilities into the labour market.

Many community organizations help persons with disabilities. For example, in the city next to mine, the Club de l'amitié des handicapés works to integrate persons with disabilities by organizing activities. It has built up expertise. However, since these community organizations fall under provincial jurisdiction, we are missing out on their expertise.

Still, these organizations can help us by sharing what works for them in their region. By getting involved in information sharing between the provinces and territories, we could have come up with a much better approach to integrating persons with disabilities into the labour market. The refusal to work with the provinces is hindering our overall objective. It is too bad.

Furthermore, the panel's report does not take a close enough look at the employability constraints that prevent disabled people from finding work, for example, inflexible schedules or the quality of the job. These criteria, which can deter people from working, are not mentioned in this report. It does not consider specific constraints related to a person's disability.

For example, if a disabled person's accessible transportation is not available before 9 a.m., they will obviously not be able to work a 9 to 5 job, since they would be late for work every day. There are constraints to that job. When there is a very strict schedule, that person loses a job opportunity.

We need to look at these specific constraints, which sometimes have simple solutions. There are people who would like to work, who feel able to work and who have the intellectual ability and the energy to work, but who cannot do so because of technicalities such as lack of transportation. If these simple issues had been addressed through consultations with disabled people, this could have been much more effective.

•(1855)

The analyses published by Statistics Canada clearly show the correlation between disability and low income.

Persons with disabilities are sometimes unable to find work because of constraints that are essentially easy to handle. As a result, they have low incomes. When you have a low income, it is often more difficult to acquire additional skills to find another job later. When you have a hard time making ends meet because you do not have a job, you obviously cannot afford to get additional training at university to improve your job prospects.

*Private Members' Business*

When we talk about persons with disabilities, we must look at the big picture and take a collaborative approach.

Unfortunately, although this motion contains some improvements and tackles the issue, some parts are not quite complete and could be improved. That does not mean that we have to oppose the motion. However, I think that if we really want to improve the job prospects of persons with disabilities, we must do better. The motion leaves something to be desired.

The participation rate of people with a temporary disability is lower than during times when they have no disability. According to Statistics Canada, approximately 55% of men and 39% of women without a disability worked the equivalent of a full-time schedule all year, compared with 21% and 14% of those with six years of disability.

These figures clearly show just how much a disability, even a temporary one, can affect a person's ability to remain active in the labour market. Accordingly, people with a disability are at a greater risk of having a low income, especially when their labour force participation is interrupted.

Canadians with a disability are affected in two ways. The disability hinders them physically or mentally, but it also makes them more likely to live in precarious circumstances. It often becomes more and more difficult to break such an impasse.

If I may digress for just a moment, I would point out that workplace mental health problems cost the Canadian economy \$20.7 billion. It is an important issue. Mental illness is usually a temporary disability, but unfortunately, it can sometimes be permanent.

According to another statistic, every week almost 500,000 wage earners miss work because of mental illness. It seems to me we have a lot to think about. We have to do a better job of protecting the health and safety of our workers.

Gender inequality that is, unfortunately, already widespread within the labour market is even more marked when we compare the hours worked by women and men with disabilities. I think that is another point to consider.

Maybe we should pay special attention to what is happening to women with disabilities, who, sadly, struggle with tremendous instability. Women already have a hard time earning as much as men, and when a disability is thrown into the mix, they often end up in very unstable situations.

I would like to close by suggesting that the member who moved the motion should really think about women with disabilities, who are facing instability on both of these fronts.

● (1900)

[*English*]

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise and address Motion No. 430. I know that we got off to a rocky start, but I was hoping to speak to this motion because it is an important issue and in our best interests to see stronger leadership on this file. The more successful we are in acting on the issue of disabilities in general, the more we will improve the quality of life of those with disabilities.

Disabilities come in all different forms. We heard some of the numbers from previous speakers. A lot of people are surprised at how many Canadians are impacted by disabilities, whether mental or physical. We would do a great service by having more dialogue in the House of Commons on this important issue.

We are not alone. There are many organizations throughout our country that deal specifically with advocacy, supply, and support for people with disabilities. In my home province, the Society for Manitobans with Disabilities and the Learning Disabilities Association of Manitoba are two examples of great organizations. The Learning Disabilities Association has enabled people to better understand disabilities over the years. The Society of Manitobans with Disabilities has become an advocate for those with disabilities and is there for them.

If we were to canvass what needs to be done, there are a number of specifics involved. However, I want to pick up on a point the previous speaker referred to, the idea of working with the provincial government. I would go further and suggest that we need to take a much more holistic approach to dealing with the issue of disabilities.

What role does Ottawa play? One is leadership. Ottawa and the Government of Canada is in the best position to ensure there is some sort of a strategic approach across Canada dealing with this important issue. That means we need to start looking at who the stakeholders are while ensuring that a dialogue is taking place.

The previous speaker referred to the provinces. Yes, provinces do play a very important role. In Manitoba we have seen legislation passed and the department of family services getting directly involved. As many members might be aware, I was a member of the Manitoba legislature for just under 20 years. There is no doubt that the province has a critical role to play. I would suggest that the local municipalities also have a critical role to play. One could even go beyond that and talk about how important education is in being able to deal with the issue of disabilities and some of the stereotypes there are. We can also talk about school divisions.

In my opening remarks I referred two great organizations in Manitoba. We can talk about some of the people with disabilities who are directly impacted. There is no shortage whatsoever of strong advocates within that community who know and understand the issue because they live with it every day.

● (1905)

If we want to deal with this issue, we need to take more of that holistic approach. What role can Ottawa play? We can pass legislation. We can look at what our national civil service does today. We can look at accessibility, whether it is to the House of Commons or to the smaller federal offices scattered throughout our country, from the one-office locations in municipalities to our larger federal buildings across Canada. Accessibility is a critical aspect in dealing with individuals with disabilities.

We do not get that appreciation unless we are affected first-hand or directly. Maybe we have a disabled sibling, a son, a daughter, a parent, or whoever it might be, someone who is close to us who has been profoundly impacted by disability. I would argue that not only those individuals but the broader community, all of us, have a vested interest.

What do I mean by a vested interest? What expectation do we have to provide a certain quality of life for all Canadians, whether they are disabled or not. We need to strive wherever we can to improve the quality of life.

There are significant challenges for those with disabilities: everything from the workplace, on which we are focusing a great deal of our time this evening, to living accommodation, which does tie in directly to the workplace. Accommodation is very important.

So is transportation. The best volunteer I have had at my constituency office for a long time is a wonderful individual who is disabled. He has done an outstanding job. Transportation is critically important. Where individuals are employed, for example, in the Province of Manitoba, they are given a higher priority in terms of access to transportation. I can understand and appreciate why they need access to transportation. Transportation is absolutely critical.

What about individuals who want to continue volunteering? Through volunteering, individuals often establish the networking that enables them to land the type of employment they hope to achieve.

We need to ensure that there are adequate resources that provide the opportunity for those individuals to gain employment. Whether someone is in a wheelchair or has a form of disability with another requirement, whether it is a piece of machinery or computer technology, there is a wide variety of things that could be provided.

I would ultimately argue that, if we made this a higher priority, not only would we improve the quality of life of thousands of Canadians from coast to coast to coast but we would also improve the economics of our country, as has been pointed out. There are many jobs out there that individuals with disabilities could be filling if they were provided the legitimate opportunity to engage in a particular occupation or job.

●(1910)

We have to really start thinking of it right from our elementary students all the way up to those individuals in their 50s and 60s who have disabilities and who still want to be engaged in a working environment, let alone everyone who wants to be engaged, generally speaking.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak tonight. I will obviously be supporting the motion.

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as the member of Parliament for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, I am pleased to support my colleague, the member of Parliament for Brant, regarding his motion to endorse rethinking disability in the private sector and encourage greater private-public partnerships to increase job opportunities for persons with disabilities.

The member of Parliament for Brant has a sincere interest in assisting people with disabilities. I am pleased to acknowledge his efforts as chair of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons With Disabilities.

I was also delighted with the support he gave me with respect to my private member's bill, Bill C-462, An Act restricting the fees

### *Private Members' Business*

charged by promoters of the disability tax credit and making consequential amendments to the Tax Court of Canada Act. Bill C-462 was passed unanimously by all members of the House of Commons and for that, on behalf of persons with disabilities, I thank everyone.

The motion before us is very timely as it fits in with our Conservative government's focus on jobs, growth, and long-term prosperity.

We have all heard of the skills mismatch in this country. Businesses all across the country are calling it the greatest obstacle to their continued growth. Our Prime Minister has called it the most serious economic issue of our time.

We have hundreds of thousands of jobs going unfilled, and yet we have about 800,000 working-age Canadians with disabilities who are unemployed even though they are capable and want to work. About half of this group have college or university education.

Just under 60% of people with disabilities are in the workforce, compared to 80% of other working-age Canadians. There is a clear mismatch here. Businesses are telling us they cannot find workers with the right skills. At the same time, people with these particular skills, who just happen to be disabled, cannot find work. Here is the crux of the matter: we are ignoring an important source of talent.

People with disabilities can be part of the answer to our skill shortage. When the panel on labour market opportunities for persons with disabilities interviewed employers across the country, it found that there was considerable openness to the idea of hiring people with disabilities. It received positive reactions from businesses of all sizes and from a broad range of industry sectors.

Those employers who already had employees with disabilities were more open to hiring more people with disabilities. In fact, they were enthusiastic. They had seen how much people with disabilities contribute to their businesses. People with disabilities are just like all workers. They are highly motivated to do well and they work hard. They make excellent employees.

The cost of accommodating a person with a disability is often quite low or even nonexistent. As I said before, the panel's report makes it clear that accommodation costs are usually so manageable that they should not be a barrier to hiring a person with a disability.

For a small investment, employers get very good value. For one thing, businesses with employees with disabilities have less turnover. People with disabilities can give businesses a competitive advantage. Why then are employers not hiring more people with disabilities? It must be that these workers currently do not have the skills for the jobs that are available. That is why our government is responding to this motion directly by investing in programs that will equip people with disabilities with the skills they need for the jobs that are available.

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In economic action plan 2013, we announced that the Government of Canada would work with the provinces and the territories on a new generation of labour market agreements for persons with disabilities, to more effectively connect Canadians with disabilities with employers and with jobs. These new agreements will be negotiated this year and will deliver better results by being driven by demand and have more employer involvement.

•(1915)

We provide \$222 million a year for these agreements, which support approximately 300,000 interventions every year for people with disabilities through more than 100 programs designed and delivered by the provinces. We have rewritten these agreements to better meet the labour needs—the particular skills employers need—and Canadian businesses will improve the employment prospects of people with disabilities through these programs.

Economic action plan 2013 also maintained funding of \$40 million per year for the opportunities fund for persons with disabilities starting in 2015-16. The opportunities fund is a subsidized job program that will help Canadians with disabilities gain the hands-on experience they need to fully participate in the labour market. Since 2006-07, the opportunities fund has helped more than 34,000 clients develop skills and gain work experience.

Economic action plan 2013 proposed that employers and community organizations be more involved in local project design and delivery to ensure a stronger link to the labour market needs. This will improve the outcomes for people with disabilities.

Some of the other measures that were announced in the action plan include additional funding for the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, some of which will support research related to the labour market participation of people with disabilities; support for the creation of the Canadian employers disability forum, now officially incorporated under the name Canadian Business SensAbility, as recommended by the panel; and the extension on an ongoing basis of the \$15-million-per-year enabling accessibility fund, which defrays the costs of construction and renovations related to improving physical accessibility, including the addition of a workplace accessibility stream.

We want to see the private sector do more. According to a Conference Board survey, in the last 20 years employer investment in workplace training has declined by nearly 40%. This has hit persons with disabilities harder than most, for they often require more training.

Canadian businesses spend about 35% less on workplace training than their U.S. counterparts do. This is why, if we are going to tackle the problem of skill shortages, we are all going to have to pull together. Governments at all levels, employers, institutions, and yes, even individual job seekers are going to have to co-operate for the common good.

In conclusion, I would like to commend the hon. member for Brant for introducing the motion, and I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak today in support of his efforts.

•(1920)

**Mr. Phil McColeman (Brant, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, first, I would like to thank my two colleagues on the government side who spoke

tonight, the member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke and the member for Brandon—Souris, for their words, as well as opposition members who have spoken in support of the motion this evening.

I have said this before, and I will say it again, I am under no illusions about this motion, in the sense that there is much more to do. That is a point that has been brought up by all sides of this House.

Here is what we know. We have this untapped resource of approximately 800,000 individuals in this country who have one form of disability or another. Those disabilities range from episodic-type disabilities to physical and intellectual disabilities. The broad range of disabilities of those individuals has been spoken about over and over again.

About 340,000 of them have post-secondary university or college degrees. These are talented people. These are people we need to match to the jobs that are available in our country, both public and private sector.

What this motion is really about is mobilizing those people who own and operate businesses in communities, at the grassroots level. I was fortunate before coming to the House of Commons to have owned my own construction company that I ran for 25 years. In those 25 years, I was rewarded greatly by my employees.

I would like the opportunity for my colleagues in the construction industry to consider hiring someone with a disability, and not because of sympathy or feeling sorry for someone because they do have a disability, but because it makes good business sense. The business case that was laid out by the panel that the government put together on hiring persons with disabilities shows that the broad range of benefits from hiring someone with a disability go far beyond what anyone's expectations could be.

First, they are some of the hardest-working individuals in this country when they get a job. There are many reasons for this. First and foremost, it is because they are thankful to have a job. They are a group of people who inspire those around them. Another great benefit is that attrition rates and rates of turnover of employees are greatly reduced. People want to be around and to be inspired by these wonderful individuals, many of whom have had to overcome many obstacles on a daily basis, the kind most of us do not have to face.

I have seen it in my community. I have seen it in groups of individuals who support those with disabilities. I have seen it in individual lives. I have seen individuals who have started their own businesses. When going out to do business for our own personal reasons, as many of us have, I have seen these individuals in our communities. Would it not be wonderful if we took the next steps, as a society, to make sure that the focus is on that pocket of individuals in our community? When we see opportunities, we want to encourage those who have businesses to consider them on their merits when there is a job opening.

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That is what this motion strives to do. It sets out prescriptive things that the government can do, many of which are non-monetary. It is my belief that it is private sector's responsibility to step up to the plate. They need to step up and realize that there is this pool of untapped talent out there.

The motion has very prescriptive actions and includes the necessary government support behind it. We talked about accommodation. Things have been brought up, such as transportation. All of these things are pieces of the puzzle that can help. It is those opportunities, those doors, that need to be opened.

• (1925)

I appreciate the support of all members of the House on this motion. It is a motion that can move the yardstick ahead one step. It is better to take it one step at a time than to not take any action at all.

It is a great privilege and honour to have put forward this motion.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Some hon. members:** No.

**The Deputy Speaker:** All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

**Some hon. members:** Yea.

**The Deputy Speaker:** All those opposed will please say nay.

**Some hon. members:** Nay.

**The Deputy Speaker:** In my opinion the yeas have it.

*And five or more members having risen:*

[Translation]

Pursuant to Standing Order 93, a recorded division stands deferred until Wednesday, February 12, 2014, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

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## EMERGENCY DEBATE

[English]

### GRAIN TRANSPORT

**The Deputy Speaker:** The House will now proceed to the consideration of a motion to adjourn the House for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter requiring urgent consideration, namely grain transportation.

**Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.)** moved:

That the House do now adjourn.

He said: I would first like to thank the Speaker for allowing me to bring this grain crisis to floor of the House of Commons tonight.

Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Winnipeg North this evening.

Over the next four and a half hours, farmers and their families will be watching MPs debate the crisis they are facing, and the money they are losing. I am hoping that many other Canadians will also be watching, so that they can have an understanding of the crisis at hand on the prairies. We hope that following this debate tonight that we can see more action from the government.

We have been hearing from many farmers and farm groups from across the country of the frustration they are facing with delays in shipping and the money they are losing.

This last fall, in November, I visited Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta. I witnessed firsthand the mountains of wheat, canola, and other crops that were building up outside of the grain elevators. I have seen the grain stored, not only in the elevators, but in machinery sheds and under tarpaulins.

At that time, many were very optimistic. The crop was good. The prices were good. They had customers. What more could one ask for?

I recall visiting Curtis McRae's farm in St. Andrews, Manitoba. He had over 30,000 bushels of wheat and 30,000 bushels of canola on his 5,000-acre farm; and it was a very impressive farm at that. He said that the local elevator was not taking any grain, as it was waiting for 600 cars to move the crop already at hand. That is just one example of the many thousands that we are seeing right across the prairies.

As a result, the prices started dropping. The prices have now dropped 40%. The problem is that there is no cost-benefit analysis and no business plan to manage the implementation of transportation. The Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food even defended the railroad last fall, stating that the grain companies' performance was adequate. It clearly was not.

Promises were also made by the minister to bring forward new legislation to rectify the imbalance in the market power between the farmers and the railroads, to enable shippers to get a decent level of transportation service. Federal legislation introduced last June, the Fair Rail Freight Service Act, was supposed to deal with this situation. Well, it has not worked.

Many prairie farmers agree that the legislation needs to be amended to make it easier to hit the railroad companies with fines over these transportation bottlenecks. The current act is not effective.

We have to realize that over 95% of Canada's export grain is shipped by rail. Canada is the top canola producer in the world and the second largest exporter of wheat. We had over 100 million tonnes of crop out west this year. What a bonanza and opportunity we could have had, and there were customers for the crop.

When we look at the nation's two major carriers, CNR and Canadian Pacific, they say they are each providing 5,000 cars a week, and one is at 5,500 cars, to move the grain. However, that is not even half as much as we need.

Not only do we see this on the prairies with the railroads, there were 20 big ships waiting for grain in Vancouver and 5 ships waiting at Prince Rupert, the two grain terminals on the west coast, and that was on October 31. Today, there are between 30 and 40 vessels waiting to be loaded in Vancouver alone.

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We can see that there is a big problem. We have the crop. We have the customers. We have the ships. However, it is just not getting there.

Ships have been idling for as long as six weeks in Vancouver, waiting for grain. It costs \$12,000 to \$20,000 every day in demurrage penalties. Who is going to pay for that?

I was talking to a farmer yesterday from Saskatchewan, and it is going to come right out of the farmer's pocket. That is who will end up paying for these delays.

Canadian-based grain companies have been charged more than \$20 million in fees for delays at the port of Vancouver since August, according to the Western Grain Elevator Association. Some grain companies have sales for China, but they are not able to transport all their grain.

• (1930)

What has happened? What are all of the rail services being utilized for? They are being utilized for crude oil, potash, and other products. They are getting priority. The grain farmers are not, though, because there is no watchdog over the whole system. This is leaving as much as 3 million tonnes of grain stuck in the Prairies.

Canadian railroads shipped 34% more cars of fuel, oil, and crude petroleum in October. They are shipping more products than in the year before.

CP Rail reported a 19,900-car shortfall, according to a January service report. Outstanding grain car orders for CN totalled over 17,000, according to the January 17 report.

Let us look at some of the prices. Less than a year ago, wheat was selling for \$9 a bushel; now, farmers are getting less than \$4 for the same quality of wheat. That is less than half the price. The fuel costs are all the same, the seed prices are all the same, and the fertilizer prices are all the same, but let us look at the prices the farmers are getting—and those prices are only if they can sell it and get it to their customers.

The problem is not a lack of a competitive transportation system, but that the grain is in competition, as I said, not only with oil but also with potash and coal. These are other commodities that are taking up the rail space. They accounted for 54,000 cars in November. That is a big increase from the year before.

We have a loaded rail cars waiting at the elevators for up to 11 days. Then we have the demurrage fees, which I have already talked about, adding up to \$20 million.

We look at all of these losses. What do they add up to? We are figuring out now that they add up to \$1 million a day, all of which will come out of the farmers' pockets. Overall, they are losing \$1 million a day. What does the minister do? He throws \$1 million at the whole project for a study. It does not take much of a study when we call these growers from all across the country.

Let us have a look at some of the farm leaders across the country and some of the newspapers that we get in the Prairies. I will name a few of the farm leaders. I will quote what they say in some of the articles.

The first one comes right out of the Canadian Press. This gentleman is from Keystone Agricultural Producers. My colleague knows very well that it is the biggest agricultural organization in Manitoba. The article says:

Doug Chorney of Keystone Agricultural Producers said the backlog is so bad that mountains of wheat and other crops are building up outside jammed grain elevators.

As prices fall, farmers are wondering what good a record bumper crop is to them if they can't get it to market.

"There is grain in piles across Western Canada", Chorney said from Brandon, Man. "This creates big cash-flow problems for farmers. We all have bills to pay".

The minister came out and said that the government will give the farmers a small advance payment. The farmers have all these piles of grain, and the government is going to give them an advance payment. That has to be paid back. It is only going to be paid back if they sell their grain. I do not know where the rationale is, and I do not think that farmers feel any more confident.

That is in Manitoba. Let us move over to Saskatchewan.

Norm Hall is the President of the Agricultural Producers Association of Saskatchewan. I will quote from the newspaper what he said about the legislation that the Conservatives brought forward in June:

Norm Hall, president of the Agricultural Producers Association of Saskatchewan, said the Fair Rail Freight Service Act is just not effective.

He said the legislation needs to be amended to make it easier to hit railway companies with fines over transportation bottlenecks.

"There are no teeth...to make sure that it happens", Hall said.

The legislation does include a provision for possible penalties of up to \$100,000, but only if a government arbitrator decides a signed service agreement between a shipping company and a railway has been violated.

What is that going to do to make the rail service accountable?

That was out of Saskatchewan.

• (1935)

The Conservative members from Saskatchewan or the Prairies must have had an earful when they went home and were at the curling rink or hockey rinks over the last few weeks. It must be a hard go for them. However, there are answers and there are solutions out there.

Let me move over to Alberta.

Lynn Jacobson, president of—

**The Deputy Speaker:** The member has used up all of his time.

**Hon. Mark Eyking:** Have I no time to wrap up, Mr. Speaker?

**The Deputy Speaker:** Perhaps during questions and comments, the member will be able to.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Vegreville—Wainwright.

**Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I hate to agree with the hon. member from Atlantic Canada, not only because he is Liberal but because some of his positions on issues are just plain wrong, but quite frankly, what he is saying on this issue is correct. There is a huge problem. The railways are part of the problem. The grain companies are part of the problem. I do not know whether the ports are part of the problem.

The hon. member for Malpeque is heckling me, saying that it would be better if we had the Wheat Board, but frankly, it would be worse. We would never be able to figure out what the problem was with the system if we had the Wheat Board, and farmers are not going there, by the way. They know that is not part of the answer; that has been part of the problem, and the problem would be worse.

However, the problem is there. Some of the information from farmers that he referred to is in fact, I believe, completely accurate. Those problems are there. I have farmland that I rent to people across Alberta and Saskatchewan, and these young people have been phoning me and complaining about the same situation. However, I have not heard a single idea that would provide a solution. I would ask the member if he has any concrete ideas for how we could deal with this problem.

The railways have to perform better, and the grain companies should not be allowed to take advantage of this situation, which only exists because of the monopoly situation with the railroad. There is the choice of either CN or CP, depending on which line is closer.

I would like to ask the member—

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. member for Sydney—Victoria.

● (1940)

**Hon. Mark Eyking:** Mr. Speaker, I would first like to thank the hon. member for his question, and I have to commend him. He was one of the few on the other side who even questioned the minister on the lack of action.

First the government got rid of the Wheat Board. The result is not making any more money for the farmers. Let us not open that debate, because it is gone. When the government got rid of the Wheat Board, it should have had something to take its place, and the railways act did not do it. It had no teeth, and the rail companies knew there was no teeth in it last fall. That is why they kept shipping more potash and oil. It was because there were no teeth in the legislation. These guys had the chance to have a good act that would be a watchdog over the railroads, and they did not do it. They got rid of the Wheat Board and put nothing in its place, and that is why we now have this situation.

Now they are trying to play catch-up, but it is costing the farmers money. It is costing farmers big money to have this catch-up, and it is not working. What is going to happen with all these grain piles come springtime, when moisture starts to get into it and it starts to deteriorate? Where are the customers going to be found?

**Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I have been getting emails like all the rest. I am sure that on the other side they are as well, as members from the prairie region are also seeing the same thing.

I wonder if my colleague could comment. Yes, the Wheat Board is gone, and we are not re-entering that debate, but part of the piece that disappeared as well was the logistics of moving grain off the Prairies. It was then handed over to private companies. That is what the government side wanted. Clearly what we are seeing is that as soon as they get a bumper crop, those particular companies are failing farmers.

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Would my friend agree that what really needed to happen was that some sort of logistical support system needed to be left in place, not totally eliminated and left up to private enterprise? What happened with private enterprise through Hunter Harrison and CP is that last year they got rid of 11,000 cars and 440 locomotives. He took capacity out of the system right before a bumper crop. CP made more money, but it left farmers stranded.

I wonder if my colleague would like to comment.

**Hon. Mark Eyking:** Mr. Speaker, the member hit the nail on the head about how the Conservatives dropped the ball on this. We see it even at the Vancouver port.

The Wheat Board used to have a way of controlling where all the cars were going. The grain industry is vitally important not only for farmers out west but also for people who buy the grain, for the livestock farmers in eastern Canada, and for people all over the world. We cannot leave it totally up to the free enterprise system of cars shipping potash or oil. There has to be a watchdog. Someone has to be accountable. There should have been quarterly reporting on this situation to see if people were being taken care of, and they have not been. It is on the Conservatives' watch, and they are going to have to suffer for it.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it is really important that we recognize the simple fact that Canada has the best wheat in the world, yet throughout the Prairies there is wheat sitting in bins. There is wheat covered by light plastic sitting in fields. Let us imagine the frustration of the farmer in the Prairies today, who has poured his heart and soul into producing the best wheat in the world, but the Government of Canada has not done enough to ensure that the wheat moves out of the Prairies to the west coast, where we have dozens of empty ships ocean waiting to receive that Prairie wheat.

How do we describe the feelings of the farmers in rural Manitoba, Saskatchewan, or Alberta, given their efforts not only to produce wheat but to contribute immensely to the Prairie economy through the thousands of jobs, both direct and indirect? If we try to get an understanding of how the farmer has been impacted, we would get a better appreciation of the negligence of the government in not doing what it should have been doing.

What we are debating today should not be any surprise. We had wonderful crops last fall. It is no surprise that we needed to be able to get that wheat to the ports. What has the government been doing to address that issue?

My colleague said it offered just over \$1 million. One could talk about falling short on that front, but the biggest failure is the government not recognizing early enough the need to deal with the transportation and handling issue. That has to be the biggest disappointment for the farmer today.

I have had the privilege of being born and living in the Prairies. I go to the Prairies every weekend. It is my home. I have been on many different farms as a guest. I have been a passenger in some of the gigantic tractors. I remember driving down Highway 2 a couple of years ago late in the evening and seeing a sequence of 14 or 16 lights. It was combines working together to pull the wheat off the ground.

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It is impressive to know that our product feeds many parts of this world. At one point or another, virtually any country that imports wheat has looked to Canada to provide it.

I can appreciate that the handling and transportation of wheat and other products are of critical importance and I do not claim to know all of the details of how that is managed. I look to individuals within my caucus, in particular my colleague from Wascana, who has time and time again raised this issue on behalf of the Liberal Party as the deputy leader. He is an individual who has served the Prairies, representing not only Saskatchewan but the Prairies as a whole to ensure we see the farmers' issues being brought to the House as often as possible.

● (1945)

Our former critics and the current critic are working with the leader of the Liberal Party. They have been saying that we need to bring this crisis to the floor in the form of an emergency debate. It does not happen very often, where the Speaker acknowledges that what we have brought forward requires an emergency debate. We are pleased that via the Liberal Party critic we were able to bring this forward for debate tonight. At the very least, it highlights how critically important it is that this issue be dealt with. It is a crisis. People do not have to be in economic ivory towers to comprehend the situation and the degree in which intervention is needed.

We are looking to the government to come up with ideas. A Conservative member stood up and asked us for our ideas. I am looking forward to the government members coming forward and sharing their ideas. More importantly, I would like to hear what the government has done to date that should have prevented this from taking place. How is the government going to make amends to the farmers and others it has virtually destroyed?

It has been pointed out that there is a 30%, 40%, 50% loss of revenue. Those are incredible losses. Let us imagine having our own business that hit with a 30% to 60% loss of revenue, and the impact that is going to have. We already ask our farmers to work 7 days a week, 16 hours a day, especially at certain times of the year.

We are looking for the government to come up with ideas. The deputy leader of the Liberal Party has talked about the Fair Rail Freight Service Act. The Liberal Party has been talking about transportation for months, both inside and outside of Ottawa. We recognize the need has been there. My colleague made reference to the fact that he was out in the Prairies just last fall, talking about the piles of wheat that were accumulating back then. This should be no surprise.

We have to ask, why? Where has the government been? The government needs to start demonstrating that it really understands what is taking place and tell the farmers and others who are watching tonight exactly what it is prepared to do to resolve this issue.

A boat sits out in the Pacific Ocean, and every day it costs \$15,000 for it to just sit there empty, waiting for the wheat. There is nothing like having a boat go into port, getting a partial deposit of wheat, and then having to go back out and wait for the same company to have another deposit delivered for transfer to the boat.

There is a coordinating element that has been lost. There is no doubt in my mind that some of the actions of the government have

caused the problem. That is something I believe many farmers out west understand and will remember. They are watching what the government is doing.

The farmers on the Prairies are starting to lose confidence in the Conservative government in a significant way. We hope to continue to raise the issue, whether it is here inside the House or outside the House where the farmers are, in the prairie regions, and to talk and communicate.

● (1950)

The leader of the Liberal Party constantly tells us that he wants us to connect with Canadians. We are connecting with farmers and are going to continue to hammer home the message that the government needs to stand up and start taking responsibility and being more accountable to the farmers, especially on our Prairies. This is a time of need and we want the—

● (1955)

**The Deputy Speaker:** Order, please. Questions and comments, the hon. member for Prince Albert.

**Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is great to have this debate and about time. I have been talking about this issue with my constituents since October or November when the crops started coming off.

One thing I will remind the member of, though, is that it was actually the member for Wascana, when he was the agriculture minister, who came out with the new type of rail system that we are faced with today. He was the guy who actually went to the farmers and said to get rid of their small-town elevators and branch lines, to buy a Super B, to go to inland terminals and make a more efficient railway service. Well it was more efficient, but it did not go back to the farmers. Where did it go? It went to ship more coal, more potash, and more oil. That is the Liberal policy on this.

When it comes to the revenue cap, where is the Liberal policy on that?

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux:** Mr. Speaker, I have two points.

First, let us acknowledge what the member said, that it is about time for this debate. I agree. The time for this debate probably was a lot earlier. However, the only reason we are having this debate tonight is because the Liberal Party said we needed it, that it is a priority, that there is an emergency, that there is a crisis happening on the Prairies.

Second, in regard to the latter issue, I would welcome the opportunity to see a good, healthy debate between the Prime Minister and the member for Wascana on the prairie farm and the decisions the Liberal Party of Canada made back when we were in government, compared to the damage caused by the current government. Never before have we seen piles of wheat to the degree we see today. That is because of Conservative mismanagement. You have to take responsibility for some of the actions you have and have not taken.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The member for Winnipeg North is well versed in the rules of the House. His comments have to be directed to the Chair, and not to other members of Parliament.



Questions and comments, the hon. member for Vaudreuil-Soulanges.

**Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the member mentioned that when we were in government in 1995, the Liberal government privatized CN via the CN Commercialization Act. Section 16 of that act stipulates that “The railway and other transportation works in Canada of CN, of every subsidiary...are hereby declared to be works for the general advantage of Canada”.

Seeing that health of our grain farmers on the Prairies is also to the advantage of Canada, would this member support or agree to compelling CN to act through the CN Commercialization Act the Liberals enacted in 1995, through section 16?

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux:** Mr. Speaker, what we would ultimately like to see this evening are ideas and thoughts brought to the table, and where there are opportunities for us to be able to assist the farmers, that is what we should be doing.

I am hoping, in particular, to hear some initiatives from the government side. I think as we see time pass, there will be some ideas be discussed and, hopefully, acted upon where possible.

**Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, there are some things that all of us will agree on tonight. If we could just agree on those things and then get on with the rest of the debate, that would be helpful.

First, farmers have done a marvellous job in growing this crop, an incredible job. It is a record crop by far. We have never grown a crop like this before.

Second, the railways simply have not performed in the last few months. CN has become an excellent railway and has increased the movement of all commodities, including grain, each year for the past four years, until December and January.

The third thing we can agree on is that a lot of harm is being done to farmers because the railways are not moving grain as they should. Moreover, grain companies are taking advantage of this situation, the fact that there is not competition, and are offering farmers a lower price than they would if we had real competition in moving the grain to the ports.

So I think we can agree on all those things. I would like to ask the member once again to provide some serious part of the solution to this problem.

● (2000)

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux:** Mr. Speaker, first we need to recognize the need to amend the Fair Rail Freight Service Act. If the member needs some advice on that, the member for Wascana, or the critic for agriculture, would be more than happy to provide that information or amendments as necessary. This is something that we must absolutely do.

To what degree has the Government of Canada actually sat down with our railways and talked about the number of locomotives and rolling stock and the staffing issue, to ensure that we can in fact mobilize and get the wheat out to the Pacific Ocean? The government should have been working on this with the railways.

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We hope it will expand on that particular point in the debate this evening.

**Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we are here tonight because we are dealing with a record crop in western Canada. All players in the supply chain are looking at solutions for getting grain more quickly to port. Let me share what Mr. Gary Stanford, president of the Grain Growers of Canada, said:

We had a record crop last year with a significant increase in yields. A buoyant farm economy, better genetics, increased usage of new and better fungicides, overall better agronomics, and better utilization of micro-nutrients in fertilizer application were all contributing factors

As many in the industry have said, higher crop volumes are expected to be the new normal, and our government is taking action to help the industry prepare for that.

Our government also understands the challenges that Canadian farmers are facing. Canadian farmers face some of the longest inland distances to market of any exporting nation. On the Prairies, grain travels an average of 1,500 kilometres to reach a port terminal. In addition, in 2012 farmers paid over a billion dollars to move grain by rail. Grain growers deserve an efficient, reliable, and predictable rail service to get their crops to market.

World demand is growing and while the bumper crop is posing frustrations for our grain farmers, it also represents an opportunity for the industry to find new efficiencies. That is why we are working with stakeholders on a number of fronts to make the supply chain more competitive. Over the past months, the minister has met on several occasions with key players throughout the grain sector to find long-term solutions. With the new reality of larger crops, this holistic approach is the best way forward, and is certainly much more constructive than pointing fingers. That said, as we are working with stakeholders to identify improvements going forward, we expect all players in the supply chain to step up their game.

I would like to talk about an important action our government is taking to protect the economy and Canadian grain producers.

[*Translation*]

Our government is concerned about the potential repercussions of the CN strike on hard-working Canadian farmers, the manufacturing sector and exporters. We were disappointed to learn that the union representing CN workers, Teamsters Canada, gave its strike notice. A strike would have damaging effects on our economy, farmers in the Prairies, auto workers in Ontario and proud forestry workers in Quebec.

The total impact of a work stoppage is estimated at \$450 million per week.

Canadian farmers have harvested record crops. At the same time, our government has opened markets for our exporters. Our government is working hard to support growth in this sector, and a devastating strike would threaten our grains and our gains and would hurt workers and their families. Today, at the Port of Vancouver, container ships are waiting to be loaded for export. Our government will not allow other obstacles to prevent Canadian exports from getting to market. A strike would compromise our recovery.

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Therefore, our position is clear. Our economy must be protected. Our product has to get to market. We must protect jobs. That is why, today, our government is taking action to protect the Canadian economy and Canadian farmers by giving notice of a bill to get CN back on track.

● (2005)

[*English*]

I have received confirmation that our government welcomes a tentative deal to protect Canadian jobs and the economy and to prevent a strike at CN Rail. Our Minister of Labour said:

I am pleased that the parties continue to make every effort to settle their differences. It is essential that employers and unions work together to come to agreements that are in the best interests of everyone involved.

They are reaching a tentative agreement, but of course this still has to be finalized. I would ask the members of the opposition to support the type of legislation we are proposing if this tentative deal is not finalized.

As well as taking action on a potential CN strike, our government has taken steps to improve the performance of the entire rail supply chain. This includes investing \$1.5 million in a special crops Canada-led multi-sector collaboration project of the pulse, oilseeds, and grain industries to improve supply chain efficiency and reliability; passing the Fair Rail Freight Service Act, which creates a process to establish service agreements; investing \$25 million to support grain shipments through the Port of Churchill; and implementing marketing freedom for western Canadian wheat and barley growers.

We are also working to help farmers get their crops to market by bringing industry groups together through groups such as the commodity supply chain table, the crop logistics working group and value chain round tables to facilitate comprehensive industry-led solutions.

On Monday, we further acted to respond to early recommendations of the crop logistics working group by pursuing enhancements to the grain monitoring program to improve the frequency of reporting, and by committing to providing an ongoing forum for representatives across the industry to discuss improvement throughout the supply chain.

The crop logistics working group has clearly identified a need for a fuller measurement of the transportation system from farm to point of sale. The working group said that a broader, more timely system is needed to deliver the kind of information required to support the efficient functioning of the crop logistics system. In other words, to improve productivity, timely and transparent measurements are needed.

Building on their recommendations, we are taking action to expand the mandate of the grain monitoring program to incorporate that information and to increase the frequency from quarterly reporting to monthly reporting. Expanded monitoring will provide a much clearer picture for all players, helping them to improve planning and to cut overall costs.

The proposed expanded range of metrics and reporting frequency would include railway order fulfillment information; weekly loads on wheels by carrier; the covered hopper car fleet size and grain

service for both mainline carriers by class of service on a weekly basis; terminal unload performance by railway; western Canada railway grain traffic to eastern Canada, United States, and Mexican destinations; U.S. grain traffic to western Canadian destinations; and western Canadian grain traffic shipped to port in containers.

Our common goal is a more transparent system, so that all players in the supply chain, especially farmers, have the information they need to make the right decisions for their businesses and for our economy as a whole. Together, a better flow of information will help build a more reliable, predictable, and efficient transportation system.

These concrete actions build on our previous investment of \$1.5 million under Growing Forward 2 to identify key areas of improvement in the supply chain and develop the tools and technical support to get there. This is a five-year, long-term collaborative industry effort led by Pulse Canada.

With matching industry investment, the goal is to improve the efficiency and reliability of the supply chain from farm gate to port terminal. The whole idea of increasing our logistics capacity is being able to figure out where we are at, where we are short, and what needs to be done.

I would add that we have the support of the Grain Growers of Canada in this way forward. As well, the Premier of Saskatchewan spoke today to a trade summit in Saskatoon, where he said:

We fully support the federal government in any measures they can take to address this situation.

As many in the industry have said, these kinds of crops are the new normal. Everyone has to improve, and that includes the railroads. Since day one, our government has been there for Canadian farmers and we are there for them today.

Our government knows that Canada's grain industry drives our economy and jobs with over \$20 billion of our exports. The fact is that agriculture is a growing economic powerhouse in Canada and around the world. Agriculture is a big reason that Canada's economy is leading the industrialized world. That is why our government continues to ensure that farmers and food processors have the tools they need to continue to grow our economy and to employ Canadians.

Let me give a few examples. Top of mind, of course, is marketing freedom for western Canada's hard-working wheat and barley producers. This year's record harvest clearly demonstrates that the end of the old single desk two years ago has reinvigorated Canada's world-class grain industry.

Our farmers seeded 2 million more acres of wheat and produced over 20 million more tonnes of grain this year over last year. Since the end of the antiquated single desk, western grain farmers now enjoy the basic right to make their own business decisions on the marketing of their crop.

● (2010)

Over the first 18 months of freedom, we have seen record farm incomes with a strong balance sheet, two million new acres of wheat, and wheat exports up by close to 20%, with sales to the United States up by half.

A Canadian Federation of Independent Business survey found that the vast majority of its agriculture members, over 80%, are positive on the impact of marketing freedom on their operations. It is called choice, it is called freedom, and it is clearly working.

Trade is another excellent example of how we are strengthening the industry. To help our farmers find new markets for their high-quality crops, our government is moving ahead with the most aggressive trade agenda in the nation's history. I would remind those voices for protectionism who would build a wall around Canada that Canadian farmers depend on trade to market up to 85% of their products.

For 2013, all signs point to another record year. Our beef industry is back on the map, with our beef trade with China increasing sixfold last year alone. None of this would have been possible without a lot of hard work from industry and our government in working together.

Of course, the historic breakthrough on trade was our agreement in principle with the European Union on a comprehensive economic and trade agreement. This accord is without doubt the most comprehensive and ambitious trade agreement since NAFTA.

Upon ratification, Canada will be one of the only developed countries in the world to have preferential access to the world's two largest economies, the European Union and the United States. With Europe and NAFTA, that will mean access to more than 800 million of the world's most affluent customers.

Right now, our agriculture imports hit a tariff wall of almost 14%, so we see the kind of opportunity we are looking at in the world's largest and most affluent market for food. Under this agreement, tariffs will be eliminated on the vast majority of our agricultural exports, including wheat, which currently faces tariffs of up to \$122 per tonne. Clearly, this agreement will mean more money in the pockets of our Canadian grain producers.

Likewise, the Canadian beef sector will secure new market access opportunities for exports of 65,000 tonnes, and the industry estimates that new beef market access under this accord to be worth about \$600 million a year.

Additionally, increased access for Canadian pork products to the EU has been estimated by industry to grow by \$400 million, or \$20 a hog. For Canada's economy as a whole, the agreement is expected to create an additional 80,000 jobs nationwide and boost Canada's GDP by \$12 billion.

We are working hard now to finalize the technical issues, which would then allow the agreement in principle to be formally

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approved. We will also push forward on other trade agreements, like India and the trans-Pacific partnership, a vast market of almost 800 million people. As well, we have revived the South Korean trade talks.

Here at home, we continue to transform and modernize our agricultural industry to help farmers drive our economy and feed the world. Growing Forward 2, our five-year framework for agriculture with the provinces and territories, has a much stronger focus on proactive measures like science and research and less on the reactive measures of the past. Growing Forward 2 is driving innovation through investments of over \$70 million in industry-led research clusters on grains and oilseeds alone. We are helping our grain sector to succeed.

We remain committed to developing a policy to manage low-level presence of genetically modified organisms in grain for food and feed. We continue to work with our trading partners and domestic stakeholders to develop an approach that is predictable, flexible, transparent, and proactive.

Also to drive innovation, the government recently introduced the agricultural growth act, to bring our plant breeders legislation in line with the rest of the world. UPOV '91, as it is known, will strengthen intellectual property rights for plant breeders and help increase investment in research and development for Canada's crop sector.

These discussions have been going on for 22 years, and industry agrees it is time to invigorate investment, innovation, and growth in Canada's agriculture sector, right now. That will help our farmers remain competitive by providing them with access to the best new crop varieties, whether they are developed here in Canada or abroad.

Farmers have a bright future. My message to the House this evening is that we are taking action on the grain transportation challenges our farmers are facing. We are taking action on early recommendations of the crop logistics working group. Our government knows that action is needed now and for the long term. We will continue to take a holistic approach, working with all stakeholders across the industry.

The ministers of agriculture and transport continue to work with producers and the entire value chain to identify and generate new efficiencies. All stakeholders, from farmers to elevators to grain companies to railways, must look at the challenges of transporting this year's record harvest and identify improvements for going forward.

● (2015)

It is a competitive marketplace. Our farmers' renewed strength has also benefited from marketing freedom. Marketing freedom, coupled with a top-quality product, puts our farmers on a level playing field with any country in the world.

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To win and maintain our markets, Canada must be competitive not only on price and quality but also on service reliability. The recommendations from the crop logistics working group are a big step in that direction. I am confident that they will help build a stronger supply chain for farmers over the short, medium, and long term. Record volumes present both challenges and opportunities for the industry, and the time is right for the Canadian grain industry to capture these opportunities in marketing their world-class products in a secure and profitable way.

Our government has always put farmers first, and it will continue to do so.

**Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, by golly, if farmers are sitting out there tonight thinking that they are probably not going to get their grain shipped until spring and therefore have no income, they must really be reassured by the lead spokesman for the Government of Canada that they really are still going to sit there until spring with no income, because that is all the member has said tonight.

The parliamentary secretary falls back on this “two million more acres”. Look, Canadians, do not be fooled by that. In 1990, there were nine million more acres seeded than there were last year, so let us not play the numbers game.

My question to the member is quite simple: who is responsible for allocating the grain cars now, so that the grain can get moved?

The member used the diversion of “possibly a strike”. The reality is that Parrish & Heimbecker put in an order for 800 cars last week and they got zero. Roughly 4,500 cars are supposed to be allocated every week, and that was zero. It used to be that the Canadian Wheat Board allocated the cars and took some control over the railway and the grain companies.

My question is who is allocating the cars now? Who is responsible?

**Mr. Pierre Lemieux:** Mr. Speaker, clearly in my speech, I was showing a few things. One of them was the actions that we are taking, primarily engaging all stakeholders across the crops logistics sector. Second, I was showing how farming and agriculture have succeeded under our government, both with ending the single-desk monopoly of the Wheat Board and with our innovations in science and research.

The fact that an extra two million acres were seeded is good news. The member treats it as bad news. The harvest is up by 20 million tonnes. There is no question that it is a record crop this year and that the transportation system is struggling to deliver it.

We do not take this matter lightly, which is why the minister has been meeting with stakeholders across the country on a number of different occasions. We have made funding available to encourage them to find solutions, not just tomorrow but in the short, medium, and long term, because we are convinced that agriculture will continue to succeed, and it needs medium- to long-term solutions as well.

**Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the only thing missing from the member's speech was the Canada action plan sign behind him, but I know that would not be allowed as a prop.

We talked about CETA and we talked about TPP, South Korea, and all these trade deals. The Conservatives can sign trade deals until the grain rots in the bin, because they are not going to move one kernel of grain by signing another free trade agreement, no matter how good it is.

This is about getting stuff out of the Prairies. As wonderful as the parliamentary secretary's speech was in highlighting all of the wonderful things that the government thinks it has done, it will not move grain out of the Prairies.

Gordon Bacon said just this week, as part of the round table group, that it is obvious some serious improvements to transportation are needed, but he said it is not as simple as adding more rail cars. He said that shipping grain requires coordination from farm to rail terminal to port.

We used to have that, but the government decided, in its wisdom, that we did not need it any more and it threw it away.

The parliamentary secretary talked about these great deals and how we are going to be wonderful partners.

Mr. Bacon, CEO of Pulse Canada, said that “Our goal is to be seen as a reliable supplier of grain to markets around the world and our record is a bit tarnished in that area”.

How on earth do we ever do trade deals with our partners when our reputation is tarnished?

● (2020)

**Mr. Pierre Lemieux:** Mr. Speaker, I see on the opposition side a lot of arm waving and am hearing that something should be done, but I do not hear any proposals. I do not hear what the opposition is proposing to resolve this problem tomorrow, which is what they are actually advocating.

What is needed are short-, medium- and long-term solutions. There was a record harvest this year, which is complicating all matters regarding transportation and crop logistics. I do not think anybody in the House believes that if the single-desk Wheat Board were in charge, all those problems would be solved. In fact, what we saw was another layer of bureaucracy, and in fact, far less efficiency and far more unhappy farmers than we have today.

What we are proposing is working within the sector in a meaningful way and making funding available to launch initiatives to solve this problem, not just tomorrow but in the near, medium, and long term.

**Mr. James Bezan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture for his comments. I also want to thank the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food for the work he has done on this file.

*S. O. 52*

There is no question that we have some major challenges. In my riding of Selkirk—Interlake in Manitoba, we are facing a backlog. There are many producers who just cannot get their grain delivered. The Paterson elevator at the South Lake location in Selkirk—Interlake is full. It cannot move grain, and there has been difficulty getting cars placed. These inland terminals can handle a lot of volume, as long as the rail system works.

It is great to see that the minister has met with all players in the industry and with CN and CP. However, I want the parliamentary secretary to talk about two things. First is the problem of making sure that farmers who cannot deliver at this point in time make use of cash advances. Second, what is being done to ensure that CN and CP rise to the challenge we have with this bumper crop and also make sure that we are not in this situation again next year?

**Mr. Pierre Lemieux:** Mr. Speaker, my colleague brought up an excellent point about the advance payments program to help farmers manage cashflow challenges, particularly because of what is happening logistically now in the grain sector.

In terms of what we are doing with the railroads, we are bringing the railroads together with the minister and with the other stakeholders in the industry so that common solutions can be found. Normally when the government jumps in with its own solutions, and proper consultation and proper work has not been done with stakeholders, those solutions tend not to succeed. It is very important to engage the stakeholders, who understand the challenges they are facing and have very practical solutions.

It is larger than the railroads. The railroads must step up their game, but they must also work in concert with the other stakeholders within the crop logistics system.

**Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, going right to the issue of potential solutions, I wonder to what extent the government has discussed expanding capacity in the rail system with additional locomotive power, railway rolling stock, and trained staff to increase throughput. To what extent has the government examined a new system for logistical coordination with all of the players in the grain handling and transportation system? That problem was evident two years ago, and not a wheel has been turned since.

Has the government examined the issue of coordination? Has the government tried to get more throughput through Churchill and through the port at Prince Rupert, and to what extent can the government move more grain south through U.S. facilities, if the Canadian system just cannot handle it?

• (2025)

**Mr. Pierre Lemieux:** Mr. Speaker, I can say that work is being done on a number of those initiatives. In fact, he is asking about, for example, the Port of Churchill. It is our government that made \$25 million available in funding to support grain shipments through the Port of Churchill. We were more proactive in terms of making this funding available a number of years ago. Unfortunately, the member voted against that initiative of \$25 million to help improve grain shipments through the Port of Churchill.

In terms of specific solutions for the railways, this is the idea of bringing stakeholders together so that those types of solutions can be discussed and then implemented.

**Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I was at the transportation committee when Bill C-52 was discussed, and it was clear that the grain shippers were not happy that they were not going to be able to negotiate certain aspects, which they are feeling now. The aspects of that bill they cannot negotiate are what they are being hit with: these big expenses.

In addition was the demise of the Wheat Board. While it was cheered wildly on the other side of the House, there was one thing the Wheat Board was able to do that is not possible now without it. That was to pay farmers and subsidize the transportation of grain eastward through Thunder Bay and Churchill in order to go westward. The Wheat Board did that as a regular part of its business, because it knew full well that the port of Vancouver could not handle a bumper crop. The port of Vancouver cannot transport all the grain that comes off the prairies to China. It just cannot do it. It is physically impossible, and here we are.

We knew it was going to happen, but the Conservatives are discovering it for the first time. We are having what is called an emergency debate, because there is an emergency. Farmers are not going to have money this year. They are not going to be able to plant crops next year if they do not have money this year.

The government has indicated that it wishes to use its legislative authority against Canadian National Railway. Will it do so, not just for the workers? Will it use its legislative authority—

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

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary, a short answer please.

**Mr. Pierre Lemieux:** Mr. Speaker, when it comes to the Wheat Board, no one really believes that the Wheat Board was free for farmers and that it solved all logistical problems. What we did see under the Wheat Board was much less seeding of acres for wheat and barley crops and much smaller harvests. That is what is making the system struggle today.

When it comes to the labour situation with CN, I would be interested in knowing if the member would support the Teamsters going on strike. If they go on strike, this situation will certainly not get better. I am hoping he will comment on this a little later in the evening.

**Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I will try not to wave my arms too much, because it seems the parliamentary secretary believes that my arm waving annoys you, and I would never try to annoy the Speaker. Being a Scotsman, we are somewhat inclined to move our arms. At least we are moving our arms in the sense of having conviction and passion about doing something immediately and are not flapping our arms in the air trying to fly like a gull, when clearly we are not.

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Ultimately, this really is about an emergency now, not in three or five years. There is no question that additional data will be a good thing and the round table will eventually be helpful. However, the round table that will come out with recommendations six months from now, in the initial report, and then in additional reports over the next five years, will not move one more bushel of grain off the Prairies in the foreseeable future.

Yes, there is a recommendation not only from the minister but from Farm Credit Canada that farmers should apply for advance payments. That certainly is a program to protect farmers, but in some cases, these farmers are going to actually have advance payments and will still have crops in their bins in April when they are getting ready to seed the next new crop. They will actually have to repay it by September and may not have the funds to do that.

Would the minister's position then be forgiveness for some of those things if they do not happen? Clearly if they are backstopping that, and they still run into difficulties, it is going to be farmers who take on additional debt for what was not their problem. They did not cause this logistics problem such that they cannot get grain out of their farms to ports and to their customers.

In fact, a couple of my colleagues down the way were at that committee hearing, the members for Malpeque and Wascana. I remember it all too well. It was the minister who said that they just needed to get with the times and forward-contract.

I got an email from a farmer who forward-contracted in November. He said that he had not moved a bushel yet, and it is now February. When he forward-contracted, he had a price of \$7. He is now looking at a base price of \$4. No one is telling him who is making up the \$3. He asked if the elevator company would be making it up and was told, "We don't know. We don't know what we'll be able to sell it for. We don't care what the contract was".

There was another account of a farmer who had 85,000 tons of malt. Lo and behold, it never moved. Not one bushel moved. The buyout ended up being \$1 a ton. They bought out his contract instead of honouring it. Instead of being able to sell it for \$4.50, he ended up getting \$1.

At the end of the day, it is farmers who are suffering, and clearly we need to do this.

For my friend across the way, the parliamentary secretary, a tentative agreement means exactly that. It means that both sides have said that they actually think they have a good deal. They will take it back to their membership. On the union side, the teamsters will. They will put it before their membership and ask them to ratify it. I would suggest that folks on the other side have a little faith in the process rather than jumping the gun. A tentative agreement has been reached, and 99% of the time the tentative agreements are actually ratified, because the members who have bargained on behalf of the workers are empowered by those workers to go and do that job for them, usually with marching orders as to what they need to bargain for.

It seems to me, according to the parliamentary secretary in his announcement, that there was a tentative agreement. That is a good-news story. We should accept it as a good-news story and not look to

continue to swing at workers when there is not necessarily something to swing at.

What we need to do is look at some of the things that have happened in the last year, specifically at CP. There was an article in *The Globe and Mail* business section last week featuring the new CEO of CP. "Harrison's Revolution" was the title of the chart it had. What was it? It was the 90,000 carloads of crude oil CP moved in 2013, which was a 68% increase over 2012. That was a good-news story for CP, not for grain, mind you, but it was a good-news story for CP.

● (2030)

Four thousand five hundred and fifty jobs were eliminated. That is not a good-news story for those workers, their families, and their communities and not good for farmers, because these were folks who actually drove locomotives.

Eleven thousand rail cars were removed from service. Were they decrepit? Were they broken down or no longer functioning? No, they were just taken out of service.

Then what happened? Four hundred locomotives were taken out.

My colleague from Wascana talked about the need to put more locomotive power on the track. What did CP do? It took it out, removed it.

Everybody knew we were headed for a bumper crop. At the time that we were headed for a bumper crop, the railway took capacity out, to maximize its profit. What did it get? It got a better operating ratio, it had more profit, and its shares went up. Well done, CP. It made a business decision based upon itself, not the overall system.

We know we need to get grain off the Prairies. The primary mode of transportation is rail. We have two railways in this country, CN and CP; and we have short lines that do great work, but primarily we are looking at two. We have, basically, a duopoly in this country.

I take my friends from the Liberal Party back to 2001, when they were the government. There was actually a review done on rail, at the time—the esteemed Justice Estey was actually part of that—as to whether we should have open access. That was part of it. Senator Banks was also part of that review. The recommendation of Justice Estey was that he thought open access should be part of the changes, making more competition on the rail between CN and CP, allowing other players in. Short-line railways, at the time, were very keen on it. Short-line railways, today, are still very keen on it, by the way. That would help with this emergency access, by the way, at the moment. Short-liners are willing to step up to help if CN and CP cannot.

The review panel, with Justice Willard Estey, supported it. Senator Banks supported it. It was supported by the Canadian Wheat Board. It was supported by the grain commission and growers. It was support by a number of other folks. The three major players that said they did not want it were CN, CP, and Transport Canada.

We cannot talk about CN and CP, in the sense that they are private businesses. I guess they make those kinds of decision.

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However, Transport Canada is ours. It belongs to the government. We deal with that. We have a Minister of Transport. We have authority there.

In the irony of ironies, in fact, it was actually hypocritical. At the time, CN and CP said they did not want open access to their lines in Canada; they were lobbying the U.S. government to have open access into the United States on its rail lines. Therefore, while they thought it was good for them and the U.S., they did not want to do it in Canada. They wanted to close off that loop, just to protect themselves, and got access into the United States.

The irony of all that is at the time this review was done, 12 years ago, we actually may have had more competition than we have now. There is no guarantee of that, none. We do not know if indeed those competitors were committed; perhaps they would have been taken over or perhaps they would have gone out of business. We are not necessarily certain.

However, what it points to is that, indeed, open access is an alternative to be looked at.

The government is asking for ideas from this side of the House. I am happy it is asking. That would be one idea we suggest looking at. It is not simple to do. Running a railway is not an easy business. Allowing other access on one's rail line requires logistical support and planning. For sure it does; so it has to be well thought out. However, it ought to be thought about, at this moment, at this juncture in time. We could do it for a short period of time to see how it works out. Maybe it is a longer term strategy. Maybe that would come out of the round table.

However, I have to be honest. I have this vision of a round table. I remember the railway set I got when I was a child, many years ago, growing up in Glasgow, Scotland. It went round and round and never went anywhere.

● (2035)

I have this vision that nothing will happen with this round table and train that goes round and round. The grain will just not move. It will not do what all of us want it to do. I do not think that anyone in the House would say we should not bother with it. The problem is that there are solutions that need to be explored, and we cannot worry about it in five years or two years. We all know there are farmers who are hurting now. We have all received emails from across the country and the Prairies from farmers who are saying they are broke because they have not moved anything. They do not get paid if they do not move it, and they cannot move it.

I talked to a gentleman just the other night from the Port of Vancouver. He said straight out that his bins in the port are half empty and that he was shuttling ships up and down the berth. He said he fills one third here and moves that one up, like parking cars. Then he moves another ship in and fills it a third and then moves it back and brings the other one back. He said he now has ships at anchor off Vancouver Island because there is no longer room to put them in Burrard Inlet. Clearly, the backlog is not at the port. Rather, it is inland, as we head. One of the ways to solve it is to look at open access. I think the government should look at that.

Looking back in time, I found that the two railways got together in 2000 for what was called the Fraser Canyon deal. They both run

west up one line through the Fraser Canyon. For those who may not know, the Fraser Canyon is a bit of a bottleneck for the railways. It is part of the geography of the country we live in. What amazes me, and I have always wondered about this, is when companies say it is snowing. Yes, it is. It is winter. It is Canada and it snows in the mountains. One would think that a major railroader would think about those issues. We understand it slows things down, but the Fraser Canyon piece was done because the two railways got together and said it would be more efficient for them to do it that way: going west, they go up one side where the grade is lower, and they go back on the other side where the grade is higher, because for the most part they are coming back empty, especially the hopper cars. In doing that they created efficiencies for themselves and did not pass any of the money back. That is not unusual. If it was good enough for them to do that in 2000 and they were more efficient, at this moment in time when we need them to be more efficient and need more capacity on the Prairies to move grain, it is another idea for the government to pursue with the railways, because talking clearly has not had any major effect on them.

I know there are a lot of numbers being thrown around. Let me provide some other numbers, because we know they are being bandied about tonight. This is what CN booked for the full year last year. For 2012, it booked 597,000 potash and grain cars. In 2013, it booked and handled 572,000. It is down, not up. At this moment in time when there was a bumper record crop on the Prairies, CN's carloads were down, not up. I cannot suggest that it took cars out of service, because it did not do that, unlike CP, which took its capacity away to increase its share of profits. CN just did not deliver the cars. My colleagues have talked numerous times about a large number of orders for cars. Even the minister said that he wants to know why, if an elevator orders 150 cars, it gets 100. Why does he not know? This has been going on for months. I would have expected the minister to be out there saying, "I no longer want to ask the question. You are going to answer it and answer it now. I do not want to hear any chin-wagging stuff about it being winter. I want to know where this stuff is coming from, because clearly it is not happening. We have all heard it."

We, as legislators, as the policy makers, have the stick when it comes to the railways, because clearly the elevator companies do not. The grain farmers certainly do not. The profits were up for both railways last year and they are singing a merry tune to their shareholders, so why would they do something different? Is it in their best interests to do something different?

● (2040)

I would suggest that they probably would not. They have a record year in their profit bottom line, the share price is up, and the bonus is good. Why would they want to put excess capacity on the line that they might use for a couple of months but have to carry the overhead for six months or a year? Their bottom line would shrink. Why would they do that?

They are not service providers from the goodness of their hearts. They are service providers to make money, and we should accept that. Most of all, the government should know that, as it set it up that way.

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If we want the railways to provide a true service to farmers who are in an emergency situation and need to move the grain off the Prairies, then it is going to take more than sitting down with them and asking for a favour.

I would suggest that the minister sit down with the railroaders and dangle a carrot, and when they refuse it, hit them with a great big stick. Tell them that they are going to do it or we are going to start talking about the fact that what they own is from the wheels up, but we own the track. That is the way we are going to make them move.

At the end of the day, if we own the track as the Canadian government, the railroaders will move. Then we can make decisions about open access and short-line railroads helping out, because they can and they have the initiative to do that.

We can bandy about the politics of the Wheat Board, and a lot of us would like to go back to that. One thing is clear: the logistics end of the Wheat Board worked. Now, it might not have worked as well as everyone would have liked, but we threw it all out and had nothing to replace it with.

Now we have a five-year study. Mr. Bacon says that we need to put back in place something to get the crop from the farm, to the elevator, to the railway, to the port, to the terminal, and into our market. If we do not do that, he says we will tarnish our image, which is already starting to tarnish.

When we become an irregular supplier, when our customers see us as unable to get product to them, what will they do? I will bet Australia, the Americans, and Brazil will be knocking on their door saying that Canadians cannot deliver but they can.

There is an emergency debate for a reason: it is indeed an emergency. It means action, not words. I would enact it now, but I am not the government, and those are the rules of the House.

Therefore, I look to the government. Where is the action plan? Heaven knows it has enough billboards hanging about with wonderful colours. It has a lovely green on it, and I spotted orange on it once. Maybe somebody put a dash of colour in it. Show us some action on this. It is time for action from the Conservative government.

The minister and, quite frankly, the Prime Minister need to simply say that we have to actually act and that we are going to move forward on this. Farmers depend upon it, and it is not just farmers.

I will end with this.

There are a number of things happening across the broader economy. There is a mill in B.C. that has shut down because it cannot move product either. There are millers saying that they do not have product, and so they will probably have to go idle for a while. A canola plant in the western provinces last week went idle for a couple of days and it could not get rid of its crush. Where was the crush going? It was going to farmers who had cattle to feed. However, none of that happened, none of that moved, because as this bottleneck gets bigger, the backup impacts more than just the farmers. However, clearly, they are the ones with the most need at this moment in time because, unlike others, they do not get paid if they cannot deliver.

As I said at the beginning, these farmers have contracted to sell their grain months ago, but they still have it, through no fault of their own. They took the government's advice on the CWB and when it left they said they would forward market, do all the great things the government said, and at least they would have market freedom. The problem is that they are free to keep all their grain in their bins, which is free to them because they cannot get a nickel for it if they cannot move it.

Clearly, the obligation is on the government to show initiative, to make a decision, and to act.

• (2045)

**Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the hon. gentleman took us through an interesting excursion on grain policy and politics, and for the most part I found many things in his remarks to agree with.

I am curious about his reference to the Estey report back in 2002, and particularly Judge Estey's recommendations about open access, which I found to be quite an intriguing idea. The member will remember that the Estey report was an integrated set of recommendations that included removing the Canadian Wheat Board from the logistics of grain handling and transportation.

I wonder if my colleague embraces the second of those recommendations as enthusiastically as he embraced the first, because that would seem to be a bit contradictory.

My second point is this. To what extent practically, in dealing with this current crisis now rather than six months or five years from now, would it be possible to take some of the pressure off the Canadian system and put some money in the pockets of farmers by making use of some aspects of the American grain handling and transportation system as an alternative if the Canadian system just cannot cope?

**Mr. Malcolm Allen:** Mr. Speaker, the member for Wascana was here in 2001-02.

To answer his question succinctly, yes, to the first part about open rail and no, to Judge Estey's piece. I know he wanted that clarification.



The open access piece is intriguing. Let me explain what that means exactly to the folks who are listening tonight. Has it been done anywhere else, because it sounds revolutionary? Bell Telephone and SaskTel do it. They have the telephone line, which they had to open up years ago. There is a carriage fee for it. It is not done for nothing. Railroads and telephones are not quite the same. Railroad is dangerous. Logistics are needed. It is not as easy as saying we would like to run a train down there.

To the second part of my colleague's question, I would first and foremost go to the short line in this country to see what it would be able to do for us, and then I would look to the American side to see if it could take some. It is an intriguing option and it needs to be looked at. It should be put on the table so that we can actually decide what is doable and workable. It is about finding a way to move this grain now rather than later.

● (2050)

**Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we are going to miss the hon. member for Welland on the agriculture committee.

The member and I agree on a lot of things. Our farmers do need to get their grain to markets. Farmers in my community have had bumper crops this year and their grain is sitting in bins and they are having trouble getting it to the market.

From the government perspective, the Minister of Agriculture has made it very clear that logistics are an issue. He has dedicated some money to fund a study of that, and not just an ongoing study.

We need answers to these problems. Canada is blessed with a bounty of natural resources and we need to be able to get them to port.

The member suggested that we should swing a stick. It is one thing to swing a stick but we need to be deliberate in how we do it and make sure it will serve a purpose. What are his recommendations to that effect?

**Mr. Malcolm Allen:** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his warm remarks and comments about my absence from the agriculture committee.

One always needs to be careful when one swings a stick. The two big railroaders in this country, CN and CP, basically have a duopoly. We allowed them to have that. We need to tell them that we might not let them have that duopoly any more.

The government and Parliament have the authority to tell them that they will no longer get to own this line or that line, that we are going to open them up to the United States if it wants to run down those lines. We could set regulations and charge a fee. The government does not always like regulations, and I understand that, but neither does business. I am sure my colleagues on the other side of the House understand that when business is threatened with regulations, it sometimes acts accordingly.

I would remind the government about some of the comments it made to the cellular folks last year to try to generate competition. You used a stick. You might find it helpful to get that stick back out.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** Before we go to another question, I would just remind all hon. members to direct

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their comments through the Chair. When you use the word "you", you are referring to me, not your colleagues.

The hon. member for Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing.

**Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I find it very disheartening to stand here today and ask a question on an issue that I am sure could have been avoided had the Canadian Wheat Board still been in place.

We see over and over again a government that has refused to take action on serious issues. We have seen that with the meat recall, and now we see it again with the grain producers.

Rail is important, and the government has refused to invest in rail, whether it be passenger rail or by acting on this particular issue.

I am wondering if my colleague could talk about the importance of rail all the way across, whether it be passenger rail or grain transportation, and how we need a government that is willing to lead to make sure that the negative impacts are not felt in our economy.

● (2055)

**Mr. Malcolm Allen:** Mr. Speaker, there is no question that the railroad has an iconic place in our history. It was the railroad that opened up this country, in the sense that there really were no roads to get across. People either went up a river or across a lake, and the railroad literally opened up the country.

We see it from that perspective. However, with VIA we see reduced service in New Brunswick. In my home region of Niagara, we do not have any VIA Rail service at all. It was cancelled. There are no trains from Niagara Falls to Toronto, or from Toronto airport, from which folks might want to go to Niagara Falls.

When sitting down and talking to the president of the Niagara Regional Tourism Board last year, I learned that the first question foreign-based travellers ask themselves after they have decided where they would like to go is whether there is a train. The thousands of offshore tourists who think of Niagara Falls, the wineries, and the casino as a destination ask, "What do you mean you don't have a train? If you don't have a train, we're not coming".

We need to make the railroaders understand that not only does our economy depend on them and that they can help themselves, but that they can also help the greater economy. They need to get on with the business of doing that.

**Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the member for Welland talked a fair bit about the railways being part of the problem, but is there not another huge problem, and that is the grain companies?

Grain used to be shipped as Canadian Wheat Board grain and could move around Vancouver by a paper transaction to get to a certain elevator, but now the grain companies are targeting it to their own elevators so they can profit from the demurrage in handling fees.

As a result, when the railways deliver a unit train of grain now to Vancouver, they have to break the train apart, whereas previously they did not have to do that. Grain cars are actually being used for storage of grain. Is that not part of the problem, the grain companies themselves and where they are allocating the cars?

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**Mr. Malcolm Allen:** Mr. Speaker, I would agree that is true. There is no question that there are issues with the grain companies themselves. In fact, at the agriculture committee before the winter recess, a question was posed to them about what would happen with these additional charges, because it is costing them. The answer from the grain companies that we heard was, "If you can get it from the railroad, we will give it back to farmers".

Clearly, the grain companies are saying that farmers are on their own. They will not fight for them. They will not stand up for them. The railroad will not give the money back. At the end of the day, farmers will be out of pocket from these additional charges.

The coordination between the elevator companies and the ports is off. That is why, as I mentioned earlier, the gentleman from the Port Authority of Vancouver said, "We are literally shovelling ships up and down the berth to simply load them part way and then let them go out, and load them part way again and then bring in some other ship".

Clearly, it is an inefficient system. It needs to be rectified now.

**Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I want to highlight just how important the agriculture sector is to Canada. There is some \$47.8 billion in exports coming out of the agriculture sector. It is 8% of our GDP and one in eight jobs is created in the agriculture field.

Canada has a world-class grain industry. It is a strong driver of the economy and jobs on its own, with over \$21 billion in exports. Close to half of our total agriculture and food exports—pulses, wheats, canola, barley, flax, corn, soybeans, and many more grains—grow our economy and jobs. That is why our government is working hard with the industry to modernize Canada's grain industry. We have delivered on our commitment to bring marketing freedom to western wheat and barley growers, and over the first 18 months of open markets we have seen record foreign incomes with strong balance sheets, two million new acres of wheat, wheat cash receipts up by a third, and wheat exports up by close to 20%.

Another key part of our grain modernization agenda is to reform the Canadian Grain Commission. Building on our first round of reforms, we are looking at streamlining the variety registration system, updating plant breeders' rights legislation, and promoting a practical approach and a low-level presence of genetically modified content in our grain shipments.

We are continuing our strong focus on innovation and investing in over \$73 billion in research clusters and projects on grains, oilseeds, and specialty crops and, of course, we continue to lock in new markets for our grain producers through trade missions and free trade agreements. We continue to work hard to get the new Canada-European Union trade agreement out the gate. That will open up the world's largest market to our grain producers, eliminating tariffs on wheat, pulses, flowers and canola oil, tariffs that could be up to \$120 to \$130 a tonne on wheat and oats, for example.

Industry is estimating there will be new grains and oilseeds opportunities in Europe of \$100 million a year coming out of this historic agreement. Therefore, the future is bright. This year we are coming off of a record grain crop. Canada is up by close to 20 million metric tonnes from last year. At the same time, the global

demand for grains is projected to grow by a billion tonnes over the next four decades.

Of course, we all know the large crop is presenting considerable challenges. Farmers across the west are facing major difficulties in getting their bumper crops to market, from the farm gate to the ocean port. They are depending on an efficient, effective, reliable rail service to move these crops off the farm to customers in Canada and around the world.

It is important that we take a step back and look at this crop year to put in chronological perspective what has been going on in the grain belt in Saskatchewan. Last May was a late seeding and planting season. Farmers were very concerned that they were not even going to get their crops in. In fact, I received phone calls from farmers who were concerned that they would not get their crops in the ground and did not know how they were going to handle their cash flows throughout the summer if they did not.

It turned into great growing conditions, a great summer. Of course, Saskatchewan always has good summers, and I would encourage everyone here to come visit this summer. There are great lakes, and there is great golfing, and everything else. There was also a great growing season in Saskatchewan. In the fall, farmers were looking at their bins, looking at their combines and smiling. They were harvesting. Some of the guys were taking the wheat right off the combine. In fact, I know one farmer who delivered 50 semi-loads of wheat off the combine, something he could never do under the Canadian Wheat Board system.

I think farmers started to realize just how big this crop was and started to understand that it was amazing. We are starting to see crop yields, for example, in canola of 65 bushels an acre. It used to be, when I was farming—and I know the member for Red Deer would agree—that if farmers said they got a 40-bushel crop, it was pretty good. If they said they got a 50-bushel crop, people would look at them a little cross-eyed and say they were feeding people a line. If they said they were getting 65 bushels, people thought they were crazy.

This last year, more farmers told me they got 65-bushel to 70-bushel canola crops. The reason is the genetics they are getting thanks in part to the funding this government has given to plant breeders and through the different growing associations to help them select the proper traits and get the proper seeds and genetics in the ground so they can get these high-yielding crops.

*S. O. 52*

Farmers had this great crop. In October and November, the rail system seemed to be functioning fairly normally and looked like it was moving. In December, it all fell apart. In January, it got even worse. We know it is cold in December and January, but we are used to working in the cold. There are a lot of guys who work in the oil patch in -30° or -40° weather all the time. Cold definitely could be a factor for sure if safety is an issue, but the reality is that we are used to shipping and doing stuff in the cold.

What was happening was that the system was starting to show the strain coming upon it. The system could not handle the increasing growth in western Canada. It could not handle the grain, it could not handle the potash, it could not handle the coal, and then it started to ship oil. Oil capacity also increased over this time, which our speaker from the NDP, the agriculture critic, highlighted quite correctly.

• (2100)

It is ironic that the NDP are complaining about oil, when if we wanted to help capacity on the rail, we could put the oil in a pipeline where it belongs. The NDP should support the Keystone and gateway pipelines, which would free that capacity up so we could ship more grain and more products from the Prairies to the west coast.

This is conundrum that we are dealing with. This is the kind of scenario that I was dealing with when talking to farmers in October and November. A couple of things were happening in October. Farmers who were contracting throughout the summer were hedging on locking in the prices. They would go to deliver that contract, and the grain company would say, "Well, wait a minute. The rail did not show up. There are no cars. We did not get our cars this week, so we cannot take delivery of grain. We are going to have push your contract until next month because we cannot take delivery of that product".

The farmer is sitting there. He has told his banker about the contract. The banker knows about it. The farmer has his cash all figured out. He is going to pay his bills based on the terms of the contracts being honoured. However, when the rail does not show up, what does he do?

When I farmed, I can remember this scenario happening many times. The rail would phone ahead and say they were going to have cars showing up on Friday and that the grain company would have to load them over the weekend so they could be picked up on Monday. In fact, I had a scenario on my own farm where we loaded about six Super Bs on a Saturday and shipped them 200 miles to an elevator. I had them there on Monday morning at eight o'clock, only to find there was no capacity because the train did not show up. Then what do you do?

I know our members talked about the Canadian Wheat Board and how it would be the saving grace for this scenario. The reality is that it would make it worse. Let us look at what is going on in the rail freight system at this point, and I will use the example of oats. Oats does not belong to the Canadian Wheat Board. Right now, oats going to the United States is well behind where it needs to be. The mills in the United States are screaming for Canadian oats, and farmers have some of the best oats in the world. What is going on? The rail is not delivering our oats. It is amazing.

It is oats. It is non-board crops. It is coal. It is a variety of things that are affected by the lack of rail service we are seeing from CN and CP. That is affecting the economy of Saskatchewan, Alberta, and Manitoba. We need that rail to perform.

Let us look ahead and look at what is happening on the Prairies and at the growth that is happening in Saskatchewan and Alberta. I will use the example of the genetics and corn. It used to be that 10 or 15 years ago, if someone said they were going to grow corn in Saskatchewan, people would raise their eyebrows. I know the member for Red Deer would agree with me. They would say "Oh, you are nuts. You are not going to grow corn in Saskatchewan".

However, the new genetics are lowering the heat units in corn. We are going to start growing corn in Saskatoon. That is very amazing. Corn is a nice crop to grow. It is high value. It is a good profit crop for farmers.

One of the problems with corn, though, is that it has four times the volume. Let us think about it. Where we are shipping one tonne of wheat right now, we are going to be shipping four tonnes of corn. How do we handle that?

I will give the minister credit. As this was happening and we started to recognize the problem of the rail not doing its job, what did the minister do? The first thing that the minister did was to bring all the players together, sit them down in a room, and ask what they were going to do to fix this. He put them together and asked what the problems were and how to fix them.

He sent them out to create solutions. They should find the solutions. It is the responsibility of CN and CP. The minister did his job. He put them in the room with grain growers and grain companies and asked them how we make this work. He said they had to get the farmers' grain shipped to market. That is the first thing that he did.

The second thing he did is that he went to the producer associations. He funded them, to the tune of \$1.5 million from us and \$1.5 million from them, to look at the future of transportation and what we needed to make sure we do not lose markets as we get new trade agreements, such as TPP and CETA, and agreements with Korea and other countries that may be coming down the road.

They are going to look at this in the future. They are not looking at it today. I do not want people to think that \$3 million is supposed to solve this month's problem and next month's problem. It is meant to make sure we do not have the problem reappearing next year and the year after, and 5 years and 10 years down the road. It is to make sure a system is put in place that can handle the growth we are going to see in the grain sector. That growth is coming very rapidly.

Again, let us give the government credit; it is looking forward. It is saying there is a problem and bringing the players together to figure out how they can think through the situation to make sure the problem does not repeat itself going forward, and to make sure we have the proper capacity to handle the growth in the commodity sector in Saskatchewan.

*S. O. 52*

It is a very wise and bold move, something that none of the opposition members, when they were in government, ever did. It is nothing that the NDP ever talked about. The NDP would want to take a fist, a hammer, and a sledge, saying, “We will go pound on the pipe and get some grain to the port”. That is not going to work.

The government has to work with the players. It has to have a reasonable approach about how to move more grain to port. The politics have to be put aside in order to focus on the problem.

• (2105)

It is interesting. As we look forward, I am very excited. I come from a province that is growing. I come from a province that was a have-not province. It came under all sorts of nationalization in the 1970s, with potash. It chased away business investment. It was a province where our kids would have to leave in order to get a job. Now my province is totally the opposite. I am in a province where the potash sector is growing like crazy. The province is taking all our kids back from Alberta, from B.C., and Ontario, because we need them. We will take many more. We will take immigrants from the Philippines, because we need people. Our biggest hindrance to growth in Saskatchewan is people.

With all this growth and all that is happening, if we do not see growth in our rail sector and our transportation and logistics, it is for not. With all these trade deals that we are doing to allow our farmers to access higher value markets, if we cannot get to market in a timely and accurate fashion, they are no good. We need to have this vision in our transportation system. That is one thing that, again, I give the minister credit for. We needed to see some visibility in what they can actually do.

I spoke before about the grain companies taking contracts for October and November. To be fair to them, they have no clue about what each other is doing. I might take a hundred tonnes, and the member for Red Deer takes a hundred tonnes, and then the member for Calgary is going to take a hundred tonnes, but the rail system may only be able to handle 150 tonnes. However, all of us expect to ship all that grain in one month. Therefore, what we need to do is put some visibility and some monitoring in place so we can see what is going on in the rail system. We need to know when we are making out that contract that it is a reasonable timeframe to deliver in or that the capacity is full and it has to be moved into the next month.

Those are the types of things that the minister has been working on, and I give him credit. He introduced some monitoring announcements today in Saskatchewan, again, giving us visibility so we can understand what the problem is and address the bottlenecks to move forward with something that works for everyone in the shipping sector.

It is interesting when members talk about the changes in Canadian Wheat Board. I know exactly what the Canadian Wheat Board would have done in this scenario with a record crop. The member for Malpeque also knows what it would have done. If a farmer had theoretically contracted a hundred tonnes of crop to the Wheat Board, it would have taken four tonnes and shipped it. It would have said, “The rest of the grain is yours, Mr. Farmer. You can carry it until next year or the year after. I know it is nice, hard, great durum, and it looks really beautiful, and I know that in Italy it is worth \$9 a

bushel. But you can sell it in feedlot alley in Lethbridge because we don't want to sell it for you”. That is what the Wheat Board did.

There is another thing that is interesting with the Wheat Board being gone. In talking to farmers, a lot of them are very tech savvy. If one were to go on Twitter with a lot of farmers, they are using it to market their grain. For example, if they see a price across the line in North Dakota or Montana, they are taking advantage of that. They are putting it on Twitter and comparing that with each other. They are looking for logistics and alternatives, which they could never have done with the Canadian Wheat Board. They would not have had those options of looking for other alternatives for markets.

There is another thing that we need to look at as we go forward and we increase our production capacity in the Prairies with higher yields. We need to create an environment so we are processing more of that product. We need to make that product into other things rather than shipping the raw goods. We need to have a strategy on how we are going to move forward on that. The reality is, if we want good competition for rail, put it in a cow, or a pig, or bread, or put it into something that is manufactured. That is great competition for rail. Domestic processing makes a lot of sense, and we need to figure out a strategy and move forward on that. I know the minister is talking about that right now.

As we look back at this year, one thing that has to be stated very clearly is that CN and CP have dropped the ball. We can blame the weather. We can look at other issues around CN and CP, but there is no question about it. They have not read the market right in Saskatchewan about what is going on in western Canada. As the NDP agriculture critic stated, if they are dropping locomotives and cars, they obviously do not have proper vision on what they are going to require for moving our product to port in the upcoming years. That is why the service level review that is coming up in 2015 is going to be so important. That review will look at what is happening right here and now, and that will be a factor in the outcome of that review in 2015. We need to make sure in that review that the railways are held even more accountable for what they have done this last year because it has cost farmers a lot of money.

• (2110)

The impact has been very severe. I will give a few examples. I was talking to a guy by the name of Chad Doerksen. The base price on his oats is too high. He ordered 90 producer cars to ship his oats into the U.S. The producer cars are sitting in the CN's yard in Saskatoon and he only has 13 of them so far. Another example is a farmer from Melfort who was supposed to load 70 producer cars. The producer cars were actually on the next spur and he could not load them because he was not on the right spur.

Those are the types of idiocies we are seeing from CN and CP that need to be corrected, and it is up to the railways to correct that. They have to understand what the waiting is costing that farmer. Time is money. While they think that extending the shipping season over two years might be great for shareholders, it does not work at the farm gate. We have to make sure that stops and does not move forward.

In summary, there are a lot of things we could talk about in regard to changes in the agricultural sector, but there are more people wanting to be farmers today than there has been at any time in history. There are some challenges. There are some growing pains. However, in the same breath, this is a vibrant industry that sees a lot of opportunity.

Talking to hog producers this year, with CETA coming into effect in the next year or so, one of the producers said that finally in the hog sector there is a light at the end of the tunnel. It is so important that they get market access for our hogs. Farmers are excited about it. They see some future in it.

If we look at where the beef sector was four years ago and where it is today, and we look at the price of cows and calves and meat, the minister has been very aggressive in opening up markets around the world. It is very interesting that the markets he is opening are very different, but it works very well for Canadian beef producers. Some parts of the world like tongues, hooves, and different parts of the animals, where another part of the world wants steaks and ribs and short ribs. For example, Japan has basically taken all the short ribs we can produce because they like our beef.

We have lots of opportunities, and I give the minister credit because he has been very aggressive in recognizing the importance of trade to the agriculture sector. We are a trading nation. We grow more than we can ever consume in Canada. We need to make sure we can get that product to port, so we need effective rail from CN and CP.

In closing, I want to commend the minister for all the work he has done. He has had many long days working with farmers, with the industry, and with the railways to ensure we get some answers and some movement on that. I know we will see some success as we move forward, but just like anything else, it will take some time.

The sector is strong. Farmers are vibrant. We will move on and get through this. We also know that what we look back on was something that was far worse.

• (2115)

**Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I have listened to two government members now in this emergency debate, and their new action plan seems to be hurry up and wait. That is what their new action plan seems to be.

We have heard great theories about new markets and so on and so forth. I know it has to be difficult for the member that they cannot use the Wheat Board any longer as the bogeyman, but the Wheat Board did some things right. One of the things it did right was logistics.

I would suggest to the member, and I hear the member laughing, that one of the reasons that farmers did not pay very much demurrage in previous years was because the Canadian Wheat Board allocated the cars. It targeted the grain in those cars to go into a hull of a ship in Vancouver as it docked at the port. That is a fact.

The member talked about a problem with producer cars, that the railways are not delivering them. I believe that opposition members predicted that with the government's action on transportation and on

the Wheat Board that this is exactly what would happen. Producer cars are not available.

I have two points to raise with the member—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** The member is well into his time. I would ask that he could quickly put a question to the member.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** Mr. Speaker, could the member tell me, as the parliamentary secretary could not, who is allocating rail cars now where previously they were allocated in an even way? Who is allocating them now?

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind the member that what he said about the Canadian wheat board is 100% hogwash. We all know what the Wheat Board would have done in this scenario with this crop: it would not have accepted it. It would have made a contract for 50% or 30% of the crop, and the farmers would have been stuck with it.

The member asked about the allocation of rail cars. The CGC has always allocated rail cars, even when the CWB was there. If we had a member of the Liberal Party from western Canada who understood agriculture, he would have known the answer to this question.

**Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I have been waiting a long time to get up and ask a question on this very important topic.

I had seven farmers in my office who were big Wheat Board supporters. They were really excited and wanted to make sure that we kept the Wheat Board. At the end of the discussions, I said that the Wheat Board would still be there and they would still be able to sell their grain. I asked them if they were going to sell their grain through the Wheat Board, and the farmers said no, they could get better prices from grain companies.

My contention is, and we have heard over and over, that we in fact have record crops. I would like to ask my colleague from Saskatchewan what the advantage was of getting rid of the Canadian Wheat Board in its former form, and how is it responding in today's market business?

• (2120)

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** Mr. Speaker, the member is very accurate in his statements. He is exactly right about what the Wheat Board did. I have heard that story many times from some of the guys who were very strong board supporters, but when they got \$9 off the combine two falls ago, all of a sudden that changed. They realized what they could get by selling through grain companies. They got very excited about the opportunities available to them. Especially now, when they look at the problems with Canadian rail and how they can suddenly deliver straight into the States or other alternatives, they are doing that. They are very creative people.

*S. O. 52*

There is actually a very strong fallacy in terms of Wheat Board logistics in this area. It would not have done anything better. In fact, it would have made it harder to ship canola and oats. It would have congested the system even more. We know what the Wheat Board was like when it operated.

Farmers now are well ahead of where they were before and are better off in so many ways because they have a system that gives them some flexibility in how they make their decisions and do what is right for their operations.

**Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, Norm Hall, the president of the Agricultural Producers Association of Saskatchewan, has come out and said that the legislation passed last year by the Conservative government, the Fair Rail Freight Service Act, does not work. Basically, what he is saying is that the incentives for grain companies and railways to voluntarily negotiate shipping service agreements have not worked.

Is the government willing to amend this legislation, as we suggested last year, to improve it so that we can take the first step to eliminate these kinds of bottlenecks in the production chain?

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** Mr. Speaker, that is actually a very good question. We have the level of service review coming up in 2015. Maybe that should be stepped up. I'm not sure what the correct answer is there, but maybe it should be considered.

The other thing that is frustrating from the government's standpoint is that we still have not seen one grain company issue a level of service complaint against the railways. How do we know if it works or does not work if the companies do not go through the process of trying? I encourage the grain companies and farm groups to try the system and see how well it could possibly work before saying that it does not.

**Hon. Wayne Easter:** Mr. Speaker, there were a number of suggestions that the Conservative government was against at the time. I wonder if the government would reconsider doing a rail costing review. We know that the service is not there—that is very clear—and we know that the grain companies are also causing some of the disruption in service, but are the railways overcharging for the service that they provide?

Would the member and the government consider a rail costing review? Those costs are going through the roof as well, beyond the service problem.

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** Mr. Speaker, in the level of service review that comes forward, I am sure that rail costs will be factored in. If we talk to farmers on the Prairies, there is a lot of debate on the revenue cap and whether or not that is actually working for them now in this new market. There are a lot of questions around that, and more thought and process need to be put into all aspects of the rail situation.

*[Translation]*

**Mr. Alain Giguère (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to my colleague. He just told us that farmers might be able to get better prices without the Canadian Wheat Board. However, if a tonne of wheat does not get delivered, they will get a big fat zero. That is the Conservatives' promise to farmers. The farmers told the Conservatives to consult with them before they ended the Canadian Wheat Board's monopoly. However, the

Conservatives did not listen. They never do. They have given powers to rail companies and big grain companies. They are now realizing that those companies are literally making off with the money instead of helping the farmers.

My colleague himself says that he is aware that those companies have not kept their promises. Is he planning to do something about it in 2015? Why not tomorrow morning? There is a problem now. It would be a good idea for the Conservatives to solve the problem tomorrow morning, not three years from now.

• (2125)

*[English]*

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's enthusiastic question, but obviously he does not understand what the issues are. The issues here are two things. The rail is not doing its job. It needs to pick up the pace. It needs to get grain from our inland terminals out to the ports so that ships get loaded and farmers get paid.

**Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, one thing we actually have in our party is real western Canadian grain farmers. The member for Prince Albert was one, and so was the member for Red Deer. On our side we actually have the experience, and what the member says is specifically from experience.

What does the member see as a plan for the future, for us as a government, looking at the logistical issues? Could he explain what is going on, for the opposition's benefit, to that effect?

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** Mr. Speaker, finally we have a great question. It is from the member for Prince George—Peace River.

I give the minister a lot of credit in this area, and both ministers, in fact. They are actually looking forward to saying what we need to learn from this scenario, from the past, and how we ensure it does not happen again.

The \$3 million, for example, that is being spent, the \$1.5 million from the federal government and the \$1.5 million from the industry players that are participating, is for looking exactly at those issues to identify what the bottlenecks are and what the solutions are to those bottlenecks.

The other thing that also has to happen is that CN and CP have to recognize the growth that is happening in western Canada, and they have to pick it up. They have to step up and meet the challenge. That is something that these sectors will identify and bring forward to both CN and CP and back to the government.

**Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak on the urgent rail delay situation tonight, but I wish we were not here. I wish that we did not find ourselves here tonight with this problem of rail transport and all the delays. It is mind-blowing.

These lengthy delays and backlogs in rail transport have prevented thousands of landlocked western grain producers from getting their product to the market. Western farmers are coming out of a bumper crop without being able to move their product to the market. We need our railroad companies to be able to respond quickly to a bumper crop immediately after harvest. This will avoid the kinds of delays that we are seeing right now.

I have spoken to some farmers about the crisis and I am hearing that there are a lot of things that are going wrong.

One, some farmers are telling me that grain shipments are not a high priority to rail companies, as oil, potash, and coal are. This is unacceptable. Rail companies cannot pick and choose their cargo. They are putting thousands of livelihoods at risk.

A farmer told me that his grain is not moving, but his neighbour's is. He explained that his neighbour had contracted a lower price with the rail company than he had, and therefore he was given a priority. If so, this is unacceptable as well.

Another farmer from Saskatchewan, Glenn Tait, talked about how the elevator companies are charging double the demurrage fees, and I quote:

The elevator companies will recoup demurrage charges from farmers by deducting this cost from grain prices.

When the Canadian Wheat Board looked after logistical matters, freight costs from the prairies to the western ports were in the range of \$50 per tonne. Today, we are seeing costs of \$100 per tonne or more deducted.

The total losses from demurrage alone so far are in the millions of dollars, money that will never be spent by prairie farmers or anywhere within the Canadian economy.

Western grain farmers are incredibly frustrated. They have done their part and have worked very hard to produce a bumper crop. Now they need the government to hold up its end of the bargain and get the railways moving.

We are in an emergency debate here tonight. All of this is because the government did not do its homework two years ago after it abolished the Wheat Board. It did not take the time to consider or develop a plan for transportation.

Back in 2011, the NDP warned the Conservatives that getting rid of the Wheat Board would mean putting an end to stability. For generations, farmers relied on the Wheat Board—

**Mr. Pierre Lemieux:** Dig that hole.

**Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau:** Mr. Speaker, I am not digging a hole. I am proud of it.

For generations, farmers relied on the Wheat Board to get the best possible price for their grain to support their families, but the government ignored the warnings from the NDP, other groups, and farmers themselves when they all went through this. The government refused to listen to the democratic wishes of prairie farmers, who voted in September 2011 to keep a single desk for their wheat and barley.

In the past, wheat farmers could depend on the Canadian Wheat Board to fight and to put pressure on the rail companies to get the grain to market. When the board had a monopoly on selling grain overseas, it also held considerable market influence. However, it is clear that smaller producers are being penalized under this new system as they carry less volume.

In a system that has to move around 400,000 grain cars in a year, there is absolutely no room for error or a shortfall when grain

shipments are waiting at a cost of the thousands and thousands of dollars a day, a cost that is ultimately paid by farmers through a lower price for their product. We should be building up our agricultural sector, not penalizing it.

The Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food suggested that farmers should be getting loans to tide them over. That is not very sound advice and threatens long-term financial health. This will only create another financial crisis in the future. Also, a five-year study on the source of the bottleneck is far too slow for producers, who need help right now.

I will mention that I will be splitting my time with the member for Edmonton—Strathcona.

Kyle Friesen, from the Manitoba Pulse Growers Association, put it perfectly, and I quote:

We need to get the grain moving because many farmers may not be paid for last year's harvest until after spring planting.... This is already causing lost sales, things need to improve otherwise this will translate into a serious cash flow issue for farmers when they need to buy seed and inputs this spring.

Like every Canadian, grain producers have bills and loans due.

•(2130)

We need to do better to get the railways moving. Producers deserve better. This is obviously not an easy question to answer. There is no easy answer.

I urge the government to take action in a way that will help farmers' burdens now. The minister has pledged \$1.5 million for a five-year transportation study. He has also committed to increasing the monitoring of rail companies. It is a good step. However, the minister needs to look at the issue closely. Both CP and CN have seen their grain revenues go up, even as the number of rail cars available to producers has decreased.

We are urging the government to increase pressure on rail companies, including with the implementation and enforcement of rail performance standards. It is clear that we need new communication protocols and consequences for non-performers when shipping deals are broken. We are also urging the government to ensure that export and vessel information is accessible to producers and that grain producers have fair access to rail infrastructure to move their product. The government also needs to develop a strategy for future rail service that accounts for sustained agricultural growth.

[*Translation*]

Grain producers across the country are frustrated by the difficulties they are having when it comes to transporting their crops. The problems they are experiencing are driving down the price of grain, and they are afraid they will not be able to transport their crops in the future.

*S. O. 52*

Lynn Jacobson, president of the Alberta Federation of Agriculture, is asking shippers to increase their capacity in order to meet the demand. Farmers are afraid of being passed over in favour of other clients because of the price cap that the railway can impose on grain transportation. The problem is that the Conservative government got rid of the Canadian Wheat Board without coming up with a plan for shipping grain, even though that is something it could have avoided.

Now the Minister of Agriculture is suggesting that farmers use cash advances and is proposing a five-year study on the source of the problem. What are farmers supposed to do in the meantime? Life goes on.

Like everyone else, Canada's grain producers have bills to pay and loan payments to make, and the banks will not wait for them. The government needs to take concrete action immediately to get meaningful results for farmers. The fact that hard-working farmers cannot ship their grain is completely unacceptable. It makes no sense.

We are urging the government to increase pressure on rail companies, including the implementation and enforcement of rail performance standards. We need a viable strategy for transporting grain by rail.

Farmers should not have to struggle with increasing prices. We need to take immediate action to find a solution and determine the root of the problem. Are oil shipments a factor? Why is there such a bottleneck? We need to find answers. Are the ports also playing a role in this issue?

The government has asked the railway companies to come up with solutions to deal with the backlog, but it does not plan on imposing penalties. Is the government going to just stand by and watch?

The Alberta Federation of Agriculture believes that railway companies prefer to do business with oil companies, not producers and farmers. CN responds that no oil is transported in the 5,500 cars reserved for grain each week. Everyone is passing the buck.

The NDP is urging the government to increase pressure on rail companies, including the implementation and enforcement of rail performance standards; ensure that vessel and export information is accessible to producers; ensure that grain producers have fair access to rail infrastructure in order to move their product; and develop a strategy for future rail service.

It is time to do something about this. The government could have prevented this from happening. Everyone has a role to play. It is not black and white. Tonight's debate is interesting and gives us an opportunity to learn things. We are sharing good ideas. I hope that we can soon resolve this situation, which is frustrating and painful for the farmers. They have worked so hard this year.

● (2135)

[English]

**Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to put a question to my colleague on a very near and present danger.

I spoke in my speech about the Teamsters union perhaps going on strike. So far it has struck what is known as a tentative deal with CN. The grain is moving now, but nowhere near enough is moving. A

strike by the Teamsters would certainly not benefit the farmers. It would benefit no one.

Would my colleague encourage the Teamsters to finalize the deal with CN, or is she in favour, perhaps, of the union not following through on the tentative deal, which would have an adverse impact on farmers? Where does she stand on this?

**Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau:** Mr. Speaker, it is a tentative deal. I support the rights of workers to collective bargaining. The government freaks out when it hears the word "strike" and has teams working on back-to-work legislation non-stop. I think it already has some on the back burner for this.

This is not an easy issue. However, the government has a big role to play. The Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food has had so many issues in the last two years. We had contaminated meat and listeriosis. What is next?

There needs to be more communication between the agriculture minister, the transport minister, and stakeholders. We have to find solutions and get this resolved as soon as possible.

**Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has brought out the Conservatives' view of anything that is organized in this country. Whether it be organized labour or organized marketing, it is all a disaster. However, at the end of the day, that is what built this country. We as Canadians work together. We see what has failed with the government getting rid of all of this. Now it has tried to put it back onto the unions or the Wheat Board.

My question goes more to the act the minister put forward last year that failed. The NDP alluded to it. I would ask the member what kind of teeth she would want in that act to make sure that the railroads do the job they have to do.

**Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau:** Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to work with the hon. member on the agriculture committee. I think he is talking about the Fair Rail Freight Service Act. We had amendments to that act. I wish there had been more collaboration. That is something we do not see with the government. Good ideas and amendments are always proposed from this side, but it seems that they always fall on deaf ears.

I am hoping that the government is listening and taking note. If it wants more information about amendments, we will be ready to help it with that.

● (2140)

**Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, perhaps I can help my friends across the way understand collective bargaining, since I did it for 20 years. A tentative agreement means that there is an agreement in principle and there will probably be ratification. Perhaps one ought to stay out of the way and let the parties make the final decision, since none of us get to vote on it. The folks who are the workers get to vote on it.



*S. O. 52*

Does my colleague not believe that the government needs to act? It is wonderful to have a study. I am sure there will be wonderful data that comes from that study. Eventually we will finally get something down the road that we might use and go forward with it. Does she agree with me that what needs to happen now is that the government needs to take action on what is now a crisis on the Prairies when it comes to grain?

**Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau:** Mr. Speaker, like all those wonderful advertisements we see on TV for the economic action plan, the government needs to take action on this and work together. There is no action on this. It is frustrating to see. We do not need another report. We need action. There are some steps we can take right now to help get this moving. We need action now, not later.

**Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to follow the deputy critic for the New Democrats. She does a fantastic job on behalf of our producers in Canada, and I wish to thank her for her remarks today.

It is my pleasure in the House as well to share my space with the NDP critic for agriculture. It is hard to follow in his stead, because he knows this subject very well.

I am a third generation prairie product, having been born in Edmonton, as were my parents, but back before that, all of our family were farm stock. We were proud farm producers, and I grew up visiting family farms with my father.

In my earlier career, when I ran the Environmental Law Centre, I was made an honorary member of the Preservation of Agricultural Land Association. I have felt absolutely obliged since to stand up, at any opportunity I have, on behalf of our producers. I am very proud of them. Despite how the government often speaks of how our gross domestic product is based on fossil fuels, our farm products, in fact, are a major part of the revenue of both this country and my province of Alberta.

At the outset, it is important to keep in mind that railroads are under federal jurisdiction. The government has a popular refrain. Any time we raise any issue in this House, whether it is education, health care, or the environment, the Conservatives say it is a provincial jurisdiction. This is one area where they absolutely cannot raise that defence. This is absolutely under federal jurisdiction, and the Conservatives have the power to act. It is up to the government to choose to intervene and to act, or not. To this point in time, a study has been proposed, but no specific action.

If I could remind the members of the House and those who are following the debate, to the credit of the Speaker, he agreed to the need for this emergency debate this evening, and that is because three million tonnes of wheat and canola are sitting stranded in the Prairies. We are told that railway congestion has resulted in millions of dollars in demurrage penalties for grain companies unable to load ships in a timely fashion. Many farmers have willing buyers and no way to deliver the product, so understandably, many grain producers are speaking out and are calling for action by the Government of Canada. That is why, as members of Parliament, we are standing up and echoing that sentiment and are asking the government to respond to those requests.

As my colleagues have mentioned, the government has taken a number of measures. It killed the Wheat Board, contrary to calls by

many producers that they depended on the Wheat Board in exact situations like this to look after their interests. When those grains were pooled and could be delivered to any elevator, we could have avoided, at least partially, this problem.

The government also, of course, shut the gates on the prairie pastures. Why is that significant? It is because many of the prairies' small and medium farmers are having to sell off their herds, and they will be relying 100% on the grain crops. They are needing to get this grain to market all the more so they can afford to buy seed and plant the crops this spring, which is not that far off.

This is an emergency. The government has spoken loudly for other sectors. It has spent hundreds of millions of Canadian tax dollars trying to get export markets for our fossil fuels. Where is equal enthusiasm for this sector of our economy? They say that they will do a study, and maybe five years from now, they might have some ideas, and maybe they can take some action.

I do not really see equivalent action from the government in standing up for the agriculture sector. I hope from the debate today, we will see a little bit more action on exactly the kind of proposals the farmers have brought forward and that many reviews proposed, as I understand it, as far back as 2002.

The delay is not because of a failing of the producers. They have forwarded the contracts. The delay is because they simply cannot get the rail companies to deliver their product to the port. The reality is that producers are now receiving less than half the value under the agreed upon contracts.

● (2145)

This is really serious, because I have heard member after member from the other side stand up tonight and brag about the bumper crop this year. The bumper crop this year did not arise because we killed the Wheat Board. The bumper crop arose because of good growing conditions. I am told by the producers that Statistics Canada initially forecast a much lower crop.

However, they were able to—

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

**Ms. Linda Duncan:** It is okay, Mr. Speaker. I will try to speak above the heckling going on from the other side. They just do not want to hear the truth.

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

**Ms. Linda Duncan:** Mr. Speaker, I should know that they like to bully, particularly when the women stand to speak. Therefore, I will just continue speaking, because I am proud to stand up for the Prairie producers.

*S. O. 52*

The reality is that the farmers are not receiving fair return on their product. There are a good number of measures that the government could be taking. As has been mentioned previously in the House by the NDP agriculture critic, the rail review report by Justice Estey, in 2002, recommended open access of rail lines, and a number of members this evening have spoken about that, encouraging the government to pursue that more thoroughly.

Of course, we are shipping our bitumen by rail through those lines, all the way to the United States. Why on earth can we not also be pursuing, with equal energy, the potential use of those lines to get our grain to market?

Other recommendations have been suggested tonight that have been recommended by many producers and others.

Previously, there were shared lines between CP and CN. Perhaps that is a solution.

There is potential for short lines. Obviously that means that other Canadian investors have to invest and get those lines up and going. I know that a number of former members from this House are working on exactly those kinds of lines and other ways to get grain product out.

Again, there is the potential use of U.S. lines.

One of the matters brought to my attention this evening was by Humphrey Banack, who is the vice-president of the Canadian Federation of Agriculture. His concern is that there was a lot of a hullabaloo when the government passed its Fair Rail Freight Service Act in June 2013. That act was supposed to resolve the issue about negotiations between the producers and the shippers. Their concern is that the minister promised that he would resolve the matter of this dispute sometime back, and still they are waiting, yet all the minister has done is propose further studies. Therefore, they are calling upon the government to step up to the plate to deliver on those promises and actually establish a rotation process but ensure that penalties are imposed on the rail companies when they do not actually deliver on those contracts that are entered into. They say that has a significant impact on them.

They still remain optimistic. They are hoping, as a result of the emergency debate this evening, that the agriculture minister might move on that promise.

Again, absurdly, the government is standing and bragging about the bumper crop. This is part of the so-called problem. We have this bumper crop and, for whatever reason, the two major rail companies, CN and CP, are simply not providing the cars, even the number of cars they promised to provide, the initial lower estimates.

We need them to step up to the plate. We are proud of our grain growers and we want to make sure they not only get their crop there in time but that they get a fair price.

Disappointingly, this evening, we have heard, time after time, the government members saying the real culprits here are the unions. I defy the government members to tell us why it is the union members' fault that this product is not getting to market. I know that a good number of rail workers were let go. We know that there are far fewer rail cars now available, that the current president and CEO of CP has significantly reduced the number of cars available. We are also well

aware—and this matter is being discussed in the House and well into the future—that there are many cars now being dedicated toward the shipping of bitumen. In fact, in Alberta, we are gearing up with two major terminals that are going to be providing 24-hour loading of bitumen to be shipped along lines.

This question arises: What is going on between the shipping of products such as potash and grain vis-à-vis the shipping of bitumen? Do we have an issue where the federal government should be intervening on behalf of our farm growers?

In closing, I would like to say that the government has been given a lot of options this evening on specific actions that could be taken. I know that the grain growers look forward to action on one or all of those.

I welcome questions.

• (2150)

**Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for being here to speak tonight. I appreciate her taking an interest. Her lack of understanding of agriculture is to be forgiven. She is from the city, and I am not faulting her for that at all. She is here and, again, I give her credit for that.

There are some things she has not talked about tonight. The agriculture minister, I believe, is the best agriculture minister Canada has had in decades. He has done a long list of really important things. He has opened markets around the world, along with the trade minister, the Prime Minister, and others, and he has ended the monopoly of the Wheat Board.

By the way, the members across the floor saying the Wheat Board is gone is simply false. The Wheat Board still exists. It is competing and moving grain on behalf of farmers. It is still functioning well without the monopoly. That has been an extremely important measure that has helped farmers.

The minister has certainly taken this issue on. He started months ago. I know he recognized in mid August that there would be a lot of grain to move due to a bumper crop. He has done an awful lot, and I wonder why the member will not do the right thing and acknowledge what the agriculture minister has done.

**Ms. Linda Duncan:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question. I enjoy serving on the natural resources committee with him. I am a fellow Albertan, and he can throw all the buns at me that he wants, saying I am a city slicker and I do not know about agriculture. I think I can appreciate our farm producers the same as any other Canadian.

The issues I am raising tonight are not my personal opinions. They are the opinions of the grain growers of Canada. I am standing up on their behalf because they do not have an opportunity to be here. They have been trying to get the attention of the minister. I will let them voice their opinions on whether the minister is acting on their behalf.

*S. O. 52*

He mentioned that the minister responded quite some time back. I am hearing exactly the opposite, that the minister has not been responding in a timely manner and has not caught up with the amount of crop that has actually been produced and the delay in delivery to export.

**Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, there seems to be some consensus in the House tonight, even from some of the members on the government side, including the member for Prince Albert, that perhaps the rail level of service legislation that was passed at the behest of the government last year is not quite up to the standard it ought to be.

There were two principal deficiencies identified in that legislation. Number one was that the definition of service was far too vague to be meaningful or enforceable, and the second was that the method of enforcement was a fine to be paid by the railways to the government, not liquidated damages to be paid by the railways to the farmers when the railways failed to deliver the farmers' product.

If we could arrive, in the next day or two, at an agreement on how to fix those two deficiencies in that particular piece of legislation—and we have drafts for how to do it, word for word, already prepared by the shippers and grain companies, the legislation already prepared—would the New Democrats in the House give us unanimous consent to allow those amendments to that piece of legislation be adopted in no more than 24 hours?

• (2155)

**Ms. Linda Duncan:** Mr. Speaker, of course, I cannot speak for my entire party, and I am sure we look forward to deliberating on those proposed measures expeditiously.

The very measures that the member is recommending are the very measures that were brought to my attention by all the grain growers I have spoken with, as recently as an hour ago. In particular, on the last measure that the member mentioned, they are deeply troubled that the penalty provisions are not assisting the grain growers when they are suffering due to the delay of their shipments. They are very troubled that, while the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food promised he would move expeditiously on this, he has not.

Certainly, New Democrats will take his recommendations under advisement. All members of the House will have been listening very closely, and we look forward to the government moving expeditiously in considering and actually acting.

**Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity this evening to speak to this motion. It is important that the players in the grain transportation system explain, identify, and work with the government to improve our grain transportation system.

As I think everyone is aware, Parliament just returned from our winter break. One of the first items of business we undertook was establishing committees, including the agriculture committee. I am very pleased that I am now a member of that committee.

The member who brought forth this motion can be assured that it is a priority for committee members from our side to make sure we get to the bottom of this transportation backlog. We will be asking hard questions to principals in charge, in order to get some real answers to determine real solutions to a real logistics problem.

That having been said, and as my colleague from Prince Albert has mentioned, I am a grain farmer, although my wife does most of the work. I would like to explain a little about what it is like on the farm and give a bit of a farmer's side of the story.

We start off by seeding our grain in the spring. We are making decisions based on the situations we see in front of us. We are watching our crops grow. This year farmers knew that it was going to be a record crop. Decisions were then made about extra bins, grain storage bags, how much to store in the ground, and the amount to sell straight off the combine, either directly or with some fall contracts or other contracts that we would have throughout the year.

After they have secured safe winter storage for the grain they have, farmers look to the next off-farm opportunities to deliver. That means we do not want to be delivering in  $-40^{\circ}$ , as we were often told to do under the previous system. Certainly, the other time we would be called to haul grain would be when the spring road bans were on or when we were trying to put our crops in.

Farmers recognize that, for cash flow, the other opportunities they have are agri-invest and also crop advance opportunities. We have heard comments about cash advances, but this is something that farmers have as a tool and the government has as a tool if farmers find that this particular situation that we have continues. The point is that we knew the yields, we analyzed the risks, and we took action.

The next part of the supply chain, during fall delivery, was a change of attitude on grain elevators, especially in Alberta. They made calls to organize daily delivery times, which was a lot different from normal practices, but it worked well as truckers hardly had to wait in line. In the past, they could be sitting for an hour when companies just gave a generic call to haul.

Obviously when the elevators are plugged, though, everything stops. As I said earlier, farmers make decisions on their part of the distribution system in conjunction with the grain industry.

Let us talk about the next part of the system. As those trains roll through the Prairies, did no one notice the bumper crops that existed? Where was the planning on the part of the rail companies? What coordination was there between the grain company sales, the rail company car spots, and the efficient ship-loading at the ports? These are questions that will be asked of those involved in the grain logistics system.

We will solve this problem. However, for now what I would like to do is speak about where Canada's grain industry is going. Canada's world-class grain industry is a strong driver of the economy and jobs. In 2012 Canada had its best export year on record for the agriculture and food industry. There was a new record, \$47.7 billion. For 2013, we are likely going to approach \$50 billion.

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All of the top exporting sectors come from the Canadian grain industry: wheat, canola seed, canola oil, soybeans, and pulses. That is total exports of over \$20 billion, driving jobs and growth across Canada.

• (2200)

Grain and oilseed farms account for the highest share of total Canadian farm asset values, representing over 44% of total Canadian farm assets, and account for about 60% of all farm cash receipts. To maintain this incredible momentum, the government has embarked on an ambitious plan to modernize Canada's grain sector, and the timing could not be better. We are coming off of a record harvest, global demand is growing, and the FAO estimates that the world will need a billion tonnes more of cereals over the next four decades.

To help meet this new demand, we have a new open market for wheat and barley in western Canada. The record harvest clearly demonstrates that the end of the old single desk two years ago has reinvigorated Canada's grain industry. In the second year of marketing freedom, farmers planted two million more acres of wheat, and I would be happy to talk about how important marketing freedom has been for our farm. Decisions are ours, and as I mentioned earlier, a dropped ball by CN and CP would hit just as hard or worse under the single-desk buyer. We would just be hearing excuses from them instead.

A Canadian Federation of Independent Business survey found that the vast majority of its ag members, over 80%, are positive about the impact of marketing freedom on their operations. This is why young farmers are coming back to the farm. They are making marketing decisions from the combine, and this is going to continue. Yes, bumper crops are now the new normal. A fellow farmer said:

We had a record crop last year with a significant increase in yields. A buoyant farm economy, better genetics, increased usage of new and better fungicides, overall better agronomics, and better utilization of micro-nutrients in fertilizer application were all contributing factors...

The person who said that was Gary Stanford, president of the Grain Growers of Canada.

That said, we understand farmers' frustration with a system not moving grain fast enough to keep up with the demand. The government has taken steps to improve the performance of the entire rail supply chain to help farmers get their crops to market. These include, if necessary, taking action to protect Canada's economy and grain farmers by introducing legislation to get CN Rail back on track if that issue does materialize, which we have heard some good news about tonight; investing \$1.5 million in a Pulse Canada-led multi-sector collaboration project of the pulse, oilseeds, and grain industries to improve supply chain efficiency and reliability; passing the Fair Rail Freight Service Act, which will create a process to establish service agreements; investing \$25 million to support grain shipments through the Port of Churchill, which, of course, had record shipments this year; implementing marketing freedom for western Canadian wheat and barley growers, allowing decisions to be made by individuals, who now have a vested interest in all parts of their own operations.

The government is also working to help solve the challenges of the supply chain by bringing industry groups together through fora such as the commodity supply chain table, a crop logistics working

group, and value chain round tables to facilitate comprehensive industry-led solutions that are suitable for all players. These are the people who have their finger on the pulse of the commodity supply chain.

We have further acted to respond to earlier recommendations of the crop logistics working group by pursuing enhancements to the grain monitoring program to improve the frequency of reporting, and committing to providing an ongoing forum for representatives across the industry to discuss improvement throughout the entire supply chain. This crop logistics working group was created to drive new efficiencies in the system, and we are already moving forward with some early recommendations. The working group provided a useful forum for industry to exchange views, build consensus on priority areas, and identify future opportunities to improve supply chain performance. Its work will complement the government-funded study of the grain supply chain, which will also identify ways to improve the efficiency and reliability of the system.

To bring more predictability and to clarify the system last year, the government passed the Fair Rail Freight Service Act. The act creates a process to establish service agreements and ultimately encourage commercial solutions between shippers and railways. Transport Canada has committed to establishing a commodity supply chain table where supply chain partners can discuss issues, including the grain sectors.

• (2205)

I would like to talk for a moment about the Canada-Europe free trade agreement, the comprehensive economic and trade agreement. The government will continue to work toward a modernized grain sector that has the tools to solve issues commercially and is well positioned to continue to drive the Canadian economy. The discussion this evening speaks to that as well.

A prime example is the historic trade agreement in principle between Canada and so many other countries, but specifically the European Union. Once this trade agreement is fully implemented our farmers and food processors will have virtually tariff-free access to half a billion consumers. This is a remarkable achievement when we consider that currently only 18% of EU agricultural tariffs are duty-free.

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Our agriculture industry here in Canada will be the only one of all the G8 countries to have preferential access to the EU. As Grain Growers of Canada said recently, this trade agreement is opening up a new frontier for Canada's grain industry.

Our top three agri-food exports to the EU are soybeans, durum wheat, and non-durum wheat. Europe has a grain deficit when it comes to feedstocks, both for livestock and for the biofuels industry. So we really have the opportunity there to start shipping products to them.

The Canadian Agri-Food Trade Alliance is estimating there will be new grains and oilseed opportunities in Europe of \$100 million a year. On wheat, tariffs of up to \$122 a tonne will be gone once this deal is fully implemented. At a wheat yield of one tonne an acre, that is \$122 an acre. On barley, tariffs of up to \$120 a tonne will be gone once the deal is fully implemented. On processed pulses and grains, tariffs will disappear as well, and they start at over 7%. It is the same story as well with canola oil, whose tariffs now exceed 9%. Canola growers alone are looking at \$90 million a year in new sales to Europe, including the biodiesel market. Our pulse producers are estimating a new market of up to a million tonnes in Europe for them to use as healthy ingredients in a whole range of processed foods. Of course, our pork and beef producers will also win with an estimated billion dollars a year in new sales, which is good news for our grain sector as well.

Let us talk about some of the great initiatives in agriculture that will help guide them. In terms of non-tariff barriers to trade, the agreement will establish mechanisms allowing Canada and the EU to address issues of importance to our agricultural exporters, such as technical and regulatory co-operation, promotion of efficient science-based approval processes, and co-operation on low-level presence of genetically modified crops.

The agreement also includes new mechanisms for preventing and resolving trade challenges related to plant health and food safety issues. The Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food remains committed to developing a policy to manage low-level presence in grain, food, and beef, and we continue to work with our trading partners and domestic stakeholders to develop an approach that is predictable, flexible, transparent, and proactive.

Canada also launched a global LLP initiative via a group of 15 countries committed to developing international solutions to LLP, with the goal of minimizing trade disruptions. Likewise we remain committed to implementing UPOV '91, with a view to stimulating investments, innovation, and growth in the agricultural sector.

We are focused on international standards on maximum residue levels for pesticides, which can also act as a non-tariff trade barrier for Canadian exports.

The reform of the Canadian Wheat Board and European trade agreement, as significant as they are, have essentially launched us into an active agenda for modernized grain policy, expanding markets and moving the markers on innovation.

We are pushing ahead with our aggressive trade agenda in key markets like China, and through the trans-Pacific partnership, negotiations with Morocco, and the talks with some 50 other countries that are under way with key customers around the world.

The Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food is also committed to continuing our modernization agenda around the Canadian Grain Commission, building on our first round of reforms.

We will also continue to focus on improving the supply chain through a number of initiatives, including encouraging Transport Canada to convene the promised supply chain round table to squeeze inefficiencies out of the supply chain.

● (2210)

Our strong innovation continues. Under Growing Forward 2, we are investing over \$70 million in grains, oilseed, and special crop research clusters and projects. That includes the wheat cluster, backed by shared government-industry funding of over \$25 million. All of the clusters continue to do a tremendous job of bringing everyone to the table to set common directions and achieve common goals.

There is also the \$97 million Canadian Wheat Alliance. The alliance is a five-year partnership with the University of Saskatchewan and the National Research Council to develop elite new wheat varieties. The goal is to kick-start wheat yields by an estimated 10 bushels an acre, increasing producer revenues by close to \$5 billion over the next two decades.

As we have learned from the clusters, collaboration is key to moving the yardsticks forward on innovation. Ensuring that farmers continue to have the latest tools at their disposal will take greater emphasis on public-private collaboration and value chain partnerships, such as what we are discussing tonight.

Meeting the new global demand for grains will take investment from government and industry. At the same time, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada remains committed to core research while partnering with industry to get new tools out the door. A good example is the recent discovery by scientists of three genes resistant to Ug99, a potentially devastating wheat stem rust. The discoveries coming out of this research will protect farmers' livelihoods and food security in Canada and around the world. We have already invested \$13 million in the fight against this disease, plus an additional \$1.6 million under Growing Forward 2.

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The new variety registration system is also tied in closely with our innovation capacity. We are committed to working with industry to develop a system that facilitates increased innovation and productivity, reduces the time it takes to get varieties into the marketplace, and delivers on the performance demands of our farmers and the quality and consistency demanded by our customers.

Looking ahead, the Canadian grain industry will certainly continue to play a vital role in creating jobs and economic growth. Of course, there are challenges. That is to be expected for an industry that is in an expansion mode. We are addressing these challenges by working closely with industry and calling on all players, including the railways, to step up their game.

The time is right for the Canadian grain industry to capture new opportunities in burgeoning markets that are looking for healthy, nutritious foods more than ever. The government will have to continue to work with the Canadian grain industry to drive transformative change and lay down the conditions required to unlock the sector's full economic potential.

• (2215)

**Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I see that they are all speaking from the same blueprint, because they all go on and talk about the 2 million additional acres over last year. Let us put the facts on the record. That is 7 million fewer acres than in 1990.

The member talked about the new open market system. What farmers are beginning to see is whereas we used to have an orderly marketing system, there is now a disorderly marketing system. There is chaos at port in trying to move the rail traffic around to get the grain into the hull of a ship to get it to market.

I wanted to ask a question of the member who is from Red Deer and is himself a farmer. I talked to one of his neighbours tonight. He told me something, and I wonder if the member could confirm these figures under the new system. On the pricing on spring wheat, the farmer said he was getting \$3.78 per bushel on January 14. He said that \$2.32 per bushel of that \$3.78 was taken away for the rip-off by the grain companies and the railways in handling and transportation costs. At the same time, the Minneapolis future price was \$6.10. In other words, the new pricing arrangement under this new system means that Canada's price is discounted by 35% to 40% off of the Minneapolis price. Could the member confirm that those figures are relatively right?

**Mr. Earl Dreeshen:** Mr. Speaker, one of the things we can talk about is where the bases are. The amount that makes up those bases would come through elevation, inspection, cleaning, storage. These are the amounts that make up the particular chunk that is taken off. If there is no transportation, that gets larger because we are dealing with the storage aspect of it. In situations where people want the grain, that is where we would be looking at negative bases or trucking incentives that are also going to be included in that. We have to recognize that is what is taking place and that the prices are there if we are selling. That is why we have to take a look at some of the options that are available.

There is always the discussion that it happened because of the Canadian Wheat Board, which has nothing to do with it. It happens to have the same information as the canola commission, which is

managing it now. All it needs is to have that information available, and it is there for them.

People have to recognize the other aspect of it, as well, which is that the government will be there. The concern, and I heard this earlier today, is that the farmer is going to owe all of this. It is part of the equity that the farmer has in that crop. That is what we have to look at and what people should be looking at when making these marketing decisions. If we sell at the bottom, we are going to be under the system and it is going to cause a problem. We have to look after—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** The hon. member for Thunder Bay—Superior North.

**Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, GP):** Mr. Speaker, the member has done a great job of talking about our farmers who are doing a great job in producing bumper crops.

Over a month ago, prairie farmer groups, including agriculture groups in Alberta, asked the Minister of Transport to look into the problem of constraints, and she has not even bothered to get back to them yet.

We are the only country in the G20 that has no national rail strategy at all. We have doubled the number of oil transports in the last five years in unsafe DOT-111 cars.

I would like to ask my colleague, when is the government going to invest in rail safety, rail quality, and rail efficiency? That starts with a national rail strategy.

**Mr. Earl Dreeshen:** Mr. Speaker, people have to recognize that a couple of things have happened. We are 3% above the five-year average with respect to the amount of grain that has been delivered already. We are 5% below last year, and that is an issue.

When we are looking at situations like that, we then have to look at why we are having this problem. Cold temperatures do matter. As I mentioned earlier in my speech, there is a reason that we do not take our grain to the elevators when it is -40. We do not want to be taking our trucks through that. We do not want to have to worry about that. We do not want to be standing at the elevators in that kind of situation, and that is happening at this particular point in time.

I am not excusing the rail companies, but if they have to move from 130 cars to 107 cars because of the temperature and conditions, then we have to recognize that is where the problem is at this point. The rest of it is a case of trying to make sure we have the right rail allocation for the grains we have.

• (2220)

[Translation]

**Ms. Paulina Ayala (Honoré-Mercier, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, western farmers had a bumper crop, but have been unable to ship their products to market.

The Conservatives dismantled the Canadian Wheat Board without coming up with a plan for shipping grain. On Monday, the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food announced that the government would conduct a five-year transportation study. Five years is a bit too long.

Does my Conservative colleague not think that the government should work more efficiently to solve this problem?

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*[English]*

**Mr. Earl Dreeshen:** Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Wheat Board is still there, and it is still working. I talked to members in December who were putting into the pool and buying grain at that point. They were making that decision. We can take a look at the types of things that are going to happen. If they decide that they have the transportation opportunities, then they will build new pools and go from there.

To suggest that there is no Canadian Wheat Board is not true. Farmers were asking for a choice, and the Canadian wheat pool is one of those options.

This is the kind of thing that we have to look at. We have to realize that when people say there is no Canadian Wheat Board, it is all because of that, and that is not true.

**Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege for me to represent the farmers from the Peace Country. Today there are Peace Country farmers looking to move their product. This has been an exceptional year. We have seen record amounts of crop coming off the fields of the Peace Country, and I am incredibly proud of the resourceful Peace Country farmers who have seen record crop yields.

We have had record crops coming off the fields. We have also had record amounts of snowfall this winter. We know that the rail companies have contended with that. We know there are a number of reasons for this. The challenges are real, but the only solution my colleagues on the other side of the House seem to have is forcing my farmers, who voted overwhelmingly to get rid of the Wheat Board, to bring back the Wheat Board and force it back on each and every farmer. That is not a solution. I have heard from many farmers who say they are really pleased with the opportunities they have today.

The other option that is being floated around on the opposition benches is nationalizing the railway. I do not think there is any Canadian who is looking at this situation reasonably who thinks that is a solution.

Therefore, I wonder if my hon. colleague could talk about some of the things our government has done to work through the challenges we are facing, in terms of the bumper crop, the amount of wheat and barley and canola that have come off Peace Country fields as well as prairie fields, and the issues of shipping that product to market?

**Mr. Earl Dreeshen:** Mr. Speaker, one of the most important aspects of this is recognizing that the rail system has to match the amount of grain that can work its way through the system. The purchasing of it at the grain elevators, the transfer of it to the ports with the trains, and then getting it on to the ships and moving it is something that has to happen. Our government, in discussions with all of the stakeholders, is looking for ways in which that can occur.

As I mentioned earlier today in my speech, we can be assured that when we speak about this to the stakeholders, and I am hopeful we will do that soon, we will be getting answers from people other than politicians, and we will be finding the situations that occur and the important things that are required.

To go back to one of the questions, I know that people were talking about car allocations. It is important to understand that the Canadian Wheat Board never allocated cars. It is the Canadian Grain

Commission that allocates those cars, and it is the commercial deals that occur between the grain companies and the railway that are now actually allocating those cars.

● (2225)

**Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by stating that I will be sharing my time with my colleague, the member of Parliament for Newton—North Delta.

I am pleased to rise to speak to this motion in the House. It is a motion that many people in my constituency and in my part of the country feel strongly about.

Before I talk about where I come from and how important rail transport and its connection is to both the agricultural industry and the northern economy, I want to comment. There are some moments we have in the House where time and space seem to collide. We swear that what we are hearing we have heard before, and we swear that the problems people are talking about are what people predicted just a short while ago.

Here we are debating an issue that farmers across western Canada said would happen. Despite the rhetoric of the Conservative Party, farmers across western Canada and across the country know their land. They know the reality of their communities and the economy around them better than any of us.

What did farmers across the country tell us when the spotlight was on them as the government ran roughshod over their voices to dismantle the Canadian Wheat Board? They told us that they were getting ripped off by rail companies. They told us that they were working hard to produce a product of the highest quality that they could ship around the world, something they continue to do. They told us that they knew from development in communities around them, whether it is southwestern Manitoba, across Saskatchewan, or in Alberta, that oil and gas was ramping up and that rail lines were increasingly being taken up for product that was not theirs. They were facing immense challenges as a result. They were saying that their voices, whether it was on the Canadian Wheat Board, or on any other decision that affects them, needed to be at the centre of the decisions being made.

That is the last thing that the government has done. There are many across the aisle who have spent many years working hard as farmers in the agricultural industry, something that we all respect. However, what I do not understand is that many of those members of Parliament, whether or not they have an agricultural background, stand up and profess to talk about communities in western Canada. What they are not doing is speaking on behalf of the people who are saying they need help and support. Farmers across western Canada have given, as they do every year, everything they have to produce what they need to live, to provide for their families, and to grow their communities. Unfortunately, the player at the table who is letting them down, who has the power to make a difference, is the federal government. It is the very same federal government that is made up of members of Parliament who claim to represent their interests.

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I believe there is a map in the Prime Minister's Office and on part of the Prairies there is a lot of blue colouring that says "taken for granted". There is no debate better than this one to show how the government takes the west for granted. It takes for granted the people who work hard to give back, who have helped build our country through the agricultural sector, given Canada the great name it has in terms of its grain exports, and who simply want a fair deal.

This has a domino effect. I can speak to this as the member of Parliament for Churchill because I know the way Churchill has been impacted by the government's wrong-headed and corporate interest-driven decision to dismantle the single desk Canadian Wheat Board.

Churchill is a community that has a very diverse history, but one of its pillars is the port. This is a port that is a gem for northern Manitoba, for my province, and really for our country. It is the only deep water seaport in northern Canada. As an unfortunate result of climate change, there are some opportunities for increased trade through that port, as it takes longer for the ice to freeze in the fall.

● (2230)

There are many opportunities for investing in this port. We could be looking at how to grow linkages between Churchill, other northern countries, and countries around the world.

One of the staples that has gone through Churchill for decades is grain. The Canadian Wheat Board, as it did for every port, coordinated to the n<sup>th</sup> degree the kind of traffic that would need to go through Churchill and every other port. It chose Churchill because it was the fastest and cheapest way at that time of year to get to certain countries. It was not cheap so that it could be good for the Canadian Wheat Board; it was to save money for farmers. It was to save them money and save them time in terms of not having to decide where and how they would ship their grain. It looked out for and had the backs of farmers in western Canada. The moment the Conservative government dismantled the single-desk Canadian Wheat Board, it let Canadian wheat and grain farmers down.

In Churchill, we know that the government's ironic decision to subsidize trade that goes through the port has made for a superficial bump in the traffic going through there. This subsidy, as members know, will be over in five years, by 2017. In fact, people in Churchill, and I was just speaking to the mayor a few days ago, are very concerned about what lies ahead for this community and our region.

Churchill, of course, is affected by the fact that the single-desk is gone, but it is also affected fundamentally by the fact that the Conservative government fails time and again to project and realize a vision based on Canadians' interests and the interests of people living in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta, whether they are related to the agricultural industry or any other industry.

The domino effect extends to other industries. When rail cars are not available for farmers, they are increasingly not available for other industries. For example, our region also depends on forestry, which is another sector that has suffered deeply under the current government's reign. Most recently, Tolko, a successful forestry company in our region, announced that it would be laying people off temporarily. Why? It is because it cannot ship its product. It has produced far too much, and there are no rail cars to ship it out.

It is not that the product is not in demand. In fact, it is industrial paper that is very much in demand around the world. The company has global exports. It is not because the product is not of high quality. In fact, incredible research and cutting-edge technology have gone into producing it. The reason people are losing their jobs is that they do not have access to enough rail cars.

During this debate I have had a chance to hear great stories from the other side and very positive remarks about the hard-working farmers across our country. I cannot help but think of the people who right now are struggling because they have lost their jobs. They know that what they produce they cannot send elsewhere. They do not know what they are going to be able to save this year. As a result of the Conservative government's inaction, they do not believe that the situation will get better next year.

We are not just sitting here until midnight to talk at each other. We are here to call on the Conservative government to make a difference and to stand up for farmers across western Canada, western Canadians, and communities like Churchill, The Pas and many of the communities the Conservatives represent.

We call on the government to listen to the people across western Canada and to sit at the table to engage rail companies to stop ripping off farmers and western Canadians. We call on the government to make a difference on behalf of a part of the country that deserves to have proper representation.

● (2235)

**Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we have heard a lot from the government side tonight about predictions and not much in terms of what it is going to do to deal with the emergency. Maybe something will come five years down the road.

It is important to put on the record where the minister said we would be today. He made this statement on November 2, 2011, when he was talking about getting rid of the Wheat Board. He stated:

To that end, both CN and CP are doing over a billion dollars worth of renovations on their main lines across western Canada, because they know there are going to be demands on them to move more product more quickly than they do now, because we won't be dragging our sales out at...one-twelfth every month, as the Wheat Board does now. There will be a lot more...going to market positions earlier, getting us away from starting our trucks and our augers at minus 40 degrees in January. It used to drive me nuts. I'd wait for a malt car until the coldest, wettest, or muddiest day of the year. Now we'll be able to put that product into market position ahead of time.

That was his prediction. Has that come to pass, or is it just more of the same old, same old of the government? They sold out to the railways and the grain companies and in the process sold out farmers.

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that blast from the past. I will never forget the kind of rhetoric we heard from the government side in its steadfast campaign to get rid of an institution that Canadian farmers built. Lo and behold, those rosy predictions not only have not materialized, but the government, when problems have persisted, has failed to act.



Let us come to the present day. There are farmers and representatives of farmer organizations who are saying that they need help right now. I want to quote Doug Chorney, the president of Manitoba's Keystone Agricultural Producers. He laid the blame for the bottleneck on abysmal service by Canada's two major railways. He further stated that the duopoly Canadian Pacific Railway and Canadian National Railway have in the marketplace allows them to provide inadequate service without fear of consequences.

Lynn Jacobson, the president of the Alberta Federation of Agriculture, stated:

This is a crisis situation and something has to be done. It affects not only the agriculture community but the whole economy in Western Canada.

Take it from the farmers themselves. Take it from the organizations. The government must act.

**Mr. Brian Storseth (Westlock—St. Paul, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I agree with my colleague on one issue. This is a very serious issue that affects real families in Alberta. Whether I am talking to my colleague and friend, Ian Donovan, from Little Bow, or to the Bauer family farm in Thorhild, this is an issue that directly affects them and the outcome of their livelihoods. At the end of the day, it deserves serious debate, not the throwback model of back to the future we have we have heard from the Liberals.

I have some questions for my colleague on the other side, who is talking about needing staffing resources, railcars, and locomotives for Churchill going to the port of Vancouver. Will the member urge the Teamsters to accept the tentative deal with CN so that it does not deprive western Canadian families of those resources she was just talking about? Will she urge her friends and the Teamsters to accept the deal so we can ensure that we continue to move the record harvest of western Canadian grain?

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** Mr. Speaker, I believe that the House ought to be above cheap rhetoric like that. I am glad the Conservatives are finding this humorous.

Let us go back to the member's introduction, when he talked about real families in the real western Canada. I represent some of those real families, and they are hurting. People have lost their jobs in communities that I represent. People in Churchill do not know what the next two, three, or four years are going to look like. It is not enough for us to just sit here and talk. We want the government to act. It has the power to do so, and it is about time it acts on behalf of its constituents.

• (2240)

**Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise to speak in support of the motion before this House.

Like my colleague, I think that when we have these emergency debates it is an opportunity for all sides of the House to work together on an issue that we realize is urgent. I hear so much about real families. There are real families hurting right across this country. It does not matter whether they are in Newfoundland or Vancouver.

Today, let us focus on the farmers. We live in a huge country. Our geography is truly inspirational. It is our western provinces that grow the majority of the grain and the pulses. I was surprised a few years ago when I found out how much of our grain is exported to feed

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many corners of the planet. Members might be surprised to know that 40% of our pulses grown in the Prairies are exported to China and India. That took me by surprise. I did not know that.

We are talking here about the people who grow grain for us for domestic consumption, who help create a trade balance, and who also help to feed the rest of the world. It is embarrassing how badly our farmers feel they are being treated by the government.

I am not going to revisit the Canadian Wheat Board. I think what we are beginning to see are the very results that were predicted by people on this side of the House when the government was so adamant about dismantling a Canadian institution, one that served the Canadian grain growing farmers well, for its own ideological reasons. The decision was not based on what was needed by the farmers, but on the government's own ideology. The government absolutely rammed that through.

Today we are here to talk about how fast, or if ever, this grain can be moved. What we are hearing from the farmers is that they have a massive crop. We should be celebrating the fact that we have this massive crop. Most countries would be celebrating. However, our farmers cannot celebrate because the grain is not moving.

The government is very fond of signing international trade agreements. However, unless we have the infrastructure in place to move the goods within Canada to get them to our ports and out of the country, it begs the question of how serious we are when we sign those agreements or whether we are selling people a bill of goods, so to speak.

I live in a port city, as members know, and I have the honour and privilege of having Deltaport in my area, as well as Port Metro Vancouver. I have had numerous meetings with transloading companies, and they tell me of the challenges they face. I have spent time at a number of these different companies to see how the port system works and how the goods that arrive from the Prairies then get moved out through our ports.

There are huge challenges facing the ports in Canada at the moment. Many of them are aggravated by a transportation of goods to the ports, in this case through the railway system. I found out, for example, that when rail cars filled with grain arrive at the transloading company, they have 24 hours to empty them. If they do not, there is a fine, and the fines are quite hefty. I was surprised.

However, if CN Rail is late by two days, or a day or even a week, there is no penalty for CN Rail. The penalty is borne by the transloaders. They lose in many different ways.

• (2245)

First, they pay a penalty to CN Rail.

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Second, if they are expecting an arrival of goods and they do not arrive, they are paying their truck drivers. The truck companies, the owner-operators, as well as the transloading companies, lose double, then, as well. They have people there ready to unload the grain, bag it, and then ship it out. Guess what? They are paying those people while they are waiting for that grain to arrive. What they go through is famine to feast. That is no way to run a business. They hire staff, expecting goods. They do not arrive. Guess what? They still end up having to pay some staff. The truckers, the owner-operators, end up being big losers in this, as well.

We really need to address this issue in a very serious way.

The farmers on the Prairies have grown this magnificent product that is quality product, grains and pulses, that the rest of the world wants to purchase. However, here is the sad part. We do not have the infrastructure in place. Surely there is an easy way of getting rail cars. Surely the government can work with CN to work through all of those things.

Instead, we are in a situation where the farmers, after a magnificent harvest, are now saying they are going to be broke; they have not been paid, because they do not get paid until that grain gets moved. That is a serious problem for us. We need to know that it is the farmers who suffer, the transloading companies, and the truck drivers, and there is a whole chain where the costs are downloaded, and they are heavy costs.

I hear a lot about business sense and being good economic managers, from the other side. Good economic managers would address an issue like this, because here is a Canadian product that other countries want to buy, but we cannot get it to the port in time. It is our Canadian companies, the transloading companies, as well as the truck drivers, who end up being the victims and who end up suffering.

Truck drivers go from having days of famine to having days when they are told there are not enough trucks drivers and more trucks are needed.

Also, the ports themselves find it difficult to make the kind of plans they need to make to ship the goods out.

Sometimes members think that maybe we are just making all this stuff up. However, let me tell members that we have been hearing from some of the farmers and grain growers themselves. A flax farmer in Central Butte, Saskatchewan, says that free trade is no good if we cannot get the product there.

I come from a farming background in my ancestry, not that I have ever farmed myself. I have not, but my grandparents and great-grandparents did. One thing I know about farmers is that they are blunt and to the point. I think there is something significant to be learned from that.

Here is a quote from the Manitoba Pulse Growers Association president, Kyle Friesen:

We need to get the grain moving because many farmers may not be paid for last year's harvest until after spring planting.

How many members would like to wait six months or nine months before they get their pay, as members of Parliament? We would not.

This is already causing lost sales. Things need to improve; otherwise, this will translate into a serious cash flow issue for farmers when they need to buy seed and inputs this spring.

Also, it absolutely harms our international trade. What kind of credibility do we have when we do not have the kind of predictability we need for the transportation of our grains and pulses from the fields right to the ports and to the countries that have bought them?

Rick White, general manager of the Canadian Canola Growers Association, had this to say:

The big question now is, are they going to be able to get enough grain delivered into the system to pay off the advance prior to the deadline?

Farmers who are growing grain and are helping in our trade balance are being punished. If we want future generations to remain in farming and to utilize the wealth of our land, then surely we have to have an infrastructure in place and we have to ensure that they are remunerated at the right time and in an appropriate manner, that they are not left begging and wondering whether they are going to be able to feed their family, whether they will make it into the next year, and whether their grain is going to rot.

• (2250)

**Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, that intervention comes typically from a member who lives in Vancouver and who wants to tell a western Canadian grain farmer how a solution can be arrived at. Simply, the response is to just fix it. That is where we, as a government, differ from the NDP. If we want a concrete solution to a real problem, we get a real solution that is long term and is good for all farmers and Canadians.

From a Vancouver person's perspective, the member says she has a solution to the problem. What is her solution?

**Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims:** Mr. Speaker, there are many things we know about without actually having to live that experience for ourselves.

I have been a teacher all my life, and that has to be a question that had me really thinking for a minute. I want to respond to this.

There is a very simple solution. Build infrastructure, support the infrastructure, provide extra rails, get the goods moved, and get them to the ports, to cities like Vancouver and Churchill where the ports are, so all the ports can operate and get the goods where they need to go.

The food we grow on the Prairies is part of a food chain. It gets grown on the Prairies and it gets used right across the country, but we also ship it overseas to earn money and to get a trade balance.

**Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, not long ago, one of our colleagues in this House resigned to take up a new challenge. That was Merv Tweed, the former member for Brandon, who went off to become the new CEO of OmniTRAX, which has responsibility for the Port of Churchill.

The government has indicated that there are a million or so dollars to be of assistance to Churchill. It would seem to me that somebody should be looking right now at the question while the permafrost in northern Manitoba is still frozen.

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Is there the possibility of moving any kind of significant volume of grain by rail to Churchill, to have it in position for the spring shipping season to take some of the pressure off the current situation? Is that one small practical example of some things that might be done, and has anybody spoken to Mr. Tweed?

**Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims:** Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Churchill tells me that is one solution. The other solution is to get some additional rail cars in place and let us utilize the Port of Vancouver. Deltaport is available as well.

Let us stop these periods of feast and famine, and let us get the goods moving. What I am hearing over and over again from the transloading companies is about the wait periods and the kinds of penalty they have to pay.

Let us build some accountability into CN so that the penalty is not always one way, which is on to the transloading company.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Djaouida Sellah (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, when the Conservative government dismantled the Canadian Wheat Board's single-desk system, my NDP colleagues gave many speeches predicting the problems that this would cause.

Once again, this government has a gift for destroying anything that works without thinking of the consequences. The proof is that we are in the House today having an emergency debate, after the fact, about the consequences of the government's ill-considered decision.

We know that the Minister of Agriculture has destroyed our niche market, and that this has resulted in complaints from Japanese and Chinese food companies about quality and service. The farmer-controlled CWB managed the supply chain, from farm to end user.

Would my colleague agree that this government is shirking its responsibilities? We urge the government to resolve this crisis caused by its ill-considered decision. It should not try to hide behind weather conditions.

• (2255)

[*English*]

**Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims:** Mr. Speaker, we have a Conservative government that is a majority government. If the Conservatives really had a will to fix this problem, I bet it could be fixed overnight.

We have seen that, when the Conservatives want to move on issues, they can move. They have actually even shut off debate in this House and will move closure motions to get their will put into place.

However, here where we have Canadian farmers hurting and the whole export chain hurting—in a way because of their lack of action, lack of investment in the infrastructure, and lack of accountability that is required in the contracts they have signed with CN—what the Conservatives really need to do is sit down and get to work straightaway.

I believe they can do it. I am pleading with them to do it, for the sake of the farmers and so we do not see good grain going to waste.

**Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to be here tonight to take part in this debate. It is very

unfortunate that there is a need for us to be here once again discussing slow rail movement. I have been here in Ottawa about 20 years and I have been through this discussion on slow rail movement and problems with rail movement a number of times.

In my life as a farm economist and a farmer before I went into politics, I went through this same situation many times, and I want to say that it hurts. It is hurting farmers now. Many in our caucus are still involved in farms. I am very much involved in a farm. This slow rail movement has hurt me personally in a very serious way. It has hurt the ten farmers, mostly young farmers, who rent land from me on a crop share basis, meaning that I pay part of the expenses and get a part of the crop. Every one of them is being affected in an extremely negative way by the slow rail movement.

The situation certainly is a very negative, unfortunate situation. We would all love to see it solved once and for all. It simply probably never will be, but I know that our government has done a lot of things that will help and have helped, things that have led to really good rail movement over the past few years.

I want to start by talking about the situation.

In western Canada we have a very unusual situation in that 85% of many of the crops we grow are exported. That is extremely unusual. The only other countries that might have a similar situation are Australia and Argentina, but most crops in Australia are grown within 200 miles of the coast, and Argentina as well certainly does not have the kinds of distances that exist in Canada in moving grain to a port so that it can be exported to the world.

In Canada a huge percentage of the crop goes to export. It is our only market. The shipments must travel extremely far, well over 1,000 kilometres, and 1,500 kilometres in some cases. Such distances make this a very unusual situation, and one that is really difficult to deal with.

Railways have been making record shipments of grains and all other commodities over the past few years. In fact, CN is really to be commended up, at least up until the last few months, for increasing its shipments of almost every commodity over the past four years. There was an increase each year over the preceding year. It is to be commended for that. It has done a great job. It has turned what was an average railway into probably the best railway in North America.

However, that does not let it off the hook for what it has not done over December and January, because that has hurt our farmers in an extremely real way and in a very damaging way. It has hurt them because they are not getting the income because their commodity is not moving. It has hurt them even more because the situation has driven prices down quite dramatically. I would argue that some of the grain companies are taking unfair advantage of that situation: they know this grain is not being moved to the coast, so they are paying less than they otherwise would if grain movement was better. That is a huge problem.

In fact, one of the young farmers who rents land from me called me tonight after this debate started. He said that he had phoned a couple of grain companies today to price some of the wheat he has to sell. He received an offer for April of \$5.35. This is soft white wheat, so it is the least expensive type of wheat and is usually used for ethanol. In today's conditions, that price is not too bad.

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That was a shipper 20 miles west of his farm in Saskatchewan. However, 20 miles south of his farm, the price offered was \$3.50 a bushel. He told the guy he had been offered \$5.35 just 20 miles west and asked why the guy was only offering \$3.50. He was told it was because management had told them not to offer any more because farmers were going to be desperate and some of them were going to take it.

• (2300)

If that is happening, those grain companies are dealing unfairly. In a normal marketplace, I would say that it is the market, but it is not a normal marketplace when farmers and grain companies are held captive to a railway. I say “a” railway because in most cases farmers only have one option. They can choose either the CN line or the CP line that runs near their farm. They really only have one option.

It is not a free market, and that allows things to happen that really should not. That is why there is a place for government to be involved. The minister has been very much involved. He has been involved in this for months now. We knew mid-summer that we were going to have a huge grain crop. The minister started working with all of the parties involved back then. Clearly the railways did well in the first couple of months of the crop year, early in the harvest. I do not have the exact numbers for December and January, but I know that shipments have been way off, and the minister has been working on that.

The members across the floor talk about the five-year plan to fix the system. Quite frankly, that is a long-term plan. The minister has been working on a short-term plan as well. I am confident that we will have results from that. It is too slow for me. It is too slow for other farmers. However, it is certainly the best that we could expect.

I would argue that the Minister of Agriculture is absolutely the best that this country has had in decades, and I do not say this only because I am a Conservative member of Parliament. He is on top of these things. He is working for farmers. He is opening up new markets for farmers, which is extremely important, particularly with the huge increase in crops we are growing. We saw that this year, and I think we will see it for years into the future. The minister is doing an excellent job.

Having said that, I encourage farmers to continue to push the railways, the grain companies, the ports, and the government, to do more, and to do it more quickly, because what is happening now is completely unacceptable.

I am not here tonight because we are talking about an issue that is near and dear to my heart. I am here for this one thing that I have to do. It is really rich to me when I hear the members across the floor in the House complaining about slow rail delivery. Some have even complained about the increase in delivery of crude oil by rail. It is true that this has tripled just in the last couple of years. In fact, it may have tripled this year over last year. The members are complaining about that at the same time that they are doing everything to block new pipelines from being built. They should take some of the blame for this situation, and there is no way around that. They are blocking the pipelines. If oil is not being moved by pipelines, it is going to be moved by rail.

Rail is competing with grain movement and that is a problem, although I do want to give the railways credit for increasing delivery on all commodities until this last couple of months. They have to get their game together. CN has done a great job over the last four years. CP is starting to get it together, and that is encouraging. We, who move commodities so far in this country, really do depend on the railways to get our bulk commodities to market. There is no other choice. I would like the members across the floor to give that some serious consideration.

How bad are things? I have already explained an example about one of the farmers who rents land from me, and that kind of tells the story.

Some of the members try to talk about ending the Wheat Board monopoly. The Wheat Board is still there. Farmers can still ship to the Wheat Board. Some try to say that ending the Wheat Board monopoly has somehow exacerbated the situation. It is just the opposite.

I have watched these problems over the years, first as a young lad who grew up on a farm, then as a farmer and a farm economist working with farmers on marketing. This is not anything new, but it does not make it any easier.

• (2305)

How bad is it? It is bad. It is a problem, and it is depressing prices. What I am most concerned about is how bad it is going to be in March and April, as farmers are planning what to grow next year and the bins are still full.

I have wheat, oats, and even canola in long, white bags out on the ground. I even have canola in bags because I cannot move it. It is a huge problem. What am I going to do? More importantly, what are the farmers who farm my land going to do? I just get a third of the crop. They get two-thirds. I pay one-third of the expenses. They pay two-thirds. What are they going to do as they move up to seeding time? They are facing a huge problem, especially when they talk to the grain companies and the grain companies say they cannot contract this year's crop until next fall. Not only may the bins still be full, but a lot of farmers are not even sure they are going to have the temporary storage emptied by that time. That can lead to an awful lot of problems. That is how bad things are. It is extremely bad, and that is why it has to be dealt with.

However, I do give the Minister of Agriculture a lot of credit for what he has done, and I give my colleagues a lot of credit. We have dozens, I do not know how many exactly, of members of Parliament on this side who represent rural areas. We represent most of the rural areas in the country. There is a reason for that. We understand farmers. Many of us either are or have been farmers, so we understand them. Of course we are not going to let things go bad for farmers. We are going to do everything we can to make things better and do it as quickly as we can, not only because we have a vested interest but also because our neighbours and friends are farmers. Our constituents are farmers. We are doing all we can, and I do think we have done quite a bit.

Back in about mid-August, the Prince Rupert Port Authority had a meeting in Edmonton to which I was invited and which I attended. I talked to top people from CN Rail and the Port of Prince Rupert. The Port of Vancouver had representatives there too. I talked to representatives of some grain companies that handle this grain. I told them all that we were going to have a huge, record crop this year. I asked them if they were going to be able to move it, and they all assured me that they would.

Quite frankly, they have not delivered. I am bitterly disappointed that they have not delivered. The Minister of Agriculture is in the process right now of getting the real answers as to why they have not delivered and is strongly encouraging and pushing the railways, the grain companies, and the ports to turn that around.

One of our members earlier talked about the Port of Churchill and was complaining about what is happening there. The Port of Churchill is actually one of the bright spots. Grain movement last year in Churchill was 51% higher than the year before, so it is one of the bright spots, although grain movement has been increasing year over year. CN has been doing its job and CP is getting a lot better as well. There is some hope. The capability is there. The railways and the port authorities assured me that this can happen. CN, of course, is increasing capacity by getting more locomotives and by more double tracking, which is a key part of what makes things move faster. CP is starting to move in that direction too, but I would argue they are a lot slower.

What are the solutions? I wish I could say we could take that big stick that some of the members across the floor were talking about and have things fixed next week. Well, I agree that maybe a big stick is necessary, but I still do not think we are going to have things fixed by next week. It is going to take some time. My hope is that over this next month there can be huge, record rail movement and that we can at least see a light at the end of the tunnel and that the light will not be a locomotive coming through the tunnel with no grain on the train. Anyway, that is a little convoluted, but it is late at night.

• (2310)

My hope is that next month and the month after that, we will see record movement and catch up on some of what did not happen in December and January.

The railways and grain companies have not been performing, and that is not acceptable. What has our government done over the past few years to help prevent a situation like this? We cannot prevent it: we do not run the railways or the grain companies; we do not own the railways or the grain companies.

I believe a New Democratic member suggested earlier that the government should buy the railways and control them. To be fair, I might have misunderstood, but that is what it sounded like. I do not believe the NDP would propose that because it is outdated, something for the last century. I hope I did not misunderstand what the member was proposing.

That is clearly not the solution. The private sector is involved but the government does have a role to play. The federal government regulates the rail industry in this country, and rightfully so. That is the lever we have. That is the big stick.

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I hope by some strong negotiations, by some quick discovery as to what the real problems are, that we can move this along and be in a much better situation a month from now and in the month after that, so that farmers can at least go into seeding with a good handle on what will happen. They can then base their seeding decisions on that. Some people who do not understand the farming business at all have asked me why farmers would seed a crop if they are not going to make a profit next year and their bins are full.

I talk to constituents on a regular basis. The young fellow who phoned me tonight said that he had pencilled it out and is going to lose money next year on his grain. Does that mean he should not seed a crop? No, because he has to cash flow payments on his land and equipment, even if he does not seed a crop. These are huge payments, so he has to seed a crop. With the way things look now the best he can hope for is to minimize his losses. In business that is one of the toughest things to learn. It is tough to acknowledge a loss. Sometimes that loss can be minimized, but take it and get out the best way possible. In agriculture, who knows?

Next summer farmers can see what is happening around the world. Prices could be up again, but perhaps not like they were last year. Farmers could be in a much better situation, but that is unpredictable. I am not going to stand here tonight and say it is going to happen, but it is a possibility. In the meantime, we need the grain to move. We need more certainty so that farmers seeding a crop can at least know what they are facing. That is absolutely critical. That is why our government has been working so hard on this.

In June 2013 we passed the Fair Rail Freight Service Act. That legislation gives shippers the ability to deal with a railway company that is not performing. Am I going to stand here and say that it is working for grain farmers right now? No, I am not. It is not working the way it should be working and we have to fix that. Things are obviously not perfect, so we have to fix that.

It was a very important change that we made that has helped a lot of sectors, and it will help the grain sector in the future. But it does not solve this problem; it has not prevented this problem. We will see. Maybe grain companies can use this. Maybe farmers can use this to help deal with the situation, but I am not counting on that.

I see that my time is almost up. I have rambled a bit here tonight but I am summarizing some of the things that are important after having listened to the debate tonight. I do want to give farmers some hope. I do believe that a month from now, and two months from now, things will be better than they are now. That would be a positive situation for farmers.

I will be meeting with two groups of farmers on this exact issue this weekend. The meetings have grown from two to three farmers to more than 10 in each group. They are going to give me some advice, which I will take to the agriculture minister. My colleagues are doing the same. I look forward to some good things happening in the next few weeks.

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• (2315)

**Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague and friend across the way for his knowledgeable and heartfelt story about not just his farm and the young folks who work his farm but what farmers are feeling. He articulated extremely well what the effect is of what is happening out there.

A lot of statistics have been thrown about back and forth as to whether the rail companies did better in the first quarter of last year's harvest versus other times. There is a famous saying, "Figures don't lie, but liars figure". That is not about anyone here in particular who is suggesting that. It is simply an old saying that the Scots use in the sense that we can make a penny a threepence if we want. Let me say this. There were 7.4 million tonnes exported in the first quarter of this crop year. We look back five years; we kind of get stuck on the five-year piece. In 1994, 8.7 million tonnes were exported. That is a fact. Therefore, we can look back and say that they did better in that quarter versus some other times.

My colleague across the way talked about the stick, and I surely suggested the stick of regulation. Perhaps we should look at it. Let me point to a regulation that my colleagues down the way took away. At one point in time there was a \$720 million subsidy for the rail companies. When they did not behave themselves, the threat from the government was that it would take some of that away. That became a stick. It never took any of it away, but it was there. I see some heads nodding. It was under the Western Grain Transportation Act, which was in place between 1984 and 1995. The federal government subsidized private grain shipments by about \$720 million. If a government has that stick, that is the stick to use. However, the government does not have that stick anymore. Does it want a new one to play with? That is what I am suggesting.

**Mr. Leon Benoit:** Mr. Speaker, it is a legitimate question. I do not think that threats to the railways and the grain companies are the way to go. Right now we want to talk with them and find out what the real problem is, tell them we need quick action and give encouragement for now. However, if that does not work, then we will have to look at all options down the road.

Let us take it one step at a time. We all know it is much better to deal with things in a collaborative way. That is certainly the approach we have been taking. That does not mean we are not pushing, because we are.

• (2320)

**Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I too know that the remarks from the member from Vegreville were heartfelt, and I know the impact on the farming community. We may disagree on the Canadian Wheat Board. His government really killed the only entity that had the authority and the power to challenge the railways and the grain companies, which was the Canadian Wheat Board; but we will set that aside.

I want to ask the member if he would consider some of these solutions. I would like to outline about five of them. The member for Wascana named a few earlier.

One is certainly doing what can be done immediately, while there is still permafrost in the ground, to get grain movement to the Port of Churchill so it can go from there.

The member for Wascana mentioned making the definition of "service" explicit in the Fair Rail Freight Service Act and making penalties under the law and applying them against the railways, which would compensate for liquidated damages and pay them to the farmers rather than having a fine paid to the government.

I would also suggest that the government re-establish the B.C. Clearance Association, which the government killed in August of 2012. That association was responsible for coordinated ships coming into port six weeks in advance of the delivery of grain to port. That needs to be considered.

The government needs to learn from the logistics operations of the Canadian Wheat Board with respect to collecting the grain inland in a coordinated way and targeting it into the hulls of ships in Vancouver.

Last, would the government consider a grain transportation authority with some power to take charge and, if necessary, order certain things to happen with the grain companies and the railways?

Those are some proposals.

**Mr. Leon Benoit:** Mr. Speaker, I really appreciate the member giving some specific proposals. I do not feel I can stand here and give definite answers, but I will say this. It is very clear to me and my colleagues that we will consider anything that will fix this problem quickly now and help to keep things operating better in the years ahead, anything except putting in some kind of a structure like the Wheat Board, which interfered. It did not help.

The Wheat Board monopoly interfered in the movement of grain, there is no doubt about that. We could never find out who was causing the problem because we had another player in there and there was just one more person to point the finger of blame at others. It simply did not work, it did not help, and it will not help in the future.

I am hoping that the new Wheat Board, which is not a monopoly any more and competes with other grain companies, can become a big part of the solution over the next couple of years. I am somewhat confident, as is the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, from what I understand, that in fact it can. The Wheat Board is still there, a Wheat Board that will have to compete, but that will be an important part of the solution in the years ahead. So I am looking forward to that.

**Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to ask my colleague a question.

He is absolutely right. Many of our colleagues on this side of the House do represent farmers. In fact, I am privileged to represent a large agricultural area in the MD of Taber, the County of Newell, the County of Cypress, and the County of Forty Mile. There are farmers all throughout this area, and they know that we do in fact stand up for them.

Dennis Thiessen, director of Grain Growers of Canada, said this week:

We want to thank [the Minister of Agriculture] for continuing to recognize the rail capacity needs of grain farmers and the urgency of the current situation.... [The government's] recommendations make sense and they are needed at this time. Improving the frequency of reporting and better communication with industry, railways, government and farmers at the table is what is needed to get the grain moving.

My question for my colleague has to do with the Wheat Board. Liberal and NDP members are saying that the Wheat Board was so fantastic, yet farmers throughout my riding complained about the Wheat Board. They would take their grain and it might take them a couple of years to get their money. I wonder if my colleague could comment on that.

• (2325)

**Mr. Leon Benoit:** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that excellent question by my colleague, as he is certainly familiar with farming. He understands the industry and it is an extremely important question.

The reality is that this was a monopoly Wheat Board, and monopolies just do not work. I had professor in my third year of university teach me my first marketing course and explain why a monopoly would never work, and a government monopoly is the worst kind, which is what the Wheat Board was. It was put in place, for Pete's sake, under the War Measures Act to get cheap grain from farmers. It was not to get more money for farmers; it was to get cheap grain from farmers for the war effort in 1942-43. That is when it was put in place. Then they forgot to get rid of the monopoly. We had to do it, and we finally did.

However, the other thing the opposition members forget about when it comes to the Wheat Board is that farmers did not receive all of their money until more than a year after the time they shipped the grain. How does that help farmers? How is that going to help in a situation like this? It took up to a year and a half sometimes, from the time farmers shipped the grain until the time they get their final payment. That simply does not work.

Farmers still have the option. They can use the Wheat Board if they choose. It is their choice, nothing is forced on them. As I said, I am really starting to see a competitive Wheat Board as one that will help farmers in the years ahead.

**Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, here we are again debating one of the many issues in which the federal government has lacked leadership. The Conservatives try to make Canadians believe they are good economic managers but they have continued to sweep things under the carpet or turned a blind eye until a crisis occurs.

On this particular file, it is extremely disconcerting that the Conservative government eliminated the Canadian Wheat Board without ensuring that there would be an efficient plan for grain transportation. It did not make this a priority.

[*Translation*]

In the past, wheat farmers could depend on the Canadian Wheat Board to fight and to put pressure on the rail companies to get the grain to market. When the board had a monopoly on selling grain overseas, it also held considerable market influence. In a system that has to move around 400,000 grain cars in a year, there is absolutely no room for error or a shortfall when grain shipments are waiting at a

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cost of thousands of dollars a day, a cost that is ultimately paid by farmers through a lower price for their product.

• (2330)

[*English*]

The Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food commented last month that in his opinion the railways were doing an adequate job of moving crops to market. However, thousands of farmers, agricultural experts, and newspapers across western Canada are instead pointing to deep and fundamental flaws with the grain transportation system after the loss of the Canadian Wheat Board.

Now the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food is suggesting that farmers apply for advances and proposes a five-year investigation into the source of the problem. However, Canada's grain producers have bills and loans that are due now. The government must take action to get the railways moving.

The lack of leadership from the Conservative government with respect to grain farmers will mean that farmers will likely continue to see lengthy delays and backlogs in rail transport that will prevent thousands of western grain producers from getting their products to market. On this side of the House, we fully understand the frustration of western farmers.

It is not just the grain farmers who are frustrated with the government's lack of leadership when it comes to rail. Let us look at the frustration being felt by the residents of Oba, the tourist lodges, businesses, municipalities, and economic development offices, from Hearst to Sault Ste. Marie, because of the Conservative government's ill-thought-out decision to cut approximately \$2.2 million in subsidy to CN for passenger service on the ACR line. This is the Algoma Central Railroad line, which recently saw CN announce that without the subsidy it could not continue to maintain the current passenger service. CN told the people around January 24 that the service would end as of March 31. This has also raised concerns that the freight service may also be at risk.

Again, when we are looking at the wheat farmers, they are concerned about their freight services, as these people are as well.

Particular to the ACR passenger service, let us look at the short-sightedness of the Conservative government. It is obvious that, just like the wheat farmers, the government never considered the economic impact of its ill-thought-out decision, nor did it care to consider that it would basically leave the residents of Oba stranded. They only have access to train passenger rail or an industrial road, which at times is impassable and is around a two-hour drive to Hearst, if they can take it.

I forgot to mention that I will be splitting my time with the member for Vaudreuil—Soulanges.

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On that note, when it comes to rail transportation, the government's action on this file reminds me of a similar situation that occurred last year with respect to another mode of transportation, the Chi-Cheemaun Ferry on Manitoulin Island. It became a showdown between the government and the province. The impact on tourism was quite great for Manitoulin Island. Although the ferry ended up running, there was a delay in the tourist season for some of them. People cancelled because they could not rely on the ferry.

Now the government is choosing to attack the economy of northern Ontario again, especially the tourism economy, from Sault Ste. Marie to Wawa to Hearst.

I will read something from Tatnall Camp. I have had massive emails on this, and it is all about rail. Whether it is freight or passenger, I think it is important for us to raise the issues here in the House.

This is about Tatnall Camp. Cindy Lebrun and her family have written. They are very concerned, because March 31 is coming up very quickly. They are afraid that their tourist resort will be severely impacted, as 98% to 100% of their business depends on rail. They say:

The vast majority of our guests are railroad travellers that would never want to fly. 100% of our freight arrives by railroad.

She goes on to say:

If this train goes under, our business and all of our investments both past and present will be gone. To hear this news is completely devastating and lacks any Federal promise for our future and also the economic boost businesses like ours provide to the local communities nearby over the long term. My brother and I are one of only a handful of up and coming entrepreneurs under 35 years old in the community of Wawa, and we have a one of a kind train-in destination product that will continue to sell as long as the railroad is here.

Just as we are trying to entice young farmers to take on farming, these are young entrepreneurs who are looking at the tourist industry. They are relying on rail for their business, and all of a sudden, things are being ripped out from under them.

She goes on to say:

We are not the only train-in business on Oba Lake and there are numerous other interests who are served by this railroad (cottage owners, trappers, local citizens, other tourist Camps, canoeists)

Municipalities are also going to be affected. There is a big ripple effect. Let us not forget that some of the effect happening because of the removal of the subsidy by the government, which is a mere \$2.2 million, is also impacting the Conservative riding of Sault Ste. Marie. I hope that the government is going to look at the need to find that financing to give back to CN to put that passenger rail back in place so that it does not end.

The other thing is that the government actually invested in a revamp of passenger cars just recently. Now it is saying, "Sorry, no more cigars".

The letter goes on to say:

...we have an increased number of reserved and confirmed guests and this upcoming season is looking even better than the last...

Our reservations are completely in jeopardy as well as our ongoing marketing investments.

They have been marketing for quite some time. Given the fact that the dollar has now gone down to about 90¢, it was going to be a prime time for them.

I have another letter from Betty, who talks about the impact:

How many FEET of track would this maintain in southern Ontario [for this amount of money] and yet it was sufficient to maintain over 300 miles of track in the north.... Where was the consultation with those directly impacted by such a decision, before they potentially remove their business livelihood.

When we are looking at the particular situation we are talking about today, we see that the government has no national strategy when it comes to rail, whether it be freight or transportation, and none at all for the short term or long term, not for farmers, not for passengers, not for tourists, not for jobs, and not for the economy.

On that note, I just want to reiterate the request we are making. What we want is increased pressure on rail companies, including through the implementation and enforcement of rail performance standards. We want the government to ensure that export and vessel information is accessible to producers, that grain producers have fair access to rail infrastructure to move their product, and that a strategy for future rail service that accounts for sustained agricultural growth is developed. That is on the agricultural piece.

On the passenger side, I think the government has to be really serious to divest our economy for tourism, for municipalities, and for Canadians as a whole. I would ask that the government find the money to reinstate the ACR line as well.

● (2335)

**Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, that was a 10-minute speech, and nine minutes of it was not about farmers and moving grain. Amazing.

In that regard, I am wondering if my colleague on the opposite side would like to know that this is a debate on grain transportation. As a government, we have really moved forward the opportunity for farmers to have a marketing system they can manage themselves.

Wheat sales contribute \$9 billion to the economy and \$5 billion to export sales. We are moving to make sure that we open markets for western wheat and barley. The minister is currently working with the grain companies, the railways, and farm producers to try to find a solution to this problem. It is a major problem for the farmers in my area as well.

In that regard, I am wondering if the member opposite would make sure that she talks to her colleagues in the union at CN to make sure that they actually sign an agreement so that grain will, in fact, be shipped by CN without disruption to our farmers, who desperately need to get this grain to market.

**Mrs. Carol Hughes:** Mr. Speaker, there is a lot to his questions. I will start with the fact that whether it is farmers, passengers, or tourists, it is all the same. We need a government that can act.

Let us see how it acted. This is a government that wasted \$50 million building things like gazebos in a southern riding. This is a government that spent \$2 billion to host the G8 meetings in Toronto, when they it could have hosted it for a fraction of that cost in a more secure location. It is wasting tons of money and not doing enough to help farmers.



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I have an article that states:

Doug Chorney, president of Manitoba's Keystone Agricultural Producers, called on Ottawa to act sooner rather than later to fix the bottleneck. In a recent opinion piece, Chorney laid the blame on "abysmal service" by Canada's two major railways.

It says the duopoly Canadian Pacific Railway and Canadian National Railway have in the marketplace allows them to provide inadequate service without fear of consequences.

Again, we have a government that refuses to act.

On the CN piece with respect to the strike, I can say—

• (2340)

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** We are running out of time. The five minutes runs down pretty quickly.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Malpeque.

**Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I will take the opportunity, in asking a question, to outline another problem. The Conservative member said that the minister is trying to find solutions. However, I think it needs to be noted that the minister was in fact part of the catalyst for problem that we now have, by changing a system without implementing the required protections for producers and implementing some other authorities that could challenge both the railways and grain companies.

There is another problem that farmers have as well right now with grain companies. A lot of the comments tonight have been against the railways, but the fact of the matter is that the railways, in the port of Vancouver, now have to break up their cars and actually move the cars, whereas previously with the Wheat Board they were able to move a paper allocation between companies, which created greater efficiencies.

Does the member not see the way the grain companies are operating at port position as a problem as well, creating inefficiencies and complicating things even further for the railways?

**Mrs. Carol Hughes:** Mr. Speaker, a variety of questions were asked.

Together we can strengthen rail services so that producers and shippers can finally enjoy fair and reliable freight services. This is key to being able to resolve some of the issues.

Earlier I raised some points about other things we were asking for that would go a long way in helping to resolve this matter. I will go back to the CN strike. The Minister of Labour was quoted in the newspaper saying that the government was looking at back-to-work legislation and talked about the impact a strike would have on businesses. All I would say to the government is that \$2.2 million for the ACR line would go a long way in protecting all of the tourism business along that line in northern Ontario.

**Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it appears that I have the bedtime story slot in tonight's emergency debate, so I will get right to it.

There is a grain farmer out in Hanley, Saskatchewan, tonight who cannot get to sleep. Let us call this farmer Ryan. He is tossing and turning in his bed because he is worried that he is not going to get his commodity to market. He is not the only one. There are farmers all over Rosedale who are worrying tonight.

It has been a cold winter—colder than Mars, some say. All Canadians know that cold winters mean big heating bills, so Ryan is worried about the bottom line. He is not only worried about getting his crop to market; he is also worried about the bottom line. He is worried about the heating bill and all the bills he has to pay. He is worried about his credit cards.

Ryan and his wife and family have been on that land for several generations now, so they know that land. They invested their money this year to expand their grain drying capacity. They put the money in, and they expected and hoped that the system would function so they could get their product out and export it and get their money.

Ryan is in bed tonight. He knows that his three kids are growing up. They are getting older, and soon he will have to send them to the city to go to school, which will be more cost.

He is adding it all up in his head tonight, and he is thinking about all of these figures and the money going out and not coming in because he cannot move his product, because of the backlog. This backlog could turn a bumper year into a bust year for Ryan.

Members from the other side know that guys like Ryan are the backbone of the Prairies. They work to the advantage of Canada and they feed us. Ryan knows where the problems of the backlog started. He is the expert in all of this, not any of us in this room. It is Ryan who has been working the land from year to year and from generation to generation. His family knows.

To begin with, one of the problems is the monopoly of the railways and their willing partners in government to protect this monopoly and its privileges. That is part of the problem. About 30 years of deregulations have led to this logistical mess. No, we are not going to solve it in the next 24 or 48 hours, because it is the product of 30 years of deregulation.

Ryan has heard 30 years of promises. He has listened to his dad grumble about different governments, the Liberals, Reform, Alliance, and Conservatives. He has even heard his grandfathers grumble about the CCF. No one here has their hands clean. We are all responsible for taking care of Ryan and his family, and other families like his.

Ryan's MP in the 1990s was not even a farmer. He was a lawyer. When he sat in this place, he did not represent farmers' interests. He helped CN to privatize and was beaten in the 1997 election as a consequence. Ryan's dad hoped that the Reform Party of Canada would improve things. It is part of the reason that Ryan, when he got to voting age, voted Conservative. However, he now knows that these Conservatives are the same as the Liberals were 20 or 30 years ago. He sees his member sit behind the Prime Minister and he realizes that she is more of a banker than a farmer. Otherwise, she would do something for him. He knows that his member is a good person, but he is disappointed in her.

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Ryan believed that the government was going to take care of this problem with the Fair Rail Freight Service Act that was passed last year, but he now knows that it will not, because on TV tonight he heard Norm Hall, the president of the Agricultural Producers Association of Saskatchewan, say that the Fair Rail Freight Service Act passed by the Conservative government was not working and should be amended. That is what we said. That is what I said in this chamber, back in May. Ryan turned off the TV and he rubbed his forehead, which is what any Canadian would do when he realizes that he is hearing another broken promise.

I doubt that Ryan will be voting Conservative next time. Norm Hall has suggestions for amending this problem and solving it. He said that the incentives for grain companies and railways to voluntarily negotiate shipping service agreements have not worked and that we need to put responsibility on the railroads. If there is inaction, there need to be penalties. The government needs to penalize the railway companies when they are not responding to the incentives that the government has put forward.

A review of the legislation of the Fair Rail Freight Service Act is up for 2015. Another member in the House, from the government party, suggested that we move up the review to this year, perhaps, to see what the problems were. We said back in May that there were problems, and those suggestions fell on deaf ears.

● (2345)

It is good to hear that government members tonight are saying maybe we should move up this review process earlier than 2015. When CN privatized in 1995 through the Liberal government's CN Commercialization Act, it had clause 16 that stated more or less that the railway and other transportation works in Canada of CN and all corporations associated, any corporation that evolves out of CN, are declared to be "works for the general advantage of Canada".

Grain farmers like Ryan work for the general advantage of Canada as well, and it is time government stepped up to the plate for guys like him and not just for the shareholders of CN and CP. The government could provide low-interest cash advances so that farmers can meet their obligations to their financial institutions, because they are worrying. They have loans that are coming due that have to be paid. Their crops are not getting out, so they do not have the money to pay them to meet their obligations.

The government could also ask or work with the financial institutions to extend the terms of the loans of these farmers, to help them out, to give them a hand up, and to help them out in this crisis they are facing.

There are things the government could do and should do for western farmers. We are certainly hoping that the government is thinking about farmers like Ryan tonight, farmers in Saskatchewan, in Manitoba, in Alberta, and all over the country, who are tossing and turning because they cannot move their product to market.

We hear a lot from the governing party about the fact that they are speaking for real western Canadian families, but we know that they have to make that distinction between real western Canadian families and fake western Canadian families, because we know that in their caucus previously they have had members who say they live in Saskatchewan when they actually live in Toronto.

Throughout this emergency debate, I find it very rich and disappointing to hear criticism from the Conservative government that we do not actually understand the needs of western farmers because we do not live there, when they actually have members in their caucus who did not actually live on the Prairies but pretended that they did. We should not be pointing fingers.

The other thing that bothered me tonight about the governing party is that it blames the backlog on unions. That is just preposterous. Any western Canadian farmer knows that the backlog was not created by the teamsters. They know that, so it is ridiculous to divide workers and farmers in this country when we know that we have to work together to solve these problems. Western farmers do not want to hear us having these divisive little fights about unions and farmers. They want to see us work together to solve these problems.

I have not heard a lot of solutions. I did try to help the government on May 29. I spoke on the Fair Rail Freight Service Act, and I put forward the things that the Western Canadian Shippers' Coalition wanted in terms of service agreements. What I was given in terms of an answer was that the government could not actually implement these because they would be a nuisance to the railway companies and it had to be somewhat fair.

Now we are seeing the effects of not including the Western Canadian Shippers' Coalition's suggestions in that legislation. Farming organizations are saying we have to put those amendments in. The legislation is already passed. I have heard government members saying, yes, maybe we do have to amend this, maybe we do have to review it earlier. If we had done that back in May, maybe we would have avoided these problems.

I am not saying the Wheat Board was God's greatest gift to western farmers, but when we make a radical change and we eliminate something, we have to actually plan what the out-rolling of production will be after that body is eliminated. We always talk about how the government is incrementalist, but when it came to eliminating the single desk, it was not incrementalist at all. It made a radical move, it did not plan properly, and it did not listen to western farmers and their suggestions on the problems that would come out of it.

During the Keystone Agricultural Producers convention in Winnipeg in January 2012, farmers talked about all these problems. These were farmers from the Prairies getting together and talking about what the problems of eliminating the single desk would be. They talked about it. I am sure the government heard them. I do not know if it listened properly. However, it did not take into account those suggestions when it came to drafting its legislation, and here we are with a crisis.

● (2350)

We have to find solutions for these farmers, for guys like Ryan, who cannot sleep tonight.

**Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the gentleman across the floor for his presentation. He did ask some important questions and made some important comments about how farmers, if they cannot move their grain, are going to manage repaying loans from this crop, from seeding this crop over the past few months, and then moving into buying inputs for this next crop. They are valid questions.

I do know that our government has talked to the farm credit corporation and it has indicated it is going to work with farmers as much as it can on this.

I do know that banks understand very well that they are going to have to be patient with repayments, and they will work with farmers on this. They know it is not to their advantage to start pressuring farmers at this point. It does not make any sense. We have been encouraged by that.

We do know that only 40% of the farmers have taken advantage of the cash advance that is available to them. It is maybe slightly more difficult than it has been in the past to apply, but it is not particularly difficult. Once a person has applied once, it is certainly easier the next time. The reality is that this cash is available to the 60% of the farmers who have not used it. I think it is up to \$400,000 a year maximum.

However, in the past, governments have delayed that repayment. I believe our government even delayed the repayment requirement. I am not saying we will do that. We are willing to look at anything that has to be done to help farmers through this.

• (2355)

**Mr. Jamie Nicholls:** Mr. Speaker, it is good to hear from the member that there are solutions out there. I would urge farmers who are going through this difficulty to look at the cash advance program that exists for them.

Certainly, I know that a lot of farmers in western Canada are going to have cash flow problems, so they are going to need the government to step up and tell them that this program exists. If the farmers do not know about it, we also have to ask the question as to why. Has the government reduced its service-giving capacity in this way? Has it reduced points of service for farmers? Why do they not know about it?

It is also heartening to hear that the member at least understands what farmers are going through and how banks have to understand that as well.

**Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, at the end of four and a half hours of debate, I wonder if we could agree that one thing we need to do is amend the level of service legislation to provide for liquidated damages payable directly to farmers when railways fail to deliver on their service level commitments.

Second, the government needs to assist the railways to ensure they have adequate locomotive power and railway rolling stock and trained personnel to move the maximum value.

Third, could we agree that we need full transparency for the total volumes of grain booked to be shipped through west coast ports, transparency about the timeframes for those shipments, and the number of marine vessels that have been ordered to take delivery?

*S. O. 52*

Could we agree that we need to provide some sensible, business-like coordination throughout the system to replace the kind of chaos we have seen over the last six to eight months?

Could we agree that the government should table a plan to maximize throughput through Vancouver, Prince Rupert, and especially Churchill, while the permafrost is in place, and also south, through U.S. facilities, if that is necessary?

Could we agree at the end of this discussion that those are very simple, practical, and reasonable steps that need to be taken to alleviate the pressure in the system at the earliest possible moment? We have to act as a Parliament, long before any five-year study that would put this solution off into never-never land. The problem is now. The crisis is now. The government needs to move now, not five years from now.

**Mr. Jamie Nicholls:** Mr. Speaker, we would certainly agree that the time to act is now. There is no time to wait.

In terms of the member's proposals, I would forward them to our excellent expert on these matters, our agriculture critic, the member for Welland.

We also asked for many changes to the Fair Rail Freight Service Act. I could outline those again, but anyone could find them in my statements in the May 29, 2013 *Hansard*.

Certainly, we have to act now. I think everyone in this chamber tonight could agree that this is an urgent situation. Our farmers are great contributors to our economy. We have to step up to the plate to help them, one way or another.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** We have about a minute and a half left in the time allocated for tonight's debate.

I will recognize the hon. member for Medicine Hat.

**Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to stand tonight, even if only for a minute and a half, to support our government's long-standing and strong record of support for Canadian grain farmers and the entire agricultural sector.

Our government's top priority remains the economy, and we recognize that the grain sector plays a big part in that whole aspect. We understand farmers' frustration, because we hear it day and day out, with the railway system and the grain not moving fast enough.

When I previously spoke, I said that industry has applauded our assistance in trying to move this forward. Dennis Thiessen, director of the Grain Growers of Canada, said this week:

We want to thank [the Minister of Agriculture] for continuing to recognize the rail capacity needs of grain farmers and the urgency of the current situation.... [The government's] recommendations make sense and they are needed at this time. Improving the frequency of reporting and better communications with industry, railways, government and farmers at the table is what is needed to get the grain moving.

We have been working extremely hard in terms of the Wheat Board, trying to get new breeding clusters in place. There are so many things that we are doing that I do not have enough time to touch on them all.

Thank you for the opportunity, Mr. Speaker.

*S. O. 52*

• (2400)

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton):** It being 12 midnight,  
I declare the motion carried.

Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until later this day at 10  
a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 12 a.m.)

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