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(HANSARD)

Wednesday, April 2, 2014

—

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, April 2, 2014

The House met at 2 p.m.

Prayers

• (1405)

[English]

The Speaker: It being Wednesday, we will have the singing of our national anthem, led by the hon. member for Louis-Saint-Laurent.

[Members sang the national anthem]

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my privilege to rise today to celebrate the signing of the Canada-Korea Free Trade Agreement. I am pleased to say that this agreement will benefit Canadians across the country, and the residents of Niagara West—Glanbrook in particular.

Niagara is world famous for our wines and spirits and is home to many farms and orchards. Among its many other benefits, this deal eliminates the 15% tariff on ice wine, the 20% tariff on whiskey, and tariffs on other agricultural products. I am expecting good things for Niagara farmers, vintners, and growers in the years to come.

Speaking of Canadian whiskey, I would like to congratulate Forty Creek Distillery in Grimsby on its acquisition by Gruppo Campari earlier this year. Canadian whiskey is growing in foreign markets, and this sale goes to show international recognition of the quality and appeal of Niagara spirits.

I want to wish John Hall and all the others at Forty Creek all the best.

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CANADIAN WOMEN'S HOCKEY TRIBUTE

Mr. Dan Harris (Scarborough Southwest, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to invite all Scarberians to a very special event this Saturday to congratulate and honour our homegrown Olympic hero, Natalie Spooner. Natalie was a key member of our women's hockey team in Sochi, where she and her teammates made us all so proud,

not only winning the gold medal but displaying their tenacity, grit, and determination in staging one of the greatest comebacks in Olympic history. All of Scarborough is so proud of Natalie, and I am honoured to be co-hosting a very special tribute this Saturday, April 5, at Scarborough Village Arena. I encourage everyone to join us at noon to celebrate with Natalie.

The day will be capped off when Natalie joins us for a free family skate from 1 to 3 p.m. We are partnered with 41 and 43 divisions of the Toronto police and their outstanding skate donation program. I ask everyone to come on down and donate their old skates so that we can make sure that every kid who joins us can lace up skates and show Natalie how we are all Scarborough proud.

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CURLING CHAMPIONS

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker curling has been part of our culture for more than a century and is a sport that brings communities together.

I want to congratulate Lois Fowler, Maureen Bonar, Cathy Gauthier, Allyson Stewart, and coach Brian Fowler on winning the Canadian senior women's curling championship this past weekend. All of Manitoba is proud of Lois and her team. She has long yearned for a national championship, and I know that she could feel the entire province cheering her on. Lois and her team have once again shown the country that Manitobans are not to be taken lightly when it comes to curling. We wish them the best of luck as they represent our nation at the senior curling championships in 2015.

I would also like to congratulate Kelly Robertson's Neepawa-based team of Doug Armour, Peter Prokopowich, and Bob Scales on being silver finalists at the senior men's championship as well.

I will take the risk of saying that southwestern Manitoba has more curlers per capita than any other region in Canada.

*Statements by Members***WORLD AUTISM AWARENESS DAY**

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today is World Autism Awareness Day, and the on behalf of the Liberal caucus, I rise to help elevate the conversation, and the education, on developmental disorders. We need to show our solidarity with people with autism spectrum disorder and help those with ASD truly realize their full potential. However, today is intended to do more than just raise awareness; it is a call to arms.

Reports show a 30% jump among eight-year-olds diagnosed with ASD, which is the equivalent of one in every 68 children. Put another way, ASD touches us all. More must be done to give those afflicted, their parents, caregivers, and professionals the support and resources needed to tackle autism. It costs a family an average of \$60,000 a year to care for a child with autism. However, when we consider the lost potential caused by inaction, it costs Canada far more.

Today is World Autism Awareness Day, and my call to government is this: Let us make 2014 the year we unveil a national strategy on autism.

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ELMIRA MAPLE SYRUP FESTIVAL

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this weekend, tens of thousands of visitors will fill the town of Elmira for the annual Elmira Maple Syrup Festival, the largest festival of its kind in the world. Last year, 75,000 people descended on this town of less than 10,000 to enjoy sweets, games, and fun in all forms, raising much-needed funds for not-for-profits and charities that support our community.

From the Waterloo Region Suicide Prevention Council to the Women's Crisis Services of Waterloo Region, the local library branch, and the local swim team, the Elmira Aquaducks, the Elmira Maple Syrup Festival supports almost 30 groups that strengthen our quality of life.

This year we expect a great turnout for the festival's 50th anniversary. Fifty years ago, organizers hoped that 2,500 would attend their first effort. They were nearly overwhelmed when 10,000 people showed up. Fifty years ago, they hoped for 2,500 people to attend; today they depend on 2,000 volunteers to run the festival.

This Saturday, come to Elmira, enjoy the fun, and enjoy the games. Since April is Dental Health Month, anyone enjoying the sweets should remember to brush.

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● (1410)

[*Translation*]**WORLD AUTISM AWARENESS DAY**

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today is World Autism Awareness Day. Autism spectrum disorders occur in about one in 200 people in Canada.

[*English*]

As UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon said for this year's event, "World Autism Awareness Day is about more than generating

understanding; it is a call to action". This is a call New Democrats take very seriously.

[*Translation*]

For that reason, I am proud of the work my colleague from Sudbury has done to introduce two bills to help those living with autism spectrum disorders.

The first bill would amend the Canada Health Act to make applied behavioural analysis and intensive behavioural intervention defined as medically necessary for persons living with autism spectrum disorders.

The second bill would create a national autism strategy to ensure optimal care for those living with autism, no matter which part of Canada they live in.

I hope that World Autism Awareness Day will help Canadians better understand this issue and why we need to offer better support to those affected and their families.

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[*English*]**EGYPT**

Hon. Deepak Obhrai (Calgary East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on March 24, the criminal court in Minya, Egypt sentenced more than 529 people to death. It was not a fair trial. The lawyers of the defendants were denied time to prepare their cases, and the defendants were denied the right to be heard.

Our government is concerned about the legal process by which large numbers of death sentences were imposed on members of the Muslim Brotherhood. We urge Egyptian officials to adhere to their international legal obligations and to a transparent legal process.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs has personally raised this issue with the Egyptian ambassador. Canada will continue to engage the Egyptian government and to support its ongoing efforts to fully implement the democratic road map.

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LONDON RUN FOR OVARIAN CANCER

Mrs. Susan Truppe (London North Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, ovarian cancer is a serious disease with no early detection test. Most women are unfortunately diagnosed in the later stages of the disease, and 60% of them will not survive past four years. Every year, 2,500 Canadian women will be diagnosed with ovarian cancer, and 1,500 women will die from this horrible disease.

This Mother's Day, May 11, Londoners will come together to participate in the 12th annual Run for Ovarian Cancer to raise funds for research. The run was an idea born of the shock of realizing how little most women know about the signs and symptoms of this disease.

Last year, thanks to participants and sponsors from across our community, the run raised over \$208,000 for LHSC. It has raised nearly \$1.2 million to date. Just before Christmas, the chairman of the run, Jim Olsen, lost his wife Mary to ovarian cancer. Right to the end, she was one of the most effective fundraisers for the run. My condolences go out to the family.

On behalf of all members of this House, I salute the more than 125 volunteers with the London Run for Ovarian Cancer and encourage Londoners to participate. Let us give cancer the boot.

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[Translation]

WEARING TURBANS ON SOCCER FIELDS

Mr. Hoang Mai (Brossard—La Prairie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was honoured to give members of FC Brossard U15 AA and the Brossard soccer association certificates to congratulate them on their exceptional gesture.

In 2013, the Quebec soccer federation banned turbans for safety reasons. In a show of solidarity, and even though there were no Sikh players on the team, FC Brossard players decided to play a match wearing orange turbans.

[English]

Just a few days later, FIFA issued the following statement: “(FIFA) authorizes the [Canadian Soccer Association] to permit all players to wear head covers...in all areas and on all levels of the Canadian football community”.

[Translation]

I would like to thank Ihab Laheta, the coach, Bruno Scarsini, the assistant coach, Éric Giguère, the manager, the parents and all of the players for taking a stand against injustice.

You stood up for human rights. Thanks to you, our society is more just and tolerant. Thank you.

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DAFFODIL MONTH

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as it does every year, the Canadian Cancer Society is appealing to everyone to help it fulfill its mission: the eradication of cancer and the enhancement of the quality of life of people living with cancer.

Donations received in April, Daffodil Month, will help the society fund excellent cancer research, provide information and deliver programs and services to prevent cancer and to support people living with cancer and their families and caregivers, and advocate on behalf of Canadians on important health and cancer issues.

Statements by Members

I would also like to congratulate the society on its 75th anniversary. The society has been working in partnership with the federal Department of National Health and Welfare since 1947.

I encourage everyone to buy a daffodil or make a donation today by visiting the society's website, www.cancer.ca.

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● (1415)

INVISIBLE WORK

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday was Invisible Work Day, and today I am pleased to speak to Motion No. 500, which seeks to recognize the contribution of unpaid work.

Caregivers, parents who care for their children at home and community volunteers are just a few examples of people who do invisible work.

Motion No. 500 calls on the federal government to reinstate the mandatory long form census and include questions on invisible work, to ask Statistics Canada to hold a public consultation, and to take measures to advance the equality of people who do invisible work and improve their economic security.

I want to thank the many organizations in Laval that can attest to the importance of invisible work in our community, including the TCLCF, AFEAS, Mieux-naître de Laval, the Centre des femmes dynamiques de Laval, the Auteuil family outreach centre, and Appui pour les proches aidants in Laval.

Invisible work is essential to all our communities, and it is high time that the Conservative government recognized its valuable contribution to our society.

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[English]

NATURAL RESOURCES

Hon. Rob Merrifield (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week, our government approved four long-term liquefied natural gas export licenses. These approvals are important to Canada's economy as we seek to diversify our energy markets. Canada, by the way, is the fifth largest producer of natural gas in the world.

The International Energy Agency predicts that the world's energy demands will increase some 33% between now and the year 2035. This is great news for all Canadians, as the Conference Board of Canada estimates that the natural gas sector has the potential to create 131,000 new jobs every year between 2012 and 2035 across Canada. This is especially good news for ridings such as Yellowhead, as we predict tremendous growth in our economy due to the opening up of the Duvernay gas field.

I am proud of our government's leadership on responsible resource development as we work to protect the environment and grow the environment from coast to coast to coast.

*Oral Questions***CANADA POST**

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, across the country, Canadians are reeling in the wake of Canada Post's five-point action plan to make it more difficult to get their mail, but in Guelph, the changes appear to have come early.

We know that the end of door-to-door mail delivery, to be phased out gradually over the next couple of years, will have a drastic impact on business and, particularly, vulnerable populations like seniors and those with disabilities. Still, before these changes even take place in Guelph, residents went weeks this winter without any mail delivery to homes or businesses. Many tried to access superboxes that were so badly covered in snow that they could not get to them.

Seniors already concerned about the icy walk to their community box now have the additional worry of whether they will even be able to open their mail box once they get there.

This breakdown in the wake of the decision to stop home delivery cannot continue. Canada Post and this government must do something to reassure businesses and residents of Guelph and across Canada that their mail service is consistent and safe.

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FIREARMS

Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our Conservative government has always stood up for law-abiding hunters, farmers, and sport shooters. Let us look at our record. We eliminated the useless Liberal gun show regulations. We have not allowed the UN firearms marking regulations to come into force. We brought common sense to the Explosives Act regulations. Finally, let us not forget that we ended the wasteful and ineffective long-gun registry.

There is more to do. The Minister of Public Safety committed to bringing forward measures to tackle the RCMP's arbitrary ability to reclassify and confiscate private property of law-abiding Canadians.

However, it appears not all parties share this approach. The member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca said:

This is an example of exactly what we said when the gun registry was being eliminated: that it would create obstacles to the police in doing the work they need to do to protect public safety.

This is another clear example that the NDP leader would bring back the long gun registry, should he get the chance. That is why Canadian gun owners know that the Conservative Party will stand up for their rights.

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ETHICS

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this morning, the Prime Minister's Office leaked that it was demanding an investigation into the behaviour of the member for Mississauga—Brampton South. After being unaware last week when the NDP first raised this issue, now the Prime Minister is aware of these serious allegations being levelled by party members.

Canadians are left wondering. Why is the Prime Minister demanding this investigation but sees no need at all to investigate

Senator Irving Gerstein's use of Conservative Party funds to pay off Mike Duffy? While the Prime Minister has ordered an inquiry into this misuse of the Conservative Party's infamous database, he has never once demanded an investigation into the misuse of the very same database for deceptive voter suppression calls during the last election.

I am sure that Conservative members are happy to see an investigation into the trampling of their democratic rights, but when will Conservatives finally come clean about trampling on the democratic rights of all Canadians?

* * *

● (1420)

WORLD AUTISM AWARENESS DAY

Hon. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today is World Autism Awareness Day, and now 16 years since my big little boy Jaden was diagnosed with autism.

Having turned 18 in November, Jaden the adult is very much like the Jaden we have known from childhood. Nonverbal and almost inconceivably innocent, for those who do not know him, Jaden is easy to underestimate. Yet, for those who invest the time to get to know him, Jaden's upside is immeasurable.

He is the friend who always believes the best about you, the worker who never wants his shift to end, and the student who makes all of the others better people. He is the brother who loves his sister and is not afraid to show it, and the son who every single day reminds his parents that there is incredible joy to be discovered in even life's most difficult circumstances.

Make no mistake; autism comes with profound challenges for individuals and families, too many to articulate in just 60 seconds, but as we earnestly work to address those challenges, our country will unearth a treasure of previously undiscovered unique talents and abilities. We just need to take the time to look for them.

ORAL QUESTIONS*[English]***AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD**

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, western grain producers are losing an incredible \$140 million a week because of a rail transportation crisis that the Conservatives have allowed to fester for months now. Yet the bill introduced by the Minister of Transport provides absolutely no compensation for farmers who have suffered heavy losses.

When is the Prime Minister going to compensate western farmers for the losses that they continue to incur?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is a tremendous strain on the grain transportation system due to the unprecedentedly large crop this year. That is why the government has taken a number of steps, including orders to increase the volumes that are being shipped.

We will continue to work with producers on this matter.

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ELECTIONS CANADA

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last night the Commissioner of Elections Canada told the House that some election fraud investigations would have to be scrapped if the Conservatives' unfair elections act were ever passed, and we know which ones they are. There is the David Del Mastro case, the robocall voter suppression fraud, and investigations against the Conservative Party where Conservative witnesses have refused to co-operate.

Why is the Prime Minister shutting down Elections Canada investigations into Conservative electoral fraud?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, exactly the opposite is true. The bill would give more independence and greater power to the commissioner. Obviously, all matters, including the various irregularities that we have seen under the NDP, will be investigated.

What does not fall under Elections Canada, but does fall under the House, is to investigate the wrong use of parliamentary monies by the NDP for a bunch of party offices across the country. That money should be returned to taxpayers.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): It would be an honour for me, Mr. Speaker, to appear before that committee. Would the Prime Minister do the same to explain about his guests on the Challenger?

Elections Canada has been investigating Conservative voter suppression fraud for over two years. When it was Dimitri Soudas being investigated for using the Conservative database for his fiancée, the investigation took two days.

Why will the Prime Minister not give Elections Canada the power it needs to also compel Conservative campaign operatives to co-operate in its investigation? Is it because it works?

• (1425)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the commission will have all normal investigative powers.

We are not asking the leader of the NDP to try to explain away this misuse of parliamentary funds. What we are asking him to do is pay it back. Those parliamentary funds are not supposed to be used to run party offices. He should take those people off the payroll and pay back the taxpayers of Canada the money that they are owed.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): There is an old proverb, Mr. Speaker, "be careful what you wish for".

[*Translation*]

Let us make a comparison. It takes the Prime Minister two days to find out that Dimitri Soudas unlawfully used the Conservative

database, but after two years we still do not know who committed the greatest electoral fraud in the history of Canada.

Why will the Prime Minister not give Elections Canada the power it needs to investigate fraud? Is it because he is afraid it will work?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the commission will have all normal powers to deal with such situations.

Since we are talking about party matters, I note with interest that the NDP is making inappropriate use of parliamentary funds to run party offices elsewhere in the country. When will the leader of the NDP pay back taxpayers for using public funds?

* * *

[*English*]

ETHICS

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last week it was the Conservative-Liberal alliance party trying to say that the NDP had done something wrong with its mailings in Bourassa. Elections Canada said the NDP never did a thing wrong.

Let them keep throwing that around. Canadians understand what it means. We are doing well and Canadians want the NDP in power in 2015.

Has the Prime Minister asked the member for Mississauga—Brampton South to step down?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the New Democrats obviously think Canadians are foolish. They think Canadians cannot understand that it is not a proper use of parliamentary funds to run a party office in a province where they do not even have a single parliamentarian. That is one of the many reasons why Canadians understand one does not have to have ever been in power to be a hypocrite that big.

The Speaker: Order, please. The Prime Minister knows that word is an unparliamentary word.

The hon. member for Papineau.

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FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, can the Prime Minister please provide an update to the House on Canada's work with our allies in response to the situation in Ukraine? Specifically, can he provide any details on the Canadian election observer mission: who will be on it and the work that will be done?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the leader of the Liberal Party will know that I met with my G7 counterparts in Europe last week, where we are not just moving forward on an existing body of sanctions but looking at other options to deal with this particular crisis. The Minister of Foreign Affairs has been in Europe this week, talking to our NATO allies about further coordinated action on that front in terms of the electoral mission. Obviously, it is the government's intent to provide a large electoral mission, and I would be pleased to update the House at the appropriate time.

I thank the leaders of the Liberal Party and the NDP for their support on this matter.

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THE ECONOMY

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, CIBC estimates that today 35-year-olds put aside less than half the retirement savings that their parents did. The average consumer has a record \$28,000 in non-mortgage debt: in credit cards, unsecured credit lines, and student debt. Does the Prime Minister agree with his Minister of Employment and Social Development that the economic concerns of the middle class are “a myth”?

• (1430)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, like all Canadians, I am scratching my head about what the leader of the Liberal Party means by “middle class”. Yesterday, apparently a bank executive could be a member of the middle class, but today the middle class means someone who lives pay cheque to pay cheque. So that would exclude people of modest incomes who have saved something, like pensioners who are not living from pay cheque to pay cheque; and it would include people who have a very affluent lifestyle and spend all their money even though they get a very large pay cheque. So I have no idea what the leader of the Liberal Party is talking about, and I suspect he does not either.

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the Prime Minister chose to spend more time with middle class Canadians, he would not only know who they were—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. Even for a Wednesday this is more than usual. The hon. member for Papineau has the floor. I had a great deal of difficulty listening to the question, so I will give him the floor back, and I will ask members to come to order.

The hon. member for Papineau.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, the government is putting the brakes on economic growth with infrastructure funding cuts, gutting old age security for seniors and keeping payroll taxes artificially high. Why is the government making it harder for the middle class to make ends meet?

[*English*]

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what is readily apparent is, if the leader of the Liberal Party were with middle class Canadians, he would not actually know whether they were middle class or not.

[*Translation*]

In answer to the question, we have seen that Canada had the largest increase in income of major developed countries. As for the debt issue, interest rates are very low. Obviously, we encourage prudence with such economic measures.

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DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives' electoral “deform” will undermine the independence of the Commissioner of Canada Elections and will not give him sharper teeth or a longer reach, despite what the minister claims.

In fact, people with information relevant to his investigations will still be able to refuse to talk to him, as we saw with the robocall case.

Why deny the Commissioner of Canada Elections the power to compel witnesses?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the commissioner has powers similar to those of a police officer to conduct investigations. These investigators and the subjects of their investigations have the same type of relationship as police officers and the subjects of their investigations. If it works for police officers who are investigating very serious and complex crimes, it should work for the commissioner as well.

[*English*]

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, after saying on Sunday that it was too early to consider amendments to this bill, the Minister of State for Democratic Reform is now saying that he is willing to consider changes. If the minister is really now willing to make changes to restore vouching, will he extend this new-found openness to other sections of the bill?

Will he consider changing the bill to require that robocall firms retain records for more than just one year?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member's question is false. We believe that Canadians should present identification when they show up to vote, and I think most Canadians would agree with us on that point. People have to use identification when they do pretty much anything in our society, and it is fair to expect that be provided when they show up to cast a ballot.

As for our robocall registry, the first of its kind in Canada, it would allow a new tool to prevent deceptive rogue calls, and I would ask the NDP to finally support it.

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I asked if he was willing to make changes to the bill and he replied that the question was false, so the minister is clear as mud, as usual. I guess it is too hard for him to admit his mistakes during question period.

Oral Questions

The elections commissioner said that new rules will hurt current ongoing investigations, and these include voter suppression investigations from the 2011 election that were traced back to the Conservative Party.

Why is the minister using this bill to stop current investigations into the Conservative Party of Canada?

• (1435)

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the question again is false. Not only will all existing investigations be grandfathered over when the commissioner becomes independent, so too will the commissioner. He will be grandfathered over, and he will continue to do his job with the same staff. The only difference is that he will be able to make his own staffing decisions, direct his own investigations, and he cannot be fired for a period of seven years, which will be fixed in the legislation.

In addition to that, there are new powers for the commissioner, and there are new offences for anyone who attempts to obstruct his investigations. That is the fair elections act. It is fair, and Canadians support it.

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, nothing is being fixed here, because yesterday we learned about massive loopholes when it comes to keeping records on calls that are made by live volunteers. Now we learn that the bill could shut down ongoing investigations into Conservative wrongdoing, so it is just not good enough for the minister to say that he might be open to some suggestions. The bill is fundamentally flawed.

Will he now withdraw it? Will he work with us on a bill that actually combats fraud, not one designed to give his party an unfair advantage?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Mr. Speaker, we will continue to move forward with the fair elections act. It is reasonable, it is common sense, and we support it. We will continue to move forward with it.

If she is asking me whether I am going to support the NDP's idea to force volunteers who are making daily calls out of campaign offices—most of them seniors, stay-at-home moms, and other local citizens who are taking part in democracy—to register with a national telecommunications regulator, the answer is absolutely not. We will never bury Canadians in that kind of red tape.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Commissioner of Canada Elections believes that the Conservatives' electoral “deform” is not going in the right direction. Without the power to compel witnesses, his investigations will get bogged down and continue to fail as a result of a lack of co-operation from witnesses.

The commissioner indicated that the Competition Bureau and elections investigators in Quebec, Ontario, Alberta and Manitoba have the authority to compel witnesses.

Why are the Conservatives content with an arbitrator whose hands are tied? When will they stop protecting the interests of those who are trying to circumvent the Canada Elections Act?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the fair elections act will allow the commissioner to keep all the powers that he has already and will give him more. A penalty will be imposed on anyone who tries to impede an investigation. No such penalties currently exist. There will also be a robocall registry, which will help in future investigations. Many penalties that do not currently exist will be included in the Canada Elections Act when this bill is passed. It is time for the NDP to support this bill.

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of State for Democratic Reform is all alone in his corner telling us that he is right. I am sorry, but no one, including the commissioner, believes him.

An American election studies expert believes that the Conservatives stole the Republican playbook when developing their reform.

According to Richard Hassen, the Conservatives are trying to make it more difficult for vulnerable members of society to vote because those individuals are more hostile toward Conservative values.

Why does the minister not simply admit that he is using the electoral “deform” to disenfranchise hundreds of thousands of people who are the victims of Conservative policies?

[*English*]

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member demonstrates that she has absolutely no knowledge of voter identification laws south of the border.

It is regrettable that she is trying to Americanize the debate when there is absolutely no comparison between American and Canadian voter ID laws. For example, many American states require photo ID when someone casts a ballot. That is not required in Canada. It is an option, but there are 39 options, the vast majority of which do not include a photo and the vast majority of which are not even government issued.

We have many options to allow people to identify themselves. It is reasonable to expect that they do so when they vote.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP): Mr. Speaker, perhaps the minister should tell that to the experts in the United States and throughout the world who are opposed to his reform.

Another American elections expert, Élisabeth Vallet, says that the Conservative movement likes to focus on cases of fraud and is feeding conspiracy theories in order to disenfranchise society's most vulnerable people and thereby serve its own partisan interests. Bill C-23 follows squarely in the Conservative's pattern of prejudice and partisan interests.

Will the minister withdraw his bill and agree to reopen discussions and start over?

Oral Questions

●(1440)

[English]

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, the so-called experts upon which the member is relying have no knowledge whatsoever of Canadian identification laws.

In this country we do not require photo ID. We require that people choose from among 39 different options that include, for example, a utility bill or an attestation from a soup kitchen, a homeless shelter, or a student residence.

There are 39 different options on which Canadians can rely. That is not the case in most U.S. states. There is absolutely no comparison between the rules south and north of the border. The member should do her homework before asking a question.

Mr. Craig Scott (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last night former elections commissioner Corbett said that moving electoral investigations into public prosecutions would actually hurt electoral oversight.

It would remove the commissioner's staff from Elections Canada, which is a vital centre of expertise. It would mean the commissioner's staff would no longer work symbiotically with Elections Canada to troubleshoot during election periods.

The minister could have avoided this mess if only he had consulted. Why did he not consult with former commissioners and the current commissioner?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Mr. Speaker, obviously the commissioner speaks for the CEO. The CEO hires him, can fire him, chooses his staff, sets his budget, and in law, “directs” his investigations.

That is the current situation. That is not independence. Independence means that one cannot be fired, that one chooses one's own staff, and that one direct one's own investigations, and that is exactly the power that the fair elections act would provide.

Mr. Craig Scott (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, section 509 of the act says that the commissioner “...may be removed by the Director of Public Prosecutions for cause”. He cannot not be fired.

It is not only elections commissioners who are concerned by the bill; it is the commissioner for Ontario as well. He is concerned about voter information cards. The minister would have known this if only he had consulted.

Why did he not even bother consulting provincial elections officials who also have expertise in this area?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the troubles with the voter information card are patently evident, and the member can find out about them on Elections Canada's own website. The agency admits that in the last election there were errors in one in six cards. It claims now that it has improved it so that there is an error in one in 12 cards. That leaves millions of people with faulty information on their cards. There are regular reports of people receiving multiple cards and using them to vote multiple times. That, too, can be found on the Elections Canada

website. If the member is so interested in consultation, I think he should consult with the facts.

* * *

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the grain handling and transportation system is seriously broken. Testimony at the agriculture committee is painful. The railways, grain companies, shippers, and farmers are at each other's throats. There is no planning. There is no transparency, no coordination, and no accountability.

The system was designed by the current government; it is its responsibility, and this year it is an \$8-billion disaster. To help clear the air and follow the money, will the government agree to a full cost reviewing system to find out who is performing and who is not?

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the member were paying attention at those committee meetings, he would know that all sectors, all segments of the supply chain, are working together to make sure that in that supply chain all links are strengthened.

The bill we are putting forward certainly does that, including giving Mark Hemmes, of Quorum, more powers to look at quarter-by-quarter specificity, the capacities of those corridors, as well as making sure there is information, which is not available now, as to the export value and the purchase value of the grain on the Prairies. All of that is within the regulatory powers that will be under this legislation.

* * *

*[Translation]***THE ENVIRONMENT**

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in light of the UN report, which again sounds the alarm about the urgent need to take action to combat climate change, and in light of the unequivocal recommendation that governments the world over immediately invest more in adaptation infrastructure, what new adaptation projects has the government approved lately?

Will projects of this kind have to wait, now that the budgets for new infrastructure programs have been drastically slashed?

Oral Questions

•(1445)

[English]

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of the Environment, Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and Minister for the Arctic Council, CPC): Mr. Speaker, since 2006, our government has invested significant funds in more efficient technology, better infrastructure and adaptation, and clean energy. We have taken action on two of the largest sources of emissions in this country, the transportation and electricity sectors. In fact, in the first 21 years of our coal regulations, we expect a cumulative reduction in greenhouse gas emissions equal to removing about 2.6 million vehicles per year from the road.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as predicted by previous IPCC reports, Canada will continue to experience more and more extreme weather events, such as we have witnessed in Calgary, Toronto, and elsewhere. The government's response is to cut Environment Canada's budget by 30%, cut climate change adaptation programs by 77%, and cut infrastructure spending by 87%.

Can the minister, without looking at her cue cards, tell Canadians and the House why she is abandoning Canadians in their time of need?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of the Environment, Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and Minister for the Arctic Council, CPC): Mr. Speaker, no federal government has done more on the environment than our government. We have invested record amounts of over \$4 billion in science and technology, at Environment Canada alone. We have invested a quarter of a billion dollars into Canada's weather services. We have given new tax support for clean energy generation, building on our record of protecting historic amounts of land. Budget 2014 is investing a significant amount of money to protect Canada's national parks and the environment. We are providing almost \$400 million to make more improvements—

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for St. John's East.

* * *

SEARCH AND RESCUE

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday it was revealed that since 2007 over \$47 million has been wasted on false search and rescue responses caused by outdated emergency beacons. When already overstretched search and rescue assets are deployed on a false alarm and are not available for a real emergency, that puts lives at risk. These beacons are outdated, ineffective, and harder to find in an emergency. They have not even been tracked by satellite since 2009 and the government has failed to act.

When is the government going to ensure that these unsafe beacons are replaced?

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Transport, CPC): Mr. Speaker, emergency locator transmitters are mandatory on all aircraft in Canada, and the band that is used is 121.5 MHz. That is accepted under our current regulations. As well, it is also used and monitored by search and rescue officials to help what we want to do, which is to find Canadians who are in distress so we can make the difference between life and death.

[Translation]

Ms. Éleine Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in 2007, Transport Canada recommended new mandatory digital beacons, but the Conservatives have done nothing since that time. It is not enough to simply accept the recommendations when a report is tabled. They then have to be implemented.

The Conservatives are wasting time with useless studies when we already know the solution. The fact that search and rescue equipment is not available to respond to real emergencies is putting people's lives in danger.

What does the government intend to do to address this problem once and for all, before a tragedy occurs?

[English]

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Transport, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I take offence that the hon. member would think it is useless to conduct studies and to ensure we are putting in place the right type of framework in order to save Canadians' lives.

What I can say is this. The report recommended that Transport Canada consider the use of emergency beacons in other modes of transportation. It initiated consultations with stakeholders, in 2013, as was recommended. Based on those consultations, my officials are doing a risk assessment to ensure that we do the right thing in this matter.

* * *

*[Translation]***TRANSPORTATION**

Mr. Hoang Mai (Brossard—La Prairie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last June, a 23-year-old Quebecker from Granby was killed in an accident while driving his GM vehicle. GM had been aware of the problems related to its faulty ignition switch since 2001, but the Minister of Transport says she was not made aware of the defect until February. Canadians should have been informed much sooner.

Has the minister ordered GM to explain?

•(1450)

[English]

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Transport, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first of all, whenever there is a tragedy involved with respect to an accident, of course, we think of the victim's family, and we always want to make sure that we think of them first. Indeed, our top priority is the safety of Canadians.

The way that the recall system on defects works is that it is the auto company that notifies Transport Canada of the defect and the intention for the recall. That happened in February of this year. The accident that the hon. member has indicated is actually under investigation by the Sûreté du Québec. As such, it is inappropriate to comment further.

Mr. Hoang Mai (Brossard—La Prairie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there have been fatalities. Millions of cars have been recalled, and while the U.S. Congress has launched a full investigation, the minister is refusing to answer questions about a problem that has been going on for 13 years.

Oral Questions

GM is required to report these problems to Transport Canada as soon as they are identified, so why have Canadians been kept in the dark about this defect for so long? Who is keeping Canadians safe?

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Transport, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have already indicated, Transport Canada officials were notified of the defects and the recall by General Motors in February of this year. I am answering questions in the House on that topic right now. For the hon. member to say that I am not responding to questions, I do not know what fantasyland he is living in. Clearly, we have acted in accordance with the statutes when it comes to a recall, and we are grateful we are able to make sure that this is being done to protect Canadians.

* * *

JUSTICE

Ms. Joan Crockett (Calgary Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, people in my riding of Calgary Centre are always concerned about standing up for victims of crime and making sure their interests are upheld and that they have a voice in the criminal justice system. Victims of crime deserve to be treated with compassion and with respect. Could the Minister of Justice please inform the House what our government is doing to live up to its commitment to introduce Canada's first ever victims bill of rights?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to inform the House, and in fact all Canadians, that tomorrow is the day that we will table the first Canadian victims bill of rights. In recent months, we have heard from victims and stakeholders right across the country on how our justice system can improve and respond to their needs. Tomorrow we will respond to those concerns.

This is in stark contrast to the Liberal Party, that under Pierre Trudeau gave convicted murderers more rights, with rights under the faint hope clause. The NDP voted against repealing that awful law. The fact is, the Conservative Party of Canada is the only party in the House that puts the rights of victims ahead of the rights of the convicted.

* * *

[Translation]

LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Library and Archives Canada awarded a contract to an American company to create its new catalogue. Instead of looking at how things are done here and consulting the archives community and Canadian experts, the Conservatives decided to sub-contract the job—without a bidding process—to an American company.

Thank goodness we won the War of 1812. That decision was ridiculous. Library and Archives Canada is the keeper of our collective memory, and now the Americans are being asked to manage it? Can the minister explain why this contract is going to the United States?

Hon. Shelly Glover (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as my colleague knows, Library and Archives Canada plays a major role in preserving Canadian heritage. He also knows that the library operates

completely at arm's length. It is responsible for its day-to-day operations.

[English]

Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, our history should not be contracted out to a U.S. company.

Library and Archives Canada plays a vital role in preserving our history. Yet, Conservatives have given a sole-sourced contract to a U.S.-based company for the new catalogue.

Mr. Speaker, who do you think the Americans will say won the War of 1812?

Canadians, experts, and companies should have had the chance to bid on this important project. Will the government agree to have a real and open bidding process?

• (1455)

Hon. Shelly Glover (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said in French a moment ago, Library and Archives Canada operates at arm's length. It is responsible for its day-to-day operations and those decisions.

However, I find it quite rich that a member of the NDP would stand and make fun of the War of 1812, among other battles, when this Conservative government continues to put forward suggestions of commemoration to our veterans and men and women in uniform who have fought so valiantly for this country and they vote against it every single time.

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, once again, when it comes to fixing the cultural and behavioural issues plaguing the RCMP, the Conservative government is missing in action.

The RCMP is again making headlines, for all the wrong reasons, after an assault victim reported inappropriate, dismissive, and unacceptable remarks made by RCMP officers against her. No victim deserves to get hit or revictimized in this way.

What is the minister doing to make sure that this never happens again? What concrete action is the RCMP taking to deal with this despicable incident?

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I understand that the member is referring to what happened in Nova Scotia.

Like all Canadians, I expect all members of the RCMP to conduct themselves with professionalism and respect at all times. I have raised this serious issue with Commissioner Paulson and have been assured that steps have been taken to investigate this situation.

I completely agree with Staff Sergeant Gary Fournier of the Nova Scotia RCMP, who said: "The comments brought to our attention today are totally unprofessional. They're unacceptable.... They certainly don't represent the views of the RCMP or the members of the district or members across the province who respond to calls for service each day".

*Oral Questions**[Translation]*

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the problem within the RCMP is not a new one. The Conservatives appointed Paulson and gave him the mandate of cleaning up these kinds of problems, and once again, they failed.

The crude and disgusting comments made by these officers in Nova Scotia prove that the entire culture within the RCMP needs to change, and this includes management and officers alike. If victims' complaints are not taken seriously, we have a huge problem. What concrete measures will the minister take to restore victims' confidence and public trust in the RCMP?

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I just stated, the RCMP took action immediately as of yesterday afternoon and is investigating this completely unacceptable incident. Like my colleague, all members of the House and all Canadians, we expect the RCMP to treat those they deal with in their day-to-day operations with the utmost respect.

I have been assured by Commissioner Paulson that, as the facts show, steps had previously been taken to ensure that these situations never happen again, and this situation in particular will be thoroughly investigated.

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*[English]***VETERANS AFFAIRS**

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is now well known that wounded soldiers and veterans are still not getting the help that they and their families need, thanks to Conservative budget cuts and mismanagement.

It is simply inexcusable that National Defence has still not hired a single uniformed clinical psychologist, despite their crucial role in PTSD injury. This is just one example of the government's failure to deliver for our men and women in uniform and veterans.

Why is the minister still not listening to them, to those who have paid such a high price on Canadians behalf?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will update the member again that this has become a priority for this government, unlike when she and her party were in office, when the military was not a priority. We certainly have made that a priority. We have increased the funding for health care by \$100 million. We have 400 full-time mental health professionals.

This has been a priority for this government, and it will continue to be so.

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when Corporal Mark Fuchko, who lost his legs in Afghanistan, phones the 1-800 number that the government replaced Veterans Affairs offices with, he cannot get anyone to answer his calls, so he has to leave messages. The caseworkers who knew Cape Breton vets, Duncan McKeigan, Terry Collins, Charlie Palmer, Dan McNeil, and Ron Clarke by name are gone, replaced by a non-responsive hotline.

The government acknowledges a social covenant here, but denies it in court. If the government will not honour our sacred obligation to our vets, could it at least pick up the phone when they call?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my position has not changed. Last November, I appeared before the House of Commons Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs to demonstrate my support for this new, comprehensive review of the new veterans charter.

Some have called the work done by Veterans Affairs a duty, a responsibility, a commitment, a social contract or a sacred obligation. I believe it is all of those things, and we are in fact acting to serve the best interests of our veterans right across the land and their families, unlike what we heard from that member.

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● (1500)

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the global peace and security fund has been a key way for Canada to contribute to critical peace-building and security programs, helping in places like the Middle East, sub-Saharan Africa, and even Ukraine where, just last week, the Prime Minister promised security funding through this very same fund. Yet the government cut funding for this program last year and has not kept its promise to replace it.

Cancelling this program is shortsighted. Will the government reverse its decision on the global peace and security fund and actually fund it and give it the resolve and responsibility that we need to see in our foreign policy?

Hon. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and for International Human Rights, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government and everybody in this caucus is very proud of the strong leadership shown by the Prime Minister during the Ukrainian crisis, as well as that in Sri Lanka. This very strong leadership has resounded all over the world.

Let me say what I was told in Geneva when I was there last week. I was clearly told for the first time, "There is concrete action from Canada. We know where Canada stands", and we are proud where Canada stands.

[Translation]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we also need concrete action on the ground. That is precisely what the Global Peace and Security Fund provided through the program's important work to stabilize and secure fragile countries.

The recent upheaval around the world, in Ukraine and the Central African Republic, illustrates the importance of this type of fund. Last year, the minister promised on two occasions that new funding would be allocated, but he did not keep his promises.

What is the minister's plan for reinstating the fund?

Oral Questions

[English]

Hon. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and for International Human Rights, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have stated, Canada's voice is very strong on the international stage, led by the Prime Minister, both in Sri Lanka as well as Ukraine. Not only that, but very soon we will be hosting a national summit on maternal and child health coming out of the Muskoka G8 summit.

We could not have stronger leadership than under this government and this Prime Minister, and everyone is proud of that.

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HEALTH

Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon (Mississauga East—Cooksville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, court rulings in 2001 have required government to allow legal access to medical marijuana for those authorized by a physician. However, the use of marijuana and the system that allowed home growing ran contrary to the concerns of doctors and Health Canada itself, which has never endorsed its use.

My constituents are concerned about the existence of marijuana in our community and its potential health effects.

Can the Minister of Health please tell the House what our government is doing to protect the health and safety of Canadian families and communities?

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as Canada's Minister of Health, I am very concerned about the health risks associated with smoking marijuana, particularly for youth, and I strongly oppose the Liberal leader's campaign to normalize and legalize marijuana.

Health Canada does not endorse the use of marijuana, nor does it consider it to be a medicine.

I do applaud the Canadian Medical Association's recent comments on the health risks associated with the use of marijuana, and of course the Quebec College of Physicians who recently said that cannabis is not a treatment recognized by the medical profession.

I applaud them for making sure to caution physicians on using this, and particularly cautioning parents around the health risks for their children.

* * *

DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last night at committee the Commissioner of Canada Elections stated that he would have to abandon all sorts of investigations if not given the power to compel information, but the Conservatives refused to give him the power.

Why is that? As we now know, it would show who used their database to make fraudulent election calls. How do we know this? It is because Guy Giorno took a mere 10 minutes to find out that Dimitri Soudas had been using the Conservative database inappropriately.

When will the Conservatives stop protecting their own fraudsters and give the commissioner the power he so desperately needs?

● (1505)

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member just referred to the commissioner having the power to compel information. He has that power now; he just has to go and ask for it from a judge.

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CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the role of the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration should be to protect families, not to break them up, yet that is exactly what will happen if the government goes ahead with the deportation order for Oscar Vigil. Oscar Vigil has raised a family in Canada. His wife and children are Canadian citizens. He is a hardworking journalist and a leader in the Hispanic community in Toronto.

The minister has the authority to overturn this decision and keep this family together. Will he do so?

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have one of the most generous immigration systems in the world. Every year, this country welcomes more than 250,000 new immigrants. This level is unprecedented.

When a person is here illegally, that person has many recourses. However, once those are exhausted, CBSA, the Canada Border Services Agency, must and does apply the law of the land.

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SENIORS

Mr. Ray Boughen (Palliser, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadian senior citizens have worked hard, paid their taxes, and contributed to our nation's success. With tax season upon us, many seniors in my riding would like to know and be assured that their taxes will remain low.

Can the Minister of State for Seniors help us understand what is happening with taxes and that keeping them low for seniors is one of the objectives?

Hon. Alice Wong (Minister of State (Seniors), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for that great question. Under this government, seniors have seen record support from our keeping taxes low. We have provided over \$2.8 billion in annual tax relief to seniors. Hundreds of thousands of seniors have been removed from the tax rolls completely.

I am proud of the difference we are making. What seniors do not want is to see their taxes raised. Under the Liberal leader's reckless definition, pensioners and retirees are not middle-class, because they live off of their savings and are on the list for a Liberal tax hike. The Liberal leader's high tax, high spending agenda would threaten jobs and set seniors back.

We will not let that happen.

[Translation]

CANADA POST

Mr. François Pilon (Laval—Les Îles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my constituents are worried about the cuts to Canada Post and I can understand why.

In addition to ending home delivery, which will make things tough for seniors and people with limited mobility, the Conservatives are imposing a 37% tax on stamps, while the 23 senior managers at Canada Post put more than \$20 million in their pockets.

Can the minister tell us why she is cutting public services instead of the managers' pay?

[English]

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Transport, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have said before, Canada Post in 2012 actually delivered one billion fewer letters than it did in 2006, so it has taken a number of steps. They are in its five-point plan.

One of these steps was to convert the rest or the one third of Canadian households that currently receive mail at their door to a community mailbox. That is exactly what happens with two thirds of Canadian homes right now.

Those with disabilities and seniors are already taken into consideration in how Canada Post deals with two thirds of Canadian homes. It will do the same with the one third that is remaining.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saainich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, on Monday, the IPCC released its first update in six years on impacts, vulnerability, and adaptation, demonstrating that even low degrees of warming globally can lead to abrupt and irreversible changes, threatening global security and even human civilization itself.

In 2009, the Prime Minister committed this country to joining the world to avoid those small changes in temperature. My question for the Prime Minister is that given that Environment Canada now projects a 100% failure rate in meeting our 2020 target, is the government and this country still committed to the Copenhagen target? If so, when will he publish a credible plan—?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as you know, the government remains committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions, while doing so in a way that obviously respects Canadians' jobs and protects our economy. I am happy to note that under this government, for the first time in history we have both growth and jobs and we actually are seeing emissions reductions. The government will continue to work on getting our emissions down.

The Speaker: Order. The Prime Minister has the floor

* * *

• (1510)

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: That concludes question period for today.

Oral Questions

I would like to draw the attention of hon. members to the presence in the gallery of two finalists for the 2014 Shaughnessy Cohen Prize for Political Writing: Charles Montgomery and Paul Wells.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as you know, Bill C-474 is the only vote that is up for tonight. It does seem like a misallocation of resources to call the members in for one vote. Therefore, as there has been discussions among the parties, I wonder if you would seek consent to the following motion. I move:

That the deferred recorded division at the second reading stage of Bill C-474, An Act respecting the promotion of financial transparency, improved accountability and long-term economic sustainability through the public reporting of payments made by mining, oil and gas corporations to foreign governments later today be further deferred to Wednesday, April 9, 2014, immediately before the time provided for Private Members' Business.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

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VACANCY

SCARBOROUGH—AGINCOURT

The Speaker: It is my duty to inform the House that a vacancy has occurred in the representation, namely Mr. Karygiannis, member for the electoral district of Scarborough—Agincourt, by resignation effective Tuesday, April 1, 2014.

[Translation]

Pursuant to paragraph 25(1)(b) of the Parliament of Canada Act, I have addressed my warrant to the Chief Electoral Officer for the issue of a writ for the election of a member to fill this vacancy.

[English]

The hon. member for Cape Breton—Canso is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Mr. Speaker, if we are looking at saving resources here, I would suggest, if I could find unanimous consent, that the ministers who rely totally on their talking points and get up and read them into the record could table—

The Speaker: Order.

*Routine Proceedings***ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS**

[English]

CANADIAN HUMAN RIGHTS TRIBUNAL

The Speaker: I have the honour to lay upon the table, pursuant to subsection 61(4) of the Canadian Human Rights Act, the 2013 Canadian Human Rights Tribunal annual report.

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[Translation]

INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1), I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian Parliamentary delegation of the Canada-Africa Parliamentary Association respecting its bilateral mission to Morocco and Republic of Côte d'Ivoire from September 29 to October 5, 2013.

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1), I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the report of the delegation of the Canada-Japan Inter-parliamentary Group respecting its participation in the co-chairs' annual visit held in Tokyo, Japan, from February 19 to 24, 2011.

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● (1515)

[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

SCRUTINY OF REGULATIONS

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the third report of the Standing Joint Committee on Scrutiny of Regulations, in relation to the review of statutory instruments.

PUBLIC SAFETY AND NATIONAL SECURITY

Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the third report of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security, in relation to Bill C-483, An Act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act (escorted temporary absence), from the member for Oxford.

The committee has studied this bill and has decided to report the bill back to the House with amendments.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, three reports of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. The first report is on the Public Accounts of Canada, 2013; the second is on chapter 5, "Preventing Illegal Entry into Canada", of the fall 2013 report of the Auditor General of Canada; and the third is on the main estimates 2014-15, vote 1, under Auditor General.

Pursuant to Standing Order 109 of the House of Commons, the committee requests the government table a comprehensive response to the second report only.

INSTRUCTION TO THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS REGARDING BILL C-23

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

That it be an instruction to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs that, during its consideration of Bill C-23, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act and other Acts and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, the Committee be granted the power to expand the scope of the Bill in order to strengthen the role of the Commissioner of Canada Elections by allowing the Commissioner to seek relief through the courts to compel testimony.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by mentioning that I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Louis-Saint-Laurent, who seconded the motion.

The reason for the motion today, just to give some background, is that our attempt to have Bill C-23—the so-called fair elections act, but what New Democrats are calling the unfair elections act—channelled to the committee after first reading, at which time the bill could be more open to amendment, failed. Our attempt in the House did not receive unanimous consent.

There is concern that some areas of the bill that should be subject to amendment may not be because the admissibility rules in the House with respect to committee amendments are a little arcane, to put it mildly. They are complex. The clerks do their best to enforce the rules, but I am not completely certain I am going to get a ruling on admissibility on this point, that the Commissioner of Canada Elections be able to go to court to seek relief to compel testimony of witnesses. Therefore, out of some kind of excess of caution, we are seeking a motion of instruction from the House to permit such an amendment.

All this motion would do is permit the amendment. It does not say the amendment would occur. It would simply allow the committee to consider this kind of matter, and in committee, if the majority declines to adopt the amendment, that will determine it. However, what we do not want to have happen, after all the witnesses who appeared suggesting that the power to compel testimony through a judicial order be included in the bill, is for that to be ruled out of court from the beginning as beyond the scope of the bill. That is the reason I am standing in my place at the moment.

I also want to provide a bit of context.

Last night one of several witnesses, the current Commissioner of Canada Elections, Mr. Côté, appeared, and in no uncertain terms gave support to the Chief Electoral Officer, Mr. Mayrand, and other witnesses, who have said it is absolutely, as he put it last night, "essential to give the Commissioner the ability to seek a court order to compel testimony". This is something that was in both the commissioner's 2012-13 report and the report entitled "Preventing Deceptive Communications with Electors" by the Chief Electoral Officer, and it comes from painful experience.

Routine Proceedings

The commissioner and the Chief Electoral Officer are all too aware of how difficult it has been to have witnesses, who are themselves not suspect but are members of a political party, actually talk to investigators. The context of the Commissioner of Canada Elections' report is at page 13. Although he is talking in general terms, nobody in the House is under any illusion that he is talking about anything but the investigation into the fraudulent calls that occurred in 2011. He stated:

When investigating matters where the stakes are perceived as significant... investigators often face reluctant witnesses. Frequently, key individuals will simply refuse to be interviewed or they will initially accept, only to later decline. In some cases, they will participate in interviews but will provide only partial information and incomplete answers, often citing a faulty recollection of events or the inability to retrieve key documents. In other cases, a potential witness will profess a complete willingness to cooperate, but the process will take time – resulting in information being provided slowly and in an incomplete fashion.

He goes on to explain why the model in the Competition Act, which is a model very similar to over half of the provincial elections acts, should be adopted by the Canada Elections Act. Basically, it allows for the chief investigative officer within the Canada Elections Act system, the commissioner, to go to court to show that there is a need for witnesses to be forthcoming and to receive a judicial order for witnesses to indeed testify to investigators, with important safeguards.

Three of them were listed in the testimony last night by Mr. Côté, as follows: one, a prior judicial authorization, based on affidavit evidence showing that the person likely has information relevant to an investigation of an offence under the Canada Elections Act; two, the right to be assisted by counsel and to have counsel present at the interview; and three, the right not to have the evidence used against the person—this is obviously very important—who is required to testify. These are basically safeguards taken from the Competition Act.

• (1520)

The commissioner said, “These safeguards would present, in my view, a balanced approach to ensuring more effective enforcement.”

Here is probably the most important and most forceful statement by the Commissioner of Canada Elections last night about the need. He said, “I want to be absolutely clear: if this amendment is not made, investigations will continue to take time, and in some cases a lot of time. And, importantly, some will simply abort due to our inability to get at the facts.”

I grant to the minister that the new voter registry that would be overseen by the CRTC would be beneficial and get us somewhere within the legitimate telecom system, but what has become very clear is that however much that is true, there are all kinds of reasons to know that those who are technologically sophisticated know how to get around the system, effectively setting up proxy servers in their basements or in other countries and not ever having to use the legitimate system.

If that is the case, it is all the more necessary that the investigative powers of the Commissioner of Canada Elections be bolstered in exactly the way that he and the Chief Electoral Officer have requested for the last two or three years in light of their experience of all the recalcitrance and all the resistance they have received

investigating the fraudulent calling scheme that undermined the 2011 election.

We only discovered with clarity yesterday, when we were asking questions of witnesses from the CRTC in committee, how important this could be in terms of the internal limits of the voter contact registry. It turns out that although calls are defined as including live voice calls, there is an exclusion for live voice calls from any group or person as long as that group or person is using internal services.

Let us forget about the minister's image of the grandmother at the local level calling with regard to lawn signs. The concern is the national party with its capacity to have internal services for live voice calls. What are live voice calls normally used for? They are usually used for not just getting out the vote and that kind of stuff. They have to be used for fundraising.

There is another exception in the bill. This one would allow for fundraising calls to anybody who has given \$20 or more in the last five years to be exempted from the expense ceiling, which basically means that a whole operation has to be set up at the national level to make those phone calls. We have been concerned from the beginning that those calls could be a cloak for all other kinds of pitches to be made under the guise of fundraising requests. What we have found is that such live calls at the national level, using a national phone bank that is part of the internal services of a party, are not part of the CRTC's regime. The CRTC testified that this is an exclusion. Live voice calls coming from external telecom providers would be, but not those from the national party.

We have no problem with making sure there is no red tape for grandmothers helping out at the local level by calling for lawn signs. Our concern is at the national level, with the phone bank problem of live calls using that exemption for fundraising as a Trojan Horse that will be completely unmonitorable because it is not part of the CRTC regime and because the Chief Electoral Officer has already testified that he cannot monitor it.

One of the reasons it is so important to have the power to compel testimony through a judicial order is that the voter contact registry is only going to go so far. It is only going to provide prevention and detection for a certain kind of person who unwittingly uses the system, not the sophisticated rogue who now knows that legitimate telecom operators cannot be used to call perhaps hundreds of thousands of numbers and who would use available technology to skirt that system. The system is not useless, but it would do almost nothing for the knowledgeable, technologically sophisticated rogue, especially using offshore resources, to call into elections.

Therefore the back-end investigation is all the more important, and therefore the power to compel testimony of witnesses through a judicial order is an absolute must as an amendment to Bill C-23. Out of an excess of caution, I am asking the House through this motion for instruction to allow PROC to amend the bill in this respect to give us that authority if the committee agrees in its discussions that it is a valid amendment.

Routine Proceedings

•(1525)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech and for moving this motion today, because this is now an extremely difficult situation.

This government has introduced a bill to amend the Canada Elections Act without consulting anyone. It introduced this bill without talking to Elections Canada, the commissioner or anyone, other than Conservative colleagues. All the experts agree that this bill will simply help the Conservatives take in more votes in 2015.

As for the commissioner's power to compel, I was there yesterday with my colleague when the current and former commissioners explained how they think this change is a step in the wrong direction.

I would like to hear more from my colleague about how our colleagues reacted to this claim that the commissioner himself made yesterday. He said that this was a very bad idea and that it will undermine his independence. The Conservatives simply keep saying that, on the contrary, it will make him more independent, as we heard the minister claim again today.

I would like to try to understand how we are living in a kind of Orwellian world, in which someone says something and the Conservatives seem to completely ignore the comments and do the exact opposite.

Mr. Craig Scott: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for the question.

Indeed, that is exactly the case. Yesterday evening, my committee colleagues did not care that expert witnesses were stating very clearly that the Office of the Commissioner must absolutely be kept within Elections Canada.

I do not know exactly how to say this, except that it was as though the witnesses were completely worthless. So why bother? That is what I am wondering.

•(1530)

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the member, more in regard to the process.

We are of the opinion that we are in fact able to move amendments in regard to the compelling of a witness. Whether it is me or the Liberal Party critic dealing with the legislation we have before the committee now, we are preparing and developing amendments.

The motion is good, if the member is trying to seek clarification, but let there be no doubt that from the Liberal Party's perspective we believe it is absolutely critical and essential and that this bill would be fundamentally flawed if it were not amended to allow the commissioner to compel witnesses. It is that simple.

It is a fundamentally flawed piece of the legislation if the commissioner is not able to compel witnesses. Is it the NDP's opinion that an amendment of that nature would be beyond the scope of the legislation? We do not necessarily share that concern.

Our concern is that, when the critic is afforded the opportunity to bring forward the amendments, we have an adequate amount of time.

We are concerned about more time. I think all Canadians share that concern with us.

Would the member want to pick up on that point? We do not agree with—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The hon. member for Toronto—Danforth.

Mr. Craig Scott: Mr. Speaker, I understand I have very limited time.

I do want to assuage my colleague's concerns. I started by saying that this is being moved as an excess of caution because of the complexity of the rules. Quite often we end up being almost bushwhacked in committee by amendments that are not permitted.

We have the same view as the member for Winnipeg North, that an amendment allowing the power to compel would be admissible, would be within the scope of the bill. I personally have no doubt about that, but I worry from past experience about rulings on admissibility that nobody could expect.

This amendment is so important, and I think we agree on this. We want to make it absolutely clear.

If our colleagues across the way actually vote down this motion of instruction, it will have no effect in law. The admissibility clerk will still tell us one way or the other whether it is included, but our colleagues across the way can help ensure, for the sake of a better democratic process, that we are not going to get into admissibility discussions in the committee, that there will be no doubt whatsoever.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Resuming debate, the hon. member for Louis-Saint-Laurent.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I saw quite clearly, when you asked for resuming debate, that the member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore, was standing before the member opposite. Therefore, I move:

That, the Honourable Member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore be now heard.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, you have recognized the member, and the member should then be allowed to speak. That point of order, unfortunately, is irrelevant to the discussion we are having. You have recognized the member. The member has risen to speak in the House. Please let her continue.

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, just to add to the debate on this issue, I think you are familiar that the rules are quite clear. The hon. member had not yet started to speak. She had risen to speak. She had not yet started to speak. Therefore, the motion from the hon. parliamentary secretary to the House leader on the government side is in order, that the member now be heard.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, it is my recollection that the hon. member for Toronto—Danforth began his remarks by stating he was splitting his time with the hon. member for Louis-Saint-Laurent.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The member for Saanich—Gulf Islands is correct. However, the members still have the right to move that the member be now heard, even if it is a split time slot.

I appreciate the input from all hon. members on this matter. When I rose to call for resuming debate I saw the member for Louis-Saint-Laurent stand. I did not see this member stand. That is not to say he was not standing. The member did rise; however, she had not spoken when the parliamentary secretary rose with his point of order. His point of order is allowed and the motion will be put before the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

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

Some hon. members: Nay.

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

And five or more members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Call in the members.

• (1615)

[Translation]

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

(Division No. 95)

YEAS

Members

Ablonczy	Aglukkaq
Albas	Albrecht
Alexander	Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Allison	Ambler
Ambrose	Anderson
Armstrong	Ashfield
Aspin	Baird
Bateman	Benoit
Bergen	Bernier
Bezan	Blaney
Block	Boughen
Braid	Breitkreuz
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Brown (Barrie)	Bruinooge
Butt	Calandra
Calkins	Carmichael
Carrie	Chisu
Chong	Clarke
Clement	Crockatt
Daniel	Davidson
Dechert	Del Mastro
Dreeschen	Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Dykstra	Fantino
Fast	Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)
Finlay (Haldimand—Norfolk)	Fletcher

Galipeau	Gallant
Gill	Glover
Goguen	Goldring
Goodyear	Gosal
Gourde	Grewal
Harper	Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hawn	Hayes
Hiebert	Hillyer
Holder	James
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kennedy (Calgary Southeast)	Kent
Kerr	Komarnicki
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Lake
Lauzon	Lebel
Leaf	Leitch
Lemieux	Leung
Lizon	Lobb
Lukiwski	Lunney
MacKay (Central Nova)	MacKenzie
Maguire	Mayes
McLeod	Menegakis
Merrifield	Miller
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	
Moore (Fundy Royal)	
Nicholson	Norlock
Obhrai	O'Connor
Oliver	O'Neill Gordon
Opitz	O'Toole
Paradis	Payne
Poilievre	Preston
Raïtt	Rajotte
Reid	Rempel
Richards	Rickford
Ritz	Saxton
Schellenberger	Seeback
Shea	Shipley
Shory	Smith
Sopuck	Sorenson
Stanton	Storseth
Strahl	Sweet
Tilson	Toet
Trost	Trottier
Truppe	Uppal
Valcourt	Van Kesteren
Van Loan	Wallace
Warawa	Warkentin
Watson	Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to
Sky Country)	
Weston (Saint John)	Williamson
Wong	Woodworth
Yelich	Young (Oakville)
Young (Vancouver South)	Zimmer — 150

Routine Proceedings

NAYS

Members

Andrews
Ashton
Aubin
Bélangier
Benskin
Blanchette
Boivin
Boutin-Sweet
Brisson
Caron
Cash
Chicoine
Christopherson
Côté
Cullen
Davies (Vancouver East)
Dewar
Dionne Labelle
Doré Lefebvre
Dubourg
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Easter
Fortin
Freeman
Garneau
Genest-Jourdain
Goodale

Routine Proceedings

Gravelle	Groguché
Harris (Scarborough Southwest)	Harris (St. John's East)
Hsu	Hughes
Jacob	Jones
Julian	Kellway
Lamoureux	Lapointe
Latendresse	Laverdière
LeBlanc (Beauséjour)	LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)
Leslie	Liu
MacAulay	Mai
Marston	Masse
Mathysen	May
McCallum	McGuinty
Michaud	Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)
Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)	Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)
Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)	Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)
Mulcair	Murray
Nantel	Nash
Nicholls	Nunez-Melo
Péclet	Perreault
Pilon	Quach
Rafferty	Rankin
Ravignat	Raynault
Regan	Rousseau
Saganash	Sandhu
Scarpaleggia	Scott
Sellah	Sgro
Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor)	St-Denis
Sims (Newton—North Delta)	Sullivan
Sitsabaiesan	Toone
Stewart	Trudeau
Thibeault	Valeriote— 120
Tremblay	
Tumel	

PAIRED

Nil

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): I declare the motion carried.

[*English*]

Before we resume debate, it is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Thunder Bay—Superior North, Democratic Reform; the hon. member for London—Fanshawe, Canada Post.

Resuming debate, the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services.

Mr. Bernard Trottier (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the House has spoken clearly that I be heard, so with that, I move:

That the House now proceed to the orders of the day.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

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

Some hon. members: Nay.

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

And five or more members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Call in the members.

● (1655)

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

(*Division No. 96*)

YEAS

Members

Ablonczy	Aglukkaq
Albas	Albrecht
Alexander	Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Allison	Ambrose
Anderson	Armstrong
Ashfield	Aspin
Baird	Bateman
Benoit	Bergen
Bernier	Bezan
Blaney	Block
Boughen	Braid
Breitkreuz	Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)	Brown (Barrie)
Bruinooge	Butt
Calandra	Calkins
Carmichael	Carrie
Chisu	Chong
Clarke	Clement
Crockatt	Daniel
Davidson	Dechert
Del Mastro	Dreeshen
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	Dykstra
Fantino	Fast
Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)	Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Fletcher	Galipeau
Gallant	Gill
Glover	Goguen
Goldring	Goodyear
Gosal	Gourde
Grewal	Harper
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)	Hawn
Hayes	Hiebert
Hillyer	Holder
James	Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)	Kenny (Calgary Southeast)
Kent	Kerr
Komarnicki	Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lake	Lauzon
Lebel	Leaf
Leitch	Lemieux
Leung	Lizon
Lobb	Lukiwski
Lunney	MacKenzie
Maguire	Mayes
McLeod	Menegakis
Merrifield	Miller
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	
Moore (Fundy Royal)	
Nicholson	Norlock
Obhrai	O'Connor
Oliver	O'Neill Gordon
Opitz	O'Toole
Paradis	Payne
Poilievre	Preston
Raitt	Rajotte
Reid	Rempel
Richards	Rickford
Ritz	Saxton
Schellenberger	Seeback
Shea	Shipley
Shory	Smith
Sopuck	Sorenson
Stanton	Storseth
Strahl	Sweet

Government Orders

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

ECONOMIC ACTION PLAN 2014 ACT, NO. 1

Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Finance, CPC) moved that Bill C-31, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on February 11, 2014 and other measures, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Andrew Saxton (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity today to lead off debate on Bill C-31, the economic action plan 2014 act, no. 1. Over the next 20 minutes, I will provide an overview of the bill's overarching objectives and will highlight some of its key initiatives.

Our government continues to focus on what matters to Canadians, and this bill would do nothing to detract from that. Bill C-31 focuses on creating jobs and economic growth while supporting families and communities.

This is our government's 10th budget since 2006. Over that period our country has been confronted by unprecedented economic challenges from beyond our borders. Canada has not only weathered the global economic storm but has exceeded expectations. Let me remind members today that with the help of Canada's economic action plan, Canada's economy has seen the best economic performance among all G7 countries and is the only G7 country to have an unwavering AAA rating, with a stable outlook from all the major credit-rating agencies: Moody's, Fitch, and Standard & Poor's. Nevertheless, in good times and bad, we have never strayed from our commitment to strengthen the economy for all Canadians and have never wavered from seeing our plan through.

Economic action plan 2014 marks the next chapter in keeping that commitment to Canadians, focusing on three key priorities: returning to budget balance, promoting jobs and economic growth, and supporting families and communities. Before I get into the details of the bill, let me begin by explaining the principles driving these priorities, starting with balancing the budget, the cornerstone of our low-tax plan.

Returning to balanced budgets and basic economic principles of debt reduction means that more tax dollars can be spent improving Canada's economic potential and growth prospects rather than on servicing debt. These long-term benefits explain why our government has not wavered from our goal and has cut the deficit by nearly two-thirds since the great recession. It is also why Canada remains in an enviable fiscal position among all G7 countries, with the lowest net debt to GDP ratio by far.

Tilson
Trost
Truppe
Valcourt
Van Loan
Warawa
Watson
Sky Country)
Weston (Saint John)
Wong
Yelich
Young (Vancouver South)

Toet
Trottier
Uppal
Van Kesteren
Wallace
Warkentin
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to

Wilks
Woodworth
Young (Oakville)
Zimmer— 148

NAYS

Members

Allen (Welland)
Angus
Atamanenko
Ayala
Bennett
Bevington
Blanchette-Lamothe
Boulerice
Brisson
Byrne
Casey
Charlton
Chisholm
Comartin
Crowder
Cuzner
Day
Dion
Donnelly
Dubé
Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Easter
Fortin
Freeman
Garneau
Genest-Jourdain
Goodale
Grogulic
Harris (St. John's East)
Hughes
Jones
Kellway
Lapointe
Laverdière
LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)
Liu
Mai
Masse
May
McGuinty
Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)
Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)
Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)
Nantel
Nicholls
Péclet
Pilon
Rafferty
Ravignat
Regan
Saganash
Scarpaleggia
Sellah
Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor)
Sims (Newton—North Delta)
Sitsabaiesan
Stewart
Toone
Trudeau
Valériote— 117

Andrews
Ashton
Aubin
Bélangier
Benskin
Blanchette
Boivin
Boutin-Sweet
Brosseau
Caron
Cash
Chicoine
Christopherson
Côté
Cullen
Davies (Vancouver East)
Dewar
Dionne Labelle
Doré Lefebvre
Dubourg
Dusseau
Eyking
Freeland
Fry
Garrison
Giguère
Gravelle
Harris (Scarborough Southwest)
Hsu
Jacob
Julian
Lamoureux
Latendresse
LeBlanc (Beauséjour)
Leslie
MacAulay
Marston
Mathysen
McCallum
Michaud
Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)
Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)
Murray
Nash
Nunez-Melo
Perreault
Quach
Rankin
Raynault
Rousseau
Sandhu
Scott
Sgro
St-Denis
Thibeault
Tremblay
Turmel

PAIRED

Nil

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): I declare the motion carried.

Government Orders

Our goal is now within sight. Including the measures announced in economic action plan 2014, we expect to realize a surplus of \$6.4 billion in 2015-16, including a \$3 billion annual adjustment for risk. Let me point out that we are doing all this without cutting major transfers to persons or other levels of government. At the same time as we are reining in spending, let me emphasize that transfers for Canadian priorities like education and health care will continue to increase.

● (1700)

[Translation]

Although balancing the budget is the cornerstone of our prosperity plan, our government also believes that it is vital that we create the conditions for businesses to grow.

The government's focus on improving tax competitiveness for business is part of a policy framework that targets growth, which has allowed Canada to have the lowest corporate taxes in the G7.

That is not all. Canada is an increasingly dynamic place for investment and corporate growth. In the most recent Bloomberg rating of the most attractive countries for business, Canada jumped to second place, topped only by Hong Kong.

[English]

Our government recognizes that our greatest asset is also what will keep us a leader in the global economy, our people. This is why we continue to invest in training to help workers get the skills they need to succeed and to connect more Canadians with available jobs. To better align training with labour market needs, the Canada job grant will launch this year, ensuring that employers have input into skills-training decisions. We are also working with provinces and territories to renew the \$500 million per year labour market agreements. Our government will also renegotiate the \$1.95 billion per year labour market development agreements to better reorient training toward labour market demand. This, along with our commitment of \$222 million annually, matched by the provinces and territories over the next four years through a new generation of labour market agreements for persons with disabilities, will strengthen Canada's job market and will get Canadians working.

Now I would like to return to the specific measures in today's legislation.

● (1705)

[Translation]

First of all, economic action plan 2014 act, no.1, focuses on our commitment to families and announces improved support for Canadian families who adopt a child.

All parents must pay for their children's education, but adoptive parents have additional expenses, including agency fees and legal costs. These costs can be significant, especially in the case of children adopted outside Canada, and can include travel and accommodation expenses and the cost of translating documents.

With respect to taxation, in order to better recognize adoption expenses, primarily agency fees and legal costs, economic action plan 2014 will increase the maximum amount of the adoption expense tax credit, which had already been increased in economic

action plan 2013, to \$15,000 in 2014. This amount will be indexed to inflation in subsequent years.

Our government will also ensure that the tax system takes into account the changing nature of the health care system and Canadians' needs.

[English]

We are also proposing amendments to the Excise Tax Act to improve the application of the GST-HST in the health care sector. Specifically, today's legislation proposes three changes to expand tax relief under the GST-HST for certain health-related services and medical and assistive devices to reflect the evolving nature of the health care system.

The first change would expand the current GST-HST exemption for training designed to help individuals cope with a disorder or disability. It would now also exempt services for designing training, such as developing a training plan.

The second change would exempt the professional services of acupuncturists and naturopathic doctors from GST-HST.

The third change would add to the list of GST-HST-free medical and assistive devices eyewear designed to electronically enhance the vision of individuals who are vision impaired when it is supplied on the order of a physician or other specified health professional.

Today's legislation also recognizes the important role played by research and rescue volunteers in their communities. They protect people while often risking their own safety. Bill C-31 proposes a 15% non-refundable search and rescue volunteer tax credit on an amount of \$3,000 for ground, air, and marine search and rescue volunteers who perform at least 200 hours of eligible service in the year, starting in 2014.

Our government is very proud to publicly recognize the outstanding commitment of these volunteers and the difference they make in their communities, communities like my riding of North Vancouver.

North Shore Rescue is a daily example of the sacrifice these brave men and women commit to every day. It is why I know that measures like this will go a long way in supporting these selfless volunteers across Canada.

[Translation]

As everyone can see, we are protecting the health and well-being of Canadians. Promoting a clean, safe environment is also one of our government's priorities.

For example, since 2006, the government has taken significant action to protect our natural areas, including taking steps to add more than 160,000 km² to the Canadian national parks and marine conservation areas system—an increase of more than 58%—and securing almost 4,000 km² of ecologically sensitive private lands.

Economic action plan 2014 includes measures to protect Canada's rich natural heritage by investing in national parks, conserving recreational fisheries, expanding recreational trails, supporting family-oriented conservation and expanding tax support for clean energy generation.

Today's legislative measure will encourage additional donations of ecologically sensitive lands to conservation charities by doubling to 10 years, for income tax purposes, the carry-forward period.

This is in response to a recommendation by the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance in its February 2013 report entitled "Tax Incentives for Charitable Giving in Canada".

• (1710)

[English]

As all hon. members can see, through Canada's economic action plan 2014 we are keeping taxes low, putting consumers first, protecting Canadians' health and safety, and strengthening communities from coast to coast to coast.

Bill C-31 expands on the government's consumer-focused measures to improve the bottom line for Canadian families and to ensure that they are getting value for their hard-earned dollars.

Since 2006, our government has taken significant action to support and protect Canadian consumers. We have reduced taxes and tariffs; ensured marketplace fairness; promoted competition in industries such as financial services, telecommunications, and air services; and improved products and food safety.

Through the consumers first agenda measures contained in economic action plan 2014, our government is going even further. One key focus of our government has been encouraging competition and lower prices in the telecommunications market. Today's legislation proposes new measures to do this by capping wholesale domestic wireless roaming rates to prevent wireless providers from charging other companies that may be their competitors more than they charge their own customers for mobile voice data and text services.

Our government will also bring forward future legislation to provide telecommunications regulators with the power to impose administrative monetary penalties on companies that violate rules such as the Wireless Code, further enhancing competition in the telecommunications market.

The list goes on. I could speak well beyond my allotted time on the benefits of today's legislation. Let me very quickly list some of the other positive measures in Bill C-31:

Creating the Canada apprentice loan, a new initiative that would help apprentices registered in Red Seal trades by providing access to over \$100 million in interest-free loans each year;

Government Orders

Eliminating tariffs on mobile offshore drilling units used in offshore oil and gas exploration to improve the global competitiveness of Canadian energy projects;

Investing \$11 million over two years and \$3.5 million per year ongoing to strengthen the labour market opinion process, ensuring that Canadians are given the first chance at available jobs;

Strengthening Canada's anti-money laundering and anti-terrorist financing regime and adding measures to fight tax evasion, ensuring that all Canadians pay their fair share;

Cutting red tape on more than 50,000 employers by reducing the maximum number of required payments on account for source deductions;

Reducing costs and red tape for all Canadian businesses by harmonizing Canada's trademark framework with international norms; and

Providing \$165 million over two years on a cash basis to advance the construction of a new bridge for the St. Lawrence.

[Translation]

In my presentation today, I have merely provided an overview of the many ways in which economic action plan 2014 will benefit Canadians.

Let us look at the facts: Canada has recovered all of the jobs lost during the recession and then some. Over one million more Canadians are employed now than were employed at the end of the recession in 2009. Nearly 90% of those jobs are full-time jobs. Canada's job growth has dramatically outpaced that of the other G7 countries.

[English]

Again, we are on track to balance the budget in 2015-16, as promised, but this has not deterred us from making Canada one of the best places to do business or from providing tax relief for all Canadians. We have cut taxes in every way government collects them and have removed more than one million low-income Canadians from the tax rolls. I will remind my colleagues that a Canadian family of four saves nearly \$3,400 in 2014.

While the NDP and Liberals keep demanding reckless spending, our government will stay the course with fiscal prudence.

When the Liberal leader suggests questionable economic policy and claims that budgets balance themselves, our government will stay the course to balance the budget. When the opposition calls for higher taxes and taking more money from hard-working Canadians, our government will stay the course with our low-tax plan. Quite simply, it is our government that has had to make the tough decisions and stick to our priorities, the priorities of all Canadians. For that reason, we have remained steadfast in our commitment to strengthen the economy for all Canadians.

Government Orders

To sum up, in an uncertain world, Canada's economic action plan is working. It is creating jobs, keeping the economy growing and returning to balanced budgets. By staying the course and sticking to our proven track record and economic action plan, Canada remains on track for a great future. I therefore strongly encourage all members of the House to read the legislation and give it the support that it deserves.

• (1715)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague.

[*English*]

There are a couple of things he neglected to point out in this mammoth budget implementation act of 350 pages. There are 40 laws amended through this one bill. We started to see the depth and breadth of this, and so much of it is completely unconnected to the budget itself. I know the name of the bill is the budget implementation act, and those watching might think it would have something to do with the budget or helping the Canadian economy.

Something else he seemed to have neglected is the small business hiring tax credit. It is something that New Democrats advocated for in 2011. Imitation is the best form of flattery. The government picked it up for a couple of years, and it is missing in this bill. This was an opportunity for the government to renew its effort to help the entrepreneurs, the small and medium businesses in our country, which create over 70% of the jobs in our economy.

Therefore, it is not only on process, using over 300 pages of an omnibus bill, a kitchen sink bill, and throwing in everything under the sun—I could go through the list, but I will refer to it in my speech—the Prime Minister himself, when in opposition, said it was an undemocratic technique and a tactic used by the government. I know the Prime Minister will remember those words well.

My question is this. If he wants to help the economy that has lost those 400,000 manufacturing jobs, where is the small business hiring tax credit? It was such a good idea. They ran on it twice and simply forgot to mention it this time.

Mr. Andrew Saxton: Mr. Speaker, I think it is quite ironic that the member is asking about a measure that we introduced and they voted against. Furthermore, even though the opposition likes to suggest otherwise, it has been common practice to include various measures in a budget and a subsequent budget implementation bill. This is nothing new or groundbreaking. It simply reflects the central role of a budget to a government's agenda. Everything in the bill supports our low-tax plan for jobs and growth. I should also point out that everything in the bill was part of the budget, except for two minor changes.

The member asked me about small business. This is what we have done for small business. First, we have maintained the employment insurance premiums for three years. This is keeping \$660 million in the pockets of employers and employees. We have cut red tape in a number of different ways, by eliminating over 800,000 payroll deduction remittances to CRA that are made every year by over 50,000 small businesses. These are just some of the many things we have done for small businesses.

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Canada jobs grant that the government has negotiated with the provinces and territories may have some merit in terms of engagement of the private sector and the decisions around investments in training and skills, but the reality is that the labour market agreements with the provinces were funding organizations and initiatives that perform a completely different set of tasks than that of the Canada jobs grant. For instance, in Nova Scotia there are organizations, such as Community Inc, PeopleWorx, Hants County Community Access Network, and the Valley Community Learning Association, which help people with literacy skills. These are organizations that help people upgrade their literacy to get their GED high school equivalency in order to pursue post-secondary education. The end of these labour market agreements and the stopping of the federal funding will mean that these organizations, and the vulnerable Canadians who are helped by them, will no longer receive that vital support.

Does the parliamentary secretary recognize that while the jobs grant may help some people, there will be a lot of vulnerable Canadians left behind by the ending of funding for the labour market agreements? Will the government restore that funding, certainly for a period of perhaps two or three years, in order to transition these groups to other funding mechanisms?

• (1720)

Mr. Andrew Saxton: Mr. Speaker, some of those programs that my colleague mentioned may be good programs, but the reality is that the system was not working. Jobs are still going unfilled by Canadians because they do not have the skills necessary to fill those jobs. We have to address the skills shortage that we have in Canada. Employers across Canada say that the biggest challenge they are facing today and into the future is the lack of skilled workers. This is particularly problematic in certain sectors and certain regions of the country, where thousands of jobs are going unfilled because we do not have the skilled workers necessary to fill those jobs. We are addressing this problem with the Canada job grant.

Mr. Bernard Trottier (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am interested in hearing my colleague's comments about small and medium-sized business. We have done many things since 2006. For example, we reduced the small business tax rate from 12% to 11%, while also increasing the threshold to which the rate applies from \$300,000 to \$500,000. We have also increased the amount of capital gains exemptions.

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Could my colleague expand on some of the other things we are doing for small business? There are some measures in this budget implementation act that talk about apprenticeship programs for small and medium-sized business. Could he comment on that, please?

Mr. Andrew Saxton: Mr. Speaker, we have a number of measures to help small business in Canada because we recognize that small business is the cornerstone of our economy. Small businesses create the most jobs in our economy. That is why we are supporting small businesses with internships. We are investing \$45 million for thousands of post-secondary graduates to intern in small and medium-sized businesses across Canada.

As I mentioned earlier, we are maintaining the EI premiums so that businesses and employees can keep \$660 million in their pockets.

Our government is also promoting fairness in the credit card market by committing to work with groups to help lower credit card acceptance costs for small businesses. During pre-budget consultations across the country, we heard that this is a big issue for small businesses.

We have also reduced the small business tax rate from 12% to 11% while increasing the small business limit to \$500,000.

Our Conservative government has lowered the federal corporate income tax rate to 15%, to help create jobs and economic growth in Canada.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Laurin Liu (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, once again the government is introducing an omnibus bill.

This 350-page bill contains a number of measures that the official opposition lament, including the one whereby the government would reduce access to the guaranteed income supplement, creating more uncertainty for seniors who live below the poverty line.

A government minister even bragged about saving \$700 million on the backs of seniors. It is deplorable. The government has slipped in a number of other harmful measures in this private member's bill.

Could my colleague comment on that?

[*English*]

Mr. Andrew Saxton: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, it is common practice in a bill of this size to include many different measures. Everything mentioned in this legislation, with the exception of two items, was in budget 2014. There is nothing new. There are no surprises here at all.

Let me tell the member what the economic action plan would do for Canadians.

We are launching the Canada job grant so that Canadians can get the skills training they need to get in-demand jobs.

We are creating the Canada apprentice loan, which would provide apprentices with Red Seal trades to have access to over \$100 million in annual interest-free loans.

We are launching a job matching service. This new service would match Canadians looking for work with employers who are looking to hire them.

We have more paid internships for young Canadians. Over 4,000 young Canadians can now have extra paid internships.

Our government is helping older workers get back to work, by investing \$75 million in the targeted initiative for older workers program to support older workers who want to participate in the job market.

This legislation is good for the Canadian economy, and it is good for Canadian employers and employees. I ask the opposition to support the bill.

• (1725)

BILL C-31—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 78(2) with respect to the second reading stage of Bill C-31, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on February 11, 2014 and other measures.

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 of the said bill.

SECOND READING

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-31, An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on February 11, 2014 and other measures, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is amazing that after a full 25 minutes of debate on a 350-page bill that the government has stuffed full of all sorts of “gems” is not the right word—there is another word for it that I do not think I am allowed to use here in Parliament—the government has decided that it needs to shut down that debate because it has obviously gone on too long. They think that a full 25 minutes and a few more after that should be enough to study a bill that affects 40 Canadian laws and has over 500 clauses in it, almost none of them designed to help the Canadian economy.

As this is my first speech as finance critic for the official opposition, I want to make mention of and thank the member for Parkdale—High Park, who did such an incredible job on this portfolio for a number of years. She developed strong relationships. She was absolutely dignified, and she brought New Democrats to a strong place when talking about financial measures. She had relationships with, not only the banking community, but the small business and entrepreneurial communities in this country. I owe a great debt for the amount of work that the member for Parkdale—High Park has done.

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From the perspective of which I come, representing a rural and remote part of the country in northwestern British Columbia, and being a former small business owner myself, I have great familiarity with the struggles, challenges, and opportunities for those who operate small and medium-sized businesses in this country. Those businesses exist in resource-based economies in the rural parts of this country, and 80% of the Toronto Stock Exchange exists on those resource and extractive economies.

What these businesses are looking for primarily is a government that understands them, that listens to Bay Street a little less, and that more often consults and meets with people on Main Street. They are looking for a government that understands what small and medium-size businesses have to go through to put food on the table. Primarily, they need a strong economy and one that provides them with customers, a viable way to grow and expand their businesses. What we have seen from the government too often, on the Conservative side and previously, has led us to the position our economy is in right now.

There have been 400,000 missing manufacturing jobs since the Conservatives took over. The Conservatives call that excellent. There are 300,000 jobs that have not been replaced since the beginning of the recession. The youth unemployment rate is twice the national average, and Canadians now owe more money, at a personal debt ratio that is greater than any other country in the OECD. We are one of the most indebted nations in the world, and the government says all is fine and rosy.

Its policies are based on a simple principle of rip and ship: take the resources and the wealth that are the endowment of this country and send them out in their most raw form. Do not add value. Do not seek to enhance any of the qualities of those resources. The results are stark. Our trade deficit is at a staggering level. We are operating in a trade deficit position and have done so for a number of years. It is \$45 billion, and it does not seem to preoccupy the Conservatives at all.

We have seen finance minister after finance minister, now two of them, misunderstand the telling signs in the economy. The previous finance minister missed the global recession entirely. He thought it was a blip, a bump in the road, and nothing to be concerned with. In the midst of the first months of that recession, the government brought in an austerity budget, countering every other G20 country in the world, saying that Conservatives know best on the economy. The fact is that they do not, and the mounting evidence on economic mismanagement of the Conservatives is piling up.

Now we have the budget implementation act, a bill that is crammed with all sorts of things that, again, I cannot mention with their proper terms. These are things like the temporary foreign worker program. Suddenly the Conservatives are going to get tough on the very program that they have allowed companies to abuse. Two years ago, they said they were going to go after those bad companies and put them on a blacklist.

Do members know how many companies are sitting on that blacklist today? There is zero, not a one. That would lead me to believe that maybe there are no companies abusing the temporary foreign worker program. However, wait, one province alone, the province of Alberta, has found 100 cases of companies abusing the

massive loopholes in the temporary foreign worker program that the government created. HD Mining and certain banks have started to export jobs that we did not think could be exported: mining jobs, financial sector jobs. These are jobs that have been the heart of this economy for many years.

● (1730)

With the clock being what it is, I will be finishing my comments tomorrow, but allow me to establish that both on form and on substance, the current Conservative government has failed Canadians once again.

The Conservatives have a missed opportunity with this monster omnibus bill, which is fundamentally anti-democratic, not according to just me but according to the Prime Minister when he used to occupy this place.

New Democrats will oppose Bill C-31 every step of the way.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): It being 5:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

The hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley will have 15 minutes remaining when this matter returns before the House.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*Translation*]

FORMER CANADIAN FORCES MEMBERS ACT

Mr. Tarik Brahma (Saint-Jean, NDP) moved that Bill C-568, An Act respecting former Canadian Forces members, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me to speak at second reading to present the content of Bill C-568. I am proud to sponsor a bill that is designed to offer long-term care to our veterans who have been honourably discharged from the Canadian Forces. Note as well that this bill pertains only to Canadian Forces members and is not designed to offer benefits to members of their family or to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

When this bill was introduced on January 28, 2014, I commented on the fact that too many of our young heroes, particularly those who served in the hell that was Afghanistan, came home physically and psychologically broken, and too many of them made the ultimate sacrifice.

While it is true that our military personnel who served in Afghanistan faced the most extreme situations possible for someone who has chosen to serve in the profession of arms, the fact remains that Canadian soldiers who have served in peacekeeping roles since 1953 have put their lives in danger to protect civilians under threat of attack.

Whether in Cambodia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Cyprus, the Golan Heights in Syria, the Persian Gulf, the Balkans, Somalia, Rwanda, Haiti, East Timor, Ethiopia or Eritrea, Canadian soldiers have stepped up to help those who had no one else to protect them from human folly.

It must be understood that this bill does not amend existing legislation such as the Department of Veterans Affairs Act. Instead, it is designed to create a new law that would require the government to amend an existing regulation, namely the Veterans Health Care Regulations, so that former Canadian Forces members who meet the military occupational classification requirements and who have been released from the Canadian Forces with an honourable discharge are entitled to the long-term health care benefits authorized by those regulations.

In the second hour of debate, I will have the opportunity to go into more detail on these regulations. Now, I will simply say that these regulations govern all types of care to which veterans are entitled.

To understand why the NDP thinks we must now reform the Veterans Affairs Canada classification system, I need to give a little history. The federal government decided to stop funding long-term health care after the death of the last Second World War and Korean War veterans, except in special cases. Veterans classified as modern-day veterans, meaning those who served after 1953, are not eligible for the federal health care program, pursuant to the Veterans Health Care Regulations. That is shameful.

The reality today is that the oldest veterans who served just after 1953 were born in the 1930s, and sometimes even in the 1920s, and they are now over 80 years old. Some are starting to require long-term care.

The federal government, through Veterans Affairs Canada, already had about 40 hospital facilities across Canada. However, since Veterans Affairs Canada transferred the last federal hospital, Ste. Anne's Hospital, to the Province of Quebec in 2013, there are no longer any federal facilities dedicated to long-term care for our veterans.

As a result, all of the institutions that provide care to veterans are now under provincial jurisdiction, and veterans are faced with delays and overcrowding, which we can expect to see for years to come.

We are urging the federal government to change its classification system for veterans and to create a system in which those who served after 1953 will have access to the same quality care as their predecessors.

● (1735)

I would like to read from testimony given by Guy Parent during one of his appearances before the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs regarding the complexity of health care eligibility criteria. He said:

The complexity currently built into the program's criteria and processes creates an overarching barrier to program accessibility. Over the years, veterans have been categorized by where, when, and how they served, which explains why there are 18 veteran client groups used by Veterans Affairs Canada. Since sailors, soldiers, airmen, and airwomen, as well as members of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, do not question where and when they must serve, for Veterans Affairs Canada to determine that the level of programs and services provided will be based on the type of service rendered is an injustice of the first order.

That statement is completely logical and irrefutable. Guy Parent, the Veterans Ombudsman added:

Access to benefits should be determined by injuries and illnesses related to service, and should be the same for all veterans, regardless of the nature or the location of their service. Categorization has led to the fact that even within the

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veterans community there are those who do not consider themselves veterans when compared to our war veterans. My office has chosen to adopt the theme of "one veteran" for the duration of my mandate. We do not provide consideration to veterans based on when and where they served but recognize them based on the fact that they served honourably.

That is what we really need to understand about the spirit of this bill.

As we just heard, the rules for access to long-term care are not easy to understand. Access to three different levels of long-term care—adult residential care, intermediate care and chronic care—and two types of beds—contract beds and community beds—has become so complex for veterans, who have to meet different criteria for eligibility and access, that it is getting harder and harder for them to figure out where they fit.

"Community beds" are beds that are not specifically designated and funded for veterans, and thus there is no priority access to them. Placement in an institution is determined mainly by health care needs, as is the case for any other resident of a province.

One of the objectives of this bill is to give eligible veterans priority access to community beds—which currently represent two-thirds of the 9,000 beds occupied—based on certain criteria, for example, service overseas.

The Conservatives repeatedly say that they are there to support our veterans. However, the reality is that they are also often criticized for their lack of support for veterans. That is the case for the Conservatives; that has also been the case for the Liberals.

With respect to veterans services, if we look back in time, we can say that Jean Chrétien's Liberal government was the first to cut veterans' funeral benefits. In 1995, the Liberals reduced the amount the survivor could deduct from the estate from \$24,000 to \$12,015. Members will recall that, when the Liberals were in power, they reduced funding for Veterans Affairs for five consecutive years.

This bill is an excellent opportunity for Liberal members to send veterans the positive message that they do not want to repeat the errors of the past and that they are willing to help them, instead.

● (1740)

When a member introduces a private member's bill, we obviously need to talk about how much it will cost to implement that bill. We therefore need to look at how much it will cost to implement a quality long-term care program for all Canadian veterans.

We must consider that the existing program helps approximately 8,500 veterans, whose average age is 87, and costs \$284 million a year. The rate of service use is 9% for World War II veterans and 2.74% for Korean War veterans.

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If we take into consideration the different rates of service use for the 594,500 modern-day veterans, whose average age is 55, the cost would be \$175 million per year for a usage rate of 1%, \$350 million per year for a usage rate of 2% and \$480 million per year for a usage rate of 2.74%.

In my opinion, this additional cost of approximately \$500 million per year is completely reasonable given the enormous sacrifice a great country like Canada asks of its veterans.

In closing, for the various reasons I gave earlier, I am asking all members to support our modern-day veterans by supporting Bill C-568 at second reading so that it can be sent to the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs for review.

It is time to take care of an issue that is becoming more and more pressing as the Canadian population ages. Ensuring that quality long-term health care is available to all of our veterans—particularly the cohort of 40,000 soldiers who served in Afghanistan and could find themselves in a critical situation in a few years—is part of planning for the future. I will stop there, and I welcome questions from my colleagues.

[English]

Mr. Parm Gill (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague on the other side for his very passionate speech and his concerns about veterans. We all care very much about our men and women who have served in uniform, and the freedom that we so dearly enjoy.

I was a bit puzzled listening to his speech. I was trying to figure out what the real intentions are of this particular PMB. I was puzzled because I could not really figure out why the NDP, over the years, has voted against every single initiative we have brought forward to help Canada's veterans, including the latest in this year's economic action plan 2014. Since we took office, we have introduced roughly 10 budgets.

I wonder if the member opposite can explain why the opposition and NDP members have voted against virtually every single initiative we have brought forward to help Canada's veterans.

●(1745)

[Translation]

Mr. Tarik Brahmī: Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives keep asking us the same question. They want to know why we voted against some good measures when we vote on a budget.

The parliamentary secretary knows full well that a budget is a set of measures that address a host of different issues. That is especially true when a government systematically introduces omnibus bills that include all manner of things that are absolutely unrelated.

The government makes it impossible for us to accept most of the measures proposed in the budget, so we vote against it. Then the Conservatives only point out that we voted against certain measures that might be worthwhile. It is not right to ask that question.

The NDP has always supported our veterans. To say that we voted against a budget is not a valid argument, since a budget is much more complex than a single measure.

[English]

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Party will be supporting the member's private member's bill.

I just want to ask him a question. You have heard members of your party, the NDP, and the Liberal Party up many times in the past —

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Guelph knows that he should be directing his comments to the Chair, not the member who spoke previously.

Mr. Frank Valeriote: Mr. Speaker, you have heard members from the NDP and the Liberal Party up several times in the last number of weeks, questioning the minister about the government's real commitment to our veterans.

The member speaks of a social covenant, a sacred obligation inside the House, and yet the government is denying the existence of that covenant or obligation in its defence against a lawsuit brought by veterans through Equitas in British Columbia right now.

I am wondering if the member for Saint-Jean sees the hypocrisy in this, the government's saying one thing, that it feels it has this sacred obligation, this covenant, with our veterans to care for them, and on the other hand doing very little to honour that contract. It takes members' bills like this to fulfill that obligation.

[Translation]

Mr. Tarik Brahmī: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from the Liberal Party.

Indeed, we recently saw the closure of centres that were near veterans. The government claims that the Service Canada offices across the country can handle the veterans' files, but the eight centres that were closed were client-specific. They had staff trained specifically to deal with veterans, for instance when they transition from military life to civilian life.

I do indeed see a pattern with this government that claims to be at the service of veterans, in addition to defending them. In reality, services have been reduced. The closure of the centres proves it.

●(1750)

[English]

Mr. Parm Gill (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the chance to speak to private member's Bill C-568. I would like to begin by commending the member for Saint-Jean for his good intentions with this bill. Unfortunately, it is difficult to square Bill C-568 with the circle that is the record on that side of the House.

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On June 22, 2011, the member for Saint-Jean and his party, the NDP, voted against \$770 million for veterans' health care and \$430 million for veterans' disability awards. On June 6, 2012, the anniversary of D-Day, the day of days, the day that so many brave Canadians made the ultimate sacrifice, that member and the NDP voted against \$1.6 billion in payments under the Pension Act and nearly \$750 million for veterans' health care benefits. This shameful record goes on and on.

Our government is proud to be working hard for Canada's veterans and their families. As the Minister of Veterans Affairs has indicated, our government has already invested almost \$4.7 billion in new funding to improve the benefits and services we provide to veterans and their families. This is real money that we have allotted to ensure that veterans and their families have the care and support they need when they need it. We are helping thousands of veterans to get the treatment they need for operational stress injuries, such as post-traumatic stress disorder; we are providing comprehensive rehabilitation services for those who have suffered physical and mental illness; and we are providing the financial support and health care benefits they need. Whenever a veteran is hurting, wherever a veteran is in need, we are there ready to help.

The numbers bear this out. For example, 70% of all applications for veterans' disability benefits result in a favourable decision on the first try. The system is working. It is ensuring that veterans get the care and support they are eligible for: the treatment benefits, the home care program, and long-term care they have earned.

Bill C-568 would needlessly turn all of this upside down. It would force the government to comprehensively change the federal-provincial jurisdiction for veterans' health care by creating a parallel system. It would also commit the department to creating new bureaucracy that would needlessly cost Canadians hundreds of millions of dollars just to launch and operate. For that reason alone, our government is unable to support the bill. Rewriting the veterans' health care regulations would be a time-consuming and unnecessary process.

Moreover, a closer look at the proposed bill would make members quickly realize that there are other serious flaws with it. Among other things, the bill is based on the faulty premise that we should be creating a duplicate health care provider exclusively for veterans and solely because the member opposite wants to fix eligibility criteria that are not broken.

I will take a moment to explain how those eligibility criteria have evolved over the years. When Canadians volunteered for service in the Second World War and the Korean War, most of them were not professional soldiers. Instead, they put their real careers and lives on hold to serve our country in its hour of need. These civilian soldiers also served at a time when there was no public health care system to take care of them if they returned home wounded or ill. The Government of Canada was their only hope. So Canada continued to build veterans' hospitals and our national government developed treatment programs and provided long-term care.

•(1755)

I do not think I need to convince anyone that things are different today. Not only do we now have one of the best public health care systems in the world, but our men and women in uniform are

different too. They are all professional soldiers. Most are career soldiers. They are highly trained. When they are released from the military, they possess the most remarkable skills to start a new career.

As retired Canadian Armed Forces personnel, most of them have enviable retirement pensions and many are able to retire much sooner than most Canadians. No one holds that against them. I think most Canadians would agree that these men and women deserve some generous consideration for their service and sacrifice toward our great nation.

What is more, our research shows that modern-day veterans are much more likely than most Canadians to have supplementary health care plans, such as the Public Service Health Care Plan. These veterans do not need a separate health care system, nor can I imagine that many of them are asking for it. They just want continued access to the provincial health care system already in place when they need it. The eligibility criteria in our veterans' health care regulations reflect this. They are written to ensure that those who need our help the most are able to get it because they have suffered an injury or illness related to their military service. These are the men, women, and families we need to be helping, and we are. Eliminating the eligibility criteria would needlessly shift Veterans Affairs Canada's efforts away from those veterans who need our help the most.

Members should consider this example. Veteran *X* retired from the military in his late forties before starting a second civilian career. By the time he retired for good, he might have two pensions; a Canadian Armed Forces superannuation pension and a civilian pension. It is a comfortable life. He is happy. Then one day he is injured in a car accident or a mishap on his way home. Should Veterans Affairs Canada really be expected to serve as a second health care provider for that veteran, or could his local hospital and the provincial health care system take care of him just as well? If that is a reasonable exception, where do we really draw the line?

Our government recognizes our responsibility to be there for Canada's most seriously injured veterans. We want to be there for those courageous men and women injured in service to our country. We readily accept this duty with pride and gratitude.

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In short, Bill C-568 would only create unnecessary extra red tape and duplicate bureaucracy to provide veterans with the care and support already available to those who need it. For all of these reasons, we cannot support this bill.

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a great honour for me to rise today to speak for the first time as the Liberal critic for veterans affairs.

Over the years, as a member of Parliament and as a member of the Guelph branch of the Royal Canadian Legion, I have spent a considerable amount of time speaking with veterans, new and old, listening to their concerns, and I am certainly glad to now have the opportunity to hear from them across the country.

When deliberating legislation that will have an impact on our veterans, I think something the Veterans Ombudsman has written is particularly relevant and necessary for the adequate consideration of any veterans policy. The Veterans Ombudsman has written that he measures fairness of veterans policy in terms of, first, adequacy of the program; second, the sufficiency of resources supporting it; and third, accessibility of a program to those seeking assistance.

I have to say that it takes my breath away to hear the member for Brampton—Springdale stand in the House and fill this room with rhetoric and bluster on how much the government is actually doing for our veterans when he, as a member of the committee, has heard time and time again of the inadequate resources that are given to veterans and the issues that are ailing them.

On its face, Bill C-568 would require the government to create regulations that would extend health care benefits to former members of the Canadian Forces who meet the necessary requirements and have been honourably discharged; so we know who would access these programs. Adequacy of a program to care for these men and women is a difficult metric to meet and so it is a particularly sensitive consideration.

Throughout the generations, we as a Parliament and as Canadians have asked a select number of men and women to go at a moment's notice to places across the world to protect not just ourselves but others. When we make this request, there is the understanding that what we are asking of them is not always fair, it is not ever pleasant, and it will likely have long-lasting and serious repercussions, both physical and emotional, on them and their families. Their service requires members to make an incredibly personal and potentially life-altering commitment to place themselves in harm's way virtually anywhere the nation believes necessary.

What we ask of them is extraordinary. What we owe them is without measure. That said, there are things we must offer to acknowledge the significance of their sacrifice: responsiveness to the health care and financial needs of former Canadian Forces members.

Of late, the Conservative government has not been good about being responsive to the diverse needs of Canadian veterans, not when it shuts down nine Veterans Affairs Canada offices throughout the country, and certainly not when it shows an utter disregard for the social covenant that is owed to veterans by mounting a defence against the lawsuit seeking fairness for former Canadian Forces members in a B.C. court room.

I read an article this week in the *Chronicle Herald* about the uphill battle being faced by Cape Breton veterans Duncan McKeigan, Terry Collins, Charlie Palmer, Dan McNeil, and Ron Clarke, who are still trying to cope with the closure of the Sydney office. The article states:

There, at the Sydney office, caseworkers knew them by name, they say. Came to their homes to assess what the estimated 4,200 area vets needed. Gave them the kind of one-on-one services and personal support they still need while facing everything from post-traumatic stress disorder to the ailments of age.

Just yesterday at the veterans committee, we heard from Corporal Mark Fuchko who suffered the loss of both legs while in Afghanistan. He, too, suffers the same fate as Duncan, Terry, and Charlie, facing inadequate responses from government staff who have merely directed him to a 1-800 number where he is forced again and again to leave a message and hope someone calls him back.

I am struck, while watching many of these veterans fight for the benefits they deserve, by something I have heard many veterans say to me recently: "You break it; you buy it". It was the things we asked them to do in the service of their country that broke them. How is it then that we can just turn our heads as if we never saw it happen in the first place and hope someone else comes to clean it up?

Another veteran, in an emotional closed session in Guelph, said it felt as if they went over as heroes and came back as zeroes.

● (1800)

I rose on Monday and asked the government how it could turn its back on a promise made a century ago to honour the sacrifice made by soldiers returning from the First World War. I asked the Minister of Veterans Affairs how it was still possible for him to support the defence of the lawsuit brought in that B.C. court room on behalf of veterans, a defence based on the denial of the existence of a social covenant owed to our veterans, when only weeks ago he finally admitted that "Some have called the work done by Veterans Affairs to be a duty, a responsibility, a commitment, a social contract or a sacred obligation". He also said, "I believe it is all of those things". How hypocritical.

That is the same social contract that Sir Robert Borden believed it to be in 1914. It is the same covenant that is the very basis upon which these veterans are now before the court seeking justice.

Meanwhile, lawyers for Veterans Affairs Canada continue to argue that the social contract, the sacred obligation we owe, is simply political language used by politicians to get votes, which really confirms that messaging and votes are the only reasons the current Conservative government feigns support for our veterans.

On this side of the House, we believe that the social covenant is real and tangible. In fact, just weeks ago, after extensive consultation at our own policy convention in Montreal, a resolution was passed with overwhelming support resolving that Liberals would uphold the principles of that social covenant in the policies of both the Department of Defence and Veterans Affairs. We will live up to our country's sacred obligation to care for veterans and their families throughout their lives, allowing them to maintain a quality of life that is worthy of their great sacrifice. I believe that the bill before us proposed by the hon. member for Saint-Jean captures this spirit.

Serving members of the Canadian Forces, non-commissioned members and officers alike, have access to a range of health care through Canadian Forces health services. However, once these members have completed their military occupational classification requirements, and then, eventually, their time in the forces and are discharged honourably, these men and women will have access, regardless of being a pensioner or not, to the health services provided under the regulations of the Department of Veterans Affairs. One would assume that includes additional benefits beyond those covered under various provincial health care plans. That being said, I am under the impression that most Veterans Affairs clients are already under the public service health care plan, and so this extends primarily to long-term care and dental services.

This leads to a concern I have after reading the bill, that there is very little by way of detail. It is not clear where the responsibility for delivery of care lies or what services are being added to the provision of care for most former Canadian Forces members, although the member for Saint-Jean did give some clarity to these issues during his speech today. I find it worrisome, however, that when dealing with veterans' issues, so much is left up to the legislative discretion of the government, which I already believe to be unable to deal adequately with veterans policy.

With that in mind, in large part I agree that the member for Saint-Jean has sought out the principle of adequacy in his attempt to ensure that the right programs are in place to meet the needs of all of our veterans. I believe it moves to broaden the applicability of health services and duly removes barriers to accessibility, although I think that we need to look more closely at ensuring that the program can be sufficiently resourced.

While I would like to have seen more specifics so that there might be more certainty for applicable former members of the Canadian Forces, it is paramount that we guarantee the health benefits, along with the well-being, of our serving and former Canadian Forces members.

I thank the member for bringing the bill forward and hope that we will have more opportunity to discuss it in greater depth at committee.

• (1805)

Mr. Ted Opitz (Etobicoke Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to speak to Bill C-568 today. As other hon. members have already said, we owe a great deal to our brave men and women in uniform, both past and present, who have served our country and sacrificed so much.

That is why I am baffled by the hypocrisy from the Liberals. I lived through the decade of darkness and before and their

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experiments with trying to make sure it was just a peacekeeping army. They almost destroyed our entire military. It was this government that rebuilt the pride and the combat capability of our forces, and that was the Conservative Party of Canada.

Our men and women in uniform have sacrificed so much for what they have done, and they have made Canada what it is today: a free and democratic nation admired around the world for its values and its great riches. Indeed, Canada's veterans personify so many of the things that we hold most dear: courage, commitment, honour, and service.

That is why our government is so proud to stand with each of them every day, and why we are so proud to recognize their service and honour their sacrifices with the care and support they need. Indeed, that has always been our record.

As the parliamentary secretary has noted, our government has increased Veterans Affairs Canada's annual budget to almost \$785 million more this fiscal year than in 2005. In total, our government has invested nearly \$5 million in additional funding to enhance veterans' benefits, programs, and services.

Budget 2014 builds on this record of investment by committing \$108.2 million over three years to expand eligibility for the funeral and burial program.

Additionally, budget 2014 invests \$2.1 million in 2014-15 to enhance our delivery of online services to veterans and their families. It provides veterans with greater access to rewarding jobs in the federal public service and it ensures this country properly recognizes the historical significance of Canada's mission in Afghanistan. In fact, our Prime Minister has declared May 9 the national day of honour for our brave Afghanistan veterans.

As these measures demonstrate, we have made sure, without exception, that programming for Canada's veterans continues to evolve with the needs of the men and women and families we serve. In fact, that is one of the primary purposes of our cutting red tape initiative for veterans. It is about constantly streamlining and simplifying the way Veterans Affairs Canada operates in order to provide veterans and their families with better and faster service in more modern and convenient ways.

The measures implemented through this cutting red tape initiative have reduced wait times, eliminated unnecessary bureaucratic processes, increased transparency, and introduced new technologies that have made it easier for veterans and their families to access benefits and programs.

What has been the result? Turnaround times for processing veterans' disability benefits have been significantly improved and the approval time for access to rehabilitation services has been reduced by nearly half.

Quite simply, our government has been implementing a comprehensive new approach to serving veterans that is responsive, inclusive, and flexible. It is based on a commitment, indeed a pledge, to Canada's veterans that their hard-earned benefits and services will be delivered quickly and efficiently.

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The minister has repeatedly said that there is all kinds of room for improvement. There is an initiative on the Veterans Affairs committee to examine all of these issues, and these improvements will continually, constantly be made over time. It does take time to implement some of these changes that are identified as time goes on. This government has responsibility for the changing situations and circumstances of our veterans. Our minister is doing a tremendous job making sure that all of those pieces are falling into place and that this government maintains the initiative and ensures that our veterans get everything they need.

What has been the response by the other side? On March 10, 2013, the NDP voted against \$39.1 million in funding for the veterans independence program, and on March 20, 2013, the members opposite, the NDP, voted against \$1.1 billion in health care funding for Canadian veterans. However, the parliamentary secretary has already mentioned the opposition's shameful record of support for Canada's veterans by voting against more than \$1.5 billion for veterans' pensions on June 6, 2012, the anniversary of D-Day. The irony is certainly not lost on me. It is absolutely shameful that they voted against these tremendous initiatives for our veterans, but this government, our Prime Minister, and our Minister of Veterans Affairs stood up for veterans.

● (1810)

A recent opinion piece in *The National Post* on February 6, 2014, offered this assessment:

It's almost pathetic to witness the NDP seeking to capture the military constituency, with their defeated motion to keep those veterans' affairs offices open, after they have systematically opposed a host of Conservative military spending bills. The same goes for the Liberals, who in the last election proposed to return Canada's peacekeeping to its Pearsonian glory days, without committing the necessary resources.

I will say it again. The Liberals have had ample opportunity over the decades to do right by our men and women in uniform, and they have failed each and every time.

That is the state of affairs in our country when it comes to veterans and the issues that matter the most to them. We have every reason to be proud of our record, but we have no plans to rest on our laurels. That is why the minister has asked the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs to conduct a comprehensive review of the new Veterans Charter. We want to hear what Canadians have to say, particularly regarding care for our country's most seriously injured veterans and what more we should be doing for veterans' families.

As a veteran myself, I have a keen interest in the work of the committee. Members of the committee have heard a wide range of comments and suggestions, and I am proud to continually contribute to this initiative.

There is a robust debate going on, and as a veteran, I personally appreciate the carefully considered opinions that have been rendered.

Bill C-568 is meant sincerely as another way Canada could be there for our nation's veterans, but unfortunately, it really misses the mark. This private member's bill would force the government to completely rewrite its veterans health care regulations, an exercise that, on its own, would be a time-consuming, unnecessary, and potentially expensive proposition. Furthermore, it would entirely change the department's focus from assisting those who most need

our help to creating a new health care provider, with a duplicate bureaucracy, which would needlessly cost Canadians millions of dollars. It is a redundancy that is absolutely not needed, and it would force us to intrude into provincial jurisdiction.

Perhaps this would be justified if there were some pressing need to do so, but as colleagues have already demonstrated, the existing eligibility criteria for our veterans' programming are working and do not need to be overhauled.

For example, the new Veterans Charter and related mental health services provide a comprehensive sweep of wellness programs for veterans, a comprehensive approach that helps restore and maintain their health, independence, and quality of life. Thousands of veterans and their families are accessing these programs and are getting the help they need.

We do not need to spend millions of dollars to create a duplicate bureaucracy, as I just said, in an area of provincial jurisdiction.

Simply put, Bill C-568 would only do a disservice to those veterans most in need of help, adding additional bureaucratic red tape, not reducing it, and barriers to the care and support they so richly deserve. For these reasons, I most certainly cannot support Bill C-568.

● (1815)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise and speak to Bill C-568, which was introduced by my colleague from Saint-Jean. I thank him for his excellent initiative.

This bill would ensure that all members of the Canadian Forces who were honourably discharged have access to long-term health care. My colleague has touched on an important topic with this bill.

Before I discuss the bill directly, I want to talk about some of the comments made by our colleagues on the government side. They are attacking the opposition, as did the parliamentary secretary. They said that we had a shameful record when it comes to veterans.

I think the government is projecting because its own record is shameful. The government has a dismal record when it comes to veterans, who do not receive proper treatment. The department's dismal record is a very long list. Not too long ago, departmental officials lashed out at veterans, which shows a complete lack of class. In my opinion, the government and several of its members have been arrogant. The list is very long.

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Just recently, my colleague said that the government has invested \$5 billion since 2006. That is government propaganda, because only \$3.5 billion has been spent. The \$5 billion amount was what was budgeted. It takes some nerve to not spend the money on our veterans and to claim that an additional \$5 billion was spent, which is not true. The government is trying to balance the budget at the expense of our veterans. That is the government's record and veterans know better.

I would now like to get back to the excellent bill introduced by my colleague from Saint-Jean. As I mentioned, the government is off-loading its responsibilities towards veterans, for example, by wanting to close the last veterans' hospital, Ste. Anne's Hospital. The hospital will be transferred to the Province of Quebec by the end of 2014, provided there are no additional delays. The government is going to close the last hospital dedicated to long-term health care for veterans. That makes absolutely no sense.

Only veterans of the Second World War and the Korean War have access to long-term care. My colleague's bill would lift that restriction and give all veterans access to long-term care, no matter what war they participated in. Their service was no different from that of the veterans who fought in other wars. They deserve the same treatment.

Currently, Canadian Forces members only have access to beds in community facilities. Those beds are not specifically set aside or funded for veterans. Placement in the facility is based on health needs, as is the case for any other individual. Veterans' names are placed on the standard waiting list. Veterans Affairs Canada pays the bill once the veteran is given a spot.

Modern-day veterans have access to that type of bed, which unfortunately does not give them priority. Veterans Affairs Canada also provides reserved beds, but Canadian Forces veterans are not considered eligible, as it stands. My colleague's bill, Bill C-568, is designed to change that.

The government needs to admit that it has a responsibility and moral obligation to our veterans. Despite the fact that the government does not want to own up to that moral obligation, it still exists. The government has a legal obligation to take care of veterans, but the government is denying that obligation, which is completely appalling. That is the government's record. It does not acknowledge that it has a moral obligation to take care of veterans.

In my opinion, the respect that the government has for veterans is measured by the quality of services it provides to them. Our veterans deserve better. They do not deserve budget and service cuts like the ones they have been experiencing since 2012. The government is balancing the budget on the backs of veterans.

● (1820)

That year, government cuts totalled more than \$250 million. Our veterans deserve to be treated with dignity. Unfortunately, that is not always the case.

The government must fund long-term health care for modern-day veterans, as it did for those who served before 1953. It is about time that the government act on the Ombudsman's report entitled "Veterans' Long-Term Care Needs".

Since 2006, our veterans have suffered the consequences of the Conservative government's lack of action and poor policies. The new veterans charter was passed in 2006 with the promise that it would be a living document and that it would be amended as problems emerged. However, the government has done absolutely nothing on that file.

The new veterans charter was amended only once, in 2011, by means of Bill C-55. Unfortunately, it only fixed a tiny fraction of the problems, which have been pointed out dozens of times in ombudsman reports and committee studies. The government has shirked its responsibilities by not making any changes, which is deplorable. That is part of the government's abysmal record on how it treats veterans. As I mentioned, the parliamentary secretary is projecting his own dismal record.

In 2012, the Conservatives used their majority to initiate a wave of cuts. They cut the Veterans Affairs Canada budget by \$200 million thereby eliminating 800 jobs, not including the jobs that will be lost at Ste. Anne's Hospital when it is transferred to the province.

The government said that veterans would not see a reduction in service, which is not true. In fact, veterans are having more and more difficulty accessing the services they are entitled to. In short, the government did away with more than half of the jobs at Veterans Affairs Canada. The closure of nine Veterans Affairs Canada offices on January 31 only adds to this wave of cuts and reduced services for our veterans and, of course, to the government's pathetic track record in this regard.

Our veterans also need support. How can the government think that making \$225 million in cuts will not result in reduced services? Veterans do not agree with what the government is doing, as evidenced by a study on the new veterans charter. Veterans want this government to take action. It is shameful that the government is once again turning its back on veterans by opposing this important bill introduced by my colleague from Saint-Jean.

The minister is talking out of both sides of his mouth. We saw this with the class action lawsuit filed by Equitas. He recently—and reluctantly—acknowledged the social pact that exists between the federal government and veterans. Unfortunately, however, he has shown no leadership on this. In the Equitas case, he should have told the prosecutor not to deny the existence of this social contract, but that is not at all what he did. He denied the existence of that social contract a few times, until he finally reluctantly acknowledged it recently. This complete lack of leadership is just one more example of this government's abysmal record in terms of how it treats our veterans.

In his report on veterans' long-term care, the ombudsman stated:

The very existence of so many...eligibility categories and the associated challenges entailed in establishing a veteran's eligibility...has been and remains a source of contention for both clients and...employees of Veterans Affairs Canada.

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There is therefore a real need in the area of long-term health care. I am calling on my colleagues in the governing party to vote in favour of this important bill in order to support our modern-day veterans who have a right to access long-term health care.

•(1825)

[*English*]

The Deputy Speaker: Resuming debate, the hon. member for London—Fanshawe. I will advise the member that she will only have about three or four minutes this evening for her speech.

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank all of my colleagues for the wisdom that they bring to this particular bill. I am, of course, referring to colleagues on this side of the House. I would like to particularly thank the member for Saint-Jean for introducing this important bill. I am sure members are aware that the intent is to make regulations under the Department of Veterans Affairs to extend health care benefits to former members of the Canadian Forces who meet military occupational classification requirements and have been honourably discharged.

I have to say that despite what we have heard tonight from the government benches, the veterans of this country know that they have been shortchanged and undermined by the government. They know that they have been disrespected. When the government throws around money numbers and rhetoric, the veterans of this country know that it means nothing when it comes from the government. They have been disrespected over and over again, and they will remember. There is an election next year, and the veterans of this country will most certainly remember.

I want to talk about the bill before us.

I believe that it is absolutely the honourable thing for us to do because it would honour those who have sacrificed so much for our country and give honour to our country. The sad truth is, as I have said, that the current government, the Conservatives, and previous Liberal governments, have failed our veterans. Passing and implementing this particular piece of legislation would be a step in the right direction, an important step in the right direction, and would undo some of the terrible wrongs that we have seen over the last years.

I want to reiterate some of what my colleague from Châteauguay—Saint-Constant said because I think it bears repeating. Veterans Affairs has been hit with many cuts in recent years. In 2011, the transfer of Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue Hospital to the province of Quebec marked the loss of the last federally funded and federally run veterans hospital in this country. At the time, job cuts accompanied that closure, and New Democrats were terribly concerned about the negative impact this would have on the standard of care provided to our veterans.

In 2011, the government maintained it could cut those 500 jobs through attrition and better planning, but those job cuts were accompanied by a slashing of \$226 million from Veterans Affairs' budget, a reduction of 5% to 10%. Canada was the only country to do this. Everyone else went through austerity, the Brits and the Americans, but they did not cut their veterans' budgets. Only the Conservative government did that, and it is despicable.

•(1830)

The Deputy Speaker: The member will have seven minutes to complete her speech when we resume debate.

[*Translation*]

The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[*English*]

DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, GP): Mr. Speaker, I stand to address a vital issue here tonight, perhaps the most vital issue before the House in decades. The issue is our parliamentary democracy and how dysfunctional it has become, and the critically important efforts of the member for Wellington—Halton Hills to fix it with his reform act.

I have a long and diverse resumé, but Parliament is one of the most dysfunctional organizations I have ever seen. Many Canadians are not happy with the excessive control that party leaders' offices have over everything from what MPs say to how they are allowed to vote. No greater example exists than the dictatorial control by the current Prime Minister's Office. We have devolved into one of the most rigid top-down party systems in the western world. Political parties here control everything, at the expense of constituents.

The three main parties often muzzle their MPs. One of the reasons I left my former party was that I was punished for voting the way I promised my constituents over four election campaigns, with the full blessing of our leader at that time. I was not violating party policy or anything other than the whim of new leaders and backroom apparatchiks.

Party leaders have become far too powerful, mainly because they can withhold their signature on anyone's nomination papers. They hold this like a poised club over every MP to keep MPs toeing the party line.

It was not this way when Canada was founded. Parties are not even mentioned in the Canadian Constitution. From 1867 to 1970, candidates ran for office on their name and voters had to know who stood for what before marking a ballot. Then Pierre Trudeau changed the Elections Act to give party leaders the final say over nominations and override the wishes of local ridings. We also saw Pierre's son do this recently. Since then, backbenchers have been reduced to “mere trained seals”, in the elder Trudeau's own words.

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A key part of the reform act would restore local democracy and effective representation by ending the requirement for nomination papers to bear a leader's signature. Also, the reform act would give MPs a say in who leads their caucus. All these reforms would rebalance power back toward the British model and make Parliament work for Canadians again.

I was seconder of the reform act. It is an important first step, but it is only one of the many reforms needing to be made to Parliament. In 2012, I introduced Motion No. 404 to end party leader signatures on nomination papers. I introduced Motions Nos. 391 and 340, proposing randomized seating in the House and allowing MPs from more than one party to co-sponsor legislation. These changes would make politics in Canada less about win-lose combat and more about compromise and co-operation.

A key needed reform is to fix our dysfunctional voting system. Motion No. 304 would involve Canadians from coast to coast in any changes, to add an element of proportionality to voting.

Finally, my Bill C-512 would clarify the rules around the confidence convention, to make our fixed election date meaningful, allowing the splitting up of huge omnibus budget bills and empowering MPs.

The reform act is one of the most important pieces of legislation in half a century. Will MPs dare, and be allowed, to vote for it?

• (1835)

Mr. Costas Menegakis (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I actually do not blame the member for Thunder Bay—Superior North for his dissatisfaction with the way he was treated in his party when he was with the New Democratic Party. Of course, after having promised his constituents, as he so well said, for over four elections on what his position was on the elimination of the inefficient, inaccurate, and way-overdone long gun registry, he was not allowed to vote his conscience or the will of his constituents. He took a principled position to step outside of the party and run as an independent member, because he did not want to be part of a party system. Actually, much to our surprise, he has joined another party now. However, the term is still young in this 41st Parliament; he still has 18 more months, so he may end up somewhere else at some point.

What I will say is that the sponsor of Bill C-559, the hard-working member and my colleague from Wellington—Halton Hills, has presented his bill to the House. It has not been debated yet. It has not gone to committee, and we have not heard of any amendments that may be coming up or what those amendments are. Therefore I would suggest to the hon. member for Thunder Bay—Superior North that his request, the passionate speech he gave about whether people will be able to freely vote on private member's Bill C-559, is somewhat premature at this time.

However, given this opportunity here today, I would like to highlight a couple of points for the hon. member as they relate to the record in this 41st Parliament, which is the first Parliament in which I have the great honour and privilege of serving the great people of my home riding of Richmond Hill. In this 41st Parliament, under the leadership of our Prime Minister and this strong, stable, national majority Conservative government, I am proud to say that

backbenchers, members of Parliament, have passed more bills into law than in any other Parliament since 1972, and we are only about 60% into the completion of this term. That is a clear indication of how much we value the input of all members of Parliament.

I should say that, if we looked through the records since this 41st Parliament took office on May 2, 2011, we would find that the Conservative members of Parliament have voted freely a lot more often than any of the other parties. In fact, I believe the New Democratic Party has a 100% rate of whipped voting from its leadership. That is not the case in private members' legislation on the Conservative side.

In closing, I will say this. I am proud to be a member of the Conservative Party of Canada, which allows its members to voice their opinions through constructive debate before rising in this House to express the vote that the good people in their respective ridings have given them the right to cast.

Mr. Bruce Hyer: Mr. Speaker, the first thing I would like to say is that I wish we did have a majority government, but we do not. With 39% of the popular vote in Canada, the Conservatives cannot be said to have a real majority, as most democracies in the world have.

I believe most MPs value democracy and want to see it improved in Canada. That is one reason the reform act is an exemplary bill. It is a non-partisan initiative to improve the way our democracy works. It is something every member should vote for, regardless of political stripe. It would improve the functioning of our democracy for everyone, voters and MPs alike.

I know most members from every party here would like to vote for this bill. In my opinion, Bill C-559 must pass if we are ever going to find our way back to democracy and responsible government. It would give MPs the power to escape party servitude; to think, speak, and vote for their constituents and their conscience; and to put the best interests of Canada ahead of hyper-partisan party tribalism.

• (1840)

Mr. Costas Menegakis: Mr. Speaker, the member will know that the system of governance we have in Canada is clearly very democratic. He knew when he put his name on a ballot to be elected in his riding how we get elected and how governments are formed, whether as a majority or a minority. For the member to now change or twist his perception of whether there is a majority government is just his own personal perception. The fact of the matter is that there is. The fact of the matter is that this Prime Minister and this majority Conservative government respect the will of its members and the will of the members of this House all of the time. That has been clearly demonstrated by the voting record since the 41st Parliament began in May 2011.

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CANADA POST

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in December, Canada Post announced major planned reductions to its services, including eliminating home delivery; raising prices, effective yesterday, in fact; more privatization; and thousands of job losses.

In a cynical move, the announcement was made the day after the House of Commons rose in December in hopes that legislators would not be around to act. It is quite alarming that this sneak attack came with no meaningful consultation and dialogue with Canadians. All discussions to date have been done online and by invitation only. Canadians deserve better.

Canada Post has provided critical and essential services for over a century. Canadians depend on their local postal services. Canada Post is an important institution that provides a significant service to Canadians all across the country.

One group of people who will be most impacted by these drastic changes are seniors and those with mobility issues. There is great concern about how some seniors will manage to collect their mail. Disability and seniors organizations in Canada have been very vocal in their opposition.

The Congress of Union Retirees has been clear that the proposed changes to Canada Post will potentially have a serious and harmful impact not only on seniors but on all Canadians. According to CURC, their members are particularly concerned about the extra burden this attack entails for seniors and persons with disabilities. Members have expressed their disgust at the insulting comments made by Canada Post CEO Deepak Chopra that community mailboxes replacing home delivery would allow seniors to get needed exercise.

The National Pensioners Federation has also been critical of the cuts and has asked their members to join the campaign against these cuts.

CARP has been very vocal as well about the issue and even met with the CEO of Canada Post to express concerns about the negative impact on individuals, especially those with mobility challenges and those who would be put at a greater safety risk if they had to walk to a community mailbox, particularly in bad weather.

Although the CEO has suggested extra mailbox keys for caregivers or family members as a suitable solution, CARP pointed out that such an idea would increase the risk of potential financial abuse by caregivers or family members. CARP emphasized that door-to-door mail delivery is essential for many Canadians and can provide added value, especially for homebound individuals. For many of those people, the letter carrier may be the only point of human contact for some days.

Now senior citizens in Kanata, Winnipeg, and Calgary have learned that they will be among the first to lose home mail delivery.

Can the minister explain to them why all other G7 governments can provide mail delivery for their seniors and small businesses, but Conservatives cannot? Canada Post connects Canadians from coast to coast to coast. It is an important entity. It is important to keep that

connection and to keep it affordable. We can do this if we make it a priority.

Canada Post, despite some challenges, has earned significant profits, \$1.2 billion, in fact, over the past 17 years. It cannot, however, grow its business by eliminating services, driving away customers, and raising prices.

The Conservatives have broken their promise to protect Canadian consumers and have offered no new approach to bring in more revenue to Canada Post.

● (1845)

Mr. Peter Braid (Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to start by stating that in 2012, Canada Post delivered one billion fewer letters than it did in 2006. Furthermore, two thirds of Canadians do not currently receive door-to-door mail delivery.

We believe that Canada Post must balance its finances without being a burden on Canadian taxpayers, and that is exactly what we expect it to do.

Due to the sheer size of their respective postal territories, Canada's postal situation is more similar to that of the United States than to other G7 countries. In North America, a minority of addresses still receive door-to-door delivery. It is roughly a third in Canada, as I mentioned, and less than 28% currently in the United States.

Most senior citizens in both countries receive their mail through venues other than door-to-door delivery.

Last July, a bill was introduced in the United States Congress that, if passed, would end door-to-door delivery in that country. Despite being named the most efficient post office in 2012 by Oxford Strategic Consulting, the United States Postal Service lost more than \$5 billion last year, and almost \$16 billion the previous year. Since ending door-to-door delivery in the United States would save an estimated \$4.5 billion a year, this option is, not surprisingly, being considered by American legislators.

Mail delivery in other G7 nations differs from that of North America as a result of much higher population densities that tend to live in multi-residential dwellings, such as apartment buildings, that are grouped much more closely together. The end result is that it is less expensive to deliver in other G7 countries than in Canada and the United States, so ending door-to-door delivery would result in comparatively fewer savings. As a result, other approaches have been implemented.

Adjournment Proceedings

In the United Kingdom, most of Royal Mail has been privatized, thereby allowing an exit from declining postal business. However, this strategy has been costly.

In April 2012, the U.K. government assumed the responsibility for both the Royal Mail pension plan deficit and the plan's liabilities of over £30 billion, or about \$56 billion Canadian at the current exchange rate. Stamp prices were also increased dramatically, and the post offices were spun off into a separate government-owned limited company that received £2 billion in subsidies from the U.K. government. These actions helped shore up Royal Mail to the extent that it was able to show profits over the past two fiscal years after many years of deficits. As a result, shares in Royal Mail became more attractive to investors.

It is clear that in Canada, the traditional postal business model that worked so well in the pre-digital era is increasingly out of step with today's reality. Canadians are choosing to communicate in ways other than sending letters, including, of course, using our Black-Berrys. Due to the lack of demand, mail volumes have dropped almost 25% since 2008 and continue to fall. The Conference Board of Canada projected that Canada Post could lose \$1 billion a year by 2020.

Canada Post, as an arm's-length crown corporation, is responsible for its operations, including business and financial decisions.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Mr. Speaker, I heard my hon. colleague talk about the Americans and the Brits. The reality is that Canada Post is the subject of tonight's discussion, and it made \$1.2 billion in the last 17 years.

We heard the member opposite argue that two thirds of Canadians do not have door-to-door delivery. The fact is that many Canadians do receive home delivery. In Conservative parlance, door-to-door delivery does not include those living in apartment or condo buildings. These customers are, in fact, receiving home delivery in the lobby of their apartment buildings. They do not need to leave the

building to collect their mail. Rural recipients also receive home delivery in the mailboxes at the end of their driveways.

Both of these groups are excluded by the Conservatives in their tally of door-to-door delivery. Clearly, this adds up to Conservative double-talk, because folks do indeed get that home delivery.

Our postal service is something that is important to Canadians. New Democrats are proud to stand with those Canadians—with seniors, postal workers, folks with disabilities, charities, and small businesses—for the right to have home and door-to-door delivery.

• (1850)

Mr. Peter Braid: Mr. Speaker, due to much higher costs, only about a third of addresses in Canada and, as I explained previously, less than 28% in the United States have door-to-door delivery. Most other addresses, including seniors residences, are served by community mailboxes, apartment, condo, or retirement home lock boxes in building lobbies, or other delivery venues.

While delivery to the door is more common in other G7 nations, as I explained, this form of delivery is less costly in those countries given their higher population densities resulting in smaller building lots and a greater use of multi-dweller residences.

Consequently, other approaches to declining mail volumes have occurred, such as privatization or the leveraging of postal businesses into other market segments, such as postal banking, insurance, express courier, logistics, telecommunications, currency exchange, et cetera, to offset those postal costs.

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:51 p.m.)

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