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(HANSARD)

Thursday, March 1, 2012

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, March 1, 2012

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)
[English]

INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1) I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian joint delegation of the Canada-China Legislative Association and the Canada-Japan Interparliamentary Group respecting their participation at the 32nd General Assembly of the Asian Interparliamentary Assembly which was held in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, September 18-24, 2011.

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COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

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

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the third report of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities in relation to the federal support measures to adoptive parents.

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Rodney Weston (Saint John, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the second report of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans in relation to the motion adopted by the committee on Monday, February 27, 2012, on the support of the committee for the Canadian seal industry.

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ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE ACT

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-403, An Act to amend the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Act (Civilian Investigation Service).

He said: Mr. Speaker, this will be a bill of interest to all of my colleagues from all corners of the House. It is a bill that would require public oversight of the RCMP. It is something that the

provinces have been making moves toward steadily and surely because there is a need, both for members serving on the force and for the general safety of the public, that there be proper and consistent public oversight of the RCMP. This would tackle a number of issues in one go. It would allow for accountability at the highest levels of the RCMP. We have seen a number of issues and scandals that have arisen over the years. It also would give assurance to front line officers, when they go into a situation, that if anything were to go awry, which it sometimes does, there would be public oversight of the investigation, which would allow the officers certainty and allow the public the certainty that a full and proper arm's-length investigation will be done.

This is something we have been working on for years and something for which we have seen growing support within the RCMP and, more broadly, across the general Canadian public. We think the time has long since come for the public to have oversight and enforcement of the rules that govern our national police force.

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

* * *

• (1010)

PETITIONS

ABORTION

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the petitioners note that Canada is the only nation in the western world, in the company of China and North Korea, without any laws restricting abortion. They also note that the Supreme Court of Canada has said that it is Parliament's responsibility to enact abortion legislation.

The petitioners call upon the House of Commons in Parliament assembled to speedily enact legislation that restricts abortion to the greatest extent possible.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, it is my honour to rise today to present three petitions.

The first petition deals with the ongoing promotion by the Government of Canada of a private sector project, the Enbridge supertanker scheme, that I am recently dubbing the great pipeline of China. Members of my riding, throughout Victoria and some of the Gulf Islands call on the government to cease and desist from supporting the project until it has gone through proper review and to allow environmental considerations to be sufficiently considered.

Routine Proceedings

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, the second petition from residents of Salt Spring Island calls on the government to take immediate action on the climate crisis, specifically to be aware of the fact that, as greenhouse gas levels rise, the planet is imperilled but that, through a clean energy economy, many more jobs could be created.

PETITIONS

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, it is my honour to present a petition from members of my community in Saanich—Gulf Islands who are so interested in the proceedings of the House, specifically what we are doing right now, the presentation of petitions, that they call on the Government of Canada to create an ongoing system by which citizens can track the tabling of petitions and the response to petitions online so that it becomes a more useful tool for citizens of Canada.

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP): Madam Speaker, I have three petitions to table today.

The first petition is with respect to the creation of a post-secondary education act in Canada. Canada is one of the only developed countries that does not have a post-secondary education act. The petitioners call for the creation of a post-secondary education act that would fall on three basic principles: first, good quality education; second, that it be publicly administered; and third, that it be available and accessible to all Canadians who wish to pursue post-secondary education.

The petitioners call upon the Government of Canada to create a post-secondary education act that would remove the federal funding for post-secondary education from the social transfer to the provinces and create a new transfer of funds dedicated solely for the purpose of post-secondary education. This petition has been signed by residents living in the areas of Calgary, Regina and Saskatoon.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP): Madam Speaker, my second petition is from my riding of Scarborough—Rouge River. It calls upon the Government of Canada to act on human rights, in particular, in Sri Lanka.

The UN report, which was presented by an expert panel created by the secretary-general of the United Nations, found credible allegations that war crimes and crimes against humanity took place on the island of Sri Lanka during the last phase of the war.

Therefore, the petitioners call upon the Government of Canada to urge the United Nations to immediately establish an independent, international and impartial mechanism to ensure that truth, accountability and justice are attained in Sri Lanka.

FALUN GONG

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP): Madam Speaker, the third petition is from many people in my constituency on the topic of human rights in the country of China. It concerns Falun Gong practitioners who say that Falun Gong is a peaceful and beneficial spiritual practice centred on the principles of

truth, compassion, forbearance and a set of five meditation exercises. Falun Gong members have been persecuted since July 1999.

The petitioners call upon the Canadian government to continuously use every possible channel to call for an end to the persecution of Falun Gong members, especially at meetings with top Chinese leaders and at international forums, and to help rescue 12 family members of Canadian residents who are incarcerated for their belief in Falun Gong in China.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to bring forward a petition that calls upon the government to appoint a royal commission on the environment and health with the mandate to examine and make recommendations regarding all aspects of the environmental and health impacts of industrial activity in Canada, the application of precautionary principle, which would protect public health and the environment from uncertain risks, to the regulation of both industrial processes and production, distribution and availability of consumer goods in Canada.

This petition is in regard to calling for a royal commission on the environment and health.

POVERTY

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise on behalf of the constituents of Fleetwood—Port Kells to present a petition signed by the members of my riding.

The petitioners call upon Parliament to ensure the swift passage of Bill C-233 and to take steps to eliminate poverty in Canada.

ABORTION

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have two petitions to present, the first from constituents from my beautiful riding of Langley, British Columbia.

The petitioners note that Canada is the only nation in the western world, and in the company of China and North Korea, without any laws restricting abortion. They also note that the Supreme Court of Canada has said that it is Parliament's responsibility to enact abortion legislation.

The petitioners, therefore, call upon the House of Commons to assemble and to speedily enact legislation that restricts abortion to the greatest extent possible.

●(1015)

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Madam Speaker, the second petition notes that there are a number of severe, potentially life-threatening conditions that do not qualify for disability programs because they are not necessarily permanent or because of waiting lists for surgeries, which lengthens recovery times.

Government Orders

The petitioners are calling upon the House of Commons to adopt legislation to provide additional medical EI benefits, at least equal to if not better than maternity EI benefits, for people who find themselves in these situations.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have the honour to present two petitions today.

The first petition is from 28 residents of the Kitchener—Conestoga riding who are calling on the government, in the spirit of global solidarity, to take collective action by signing and implementing a binding international agreement replacing the Kyoto protocol, and to implement climate justice by playing a constructive role in the design of the green climate fund under the United Nations' governance.

FALUN GONG

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Madam Speaker, the second petition is from about 150 residents of the Waterloo region who are calling on the government to use every possible channel and opportunity to call for an end to the persecution of Falun Gong, especially at meetings with top Chinese leaders, and also to help rescue 10 family members of Canadian residents who are incarcerated for their belief in Falun Gong in China.

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QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*Translation*]

CANADA-JORDAN ECONOMIC GROWTH AND PROSPERITY ACT

The House resumed from December 14, 2012, consideration of the motion that Bill C-23, An Act to implement the Free Trade Agreement between Canada and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, the Agreement on the Environment between Canada and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and the Agreement on Labour Cooperation between Canada and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the motion that this question be now put.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Beauport—Limoilou has the floor for 14 minutes.

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Madam Speaker, I will pick up where I left off a few weeks ago. I talked about the value of signing bilateral free trade agreements with countries around the world. That consideration is all the more relevant when we have very limited trade relations with the country in question, as is the case with Jordan.

On Monday, in my speech on the free trade agreement with Panama bill, I pointed out that trade between Panama and Canada represented an insignificant fraction of Canada's total trade with the rest of the world. We have to ask ourselves whether associating ourselves with Panama is worth risking Canada's international reputation. We could ask ourselves the same question about Jordan.

I should mention that, in 2009, total trade between Jordan and Canada amounted to barely \$86 million. As with Panama, trade between Jordan and Canada is growing quickly without a free trade agreement in place.

I would like to go back to the first part of the speech I made about Jordan. We have examples of high-achieving countries around the world. I spoke about China and Brazil. They are increasing their international trade enormously without signing free trade agreements. However, these countries are very active through other means. They are using much more powerful and much more worthwhile means to increase their foreign trade and support their economy.

It is very important to take that into consideration. Because the way I see it, signing free trade agreements in such a disorganized way, without reviewing them beforehand, without determining whether or not they are small in scope, raises many more religious issues or, at the very least, the question of a basic belief that is not supported by fact—let us think of progress that we could measure and that would enable us to provide benefits to all Canadians.

This is a governmental approach that I find very worrisome. We can even wonder about the possible interpretation: as I said on Monday, is the government not sort of running away to avoid facing growing domestic problems?

I am the critic for small business and tourism. I can see that, currently in the Canadian economy, we are having problems supporting start-up companies. Entrepreneurship is seriously lacking, and the government is not taking care of that. But what the government is doing is overloading officials assigned to reviewing and implementing free trade agreements by increasing the number of superficial, artificial agreements that do not meet the needs of Canadians as a whole, for peanuts, for insignificant things that will, however, have a significant impact.

I would like to point out to the House that, if Bill C-23 is approved, Canada—without any guarantee and without having properly reviewed what is involved—will end up with ties to a country that may still have serious problems with regard to labour law.

Previously, when the NDP had serious concerns about this, it had learned and understood that there were outrageous cases of exploitation of foreign workers. A concrete example would be what is happening in the textile mills in Jordan. People were working in atrocious conditions, were living in totally inhumane conditions and were practically treated like slaves.

Government Orders

●(1020)

Jordan wanted to achieve some progress in that regard. But is it enough so that Canada can associate with Jordan without causing serious harm to Canada's reputation, since it has such a strong influence on the international scene? That is the situation Canada is in. That is why the NDP does not necessarily oppose at all costs entering into a free trade agreement with Jordan or any other country in the world. However, the NDP insists that we must have sufficient guarantees before we will support it.

As a member of the Standing Committee on International Trade—which is often dysfunctional and is too easily denied the basic tools needed to assess the work of officials and the minister in question, as well as free trade agreements under negotiation or already concluded—I am quite concerned.

The fact that the NDP agrees that this bill should be sent to committee for examination is in no way a blank cheque. This does not mean we fully support the bill as it currently stands. We still have questions and concerns. This does nothing to put an end to the attitude shown by this government, which is simply using one distraction after another to try to hide all the deficiencies in its management, not to mention all the scandals that keep emerging.

I have the honour of being part of a very young caucus; many NDP members are in their twenties. This agreement commits Canada for a long time, indeed, for a very long time. A parallel can be drawn here. A free trade agreement is almost like a marriage contract between two people. That is why we must examine it very carefully, in order to weigh the pros and cons and to know what we are committing to.

Unfortunately, sometimes in matters of the heart, a union between two people is entered into lightly and too quickly, which can be disastrous. The Government of Canada has adopted a rushed and reckless approach. I would encourage all hon. members of this House and all the members of the committee to participate in an open, clear and transparent review.

If the government wants the unanimous support of this House for this bill, then it should involve all the parties concerned, which it is not doing. At least, it has not so far. For the six years the Conservative Party has formed the government, it has shut everyone else out. It makes me wonder what that means for the interests of our country and for our future. It is not a healthy approach.

That is why the NDP is showing openness so that the government can share with us, in good faith, the information it has and show us clearly, through cold hard facts, the value of this future free trade agreement.

●(1025)

I am going to keep an open mind even though I have been rather disappointed by the government's attitude in the past. We will, however, give a quick account of the problems with the existing agreement that the government is trying to push through the House.

We are willing to work with the government provided that it is willing to consider the problems with the current agreement. When the agreement was concluded and the NDP was able to speak to this matter during the previous Parliament, the NDP pointed out that a

number of credible, independent international agencies had warned us about the general abuses endured by workers in Jordan, especially foreign workers.

Unfortunately, in some of the textile plants, there are cases of slavery. There have been some credible reports on that. Canada cannot condone this. When it comes to international agreements, our country is completely against such practices.

To sign this agreement without having a guarantee from the Jordanian government that it is addressing the problem, actively working on it and fighting the abuse of foreign workers would be an outright betrayal of our international commitments. I am sorry, but I am not prepared to put our excellent reputation on the line for the paltry amount of \$85 million worth of trade in 2009.

This free trade agreement also refers to the protection of investments. Although we have not been negotiating a long time in the case of the European free trade agreement, I have worked on it a fair bit. I have said it before and I will say it again: provisions that protect investors who do business in Canada are an aberration. It makes no sense because the rule of law prevails in Canada. We have all the legal mechanisms and legal protections necessary to guarantee investors that they will be treated with respect and that their rights will not be violated. What effect can the government give to a provision to protect Jordanians, or even Europeans, who invest in Canada? Is Canada a banana republic? The government will have to account to the committee on that. The government will have to explain what this means and why it is going down that road.

The lessons of NAFTA have shown that the NDP was quite right to be cautious and to ask for guarantees. We will do so with this free trade agreement and with others.

●(1030)

Mr. Jean Rousseau (Compton—Stanstead, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Beauport—Limoilou for his excellent speech. He also raised many questions about the future of this bill. I studied labour law and I find that this bill raises many questions in this regard.

Labour laws must be harmonized across Canada. I am wondering what the hon. member has to say about the fact that they should also be harmonized with the laws of the countries with which we are working. Canada has always been a leader when it comes to human rights, particularly with respect to workers' rights. I would like to know what the hon. member thinks about this.

Government Orders

Mr. Raymond Côté: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Compton—Stanstead for his question, which is particularly relevant. We could look at the question from a philosophical perspective: does Canada want to be a model or, on the contrary, do we prefer to turn a blind eye to situations that are completely unacceptable? Canada has signed many international agreements to protect human rights and workers' rights because it is against slavery and the exploitation of human beings. In the House, we have even discussed how to combat human trafficking. So why support the virtual slavery that exists in Jordan?

I would like to draw the House's attention to an issue that really hurts our pride. There is already a free trade agreement between the United States and Jordan, but the United States ensured that the agreement itself—and not a side agreement—included provisions pertaining to the resolution of labour relations disputes. The United States wanted guarantees. Even with these guarantees, Tim Waters, the political director of the United Steelworkers union, said that, after 12 years, the agreement has not been as productive as expected. This gives us some idea of the scope of the problems that Jordan is currently experiencing.

Mr. Denis Blanchette (Louis-Hébert, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his speech. He said that we need to have sufficient guarantees to be able to support this bill. He talked about labour law, but his comments suggested that Canada should impose its own conditions to make the free trade agreement acceptable to us. Could the hon. member for Beauport—Limoilou expand on that?

Mr. Raymond Côté: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his question. In terms of guarantees, we could take a colonialist approach and impose conditions, but that is obviously not the approach of the New Democratic Party, not in the slightest. However, as a trading partner in any trade negotiation on any scale, I think that we have every right to be demanding. That does not mean imposing our will, but we have to ask questions when we notice problems. We may wonder why certain things occur in that country and why, despite an international agreement being reached, it still tolerates a situation that is in violation of the agreement.

That is one of our concerns. Unlike its diplomatic relations, which Canada can suspend at any time should a problem arise, a free trade agreement is a considerable commitment on Canada's part.

Thus we may find ourselves in a position where we support and are complicit with governments that do not fulfill their duties toward their citizens and other residents. That is unacceptable and the New Democratic Party would like to look at this aspect with the government, transparently and on an equal footing. Is the government going to address our concerns? Is it going to agree to open the books and answer our questions? We are open and we hope that the government will answer our questions.

• (1035)

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his excellent speech. We are indeed showing openness here, by moving forward and allowing this bill to be sent to committee to be improved and refined. I have a concern with this bill in terms of NAFTA's famous chapter 11, of which everyone is aware. Not only is it still detrimental to our workers, it is also detrimental to the environment. Unfortunately, Canada has been

involved in well-known legal challenges. Some private multinational companies have filed lawsuits because of environmental protection legislation.

As we work to analyze this bill, and eventually to study it in committee, would it be important and essential to check whether protecting the environment and the working conditions of our workers at home does not present a problem?

Mr. Raymond Côté: Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Drummond for his question.

We are talking about the free trade treaty bill, but I would rather say treaties—a series of agreements. In parallel with a free trade agreement between Canada and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, there is also an agreement on the environment and an agreement on labour cooperation. It is certainly good that we are able to identify these matters. We will be able to see if the separate agreements are sufficient. The problem is precisely that they are separate from the main text of the free trade agreement, contrary to the American approach.

Let us concentrate on the environmental aspect. If there are problems of an environmental nature, potential conflicts will be resolved by consultations and by the exchange of information. And if the consultations do not allow the conflict to be resolved, the aggrieved party can ask for an independent panel of experts to be set up to look into the conflict. That is not stringent at all. I do not want to make assumptions about the Hashemite Kingdom's good faith, but, at the same time, is that going to be enough? I recall the example of the free trade agreement between the United States and Jordan in 2000, which was not enough to solve the major problems about rights and about the exploitation of workers. Similarly, we have separate agreements on labour rights and on the environment. If we do not obtain sufficient guarantees, the unfortunate danger is that they will be agreements in name only.

So it is very useful as a marketing exercise, but, in terms of standing up for the interests of workers, both Canadian and Jordanian, it may be more an opportunity for the two countries to have a high-level cocktail party than to provide concrete benefits to their people.

• (1040)

[English]

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is my privilege to speak to this issue. I will be speaking in favour of sending this legislation to committee where I hope to see amendments welcomed to make this free trade agreement more humanitarian, more environmentally friendly, and definitely more beneficial for Jordan and Canada.

Government Orders

Many people probably are wondering how big Jordan is. Jordan is a small country. It is one of our trading partners but it is not one of our top trading partners. Out of our top 100 trading partners around the world, Jordan is ranked 88th. We do a fair bit of trade with Jordan. Our two-way trade amounts to \$85.9 million. We export about \$70.1 million and we import \$18.7 million, mainly in clothing and textiles. If we compare that to Norway, which is ranked 10th out of all of our trading partners with exports to Norway of \$2.5 billion, we can see that Jordan is important but it is not as large a contributor to our imports and exports. This begs the question: Why must there be a free trade agreement with Jordan?

We should be looking at facilitating trade around the world with many different countries. We are living in a global economy and we need to address many of the global issues.

I have been doing some research, although I must admit it has only been a very little amount because of the timing. It seems to make sense to me that this treaty with Jordan would be significant not only because we already have a good relationship with Jordan, but because it is also seen as a gateway to the rest of the Middle East and northern Africa. As such, it may not be significant on its own, but it would give us a foothold and open that gateway into other countries. We cannot ignore that.

I have also noticed that the diaspora from Jordan is very active. According to the last census, about two-thirds of them live in the Toronto area. Part of the diaspora lives in my community of Newton—North Delta as well. They are Canadians who contribute to our society but for very good reasons have kept strong links with their home country.

As we look at what is happening internationally, it is always good to explore markets around the world, big and small. At the same time, we have to look at what that means.

I want to refer to NAFTA. I was not in Parliament when NAFTA was negotiated, but I do know that some of the fallout from NAFTA has not been good for Canadians.

In my province of B.C., logs are being loaded on trucks to be shipped to the United States while towns in B.C. are turning into ghost towns and dormitory towns as the mills close down.

● (1045)

In British Columbia and other provinces, people see well-paying jobs that gave them some security with respect to health care and pensions going over the border. They are wondering what free trade really means. Does it mean that we give away Canadian jobs? That is the question that has to be asked every step of the way.

We always hear that there will be a review panel to review this and that. My experience with review panels has not been all that great.

Let us look, for example, at the administration to the south of Canada. After all, we did sign NAFTA with the Americans. Their government blatantly said in a speech to the nation that companies that bring jobs back into the United States will get greater tax benefits, and it will look favourably on companies that create jobs at home.

Whenever we look at free trade agreements, we often feel that we cannot raise those kinds of issues, or how often do our government negotiators do that. Other countries do not shy away from protecting their jobs at home. The Americans do not shy away from offering extra tax incentives to keep companies at home, growing jobs at home, instead of contracting out to call centres and manufacturing places all over the world.

That is one side of the free trade agreements that we always have to be aware of, the net effect on working people right across this country.

The other side of the coin is we always have to pay attention to what happens in the country that we have signed a bilateral agreement with. We have signed some bilateral agreements with countries to the south of us. In my previous life, as the president of the B.C. Teachers' Federation and then with the Canadian Teachers' Federation, I had the privilege to travel to many countries where I saw the sweatshops and the working conditions. I saw the beautiful roads that bring goods up to the north. However, once one leaves those main arterial routes, what one sees is abject poverty.

Canadians have to ask themselves if that is what they want for their future. Do they really want to see child labour? Do they want to see children in deplorable working conditions? Do they really want to save a few pennies while those kinds of working conditions occur in other countries?

Let us look at the labour situation in Jordan. From all accounts it is not that great. However, to give Jordan credit, it has signed agreements and protocols. Unfortunately, very little enforcement is taking place. As a trading partner, do we really want to finalize this trade agreement if we do not see some teeth given to enforcement?

The United Steelworkers Union supported this free trade agreement in the beginning. Then it began to see what the working conditions were like.

Charles Kernaghan, the U.S. National Labor Committee executive director, testified that after nine years of a U.S. trade agreement, thousands of foreign guest workers in the Middle East kingdom continued to be stripped of their passports, forced into 99-hour—let me stress that, 99-hour—workweeks and were denied their rightful wages while being housed in bedbug-infested dorms.

● (1050)

Even though the USW had supported the U.S.-Jordan trade deal when it was negotiated in the early days, it now says that it was a decision its union has come to deeply regret. It no longer supports it. The U.S.-Jordan trade deal immediately descended into the trafficking of tens of thousands of foreign workers to Jordanian factories.

Government Orders

We know that Jordan is very dependent on migrant domestic workers as well. Some of them are not just hired as domestics to work in people's homes, but to work in textile factories as well. Once migrant domestic workers are hired, there is very little mobility for them. They are at the mercy of their employers. It is not easy for them, even after years of service, to change employers. Therefore, though Jordan has committed in a side agreement to address labour laws, it behooves us to do due diligence and to make sure that we see some action on enforcement.

Human Rights Watch Canada, in October 2011, released a report called "Domestic Plight: How Jordanian Law Officials, Employers, and Recruiters Fail Abused Migrant Domestic Workers". The report details the absolutely deplorable working conditions for domestic workers. Most of these workers come from countries where people are desperate to go somewhere to make a living. They come from Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Philippines and India. The report shows that very little has changed since these issues were first raised in 2010. That definitely should draw our attention and should push us. I am sure our negotiators will be pushing hard on that. We will be looking for some commitments to that at the committee stage.

When we do free trade with another nation, we have to look at not only what we gain out of that deal but what kind of an impact it has on development within that nation. For example, should foreign investors get a higher level of protection than investors from within Jordan? I would say absolutely not. It is so colonial in many ways to say, "We are coming in, we trade with you and therefore we should get better investment protections. Our companies, individuals from Canada who invest in Jordan, should have better, superior provisions for the protection of their investments than Jordanians themselves".

I do not know how we could look at ourselves in the mirror if we were to sign such agreements. Certainly, I know that as a Canadian, it is very difficult when foreign corporations have better rights than Canadians. Therefore, why would I want to support something that would give such lack of protection to Jordanian investors? As part of the agreement we should absolutely ensure that no such two-tier system, one for foreign investors and one for native investors, is created.

It is very similar when we look at environmental issues. We live in a global economy. We live in a world that is shrinking every single day it seems. We can watch what is happening in our living rooms. I can turn on my TV and see what is happening in drought-ridden Africa. I can see the abject poverty and the need for humanitarian aid immediately. I can see the violence in Syria and experience it, sitting in my chair in my living room.

● (1055)

In the same way, our environment is not confined within different countries. Whenever we negotiate, it is absolutely imperative, not only for our generation but for the generations to come, that we pay special attention to ensuring that we build in environmental protections. Whatever happens in Jordan, whatever regulations it adopts, has a direct impact not only on Jordan and countries surrounding it but really on the whole globe, just we know that the clearing of the rain forests has a direct impact on our climate here. Therefore, it is imperative for our world's existence that we pay special attention to addressing environmental issues.

It is often easy to say that it can be a sidebar deal, we will deal with it later, or that we cannot really push for environmental issues until after we are a trading partner. One lesson I have learned is that we have a far better chance of getting somewhere when we still hold some chips in our hands. We do, so let us not put that one off.

It is the same with human rights. I have not changed my position in the House over the years. As a nation we have a very proud history not only for advocating for human rights around the world but for being champions of human rights around the world. Over the last few years, we have seen that reputation tarnished a bit. Yesterday in committee I heard about a comment made in South America that Canada no longer really cared about our reputation overseas and that we do not have the kind of reputation we used to have. I can tell the House that Canadians care very deeply about our reputation around the world.

When I was much younger, I travelled around Europe from England. I was always amazed at how many Americans had the Canadian flag attached to their backpacks. Those were the days when I could travel with a backpack. I do not think I could do that today. I often asked these young Americans why they were not wearing their American flag. They said that they got much better treatment when they wore the Canadian flag, that people treated them totally differently. Before leaving the U.S. they would try to acquire a Canadian flag to sew onto their backpacks or wear, to show that they were from Canada. They said they were welcomed and that people would want to speak to them and tell them about the amazing work we were doing on human rights issues, on addressing poverty and on working with developing countries. We were known as peacekeepers, as a nation that brokered peace and because of that they had a great deal of admiration.

However, in my opinion, we no longer have a seat on the United Nations Security Council, thanks to the actions of the government. Canada no longer has that untarnished image as peacekeepers. I would say that it behooves us, and I plead with the government, to make sure that as we are looking at signing free trade agreements, be it with China, Jordan or any country around the world, that we absolutely make human rights a central issue. We have to make sure that we are there not only as advocates but that we make it one of our conditions, and that we put some teeth into those negotiations to enforce human rights in those countries.

● (1100)

We have heard the argument that we can do that after we become a trading partner. We need to be doing that now. As I said at the beginning, I am supporting the bill going to committee, where New Democrats will be raising those concerns.

Government Orders

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Madam Speaker, one human right which is incredibly important is the right for people to provide for themselves and their families, to have the resources to put roofs over their heads and food on the table. Our great hope with this free trade agreement is that it will help spur economic growth in Jordan. That is tremendously important.

I should note that Jordan, under the king's leadership, has made great strides. He has sped up some of the reforms that he had already undertaken in the Arab Spring. We welcome that. He has been a great constructive partner for peace throughout the region. This government has taken a strong stand on human rights all around the world. The Prime Minister, in a recent visit to China, brought up these issues at every senior meeting and discussed them forcefully, as Canadians would expect him to do.

When I spoke at the United Nations on behalf of Canada, I raised the plight of various groups around the world, whether they be women, religious minorities, gays and lesbians, people seeking political reform around the world, or people seeking justice, freedom and democracy. That is essential. We have sought human rights in Sri Lanka and Iran, which has an abysmal human rights record, and we will continue to do that.

I appreciate the member's thoughtful comments on wanting to get this bill to committee so that it can be studied more thoroughly.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Madam Speaker, I agree that our government spoke out and took a very strong stand when it came to human rights in Sri Lanka. It made me feel very proud when that happened. I commended the minister personally at that time.

Human rights are not just about earning a living. They are also about working conditions of workers. After almost 12 years of a free trade agreement with the U.S. in which Jordan had made commitments to work on those issues, a report was released at the beginning of this year which stated that there are still people being forced to work 99 hour weeks and their wages are being withheld. Part of the human rights issue includes the right of working people to negotiate and have a say in who they work for. Their passports are taken away, their salaries are withheld from them, they have to work horribly long hours and live in deplorable conditions.

We have an opportunity and I would urge the minister to take this opportunity to protect people in Jordan.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we talk about labour or environmental laws, and the importance of human rights. Some countries, from a Canadian perspective, are more challenged than others in being able to meet world standards. This includes many of the countries we have a lot of trade with today. One can reference China, where there has been a great deal of expression with regard to these laws.

Free trade agreements are quite often, in principle, a movement toward economic co-operation and development between two countries. They are an extension of trading that is currently in place. The question I have for the member is this. To what degree do we hold back on these agreements because of environmental and labour laws and human rights issues when in fact we are already trading with those nations? We are trying to influence them. None of us in the chamber supports the exploitation of child labour, as an

example. We are trying to discourage that in the world. To what degree do we not enter into free trade agreements because of those types of issues, when we are already trading with countries like China?

• (1105)

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Madam Speaker, I absolutely agree that it is not just when we look at free trade agreements but also when we are trading that we need to look at human rights issues.

We already trade with Jordan, so why is there this need for a free trade agreement? Obviously it goes beyond that. I suppose it is a little like dating. When dating, one can just wake up one morning and decide not to go out on a scheduled date, much as it is when a country is trading without an agreement. However, when one signs a trade agreement it is like committing to a marriage or a long-term, legally binding relationship that would take quite the rigmarole to get out of.

I would call this our second sober look at a relationship. Yes, one might be dating and there may be problems with the dates, but before putting on a wedding ring, one would look at all of the dates again with a little more clarity. I would hope so anyway.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, I would ask my friend if she agrees that we have a real disconnect when we talk about trade agreements. It is as if when we question new trade agreements, we are somehow against trade.

I am very cognizant of the fact that the Uruguay round resulted in a new version of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, the WTO, in which all nations are involved. We trade with all nations and the GATT rules are more than adequate in most circumstances, but these additional trade rules tend to be more about conveying new powers to corporations and new obligations on governments.

I would ask the member to comment on that.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Madam Speaker, absolutely, we have seen that happen with NAFTA and other free trade agreements. There is more and more power being invested in international corporations and powers that go way beyond. Often as nationals we are told that we have no control over that because it is part of the NAFTA deal. This is what I meant about going from a date to a marriage.

I also want to talk about child labour. We know the horrific nature of child labour, but I want to point to a province in Canada, namely B.C., where it is legal for children at the age of 12 to go to work. That is in our own backyard and we need to address that too.

Government Orders

[*Translation*]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague from Newton—North Delta for her excellent speech on human rights. We are talking about a free trade agreement and we can change things at the international level. This is the right time to do it, particularly when it comes to human rights. I would like to focus on women's rights, because in Jordan, unfortunately, not very many women are in the labour force, even if they are very highly educated. I would like to know what my colleague thinks about women's rights in Jordan.

[*English*]

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Madam Speaker, when it comes to women's rights, we have challenges right here in our own country. We know that in the Middle East and in a lot of the eastern countries and South America, women do face greater challenges. When we look at a lot of these domestic workers, many of them are women who are working horrendously long hours. Our trade agreements are an opportunity for us to build in human rights and protection for vulnerable workers, including women.

• (1110)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Giguère (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, NDP): Madam Speaker, the new Bill C-23 on free trade between Jordan and Canada gives us an opportunity to consider the nature of such an agreement. A free trade agreement means opening doors. Canada is opening its door to Jordan, and Jordan is opening its door to Canada. But what is going to come in? That is a fundamental question. Our cultures are different in terms of human rights, labour law and environmental law. Is it possible to harmonize these two countries? Well, that is the entire question, and the entire problem.

We hope that this agreement will bring progress to Jordan in terms of human rights, environmental law and economic law, but that is not a foregone conclusion. At first blush, the problems are significant. When it comes to labour law, in some areas Jordan looks more like the Middle Ages than like a modern country.

Our steelworker colleagues have told us that on one visit they observed abuses in relation to migrant workers, there being many of them in the textile industry and in home support work. First, those workers very often have their passports taken away from them when they enter the country. They are required to work at a hellish pace, more than 90 hours a week. Very often, their wages are not paid or it is difficult for them to get their pay. When it comes to housing and nutrition, the least that can be said is that they are deficient. They live in cramped, dirty apartments or dormitories. Their food is nothing special; it is low in both calories and vitamins.

Working conditions like this are unacceptable, particularly when we will be competing with that country economically. Our entrepreneurs, who pay wages and make sure that our country's social and humanitarian laws are obeyed with respect to all workers in Canada, will be facing competitors who have no such concerns and spend as little as possible on their workforce. This agreement, which might well be copied in numerous Middle Eastern countries, must not send our entrepreneurs into bankruptcy and Canadians into unemployment. This is a fairly basic question for the political representatives of the Canadian people. We want a trade agreement

that benefits both countries and that is not going to lead to a reduction in Canadians' economic and social rights.

That is not the only problem, although we have seen some encouraging initiatives. Jordan has taken some important steps. To begin with, there was a reform of the labour laws, which recognize the right to organize, the right to unionize, the right to speak and the right to negotiate collective agreements. These are important steps that must be considered. Jordan has also banned human trafficking. This is an important step in a country where recruiting people from Sri Lanka, the Philippines and India to work in Jordan was a flourishing industry. These foreigners were recruited and, once in Jordan, not paid. Jordan now wants to put an end to this practice.

Jordan has also criminalized forced labour in its labour code. Forgive me for saying this, but it is some ways an acknowledgment of the existence of slavery. Forced labour includes compelling someone to work for an unreasonable number of hours. Jordan criminalized this practice in its criminal code. It is prohibited. In 2011, Jordan harmonized its relations with the International Labour Office and the International Labour Organization. These are very important steps and that is why we are not opposed to this agreement, however we do want to review it.

• (1115)

These are positive steps. If Jordan has taken a step towards integration with the global marketplace then, for goodness sake, why not? This is very encouraging. Seeing Jordan pass laws, however, is one thing, but making sure they are enforced is quite another. This is important and must be verified. We recommend, therefore, that this bill proceed to second reading, where it can be more closely considered, and where we can determine whether the promises made have been kept. This is to be expected.

We will keep a very open mind as we consider this bill in committee. We will review what Jordan has done. Having said that, we will be exceedingly inquisitive and prudent, and we will not take any statements as gospel truth. We will make sure that there has been progress, that these laws have brought about true change, and that domestic workers are no longer slaves, let alone sex slaves, as is sometimes the case. We will demand to see the change.

There is also the matter of the environment. Before the Conservative government came into power, Canada was truly determined to combat pollution and provide a safe environment for Canadians and workers. The guarantee was made that the workplace was not deadly. It was guaranteed that any environmental emissions would not be dangerous in both the short and long-term, for Canadians now and in the future. These are basic things. There are no illegal dumping grounds in Canada; there is no chemical soup in our waters. We will not tolerate having our environment sullied and our access to clean water jeopardized. All that seems quite basic and yet, when it comes to clean water, there are some shortcomings, particularly on first nations reserves. It is quite disturbing for a country like Canada, but it would appear that we have the willingness to change. I shall take that into account and hope that things do indeed change.

Government Orders

What is the situation in Jordan? The rules in this regard are not clear. It is simply indicated that neither of the two countries has the right to suppress the basic environmental rules. But does Jordan already comply with the basic minimum rules? Can Jordan be compared in this regard to Canada? All the indications are that it cannot. That means this constitutes an invitation to all the polluting industries of Canada to relocate to Jordan, where they will not have to make expensive investments to conform to Canadian standards, and where they will not have to pay the workforce as well as they do in Canada. This is an important question.

In certain countries, people have said that asbestos was safe if worked properly under acceptable health conditions. It seems that this is the case in Canada. However, we know that in countries to which we export asbestos, this is absolutely not the case. This question is relevant and deserves to be verified. We do not want to encourage a country to become a dump for the whole world because it has an agreement with Canada. That would be neither acceptable nor tolerable. Our public image all across Canada depends on this, as do our ethical standards as a community. Do we want to develop an economic and political culture in which profit prevails over respect?

● (1120)

In short, we shall certainly not sign a blank cheque. There are more problems in the area of economic rights. Expropriation is prohibited. Do we have the right not to be expropriated when we invest in a country? I am sorry, but no. To promote the economic rights of its citizens, a country may legitimately consider it necessary to expropriate a private enterprise, even if that enterprise is a foreign company from a country with which a free trade agreement is in place. An expropriation can be carried out for medical, economic development, educational or a multitude of other reasons within the context of a democratic government.

Expropriation does not mean theft. It is simply the forced purchase of a company which is regarded as essential to the country. This is a country's sovereign economic right. It appears however that there is an intention to place a limit on this agreement. That limit is likely to affect Jordan more than Canada, for there are a great many Canadian multinational mining and manufacturing companies. There are few Jordanian companies liable to invest in Canada in key sectors of our economy. If that should happen, however, I do not see why Canada should require a barrier of this nature. Yes, a sovereign country, any sovereign country, has the right to protect the economic rights of its citizens by effecting an expropriation. Hydro-Québec was born of an expropriation; so was Ontario Hydro. Petro-Canada was established through expropriations. We are not complaining about this.

There is also the issue of repatriating profits, which can be a bone of contention. Repatriating profits, if they are excessive, could put a country in a difficult situation, leading to a deficit on balance of payments and a lack of investment. In Canada, we are currently experiencing what is known as Dutch disease. Our dollar is going up because of massive natural resource exports, especially in the energy sector. At the same time, we are experiencing a major deficit on our balance of payments. That is what is known as Dutch disease. And it comes on top of a loss of our industry.

A sovereign country can choose to tackle this problem by restricting the repatriation of profits through legislation that requires the profits to be partially or fully reinvested. It is not illegal for a country to want to make sure that its economic partner guarantees a financial return. A sovereign country does not need to limit its powers in a free trade agreement. The free trade agreement has to bring wealth to both countries. In the present situation, that does not seem to be the case. We are eroding the powers of a state in favour of private enterprise and capital. We are forgetting that we were elected by our constituents to defend them, not to sell or give up on their rights. We will have to think carefully before we pass this type of legislation.

● (1125)

We keep seeing the same types of problems. We negotiate agreements with small countries without asking any questions about the very nature of the rights in place in those countries. Panama is the perfect example. Some say that it is a problem because it is a tax haven. No, Panama is not a tax haven, it is a tax dump. Every drug trafficker goes through Panama. That is no recommendation. Will we be able to guarantee that there will be an end to those practices? No, and that is a problem. Now we have exactly the same type of problem. We are not saying no to what is unacceptable. We know about it and we put up with it.

In what has been proposed, the agreement is lacking when it comes to corrective measures. In an agreement between two countries, it is important to document what might cause problems and the action we will take to resolve those problems. There are major shortcomings in that respect as well, and we would like to put an end to them. In discussions in committee, we would like to hear opinions and proposals so that we can amend an agreement that is questionable at the moment. That does not mean that we are dismissing any possibility of an agreement with the Middle East, far from it. We appreciate it when a country agrees to negotiate agreements with us that may be highly profitable, that may lead to an increase in imports and exports and, especially, that may help a country improve its legislation.

It seems that Jordan would really like to become a country that is not at the low end when it comes to human rights, that is not a dumping ground for corporate polluters. It does not want to be a country where domestic work is almost associated with prostitution. We realize this. We are quite pleased to see the direction being taken by the Jordanian people and government. If it is true, this direction deserves to be encouraged. If this is the case, we will negotiate as equals with a country that has given us satisfactory guarantees with respect to basic human rights.

We will need to consider plenty of other factors, in addition to economic, labour and environmental rights, including religious rights and issues relating to family and matrimonial law. How are we going to align these agreements? All of that will be an essential part of the committee's discussions.

It is because of this very possibility of discussing these factors that we are going to support this bill on the trade agreement between Canada and Jordan at second reading.

Government Orders

Ms. Laurin Liu (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his speech. Since this is about a bilateral free trade agreement and not a multilateral agreement with several countries, can he tell me about some of the guarantees that should be put in place with regard to Jordan?

• (1130)

Mr. Alain Giguère: Madam Speaker, the risk is twofold. Given that we are negotiating an agreement with a country whose human rights situation and socio-economic conditions are far below ours, we could end up with the lowest common denominator and certain rights could be abandoned. The reverse would be even worse. We would then be involved in a kind of economic colonialism. Both would adversely affect both Canada's image and the everyday rights of Canadians.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, if I heard correctly, I thought the member made reference to the NDP's voting in favour of the bill going to committee. If that is the case, am I to assume that the principle of free trade agreements is something the NDP is now looking at supporting? Is it just a question of having an appropriate amendment that would ultimately see the NDP supporting free trade agreements?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Giguère: Madam Speaker, a trade agreement is an agreement between two peoples. It implies much more than economic transactions. It indicates the future of our relationship at all levels. In that context, we are not opposed, but it is not just a matter of a few amendments. We are talking about human rights and about our Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. For the NDP, some things are not negotiable and we will not bargain them away. I am a member of Parliament for the NDP, not for the Liberals. So I will not be selling my soul.

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain (Manicouagan, NDP): Madam Speaker, could the hon. member go into more detail about the concept of corporate expropriation and the circumstances that would give rise to it?

Mr. Alain Giguère: Madam Speaker, here is an example that happened right here in Canada. In the 1960s, the Government of Quebec felt that the foreign concerns controlling our production and distribution of electricity were a hindrance to the smooth economic development of Quebec. As a sovereign people, we decided to take possession of the assets that, in large part, were ours.

We paid for them; we did not steal them. We paid the proper price for those facilities, those means of electricity production and distribution. Another country like Jordan could decide to do the same thing. It is not a crime for a government to make sure that its citizens have access to electricity.

Mr. Jonathan Tremblay (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, NDP): Madam Speaker, we hear a lot about what happened in the past. In the NDP, we are not necessarily against free trade agreements between countries per se. However, we want everyone to benefit, and by everyone I mean each country, and each and every citizen, whether rich or poor. In the past, rough timber was sold for offshore processing and brought back to Canada, where it is sold at a premium. That means that our manufacturing sector does not develop.

We have a number of concerns regarding what will happen to our natural resources. Will our water be protected, for example? Will we be forced to export our water, if asked? I would like my colleague to respond to that.

Mr. Alain Giguère: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question.

Indeed, in this agreement, and in all agreements of this type, a state's power to intervene in certain trade issues is limited, and that is unacceptable. It is an intolerable constraint. A second, even bigger constraint is that Jordan relies heavily on migrant workers from other countries. These migrant workers are subject to a legal double standard. Native-born Jordanians have rights that these temporary migrant workers do not. That opens the door to the outsourcing of our industries by using a large labour force in a country that does not pay its workers.

• (1135)

Mr. Jean Rousseau (Compton—Stanstead, NDP): Madam Speaker, our colleague from Newton—North Delta spoke of certain key sectors in Canada, including the textile sector. Increasingly, companies in those sectors are going abroad to Middle Eastern countries, including Jordan. However, there are sectors that need to be protected and we must ensure that agreements like this one have more teeth, as my colleague said. What does my colleagues think about the sectors that are at greatest risk in Canada?

Mr. Alain Giguère: Madam Speaker, offshoring is not a new phenomenon, but it is clearly accentuated by this kind of agreement. The same thing occurred with Europe and Tunisia. In that particular case, it really was an economic favour; Europe wanted to favour Tunisia. In this case, companies are quite simply being given the right to lay off their Canadian workers in order to increase profits by relocating production to countries where production and workplace safety standards are non-existent. It is a race to the bottom when it comes to our rights and those of workers. The workers are the losers, regardless of their origin or nationality. The problem with bilateral agreements of this sort is that the working class is not protected.

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his excellent speech. I have some concerns about the free trade treaty. I always go back to NAFTA and its famous chapter 11, which has permitted multinationals to sue the Canadian government and other governments attempting to protect the environment. There have been some famous lawsuits in Canada. Certain multinationals have sued the Canadian government, which has had to compensate those multinationals in the millions and billions of dollars because it tried to prevent them, for example, from using chemicals hazardous to the environment and to human health.

This is one of my concerns. I hope my colleague will agree with me that it is absolutely necessary to ensure, when this free trade treaty is studied in committee, that our workers and our environment are protected.

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Mr. Alain Giguère: Madam Speaker, this question is particularly relevant. This framework agreement is the first, and there may be others with other countries. Apparently we will be using it to develop trade agreements with other Middle Eastern countries. That is the problem. What standards are we going to apply? Theirs, ours, those upon which we do not agree, where there are differences of opinion?

Unfortunately, in Canada, it seems that NAFTA has driven standards down. If one of the two countries has a lower standard, that will become the standard applied with respect to the use of certain products. One of the products that poses problems, paradoxically, is asbestos. What will be done with asbestos? We want it banned here, and we hope for a stop to the production of this pure poison. But certain countries may be interested in using it to make finished products that are exportable worldwide. These are the inherent dangers of a trade agreement that is negotiated on the cheap, in a rush, without ensuring that all human rights are respected.

• (1140)

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is with pleasure that I speak to the bill. I want to share some ideas in terms of the big picture and how important trade is to our country.

We appreciate the importance of labour legislation and labour laws. We recognize the value of our environment. We recognize how critically important it is that we advocate for strong, healthy, sustainable environments when economic development is taking place. We recognize how important it is to enshrine strong human rights, morals and mores not only in Canada but around the world.

As we become more and more part of a world economy, it is important that we deal with those very important social issues. I do not question that at all. In fact, I would encourage governments of whatever political stripe and whatever jurisdiction, whether it is a national government or a provincial government, to look at those social concerns and advocate where they can. It is safe to say that all constituents, including those who live in Winnipeg North, are concerned about those issues. We are all concerned about the exploitation of children and the damage to our environment. Some countries are far worse than others. Some countries have much higher standards.

It might come as a bit of a shock, but Canada is not the leader in every aspect. I like to believe that we play a very strong leadership role overall, but let us not fool ourselves as there is room for a lot of improvement within our borders. Having said that, it is important that we recognize there is much to be gained through trade and it is in our best interests to encourage it. Canada is a trading nation.

I did some research and came up with some numbers. In 2010, the province of Manitoba, which has a population of 1.25 million, had imports totalling \$13.8 billion. That sum of money is the total GDP of many countries. Of that total, 81.4% came from the United States; \$648 million came from China; \$380 million came from Mexico; \$210 million came from Germany; \$203 million came from Denmark; and the balance came from other countries throughout the world.

Yesterday we were talking about a free trade agreement with Panama. Today we are talking about an agreement with Jordan. When we talk about other nations around the world, these are the countries we are talking about. Members of the New Democratic Party have said it is such a small amount and that Jordan is ranked 88th in terms of countries that we trade with, at somewhere around \$86 million last year.

We heard a great deal of criticism of the country of Panama. We have to be very careful. Yes, Panama does have some issues, as does Jordan and many other countries. However, we do not undervalue the potential of those nations and the way in which trade can better the lives of everyone if it is dealt with in a fair fashion.

• (1145)

Some would argue that if we have a trade agreement with a country, we are endorsing what happens in that country in regard to labour and environmental laws, human rights issues and other concerns. Logically, we could say the same thing for international trade. Because we allow so much trade between Canada and other nations that have those types of social issues, does that mean we are endorsing that sort of behaviour in those countries? I would suggest that is not the case. As Canadians we have serious and genuine concerns in regard to those strong social issues. We have seen the value of economic development that has occurred between nations. Jordan is the country that happens to be the subject of the debate today.

I would like to highlight a country that I am passionate about, the Philippines, which I love dearly. The Philippines is the number one source for immigrants coming to Canada today. It has been the number one source of immigrants to the province of Manitoba for the last number of years. I like to think that the relationship between Canada and the Philippines involves more than just immigration. We need to develop and encourage our relationship. I challenge the Government of Canada and the Prime Minister to look at how we can extend beyond immigration. I would argue that Canada has a greater need for the Philippines than the Philippines has for Canada. We should be looking at how to expand that relationship.

My colleague from the New Democratic Party made reference to dating versus getting married. He said that dating means we allow trade and getting married means we have a free trade agreement. We need to look at getting married to countries like the Philippines because of the economic and social benefits for our two great nations.

We do not have to approach world trade or immigration or however we want to classify it as being a bad thing if it involves a free trade agreement. This is where it is confusing in terms of the message we are getting from the New Democrats.

Yesterday I asked the NDP finance critic to provide an example of a free trade agreement that the NDP had voted in favour of. He did not really answer the question, but I did get a chance to ask a follow-up question. The first thing that came to the member's mind was that the NDP supported the auto pact.

A lot of people supported the auto pact for a very good reason. The auto pact was an agreement that was achieved by Lester Pearson back in 1965. Canadians have benefited immensely under that agreement. Millions of jobs were created as a direct result of that agreement. It guaranteed a role for Canada in manufacturing vehicles. It was a great agreement. Lester Pearson happened to be a Liberal prime minister. The agreement was one of his greatest achievements. He set the stage in terms of the benefits we can achieve if we get good agreements. I am glad that the New Democrats supported that agreement.

We need to fast-forward to today and look at the valuable role we could play in terms of enhancing international trade, whereby all Canadians could benefit. To me, that is what this debate should be about.

• (1150)

The biggest criticism I would give the government on this particular bill is its attitude toward trade with some of our other larger trading partners. It seems to have been dropping the ball. It has not been successful at getting the guarantees that Canadians need in order to have access to some of those American and European markets for which we should be fighting.

A good example of that would be in Manitoba. Manitoba has a wonderful, vibrant pork industry. I had the opportunity a couple of years ago to see first-hand the strength of Manitoba's pork industry. I visited a Hutterite colony that had a hog barn with about 10,000 pigs being brought to a certain stage. After they hit that stage, they were loaded on a truck and brought out to Brandon where they were being slaughtered. I was able to tour the different facilities, from the birth to the actual packaging that was being exported. It was very impressive.

The first thing I had to do when I walked into the barn was to sanitize. I had to take a shower, put on a certain smock and the first room I walked into was a computer room. Our farmers on the Prairies are very much high tech these days. The computer told us how much food each pig was actually eating. It was all done based on any given week and ensuring that each animal was receiving the right amount of protein and food. From there, the pigs go to Brandon. Hundreds of jobs are being created in communities like Brandon and Neepawa, and many rural communities, because of the developing pork industry. It has grown from an industry back in the early 1990s, which was, and I am guesstimating here, likely less than \$500,000, to an industry of millions of dollars today.

The pork that is being produced in the province of Manitoba is being exported. Manitoba needs to be able to export that pork in order to have the jobs that it has today, some very valuable jobs that are putting bread and butter on the tables of hundreds of families in the province of Manitoba. We need to have that market. Therefore, when Korea was having discussions with the United States, it is understandable why many farmers in the province of Manitoba were asking about Canada in Korea.

We could talk about the BSE crisis and the panic among the cattle producers in the prairie provinces. Again, hundreds, if not thousands of jobs were being dealt with. Trade means a great deal to individuals like those.

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It goes beyond that. It is not just our agri-industries. The garment industry has had its ups and downs in the province of Manitoba, and I think it would be similar across Canada. That is why I believe there is a vested interest in looking at ways in which we can secure markets. It does not always need to be bad news. There are plenty of good news stories.

• (1155)

Certain sectors of the manufacturing industry in Manitoba have exploded and are doing exceptionally well. Whether it relates to buses with New Flyer Industries, a wonderful success story for the province of Manitoba, to the smaller but very successful Carte on Logan Avenue. These are companies manufacturing everything from buses to hydro components. They are not just producing products for the local markets of Manitoba. If so, they would not survive. They are producing products that are being sold internationally. Therefore, when we look at free trade agreements in principle, we see the benefits of that for Canadians.

However, we do need to be careful when we sign off on agreements. An example of that would be the garment industry. During the nineties, we had somewhere in the neighbourhood of about 8,000 or 9,000 Manitobans who were directly employed in the garment industry working on sewing machines and so forth. Over the last number of years, between 1999 and 2007, in and around that time frame, our garment industry took quite a blow. It actually went down to under 1,000 people who were working in that industry.

I have had the opportunity to have some discussions with some companies, such as Peerless Garments and Freed & Freed, which are doing wonderful work. I understand that even now there is some growth in that industry but it is an industry that does concern me.

We have a very important aerospace industry in the province of Manitoba. When looking at free trade agreements, I believe that, if done properly, they could benefit many different industries in the province of Manitoba, in fact in all of Canada. When we look at freer trade among different nations and at where we can formalize agreements in general, I think that is a positive endeavour.

Having said that, there is concern with the government not moving in other areas that are having a profound impact on jobs and on our manufacturing industry as a whole across Canada. As economies tried to adjust through the last recession, it is borderline in terms of where it is that we are going over the next year or two. We are concerned that the government has not really been there to support the industries to the degree that it could have been, which has caused a great deal of concern. It has taken some actions, such as the killing of the Canadian Wheat Board, which will have a very profound impact on our western provinces.

Once again, we are pleased to see that this bill is here and to, ultimately, see it go to committee, but we really do believe that the government needs to put more emphasis on and give more attention to the whole issue of the trade file with some of our larger trading partners.

Government Orders

I made reference to exports. In terms of imports, from Manitoba's perspective, it is the United States at 81.4%. Canadians are genuinely concerned that tens of thousands of jobs in those markets will be affected when we get companies moving from Ontario to the U.S., as well as the role the government has played in terms of trying to protect our jobs. Those are the types of concerns that we have today. We need to see the government take a much more proactive approach on that front.

● (1200)

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if my colleague could comment on how important he feels it is to have good labour practices in Canada and to ensure that good labour practices are entrenched in our free trade agreements to protect workers and elevate working conditions around the world.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, it is absolutely critical that, wherever we can, we promote and encourage good labour and environmental standards and human rights.

I will quote from a document, which is from Manitoba's perspective. It states:

Manitoba's exporting community benefits from all these agreements by receiving enhanced market access with preferential tariffs compared to their non-Canadian competitors. Enhanced market access for Manitoba exporters in new markets may encourage them to expand their existing markets and penetrate new markets in nations where Canada has concluded free trade agreements.

The free trade agreements they are talking about include places like Chile, Costa Rica, the European Free Trade Association, Colombia, Panama and Jordan. This report is co-authored by the NDP government in Manitoba and the Business Council of Manitoba. That is why it is important to acknowledge what the member has just said about environmental and labour protections, but we can do both, and that is what I would suggest is the answer.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the one thing I think my colleague and I can agree on is that, although sometimes trade agreements are not perfect, they do help both our country and the country with which we enter into an agreement.

We have seen the changes and the emergence of China over the last two decades. We are very familiar with the human right violations that were very apparent 20 years ago. We have also seen how the situation in China, because it has been exposed to other democracies around the world through trade, has certainly improved. I do not think it is where we are as a country but it has improved over the years.

When we had an opportunity to meet with delegations from Africa in the past, they did not talk about increases to aid. They talked about access to markets. They know that through access to markets, their situation will improve as well.

When New Democrats speak about trade agreements, they do not support free and open trade. They say that they want fair trade, which I think is what we all want, but in the absence of a perfect deal, I do not think we can impart our values on another country.

Is it not best that we enter into an agreement that we think we can have an impact both at home and with the country with which we sign the deal?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, the member is right on in terms of his comments. What we would ultimately argue is that we can do both. We will not tell a country that we currently trade with that we have some issues by our standards and that, because of them, possibly human rights related, we will no longer trade with it. I do not believe that is the answer.

Who is prepared to say that we will end all trade with China because we do not like some of the things that are happening there? I do not even think New Democrats would advocate that we should end all trade with China. We can have free trade agreements with a country and still be able to work on the very important social issues. In fact, some would argue that we might even have a greater impact by having a free trade agreement with a country and being able to carry more influence. There is a lot of merit to that particular argument.

● (1205)

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, to make it absolutely clear, the NDP is not against trade. It is not against free trade agreements either as long as they address the issues identified earlier in my speech.

We are not saying that we should stop trade with every country around the world. However, there is a big difference to being in a trading partnership and formalizing it into a bilateral trade agreement. A bilateral trade agreement that builds into it inequities for the people of Jordan compared to investors from Canada, we have a great deal of difficulty with that.

This is the time, as we are negotiating, to address giving some teeth to enforcement around labour laws and human rights. If my colleague's argument is seen through to the nth degree, then we would shut our eyes to what happens in other countries as long as we could buy and sell from them. I do not think that is where Canadians are.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, sometimes we have to agree to disagree. The NDP has never voted in favour of a free trade agreement, contrary to what its critic of finance said yesterday. He is already starting to get excited. Remember what Jack Layton said?

I have posed the question for the members of the NDP. One member of the NDP said yesterday, when I asked if he supported free trade agreements, "We have always opposed free trade treaties".

Members cannot have it both ways and say that they are open to trade, that they support trade agreements and so forth, such as when the critic of finance said that they supported the auto pact. We are talking about the principle of free trade agreements. The NDP has never voted in favour of a free trade agreement.

The member is getting agitated. He might get a chance to ask question.

Correct me if I am wrong. I challenge any member of the New Democratic Party to stand up and say, "here is the free trade agreement we voted for", and then name what it is.

Government Orders

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the real question is this. When have the Liberals ever voted against a Conservative bad bill?

As members know, the softwood lumber sellout cost 60,000 jobs across the country. The Liberals voted for it even though they knew it would lead to the hemorrhaging of jobs across the country.

The Liberals voted for an agreement with Colombia. We have seen the most recent human rights reports stating that the murders are continuing with paramilitaries connected to the Colombian regime.

The Liberals are also supporting the Panamanian trade agreement, even though everyone, the IRS, the U.S. State Department and the OECD, have condemned Panama for acting as a money laundering centre for drug gangs.

Every time the Liberals say they do not care about that. The Conservatives have brought it forward so they will vote for it.

When have the Liberals ever voted against a bad deal negotiated by the Conservatives? Not once.

• (1210)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, at the end of the day, the member kind of makes my point. I challenged him. I asked him a very simple question, and that was to tell me when the NDP had ever voted for a free trade agreement. Unless I am deaf, I did not hear the member cite one free trade agreement.

The reality is NDP members never have and by doing that, they have closed their eyes. They believe free trade is not in the best interest of Canadians. However, hundreds of thousands of Canadians today rely on the exportation and importation of products. It creates real, tangible jobs. That is what Canadians want. They want a government that is concerned about economic development to ensure a future for the industries that will provide those types of jobs. Yes, the Conservatives have made mistakes, but we need to focus our attention on those manufacturing jobs.

The NDP members have dropped the ball all the time. They just talk, talk, talk—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Speaking of talk, talk, talk, resuming debate, the hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we have seen the Liberals' slavish devotion to everything the Conservatives bring forward, which is a big reason why they are down in that corner of the House of Commons. Every time the Conservatives brought forward a bad deal, badly negotiated, something we could see would have a negative impact, the Liberals voted for it. The electorate has duly punished them for what has been a slavish devotion to voting in favour, regardless of the consequences, of every Conservative bill. We are not like that. We read the bills, we look at the analysis and we analyze what the impacts will be to our industries.

With the softwood lumber agreement, the testimony brought forward to the international trade committee showed clearly that we would lose tens of thousands of jobs. It was badly negotiated. We could have driven a truck through the anti-circumvention clause. Canadian taxpayers and the industry have had to pick up the tens of

millions of dollars in fines that have been levied ever since the bad deal was signed, supported by the Liberals and the Conservatives.

We have seen the Colombian trade deal. We raised concerns about human rights in the House. We were told by Conservatives and their Liberal allies that it would resolve the human rights problems in Colombia. Let me read from the most recent Human Rights Watch. It says that the new paramilitaries connected with the regime:

—have repeatedly targeted human rights defenders, Afro-Colombian and indigenous leaders, trade unionists, and victims' groups seeking justice and recovery of land. [These] groups appear to be responsible for the 34 percent increase in cases of massacres registered in 2010 and the continued rise in cases reported during the first half of 2011.

We were told in the House by members from both the Conservative and Liberal Parties that signing the deal with Colombia would somehow reduce the ongoing massacres, rape, torture and the incredible human rights abuses taking place by paramilitaries connected with the Colombian government. However, exactly the opposite has occurred and there has been an increase.

We talked yesterday about the Panamanian agreement. The member for Trinity—Spadina and a whole variety of other NDP MPs spoke to this yesterday. It is absolutely inconceivable for me that, despite the findings of the OECD, the U.S. State Department and the IRS in the United States that Panama works as a money laundering sector for drug trafficking, the government would not even bring in a tax information exchange agreement before it threw the Panama agreement on the floor of the House. This is irresponsible action that does not lead to the kind of job creation we want to see in the country. The NDP is the only party that seems to be evaluating the impacts of these agreements, making comments and fighting in the House of Commons to defend Canadian values and ensuring that we get a trade system in keeping with profound Canadian values.

The argument used in the House, from the PMO talking points we have heard from the Conservatives over the last couple of days, is that the agreements have contributed to our economic prosperity. Again, the NDP MPs, who are strong, learned and hard-working, coming from a wide variety of backgrounds, are the only ones who have looked at the statistics to find out how we have done. There is no evaluation from the Conservative government before these agreements are brought into the House and there is absolutely no due diligence from any member of the Conservative Party to see how we have done when we sign these agreements.

As I mentioned yesterday, we are not doing very well. We have a record merchandise deficit. Increasingly, as our manufacturing facilities shut down, as plants close, such White Birch and Electro-Motive, we lose thousands of jobs. Now Canada is increasingly not keeping up and there is a merchandise deficit. Those manufactured goods are being imported now. Those jobs have gone to other countries.

• (1215)

The current account deficit on balance of payments is also at a record level. Even the raw resources the Conservatives love to ship out of the country simply do not keep up with what we need to import. Record levels of deficit in those two areas show a significant failure by the government in putting into place a trade strategy that works.

Government Orders

If we look at the job losses, it is even more horrendous. I know Conservatives like to throw out a different number every day, but they like to say that they have created a lot of jobs. Since May 2008, about 200,000 jobs were created. The problem is the labour force grew by 450,000. The government was a quarter of a million jobs short even before we hit the recession, the slow-down that took place in the fall. From September right through to the month of February, 60,000 full-time jobs were lost. That has been combined with the closure of factories that we have seen in various parts of our country.

Conservatives will say that it is okay that jobs are being lost, that the job market is simply not keeping up with the growth in the labour market, that they are a quarter of a million jobs behind and have lost 60,000 jobs, but they are creating good jobs. That is another line that comes from the Conservatives, but they have never offered any proof at all. In looking at the numbers from Statistics Canada, we can see quite a different record. In fact, the jobs that have been created tend to be part-time and temporary, the kinds of jobs that cannot sustain a family.

The net result is that any jobs the Conservatives manage to create pay \$10,000 a year less than the jobs they have lost on their watch over the last six years. They have lost, as we know, 400,000 manufacturing jobs. The few jobs that the Conservatives have created pay \$10,000 a year less. That is a statistical reality. It does not come from my gut; it comes from Statistics Canada. These are poor quality jobs, the few jobs that have been created. These jobs tend to be precarious, part-time or temporary.

What has been the net result of the Conservative economic management? We have seen a decline in real wages of the average Canadian family over the past year. If members talk to folks in their ridings, they will find that most Canadian families are having a very difficult time making ends meet. It is because in real terms, after-inflation dollars, people are earning less and less.

It has often been said that Tory times are tough times. Conservative times have been particularly difficult for Canadian families because they are earning less and less. Canadian families, and this is an undeniable fact, are poorer under the Conservative government.

What has been the result? Conservatives are now waking up and saying that they should have looked at these economic statistics, that they should have done their homework. I encourage them to look at the economic statements and look at what Canadian families are going through. They will learn a lot. I know some of them are in touch with their constituents and their constituents will tell them that a 2% reduction in real wages is not a happy time for Canadian families.

The result is Canadian families are now suffering under a record debt load, a yoke that has never been seen to this extent in our country. There are record debt levels. Canadian families are earning less and less. Good jobs are being lost. Poorer jobs are being created, part-time and temporary jobs, the jobs that pay less. That is the Conservative economic record.

When Conservatives come to the floor of the House and say that all the other stuff they have done has not worked, that they will throw another trade agreement at us and maybe that will work,

maybe that will create the kind of prosperity we want to see, maybe that will pass the test of the NDP, we go beyond the fluff and the political spin. We go to reality. We look at whether there has been an economic evaluation of these trade agreements. There never has been and never will be, because with an economic evaluation, these agreements often cause difficulty. Now what happens? The government is bringing forward this trade agreement.

● (1220)

As I said yesterday in the House about the Panama agreement, we have severe concerns with that agreement as well. We raised concerns in the House about the Colombia agreement and the softwood lumber sellout. In the case of Jordan, it is a country that is making some progress on human rights, but the problems we have with what Conservatives bring forward is the actual structure or template of the agreements.

They call them free trade agreements. We talk about fair trade and the reality is that the difference between the two concepts is like that between driving a modern Ferrari and Fred Flintstone's automobile with the stones that rolled around. That is the difference between Conservative trade policy and what the NDP has moving forward.

The old antiquated template of the Conservatives dates back to the 1980s. Ronald Reagan was president when this trade template was put together. It includes things like investor-state provisions, which are an override of democratically elected governments. We have seen a number of cases where governments who make decisions in the public interest, who make decisions responding to the democratic involvement of their citizens, have had to pay significant fines, not because what they did was wrong and not because the process was somehow undermining democracy. In fact, they did exactly what a prudent government should do: they made decisions that were in the public interest such as removing neurotoxins that have profound negative health impacts. They did that but because of investor-state provisions, the citizens or taxpayers, once a government makes that decision, have to pay compensation to the company. Investor-state provisions are a right-wing ideal thrown out in the 1980s under Reagan, and today in 2012, we still these provisions reflected in the trade template used by the Conservatives.

Conservatives will defend themselves by saying that the Liberals did the same thing and that is true. However, the reality now around the world is that the modern, progressive fair trade agreements are what we favour, like we see with Mercosur where there are social objectives and anti-poverty measures. Those are the kinds of things that we want to see.

Government Orders

We talk about the European Union and its binding human rights obligations. The Conservative government signed a trade agreement with Colombia. We have seen the results in the latter government's increased links to paramilitary violence and from the increased number of massacres, as there are no binding human rights obligations in the Colombia agreement. In the deal with Colombia we have a commitment to maybe produce some kind of whitewashed report at some point. I have never seen one tabled in the House of Commons, but the reality is that there are other progressive administrations that have put in binding human rights obligations. This is the kind of fundamental value that Canadians share. This is the kind of progressive fair trade approach to trade agreements that Canadians want to see.

We talk about Australian model and the Labour government there that said it was not going to go ahead with investor-state provisions. This was in the 1980s when the right-wing was pushing back on government and democracy and everything else. We are seeing some shades of that coming back, unfortunately, but the reality is that progressive fair trade agreements do not include measures such as investor-state provisions.

Those are some of the agreements that we support. Those are the kinds of amendments that we offer. That is why we are in the House of Commons. We bring forward these kinds of intelligent, progressive and modern ideas. We have done this for each of the deals and each time Conservatives have said, no, they do not want to update their approach. They want to keep their hidebound, right-wing ideology and do not care about the consequences. They are really more concerned about ideology than the kinds of objectives of a trade agreement that would actually reflect Canadian values and would be effective.

Before I move on to the next point I want to take one further step. We have offered this kind of progressive, modern fair trade infrastructure to the government. We have consistently been refused. We proposed a dozen amendments to the last agreement, but all of them were rejected.

● (1225)

With this agreement we will endeavour again, because even those who are the most hidebound in their ideology can eventually learn. We are going to continue to offer these kinds of positive alternatives. We will certainly be doing that.

I want to point out what happens after a trade agreement is signed. Regardless of whether a trade agreement is well written or not, whether it contains Fred Flintstonian aspects or a modern, progressive fair trade agenda, like we favour on this side of the House, the question is how do we then implement the kind of export supports that would contribute to the growth of the Canadian economy?

We in the NDP do our homework and actually had to get the following statistics ourselves. I had asked DFAIT for a year for the export market development figures in real terms—

Mr. Robert Sopuck: The no development party, the NDP.

Mr. Peter Julian: I can see the Conservatives are waking up again, Mr. Speaker. That is good. I am happy to hear that. This is the

type of information exchange that will hopefully lead to progress in our country.

However, DFAIT could not produce the figures in real terms. A dollar is not a dollar when it diminishes over time due to inflation. Therefore, if we are comparing exports from Canada to a market that Canada has signed a trade agreement with, we really have to use inflation adjusted dollars to compare apples with apples. Is that not right? My NDP colleagues all agree. Looking over at the Conservatives, maybe they agree less. It does not matter. The point is this: we could not get those figures from DFAIT but had to produce them ourselves.

The interesting result up to 2009 is that in virtually all cases where an agreement was signed, and this is similar to what happened under the Liberals and what the Conservatives are continuing, exports from Canada to those markets declined after the agreements were signed. Here I am not just talking about manufacturing exports but about all exports. Imports from those countries increased, contributing to the factor I just talked about and going far beyond the Dutch disease, where we have seen an artificially inflated dollar hurting our manufacturing capacity. It is something that many people are talking about. Many have raised these concerns.

What we are talking about with our trade agreements is a type of disease where our exports decline and imports go up after we have signed an agreement. Members know what that means: more lost jobs and less prosperity for Canadians. Yet in virtually every case, with the singular exception of Mexico, which I will come back to it in a moment, our exports declined. In some cases they have recovered over time, but in some cases they have not. With Costa Rica, for example, our exports are still below their initial levels.

What we see here is a lack of will, the view that signature of an agreement is sufficient for the government to move forward without walking the talk afterwards. Other major industrialized economies, such as the European Union, the United States and Australia, have very robust export promotion. They have regimes in place and great supports for product promotion and product publicity, to get those goods to market.

I have met with trade commissioners of ours outside of Canada who do not even have the money to buy a cup of coffee for a potential client of Canada. The figure that DFAIT has given us is that about \$13 million is spent on trade promotion worldwide. This is for export product promotion. Australia spends half a billion dollars. The European Union spends \$125 million just to promote its wine products. In the United States, we are talking upwards of \$80 million just for the beef industry. It is about walking the talk as well. It simply is not happening with the current government.

Government Orders

As far as the trade agreement with Jordan is concerned, we will be putting forward amendments at committee. We will be doing the due diligence that New Democrats have always done in the House on trade issues. We will be scouring the bill that we have seen and offering amendments. Our critic, the member for Windsor West, and other members of trade committee will be putting forward those amendments at committee.

What we hope to see is a sea change in attitude on the Conservative side, that Conservative members will accept the kind of progressive fair trade amendments that we will offer. Why? It is because it is in Canada's interests to have a modernized trade template for the agreements we bring forward. It is in Canada's interests to build an export strategy that will lead to job creation. In short, it is in Canada and Canadians' interests to have the kind of progressive fair trade agreements that New Democrats bring forward in the House.

I hope that we will get support for those amendments at committee.

• (1230)

Mr. Brad Trost (Saskatoon—Humboldt, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I enjoyed my colleague's remarks for their entertainment value. We both used to sit together on the international trade committee.

First I have a comment, then a question. The hon. member referenced investor-state provisions for Canadian investments abroad. Those provisions are in trade treaties to protect private investment abroad, such as protecting investors who may invest in Venezuela, whose president has a habit of nationalizing industries. If we do not have those provisions in our international treaties, how then do we expect to protect Canadian investments in other countries? Also, if we expect protections for Canadian investments abroad, should we not protect private property investments in Canada?

How does the hon. member propose to protect the private property of Canadians abroad and foreigners who invest in Canada from unjust government seizure?

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his question. I appreciate hearing from him again. We worked together on the trade committee, as he mentioned.

The member is actually talking about two different things. He is talking about FIPAs, foreign investment protection agreements, which we have supported in the House of Commons. I was referencing a completely different order of things, the investor-state provisions that we have seen in NAFTA and which have subsequently become part of every single trade agreement put forward by this government.

Even the United States, after NAFTA, pulled back from the investor-state provisions because these provisions put in place an eternal program of compensation for businesses, regardless of what products they produce and whether they are in the right or the wrong. Ethyl Corporation, for example, which produced a neurotoxin, was able to get compensation from Canadian taxpayers under the investor-state provisions of NAFTA for a product it had produced that had known health impacts. It was toxic for Canadians, yet through the investor-state provisions it was able to get a handout.

I am sure the hon. member does not agree with that. I am sure he and all hon. members in the House would agree that when a company manufactures something that is dangerous for Canadians, the Canadian government should have the right to say that it is going to ban that product without taxpayers having to pay compensation to that company. I think we would all agree on that.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I certainly never pretend to be a trade expert, but trade and this particular deal have been referred to as a marriage. Having been married for 27 years, I can speak a little about that. I know that in the deal I signed on my wedding day there was a caveat, "for better or for worse". I know that my wife had hoped for a little less worse and maybe a lot more better, but she still hangs tough and honours her part of the agreement, and I do the best with mine.

For the benefit of the House, I am sure the government and we here on the Liberal side would want to know the answer to the following question. One thing the member for Burnaby—New Westminster cannot dispute is that your party has never supported a trade deal that has come through this House. That is on the record. You know that, so let me ask this question. I am sure the new members of the NDP would like to know this, because you have experience in the party and are a mentor.

• (1235)

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

I would like the member for Cape Breton—Canso to come to his question and remember that it is the Chair that he is asking the question of, not one of his colleagues.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my apologies. In our agreement together, I assure you that I will address the Chair.

What is one deal that the NDP came close to signing, only for one aspect of it? Could the member name one free trade deal that it came close to signing?

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I am going to speak softly because I heard a complaint from the Minister of Foreign Affairs that I was speaking too loudly. It is an important wake-up call and New Democrats make sure everyone in the House can hear us.

I addressed this yesterday and I will address it again. New Democrats were strong supporters of the auto pact and the Liberals said, "You cannot support the auto pact". We have talked about the types of progressive trade deals that we do support: the binding human rights obligations out of the European Union, the obligations around social development and anti-poverty measures in Mercosur. We have talked about Australia and its measures to gut the investor-state provisions to allow democratically elected governments to make decisions in the public interest.

Government Orders

Then the member said, “We Liberals adopt everything the Conservatives bring forward on trade. For six years, everything the Conservatives bring forward, we vote for”. What has been the result? The softwood lumber deal not only killed 60,000 jobs across the country but 2,000 jobs in my constituency. Yes, New Democrats take it personally when Liberals simply rubber-stamp everything the Conservatives bring forward. They are bad deals. We will continue to be positive and offer amendments. If the Conservatives accept our amendments, of course we will be voting for it.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Patry (Jonquière—Alma, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague on his speech. There is something that concerns me when we talk about free trade and globalization. We should be talking about the globalization of the human beings behind this, the workers in these countries.

If we compare the conditions of the workers in these countries with those of workers in other countries with which we have entered into free trade agreements and where men and women enjoy the proper conditions, we could almost be talking about slavery. What can be done with these sorts of free trade agreements? How can we insert in them a condition so that these people can live properly in their country as they trade their goods with ours?

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, that is a very good question and the best one thus far. I thank the member for Jonquière—Alma, the only member to this point who listened to my presentation. I know that I am not the most interesting speaker, but I had hoped that the members would at least listen to me. The member for Jonquière—Alma was listening carefully and that is great. I very much appreciate his talent and the fact that he listens.

As has been said, obligations must be mandatory. That is what did not work in the agreement with Colombia. The Liberals said that a report every two years would be enough, but we saw the human rights crisis in Colombia.

We know that there are problems in Jordan. Women live in horrible situations. We are proposing amendments that would make these obligations mandatory. That is what the European Union is doing and that is what we are proposing, among other things, in our amendments to the bill.

We hope that, for once, the Conservatives will set aside their ideology and use common sense. Violations of human rights must stop. An agreement that has mandatory requirements and penalties will help improve human rights in Jordan.

[*English*]

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have enjoyed the entertainment factor following the NDP member's speech. However, it makes quite a mockery of Parliament when the member has been asked several times by my learned friends from the Liberal Party to identify one free trade agreement that New Democrats have voted in favour of. Canadians know very well that when members of Parliament are asked questions, many politicians try to skirt the issue. When the NDP continued to say that it has in fact supported one, let the member be honest and either admit that he has misled Canadians by saying that or name that free trade agreement. If he does not, then I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, that you inform Canadians through this

process that this is an absolutely disgust and a mockery of Parliament.

• (1240)

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, as you know, that was very unparliamentary language. I would be pleased to answer the parliamentary secretary's question, but I would ask her withdraw her unparliamentary language.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): I would encourage all hon. members to give each other the respect that is due. I appreciate this is a contested issue. I am not sure I understand the comment of the hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster.

Is the hon. member for Winnipeg North rising on a point of order?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, it is a continuation of the previous point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): There was no point of order, so unless you are raising one there is not one before the House.

The hon. member from Burnaby—New Westminster.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I was just accused of being dishonest. As you know, that is not parliamentary language. I like the hon. member. I understand that maybe on the other side of the House things are getting a little wild. That is okay, but I would ask her to withdraw—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster can make that request. That ultimately is up to the other member.

Is the hon. member rising on debate or on a point of order?

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Mr. Speaker, to answer to the point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): That was not a point of order. The hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster was replying to a question put.

If the parliamentary secretary is rising on a point of order, I will take that. If not, time has expired for questions and comments and we will resume debate.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Mr. Speaker, I am rising on a point of order. The member from the NDP has alleged that I said something that I did not say and would not say. I simply would like the member to answer the very simple question that was put to him by both the Liberal Party and the Conservative Party and stop skirting around the issue.

Mr. Peter Julian: I answered it five times.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The Chair has heard from both hon. members and will review the blues to see whether anything inappropriate was said.

Continuing debate, the hon. member for Richmond—Arthabaska.

Government Orders

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, when things heat up, I am always happy to step in. I intend to calm the waters. I am not saying that my speech will be boring; I am sure it will not be. As the hon. member for Bourassa knows very well, and as he has just said, we in the Bloc Québécois always have interesting things to say, particularly when it comes to free trade agreements.

It is my pleasure to rise on this issue, particularly because with all the time allocation motions the Conservative government has imposed on us recently—and I certainly do not want to put ideas in their heads for the bills that are currently before the House—our turn does not come quickly or often.

So I am going to take full advantage of it to talk about the Conservative government's free trade policy since it came to power and more specifically about Bill C-23, the free trade agreement between Canada and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. I had the opportunity to address this issue several times in previous Parliaments. The Bloc Québécois supports the principle of the bill. Canada has already signed a free trade agreement with Israel. We are familiar with the unique sensitivity of that region and the conflicts that go on there. The message to be sent would be positive, in fact: it would be about signing a free trade agreement with a country like Jordan.

Obviously, if you look at things through Quebec's eyes, you can understand the reason why we support this bill. Obviously, we will always weigh all the factors to determine whether this free trade agreement is good or bad for the Quebec economy. We are not opposed to all free trade agreements, nor are we in favour of all such agreements. Obviously, the pros and cons have to be weighed in relation to the Quebec economy.

In the case of Jordan, we are not going to argue that this is going to be an extremely fruitful free trade agreement, but it may be worthwhile, particularly for the agricultural sector. There is not a lot of water in Jordan; not a lot of crops are grown or livestock raised. So this is a door that may be worthwhile for the agricultural sector. I will offer some statistics in a moment about our trade with that country. They will prove that it is not enormous at the moment, but every door that is opened in this respect may be worthwhile.

Lumber might also be a worthwhile avenue for Quebec; certainly pulp and paper would be. This affects me specifically, as does agriculture, because companies like Cascades and Domtar are well established in my riding. These are possibilities for the pulp and paper industry, the Quebec industry that already exports the most to Jordan, in fact.

I have statistics dating from 2008. I have not found any that are more recent. At that time, trade between Canada and Jordan totalled \$92 million, which is a long way from the numbers we are currently hearing in relation to the free trade agreement being negotiated with the European Union. Of that \$92 million, \$35 million came from Quebec and \$25 million came from the pulp and paper industry. So that is why I was saying that this avenue was worth exploring. In fact, Quebec is the Canadian province that has the most trade with Jordan: 45% of current trade originates in Quebec. As I said, Canadian exports total \$92 million, and that will undoubtedly

improve somewhat, thanks to this free trade agreement. So we can conclude that it will also improve for Quebec.

Reports suggest that Jordan is currently in the process of modernizing its government and economy. It is a country where education is very important. As I mentioned at the beginning of my speech, promoting trade with this country could send a clear message of support to other Middle Eastern countries in this regard. As I was also saying, Canada has already signed a free trade agreement with Jordan's neighbour, Israel. By signing this agreement with Jordan, Canada would demonstrate a degree of balance in our interests in that part of the world, given the strained political relationship between Israel and the rest of the Middle East, including Jordan.

What currently concerns us about the Conservative's approach to these free trade agreements is that they have chosen to sign bilateral agreements. Everything we are hearing right now about the development of international trade involves opportunities for bilateral free trade agreements. They recently signed such agreements with Colombia and Panama. They are holding discussions with the European Union, which is not, of course, one country.

● (1245)

The Conservatives have basically abandoned the Doha round. All multilateral agreements have been put on hold and other free trade agreements are being discussed, including a very significant one with China.

This is obviously a problem for us because this approach is much less effective than a multilateral approach for the development of fairer trade that respects the interests of all nations. For example, in the Doha round, developing countries placed considerable hope on a multilateral agreement. However, the richest countries in the world are not listening at all and are not interested in changing things, which means that multilateral free trade agreements are constantly being blocked. Canada is clearly not helping this cause.

We want to see a change in trade priorities. Canada should now shift its focus from trade liberalization to creating a more level playing field. The Bloc Québécois believes that our trade policy must focus on fair globalization, not just on the pursuit of profit at the expense of people and the environment. We want the new free trade agreements to include enforceable provisions that require respect for minimum standards related to human rights, labour laws and respect for the environment.

Government Orders

Some will say that such is not the case with all bilateral free trade agreements. Of course, we had evidence of that this week when we again discussed the free trade agreement between Canada and Panama. Panama is a tax haven. How can we accept, in 2012, that a country like Canada would enter into a free trade agreement with a country where it is still possible for banks and big companies to take advantage of tax havens? Moreover, in Canada, there is still nothing in place to prevent such practices. There are some provisions, but they contain loopholes that make such practices still possible. What message are we sending to big companies, banks and not exactly right-thinking people—not right-wingers—who see that Canada has decided to enter into a free trade agreement with Panama? The message is obviously to step right up: the door is open and tax havens are ready for business.

We cannot agree to this kind of free trade agreement. Another quite recent free trade agreement was the one with Columbia, a country where human rights are violated, journalists are murdered or imprisoned, and unions are completely banned.

I cannot understand why free trade agreements are still being entered into with these nations in the belief that the situation in these countries is going to improve, perhaps magically, as a result of signing a trade agreement. Rather, we are sending the opposite message: that it is not a problem; that in these countries abuses of power are okay; that the people in these countries can be treated in ways we would not do here, in our country, to our people. These countries are given the impression that our concerns are not serious because we will trade with them regardless, and everything will be fine and dandy. That approach is not at all credible. That is why multilateral agreements fundamentally improve the situation.

In their current form, side agreements that deal with minimal labour and environmental protection standards lack a binding mechanism that would make them truly effective. That is what we want to see in future free trade agreements.

In order to be credible on this issue, there must be swift compliance with the major conventions of the International Labour Organization against discrimination, forced labour, which still exists in countries with which we trade, child labour, which unfortunately still exist today, and also conventions regarding the rights of union associations and free negotiation.

That being the case, all the free trade agreements need to be reviewed to ensure that we are dealing with countries that are, at the very least, on the right track, countries that are prepared to make the changes needed to be able to trade. I have always thought that, before approving a free trade agreement like the one we are planning to sign with China, we should put our cards on the table and be satisfied that such countries will comply with our minimum standards, that there are no children working and no union leaders in prison, and that sound environmental practices are being followed.

• (1250)

I am not sure that in the early stages of discussions with China we will succeed in having that country adopt basic environmental standards. Take agriculture, for example. When products are imported from China, we do not know how they were grown, or what water and pesticides have been used. Even today, products enter Canada even though in some instances their quality is clearly

dubious. There have been scandals. There was the scandal in China over melamine in milk. There were scandals over toys in which the concentration of lead was much too high. It is therefore important to ensure that changes have been made before any bilateral agreements are signed with countries like China.

For some years now, Jordan has been demonstrating that it can conduct trade operations in a manner that Quebec finds acceptable. Jordan can be trusted and trade relations with that country would be beneficial to both parties. The figures I gave just now make it clear that these free trade agreements are not on the same scale as the one that is currently being negotiated with the European Union.

There is another way the government negotiates free trade agreements that is open to serious criticism. For the free trade agreement with the European Union, the issue of supply management was left on the table for the first time. Historically, all governments and parties have always excluded supply management for our farmers—poultry, milk and egg producers, an approach that has been very beneficial for both producers and consumers. We have always excluded supply management so that countries could not interfere with our tariffs and try to sell more products to us. Unfortunately, with the European Union, we left the supply management system on the table. This is extremely worrisome, even though the Conservatives are telling us not to worry about it, and that they will comply with the motion I moved and sponsored in 2005 to tie the hands of Canadian negotiators with respect to international supply management.

The fact remains that there is no transparency in the discussions between the European Union and Canada, nor in any free trade agreement. The time has come for Parliament to do what other countries do, so that the details of these agreements can be discussed while negotiations are underway, in order to remain informed about the substance of the discussions and be able to comment on the nuts and bolts of free trade agreements.

As for Canada and the European Union, we have no idea whether there have been discussions on supply management. We can sometimes learn things from leaks—for example that the French would like to send us more cheese. If the French sent us more cheese, Quebec, which is a major producer of cheese, might suffer the consequences. It is essential to remain extremely cautious.

I have been speaking about agriculture, but the same arguments hold for Quebec culture. It is important to pay careful attention with this kind of free trade agreement. Although transparency is the norm today, it is unfortunately not the case with the Conservative government.

The bilateral agreement approach is not the right one. When we are presented with bills like the one we are discussing today, Bill C-23 between Canada and Jordan, they have to be treated on a case-by-case basis. This particular bill needs to be examined in light of what is stated in the free trade agreement. Frankly, it is impossible to say that it is not a good agreement. We will therefore agree to vote in favour of it.

Government Orders

A small word of warning about water exports. I spoke about them in one of my speeches during the previous Parliament. I know that in the bill to implement the agreement between Canada and Jordan the issue of water, whether in liquid or gaseous form, is excluded, but this is not explicit in the free trade agreement itself.

• (1255)

Perhaps the negotiators could take note of this information; it could also be discussed in committee. Just now, I was speaking about the possibilities of agricultural trade. One of the reasons Jordan does not grow many crops is that it does not have a lot of water. It would be highly undesirable, for any current or future agreements, if we were to begin to think we could use water—particularly water from Quebec, which is very well endowed in this respect—to encourage other countries to import a lot of water. Our view is that trade in water should be completely excluded. Hence it would perhaps be a good idea not only to specify this prohibition in the implementing legislation, but to do the same in the agreement itself.

In spite of everything, it is possible to have productive dealings with Jordan for all those reasons. As I was saying earlier, in that part of the world, it is important as a symbol to show that we are open to trade not only with Israel, but also with other countries such as Jordan. It is a good example to hold up. Because we know that, at the moment, the Conservative government tends to have blinkers on and to take the side of one country only—not to mention any names, but it is Israel. This message that we are sending seems to me to be much more a message of openness, and the result will be that everyone will benefit.

In terms of future agreements, we must also make sure that we do not negotiate free trade agreements blindly, with no regard for human, environmental and labour rights. If we do, we will end up with free trade agreements like the one with Colombia. I can hardly wait to see if there will be any improvements because of that free trade agreement. I am sure there will not be, because we are sending the opposite message.

We are telling them to carry on, that there will be no problem, that they are going to make money and do business without anyone even rapping them on the knuckles or warning them that there will be no trade until they have improved their situation. That is a bad example. There are good examples, such as when it is possible to trade with countries that have good intentions, though they may not necessarily be at the level of Canada or Quebec. In that context, Jordan is a really interesting case.

From Quebec's point of view, looked at through our eyes, we do not have the luxury of saying no to all attempts at free trade, given all the small and medium-size businesses we have everywhere. I call on all Quebec members to bring themselves to accept that we can negotiate free trade agreements with certain countries. This is one of them. Panama is not a good example, and neither is Colombia. But in this case, given the figures, while there is not necessarily any money to be made, there is an interesting opportunity certainly for agriculture and forestry, both of which need opportunities badly, and why not also for pulp and paper, as I mentioned.

Perhaps I am being a little self-serving in this because, in my constituency, it will be very attractive for companies like Cascades

and Domtar. We also have Kruger in the area. The opening of these opportunities is the reason that the Bloc Québécois has decided to support the principle of this bill.

• (1300)

Mr. Jonathan Tremblay (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from the Bloc Québécois for his speech, which the NDP accepts. It was a good New Democrat speech. There was something in his speech that particularly spoke to me. It involved natural resources, and I asked a question about it earlier.

Earlier, he talked about water. What does the member think about the export of our natural resources, resources like water, to other countries? I would also like to know what he thinks about environmental protections, which this agreement does not seem to have. Could there be lawsuits related to environmental protections that we would like to have in our country?

Mr. André Bellavance: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. I would like to correct him, though: it was not a New Democrat speech. Frankly, we fought to stay alive, and there are still some Bloc Québécois MPs in the House. They voted in favour of a bill that prohibits floor-crossing, and they would not accept me even if I decided to join them. It was a Bloc Québécois speech, which is very different from the New Democrat discourse.

I heard my colleague from British Columbia speak, and I have a great deal of respect for him. There is a dogma in the NDP: it is against any free trade agreement. A little squabble broke out before I started my speech. The member who is now the finance critic, but who was the international trade critic for a long time, was asked what free trade agreement the NDP had supported in the House. They cannot name one.

That is why I said that Quebec's next generation is important. As a people, as a nation, we cannot refuse every free trade agreement. We need to weigh this in the balance. I gave the example of Panama and Colombia. The free trade agreements concluded with those countries are not good agreements. Those two countries do not respect environmental rights or the rights of workers. They use child labour and do not respect the right to form unions and other things like that.

In the case of Jordan, both for Quebec and for Canada, this free trade agreement could help both nations. We cannot be dogmatic about this, and we need to weigh the advantages and disadvantages.

• (1305)

Mr. Jean Rousseau (Compton—Stanstead, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his excellent speech. Could he tell me why it is important not to sign free trade agreements blindly? He said that the NDP did not endorse some agreements because they did not respect the environment and workers' rights. He said that we have to make sure that some sectors of our economy can benefit from them. He named the forestry and agriculture sectors, which are major economic sectors, as in my riding of Compton—Stanstead.

Government Orders

I would like to stress the importance of continuing to create jobs in Quebec. Over the past 30 years, Quebec has been greatly affected by free trade agreements, since the first free trade agreement between Canada and the United States in the mid-1980s. The manufacturing, forestry and agriculture sectors have been greatly affected by those agreements. That is why it is very important for us to discuss those agreements in depth.

Mr. André Bellavance: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member. I agree with him. Just now I said that we must not be dogmatic. I do not want to be mean to anyone, but we cannot afford to sign bad agreements, especially in Quebec, where most manufacturing companies export their products. The agriculture sector has major exports too, but obviously not in the supply management sector. There has to be a balance in a free trade agreement. That is where negotiators play a vital role. There are free trade agreements that we want and we have to accept, but there are some that we cannot have. It is on a case by case basis. These agreements are important for Quebec, a nation that is generally in favour of free trade. We are aware that people have lost out because of free trade agreements, but we have to look at each case on its merits.

I have to see what is good for the constituents in my riding, which is similar to that of the hon. member, and I will vote in the House based on that. In Quebec, we can benefit from free trade agreements when they are not with countries that are tax havens or that throw people in jail.

Mr. Alain Giguère (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member from the Bloc Québécois questions us a lot about the fact that we always reject free trade agreements. All of the free trade agreements that have been presented to us were bilateral. It would be worth considering presenting us occasionally with multilateral trade agreements involving more than one country, where the fundamental rules relate first and foremost to human rights. That certainly changes the nature of the agreements. Does he not think it is essential for us to change our outlook completely and abandon bilateral agreements in favour of multilateral agreements? Then there might be more New Democrats who would support them.

Mr. André Bellavance: Mr. Speaker, if the member listened carefully to my speech, that is exactly what I said. The Conservatives' approach consists of signing nothing but bilateral trade agreements. So the Doha round and all the multilateral agreements under way at the WTO have been put on ice.

I have had the opportunity to visit Geneva myself on several occasions. I am the critic for a number of other subjects, but I was and am the Bloc Québécois critic for agriculture and agri-food. In that case, it was crucial for us to support multilateral agreements. It is to the benefit of the developing countries and to everyone's benefit, except that is not this government's approach.

That said, this government regularly presents us with bilateral free trade agreements. We have to look at them in light of what is presented to us, what they mean, both for our economy in Quebec and for the Canadian economy, and also for the countries signing this type of free trade agreement.

If I am told that we are going to sign a free trade agreement with a country like Colombia, but Colombia is going to ratify international

agreements about environmental rights, workers' rights and trade union rights and is going to make sure that children are not going out to work, then plainly that is a positive thing, and for Colombia as well. However, that is unfortunately not the case.

So yes, we support multilateral agreements, but that does not mean that we have to oppose all bilateral agreements. Some are good, both for Quebec and for Canada, and for the country the agreements are being signed with. The agreement we are talking about now, with Bill C-23, falls into that category.

• (1310)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak on the subject of free trade, particularly in the context of globalization. Now, after the creation of the World Trade Organization, we have a situation that is completely different from what it was before the creation of the WTO.

As always, the models for free trade are based on the NAFTA principles and not on the principles of other agreements that would, in my opinion, produce more benefits for the environment and for all societies.

[English]

There are specific issues relating to Jordan with this trade agreement. I would like to preface that with a review of how we came to where we are in terms of where Canada's interests lie as a society, not merely our trade in goods. All of these debates usually rest on the notion that if members have questions about new trade agreements, they are against trade with another nation. I remember a venerable senator who had been minister of agriculture for many years commented that trade is not new, what was Marco Polo doing. We certainly have had trade for a very long time. No one is against trade.

In the context of global trade, we have seen a remarkable transition. We used to live in a world of tariff barriers that allowed the Canadian economy to grow to be as strong as it is now. After the Second World War tariff barriers were targeted and we began to see them coming down. The efforts to say that one country must not discriminate against another began to swing the pendulum in the opposite direction to what we had seen before the Second World War.

These efforts led to the creation of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade. In the first instance, the GATT was quite restrictive in terms of focusing on trade in goods, which is what most Canadians understand we mean when we talk about trade agreements: trade in goods, our ability to buy and sell, the ability of our neighbours to buy and sell to us. This trade in goods is something that has been handled by the GATT for a very long time.

Government Orders

Things changed substantially in the 1990s. It took nine years of negotiations, the Uruguay round, to bring forward an updated version of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, and within that new agreement to do some things that had not been done before. It was the advent of looking beyond goods to look at trade in services, to look beyond those things that were completely commercial and make changes that had implications for culture, for society overall, for the environment and for labour. In other words, the approach of the trade world began to impinge on other aspects of society. They became not just trade agreements, but agreements that actually changed the very fundamental relationship between citizens and their government versus the relationship of corporations and those governments.

If there was a time when we had too many tariff barriers, if there was a time when we were too protectionist, that time is long past. We have now seen the pendulum swing so far that the so-called liberalization of trade is not just advancing the flow of goods but to advance the interests of a dogma of globalization, which allows more and more multinational corporations to dictate policies, to have a greater role and arguably a greater role than the citizens.

I will back up and look at the model to which I referred earlier, the NAFTA model. It has dictated a great deal since we entered into that agreement. Probably the most egregious part of the NAFTA model is the investor state provisions which allow a corporation based in a country that is part of the trade agreement, in the case of NAFTA corporations based in the U.S. or Mexico, to have the ability to sue the Canadian government if it passes a law that they do not like.

Chapter 11 of NAFTA, the investor state provisions, allows a foreign corporation from the U.S. or Mexico to sue the Canadian government at the federal level. It allows a foreign corporation to have rights which are superior to those of a domestic corporation. A domestic corporation does not have the right to sue our government. This provision actually gives preferential treatment to foreign corporations to sue Canada if there is a regulation passed by the House of Commons. In a democratic house of assembly we can pass a law which is untouchable by a Canadian corporation, but a foreign corporation can sue us for damages.

● (1315)

Not only under the investor-state provisions within NAFTA can a U.S. or Mexican corporation sue us, it can sue the federal level, a province and a municipal government. We have seen the examples under chapter 11 of NAFTA for quite some time. Laws passed by this House had to be repealed because of a chapter 11 challenge. I refer specifically to Ethyl Corporation of Richmond, Virginia, which sued the Canadian government for costs and damages when this House chose to restrict access to a manganese-based gasoline additive that the health community warned was neurotoxic and the environment community warned was a danger to the environment. The car manufacturers said that they did want it in their cars because it compromised the catalytic converters, hurt their warranties and they needed action on it.

Even when the factual basis for governmental action is not in question and there is no notion that the action taken was in any way motivated by trade discrimination, in other words, we were not trying to give preferential treatment to a Canadian industry or

product, the agreement is sufficient. The lawyer who represented Ethyl Corporation at the time, Barry Appleton from Toronto, said, "it would not matter if one added liquid plutonium to children's breakfast cereal, if the government banned it and the people who made it said that they lost profit through that action, they could sue".

I may have taken too long on that specific example but I wanted to make the point that trade agreements have gone too far. We are no longer talking about access to goods and services. We are talking about changing the fundamentals of the relationship. The primary relationship between a government should be to the citizens who elect the members of Parliament to serve in that government. There should be no superior rights of redress to a foreign corporation but we have seen that happen time and time again.

The most recent and egregious example was when the Prime Minister chose to pre-empt a complaint by a forest company against actions taken by the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. In that case, AbitibiBowater was the holder of what had been a 99 year lease that allowed it, at bargain basement prices, to have access to a large area of forest on the condition that it ran a pulp mill. Into the bargain, believe it or not, in this 99 year lease, had been thrown water rights and other ancillary benefits.

When the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador said that it would not let AbitibiBowater close its mill and sell off everything it had under the lease, which would include water rights and the forest itself, as Newfoundland and Labrador said that it did not have access to those, the foreign corporation sued. In that instance, the Prime Minister chose to castigate the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to pay out tens of millions of dollars to AbitibiBowater and said that it did not want something like that to ever happen again.

These investor-state provisions are creeping into all of these so-called bilateral investment agreements, or BITs. The Prime Minister just returned from Beijing and was very thrilled to have a new proposed trade agreement with China that would include these very provisions that would allow a foreign government to sue us.

In this instance, we are looking at a proposed agreement with Jordan. There are many good and substantial reasons to improve relationships with Jordan. Jordan has a reputation and a long-standing role as one of the most stable and least xenophobic Arab states and is certainly the most supportive of the existence of the state of Israel compared to most of the nations in that region.

Jordan has many things to recommend it but democracy is not among them. It is a monarchy. However, the late King Hussein of Jordan was always seen as someone of enormous wisdom. I must say that I was always impressed by his sense of wisdom and by his wife, Queen Noor, who was a strong advocate for the environment.

Government Orders

I had the great honour of serving on the earth charter commission, which was co-chaired by Mikhail Gorbachev and Maurice Strong. I had the good fortune to get to know Princess Basma of Jordan, who was King Hussein's sister. As I approach this, I have a sense of Jordan's place in the world and a sense of, albeit small, personal connection.

● (1320)

However, when we look at the implications of this trade agreement with Jordan, I do not think we should rush into it without having much better and more substantial answers for a couple of key points. We have heard numerous commentators point out that the Canada-Jordan free trade agreement could create free licence to greater human smuggling, that there would be an increased flow of foreign workers into Jordanian factories and that this could undermine labour rights in Jordan.

When we enter into a negotiation such as this, I would suggest a couple of steps that we tend to miss. The first step would be how to build a stronger relationship with a country. We can fill in the blank for the country, although in this case it would be Jordan. Yesterday we were talking about Panama. How do we build good links? Canada, traditionally, has been able to build good links through a robust Department of Foreign Affairs. There were skilled and qualified diplomats working in these countries. There were people who spoke local languages, spent time getting to know the local NGO community and were able to provide a context with which we dealt with nations. The importance of our foreign affairs outreach in recent years has been quite diminished. We have closed embassies and consulates around the world, which means that our reach is reduced.

When we have a relationship with a country, whether it is Panama, Jordan or China, it is important that the relationship be built on many pillars. One is, of course, the diplomatic one to which I referred. Another is greater social interaction and cultural exchanges. The government has shut down all the programs that dealt with allowing Canadian artists to perform overseas, which was building stronger relationships through our culture.

We also need relationships to be built on, not on the model of the NAFTA but more like the model from the European Union. In that model, all nations within the EU, when they undertook to become part of that shared common market, had to accept the toughest levels of environmental and labour standards of any one of the member countries. This is a key principle that is completely lacking in NAFTA. Under NAFTA, there are no requirements to meet higher standards. The most we got out of the language of NAFTA was that it would be unacceptable for a country to lower its environmental standards in order to advance trade.

There is a very large difference between NAFTA saying that countries are not allowed to lower their environmental standards to attract more trade and the completely different approach of the EU, which is that countries must raise their standards. Generally speaking, Germany has the highest environmental standards and therefore other countries had to raise themselves up to equal the German standards. Some of those countries were poor and so there was a transfer of resources to help them do that.

If one were looking at models around the world to find ways to use the trade pillar to advance other issues, then one would never follow the NAFTA model. It would be the worst possible way to go. One would look at the best examples around the world and follow those. If we have relationships on the basis of trade, those relationships should include raising the bar and telling foreign corporations that they need to look at a code of conduct enshrined in law internationally in the same way that we protect intellectual property rights. We know how to design regimes, such as the TRIPS Agreement, which requires that all nations proactively pass legislation to protect intellectual property rights and give all countries the ability to search and seize goods crossing a border if they do not meet the qualifications for intellectual property rights. We know how to do these things.

What if we were to say, for instance, that no goods at a border are allowed to pass if they have involved child labour? We could say that we will not allow goods to cross a border if they involve the destruction of precious ecosystems. Instead, our trade mantra is that we do not interfere with PPMs, process and production methods. What is an intellectual property infringement other than a process and production method? It means the product was produced by stealing someone else's intellectual property. Why is it a greater offence under the trade regime to steal intellectual property than to exploit children, destroy forests or increase greenhouse gas emissions?

● (1325)

If we look at the global governance of trade, there is tremendous potential there for good. There is tremendous potential to harness the ability that has been used to protect intellectual property rights and use those kinds of agreements to protect labour standards, to protect children, to protect ecosystems and to advance a low carbon economy. All of these things could be done but they are not being done.

To ensure that Canadian corporations, U.S. corporations, Dutch, Chinese or whatever corporations participate in the GATT, we should have a global agreement on corporate behaviour stating that all corporations operating within this trade zone, which is basically every country except Cuba, need to meet minimum standards, such as proper labour standards and environmental standards. In that way, no corporation would be disadvantaged by having to take these standards on because all corporations would have a level playing field. It would be quite progressive coming from the lessons learned through the development of the GATT, the WTO, the TRIPS Agreement, the General Agreement on Trade in Services and so on. We have not done that here.

We have before us an agreement that follows the traditional typical model. It would give investment rights. It has a few nice words. There would be more of an environmental assessment review. We have had a review of what the Canada-Jordan free trade negotiations would mean. There is some agreement to work together on environmental issues. However, we still have the looming problems of reduced labour standards within Jordan, the risk of human trafficking and the fact that we have skewed the relationship that we have with other nations to the effect that it appears that nothing matters other than trade.

Government Orders

I suppose the House can now sense that there is a theme to what I am saying. We are not against trade and we are not against new trade agreements but a balance must be achieved so that our relationship with other countries in the world is based on multilateralism and internationalism. It must always recognize the priority of citizens in a country to make decisions and have them binding. It must not give superior rights to corporations over citizens. It must rebalance the importance of diplomacy, of exchange and of fair trade in goods. It must insist that the rules that govern our trade agreements constantly reinforce and elevate the nature of our relationships, not put us in a situation where the populace of various countries push back.

We will see come before the House before too long the comprehensive economic trade agreement with the European Union. As I have been talking about EU trade agreements, how ironic is it that we are not seeing in the draft of that agreement a replication of the EU model but one that looks more like the NAFTA model with the benefits that will largely accrue to European pharmaceutical companies and so on? However, that agreement is not before us yet.

I do not oppose the bill going to committee where it can be improved. Our relationship with Jordan is important but it must be much richer, more complex and more nuanced than advancing agreements and relationships with Jordan through a trade agreement that fails to live up to its potential. We must revisit this. We must protect the rights of workers and protect the environment.

• (1330)

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my hon. colleague on her fine speech and her excellent comments.

I would like to mention once again that the NDP will be supporting this bill, so that it can be studied in committee. It must be reviewed in committee to ensure that it adheres to some very important principles.

Consider, for example, the famous chapter 11 of the North American Free Trade Agreement, NAFTA. I need not remind you that this chapter has been extremely harmful here in Canada, particularly as regards the environment.

In Canada, chapter 11 has given rise to lawsuits. Certain multinationals have sued the Canadian government to demand, for example, the right to use certain chemical products, contrary to our desire to protect the environment.

I would also like to know whether my hon. colleague thinks it important to ensure in committee, for example, that the environment will be protected and that we will not be facing a problem such as that caused by NAFTA's chapter 11.

[*English*]

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, I thank my friend, the hon. member for Drummond, for his comments.

[*Translation*]

This is a question that is difficult to answer, because what we have here is a bilateral agreement which, like the other agreements, ignores the environment and workers' rights. I think that, to improve the situation, this agreement should take an innovative approach, an

approach where the governments of Canada and Jordan agree to set targets to make the situation more beneficial for workers and for the environment.

[*English*]

In other words, if we could put some targets in a trade agreement that said that not only would this be one where we would not want to see standards lowered, but this would be one where we would like to see standards advanced, and our agreement would be a model for the world.

It is hard to look at what we have now because it is one of those cookie-cutter agreements, like all the rest. We should take it apart and think about what would make it a model that other countries might want to emulate. For instance, with issue of human trafficking, we could have a system where the Kingdom of Jordan would recognize that its reputation as a progressive and forward looking power could be advanced by banning the use of workers who did not have minimum standards for the work they did in that country.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The question is on the motion that this question be now put. 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.

And the bells having rung:

• (1335)

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Speaker, I ask that the vote be moved to the next Monday following question period.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The vote will be deferred until Monday at the end of question period.

* * *

FINANCIAL LITERACY LEADER ACT

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (for the Minister of Finance) moved that Bill C-28, An Act to amend the Financial Consumer Agency of Canada Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is a wonderful opportunity to kick off debate at second reading for Bill C-28, the financial literacy leader act.

Before continuing, I would like to acknowledge and applaud the work of the chair of the finance committee and the member for Edmonton—Leduc for championing financial literacy in Parliament through his Motion No. 269. Today's legislation is a clear indication that his motion has helped to draw attention to the issue and has highlighted the need for swift action.

This is relatively short and straightforward legislation designed to establish the position of a financial literacy leader within the Financial Consumer Agency of Canada. Nevertheless, today's bill is very important because it gives Canadian families what they need: the right tools to make the best financial decisions.

We live in a world with a growing number of increasingly complex financial products and services, all with different rewards and risks, which may not be the easiest to understand: insurance, mortgages, investments, online banking, savings accounts, loans, lines of credit, retirement savings accounts, cellphone contracts, debit and credit cards, and the list just goes on and on. What is more, the list of products and services available to Canadians gets longer every year, making it even more difficult for busy moms and dads to stay on top of the risks, fees and potential returns.

In such a rapidly changing environment, financial literacy is vital to help Canadians make informed and responsible financial choices. Improved financial literacy can translate into higher savings levels and decreased indebtedness. It gives consumers the tools and knowledge they need to pick the products and services that are right for them.

As the Canadian Taxpayers Federation has said:

Financial literacy is an important life skill. Canadians make financial decisions throughout their lives, many of which involve significant risks and rewards. Improving financial literacy helps consumers act knowledgeably and with confidence in managing their personal financial affairs. Informed consumer decision-making, in turn, contributes to the maintenance of a well-functioning and stable financial system and a stronger economy.

The Canadian Association of Credit Counselling Services has said:

By embracing financial literacy, individuals and families can discover a new sense of personal control and mastery over their financial matters.

[*Translation*]

Our government is in complete agreement. That is why we have taken major steps since 2006 to improve financial literacy in Canada. The first of these steps was the creation of the task force on financial literacy under Canada's economic action plan, as set out in the 2009 budget.

The task force, composed of leaders from consumer groups, the financial sector, the media and academia, got down to work. However it was not content to hold closed-door meetings in Ottawa. It went out to meet directly with Canadians, and more importantly still, to listen to them.

Government Orders

It launched a public consultation tour from one end of the country to the other, going to every province and territory to hear from Canadians themselves what they think about this important issue.

In the course of these wide-ranging consultations, public sessions were held in over a dozen Canadian cities, ranging from the big urban centres such as Toronto, Calgary and Montreal to more remote places like Iqaluit and Yellowknife.

The task force thus had the opportunity to meet in person with close to 200 individuals and organizations. It also received briefs, through its website, and even held an online forum for those who were unable to attend the public sessions.

● (1340)

[*English*]

I am happy to note that the consultation process was very positively received by Canadians, leading to tremendous feedback. By the end of the consultation period, the task force had received more than 300 submissions. In addition to what it heard from Canadians, the task force also drew on its review of Canadian and international best practices and conducted additional research on financial literacy.

Combining the feedback received from its consultations with its additional research, the task force then produced a final report. The report is entitled "Canadians and Their Money: Building a brighter financial future". It was publicly released in February 2011 and outlined 30 key recommendations to improve the financial literacy of Canadians. I encourage all Canadians watching at home to take a moment to visit the website at www.financialliteracyincanada.com.

On the website, Canadians can learn about the work of the task force, review its detailed research and read the final report. The report highlights the importance of improving financial literacy in Canada and the urgency to get it done. The task force states:

Financial literacy is critical to the prosperity and well-being of Canadians. It is more than a nice-to-have skill. It is a necessity in today's world—and, moving forward, should be treated as such by policy-makers, educators, employers and other stakeholders across the country. The time for action is now.

As I mentioned, the report outlined 30 recommendations to support its call to action. The task force's number one recommendation was as follows:

The Task Force recommends that the Government of Canada appoint an individual, directly accountable to the Minister of Finance, to serve as dedicated national leader. This Financial Literacy Leader should have the mandate to work collaboratively with stakeholders to oversee the National Strategy, implement the recommendations and champion financial literacy on behalf of all Canadians.

The task force's rationale for this recommendation was that while excellent work was being done across Canada to improve financial literacy, it was clear long-term improvements would:

—require a focused, centrally recognized champion. Clear leadership and coordination are needed at the national level. Sustained, steady progress over the long term is unlikely to be achieved without dedicated stewardship.

As such, the task force concluded that the government should create a position to lead and champion financial literacy and to successfully implement its own recommendations going forward.

Government Orders

The financial literacy leader act would do exactly that by proposing to amend the Financial Consumer Agency of Canada Act to allow for the appointment of a financial literacy leader.

[*Translation*]

Furthermore, the amendments proposed in the bill under consideration will allow the agency to work together with various stakeholders to support and contribute to financial literacy projects.

The bill also establishes the duties, powers and functions of the financial literacy leader. It will among other things enable the leader to conduct activities in support of this objective and it sets out the conditions of employment.

The appointment of someone to this important position, and the implementation of the other recommendations made by the task force, will lead to enormous progress towards improving financial literacy here in Canada.

This act, together with the many other steps taken by our government, will contribute to the financial security of all Canadians.

[*English*]

This includes the \$5 million we invest annually in the Financial Consumer Agency of Canada, sometimes known as the FCAC. By making this investment, we support FCAC in its efforts to help Canadians increase their knowledge and confidence in managing their personal finances. In carrying out this role, the agency also ensures that federally-regulated financial institutions, like banks, provide required information to their consumers in a transparent and timely manner and comply with all other consumer laws and regulations.

There are so many ways in which the Financial Consumer Agency is already hard at work helping Canadians, making it the perfect home for the financial literacy leader. For instance, the agency provides consumers with useful information about which credit cards may or may not be right for them, including comparison charts outlining the rates and features of the many credit cards offered in Canada.

It is an important service as there are more than 200 credit cards available on the market for Canadians to choose from. While having so many choices can benefit consumers through greater competition, decisions about which card is best can be challenging if the information is unclear. That is why it is vital that consumers have access to initiatives like those already provided by the agency, which can help them increase their understanding of different interest rates and potential fees.

To even better help Canadian consumers understand the forms they are signing, the FCAC has also created a new consumer-friendly model credit card application form that many major credit card providers have adopted.

• (1345)

[*Translation*]

The agency has also developed innovative methods of helping Canadians, such as a tool for rapidly calculating mortgage payments and potential savings that can result from accelerated payment plans.

It also provides targeted online information to help consumers choose those bank products that best suit their needs.

Young people also benefit from FCAC financial literacy programs. The City, an educational program, is a very good example of this. It is an interactive Web tool designed to help young Canadians between 15 and 18 years of age to acquire financial skills. I highly recommend to all Canadians that they visit the FCAC site at www.fcac-acfc.gc.ca to familiarize themselves with the tools available to make their lives easier.

[*English*]

FCAC will also be the perfect home for the financial literacy leader as the leader can quickly build on the important work the agency has already started. For instance, a number of community-based and non-profit organizations collaborated with the FCAC to make November financial literacy month. In fact, 75 organizations in all presented at 200 events and outreach initiatives across the country. This type of grassroots level collaboration will go a long way toward improving financial literacy in Canada, especially with the added support of the financial literacy leader.

I would, however, note that our Conservative government understands that even with the appointment of a financial literacy leader, sometimes even more will be required. While we do not believe, like the NDP, that the government should dictate and excessively regulate every aspect of a private business, we do believe in the importance of transparency, proper monitoring, consumer choice and competition. Indeed, when necessary, we have shown that we are ready to act to defend the rights of consumers.

That is why only recently our Conservative government acted to protect Canadians who used credit cards. After all, the last thing Canadians need is a surprise on their credit card statement at the end of the month.

The measures we introduced mandated that clear and simple information be displayed on credit card application forms and contracts and required companies to provide advance notice of changes in rates and fees. We also limited credit business practices that did not benefit consumers.

We introduced changes that required credit card issuers to provide consumers with a minimum 21-day interest-free grace period on all new purchases when consumers paid their balance in full by the due date. We also required a minimum 21-day grace period on all new purchases in a billing period, even if consumers had an outstanding balance they carried forward.

We moved important information, such as interest rates, grace periods and fees, off of the fine print buried in credit applications and contracts and into a prominent summary box so consumers would know exactly what kind of financial arrangement they were agreeing to when they signed an application. This measure also provides a clear picture of their debt load as they pay it off.

Government Orders

These initiatives are in effect today and are providing Canadian consumers with precisely the kind of improved financial information that leads to better decision making. Indeed, the president of the Consumers' Association of Canada welcomed these moves, declaring, "All of the things that the Finance Minister has done are actually just what we asked for...overall I've got to congratulate him".

• (1350)

[*Translation*]

We have also introduced many other measures to better protect consumers. For example, we have prohibited negative optioning for financial products. We have also made mortgage insurance more transparent and reduced the hold period for funds deposited by cheque.

Before concluding, I would like to emphasize the importance of financial literacy and the need to pass the bill currently under review. Improving their knowledge of financial matters will help Canadians who want to save for retirement, buy a house or simply balance the family cheque book, and will also make our financial system more competitive and stable and our economy stronger.

That is why the government has set a priority on improving the financial skills of Canadians and why it plans to appoint a financial literacy leader.

In view of the growing number of financial services, it is essential to ensure that Canadians have effective tools and sound knowledge so that they can feel confident in their financial decisions.

[*English*]

In the words of Peter Nares, the executive director of Social and Enterprise Development Innovations:

[This] is the first step in a process that could help Canadians make better financial decisions. It could also help Canadians better weather the economic storms that will inevitably blow through the global economy from time to time.

That is why I urge the House to vote in support of the financial literacy leader act. I implore members of the opposition to take under consideration the fact that many consumers groups and consumers have been asking for these protections and that it is only fit for them to vote in favour of moving forward on this very important recommendation made by the task force. We intend to see this through.

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Mr. Speaker, once again, we are here discussing an issue that I believe is important to both the hon. member and me, as well as both of our parties. However, I liken this bill to cotton candy. It is very sweet, it smells good, it looks good, but there is absolutely no substance to it.

The hon. member talked about the recommendations and how the government is bringing forward the bill based on the recommendations. The original recommendation coming from the task force was that the financial literacy leader needed to have an advisory council that would include labour, voluntary groups, educators, as well as business stakeholders. That is not in this bill. Here is an important aspect of what the task force talked about and once again the government is ignoring it and just following through on what its ideology is.

I would like to hear the hon. member's comments on that.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Mr. Speaker, both the NDP and the Conservatives talk a lot about consumer debt and how we might protect consumers. It is only this side of the House, though, that actually votes in favour of measures that will protect consumers.

I would remind the member that this act will in fact put in place a financial literacy leader who will be tasked as the champion for making sure that the other recommendations in this report are seen and moved forward.

We cannot put the cart before the horse, which is what the NDP member is asking. Therefore, I would expect that he and his party do the right thing and vote in favour of this legislation so we can in fact get that cart and buggy moving forward to protect consumers. They have to stop putting forward obstacles that make absolutely no sense.

Therefore, I would recommend that the member speak to his party and vote in favour of our measures.

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, most of us in the House and elsewhere recognize that financial literacy is important at this time, especially as we try to deal more seriously with the issues of pensions and so on. However, given the times that we are in, with the layoffs and job losses of many public servants here in Ottawa and throughout the country, I am questioning the timing. How do we deal with the issue of the laying off so many public servants throughout the country and establishing other departments?

Second, I see that the Parliamentary Budget Officer is starved for resources, as are Elections Canada and many other parts of the federal government family. How is the government going to rectify that?

Is the new office going to have enough resources and what costs are we looking at? Will the government just create that office then not give it the resources it needs to do a very important job?

• (1355)

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Mr. Speaker, it did not sound like the question had anything at all to do with the subject, that is, the financial literacy leader being put in place to act on the 30 recommendations of the task force, but I will answer the member's question.

The answer to the jobs problem is not what the Liberals have proposed. It is definitely not increasing corporate taxes. It is definitely not increasing CPP. It is definitely not supporting a 45-day work year as proposed by the member's party, the Liberal Party. Much of that is actually supported by the NDP.

We have a low tax agenda to create jobs and to give people hope and opportunity to make sure that they can thrive in Canada. We will not destroy that hope and opportunity by further taxing Canadians and destroying the job creators out there. We will not kill jobs as proposed by the Liberals and NDP. We are going to continue on our fiscal track for prosperity. We are going to continue on a track of economic growth. We are going to protect all Canadians with the budget that will be announced very shortly.

Statements by Members

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after the work the task force has done, I think we all know how terribly important a financial literacy leader is to all Canadians. People in my riding of Simcoe—Grey, particularly older ones, want to make sure that things are crystal clear to them from the information they are receiving. As the member mentioned, we need to make sure that we have the horse before the cart: we need to make sure that we have the leadership in place first before we move forward.

I wonder if the member could please expand upon what the financial literacy leader will mean for Canadians.

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Mr. Speaker, I know how hard my colleague works to help us move forward our agenda with regard not only to jobs and economic growth but also to protecting Canadians' social services and programs. I do want to take a moment to thank her for her dedication.

The bill before us today would allow the financial literacy leader to move forward on those recommendations to make sure that we are protecting consumers and that financial institutions understand how very important it is to make sure things are clear, to make sure that consumers understand what they are buying into, when dealing with either credit cards or contracts or mortgages.

The bill would allow the financial literacy leader to start taking those steps forward. We have spoken with so many different stakeholders but we have not heard any complaints about moving this forward. The task force did a fantastic job. We should take this priority recommendation of theirs and make it happen. We need the support of the opposition to do that in a timely manner. I suggest those members vote in favour of the bill.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Tarik Brahmī (Saint-Jean, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened very carefully to the speech given by the hon. member for Saint Boniface.

The OECD report “Financial Literacy and Consumer Protection” says that financial literacy has to be a complement to, rather than a substitute for, a framework for the regulation and prudential supervision of capital markets.

What does the hon. member think about the OECD statement?

Mrs. Shelly Glover: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his question.

As I said earlier, we are talking about a financial literacy leader who will take into consideration all the information available. As I said, we need the NDP to vote in support of this act, so that the financial literacy leader can implement the measures that the hon. member is referring to.

Once again, I suggest that he vote with us to move the bill forward.

● (1400)

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): There are two minutes remaining in questions and comments for the hon.

parliamentary secretary. However, the time for government orders has expired.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*Translation*]

CLOSING OF ROCKTENN

Mr. Jean-François Fortin (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is with bitterness that we learned yesterday of the closing of the RockTenn factory in Matane, a profitable plant at the cutting edge of technology. This closure will result in the loss of approximately 100 jobs in my region, which has already been hit hard by the forestry crisis.

The Gaspé stands behind its workers, who are the victims of RockTenn's greed. This latest closure also reminds us, unfortunately, of the Conservatives' complete and utter incompetence when it comes to the forestry industry. It is high time that this government started working for the people and helping this vital sector for many regions of Quebec.

The Minister of Industry must also guarantee that no public money or federal grant is used to facilitate the relocation of RockTenn's equipment to the United States. Finally, the government must ensure that workers affected by the closure will have access, as soon as possible, to concrete support measures.

* * *

[*English*]

ORDER OF CANADA

Mr. Ed Holder (London West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Order of Canada is the most prestigious honour our country can bestow. From artists to academics, scholars to humanitarians, the order celebrates the best about Canada.

Along with other Canadians, I was proud to see Christopher Plummer, when receiving his Oscar at the Academy Awards last week, proudly display his Order of Canada pin on his tuxedo lapel. Today, I wish to honour one of Canada's finest citizens and London's most recent recipient, Hanny Hassan. He is a testament to what makes my city and our country great.

Hanny's parents emigrated to Canada from Lebanon almost a century ago. They instilled in their 11 children a belief that they could go wherever their dreams inspired them. Hanny has spent his life bridging cultures and religions through his tremendous capacity for collaboration and co-operation. An engineer by training, he has been active in everything from organizations that help immigrants to the National Muslim Christian Liaison Committee and its important efforts to facilitate dialogue between Muslims and Christians. He is a humanitarian of the highest order.

I share with the House my thanks for Hanny Hassan making our country a better place for all Canadians.

Statements by Members

[Translation]

TROPICANA CAMPGROUND IN GRANBY

Mr. Réjean Genest (Shefford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it will be a sad summer for 50 families in Granby. These families have received an eviction notice and must vacate their homes by September 1, and not because their taxes have gone unpaid, nor because they are unable to meet their mortgage payments. There has been no natural disaster, such as an ice storm or a flood. It is simply because the Tropicana campground, where these people live in their mobile homes, will only be open six or seven months of the year.

Fifty homes is tantamount to a whole neighbourhood, a northern village or an aboriginal reserve. In many cases, a lifetime's savings is vanishing, like leaves falling off trees in the fall.

The residents of these mobile homes are workers for whom this kind of accommodation is the only way of obtaining property and housing without going bankrupt. Low-income earners will be directly affected by this measure. Let us sincerely hope that the mayor and the Granby municipal council will reverse this decision.

* * *

[English]

41ST GENERAL ELECTION

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, recent allegations about electoral misconduct in the federal riding of Guelph during last May's election have generated a lot of concern from Canadians. As a Conservative member of Parliament for Wellington county, whose county seat is in Guelph, I condemn in the strongest terms this reprehensible activity. The individual or individuals responsible for such activity should be prosecuted to the full extent of the law. That is why I call upon Elections Canada and the RCMP to expeditiously conduct and conclude their investigation, so that those responsible can be held accountable.

As member of Parliament for Wellington—Halton Hills, our local campaign has always upheld the highest standards of ethics and accountability. The kind of subversion alleged in Guelph has no place in a first-world democracy like Canada.

* * *

JEANNE SAUVÉ

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it was 32 years ago when Jeanne Sauvé took the chair as the 29th Speaker of the House. While she was the 29th Speaker of the Commons, she was a pioneer as the first female to occupy that important position.

For four years Madam Sauvé served Canada with distinction, until, in 1984, her abilities and dedication were further recognized with her appointment as the 23rd Governor General of Canada. Again breaking new ground as the first female to hold the office, Madam Sauvé recognized excellence in education, established numerous national honours for women and created the Governor General's Award for Safety in the Workplace, all while trimming costs and demonstrating the importance of her office.

It has been 32 years since Madam Sauvé first took those pioneering steps, but we remain in her debt. Jeanne Sauvé was inspired by the women who went before her and, by her example,

another generation of women can look to her as a beacon of what is really very possible.

* * *

● (1405)

RACE CAR DRIVING

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, clear the track for Canada's next race car driving sensation Nathan Blok.

Nathan, an Ottawa Valley boy from just outside Pembroke, Ontario on the Beachburg Road, was featured recently on *Dragon's Den*, a Canadian reality television show. Nathan so impressed one of the dragons on the show that he walked away with a significant financial sponsorship, not bad for a boy who is only 17.

That investment in Nathan has demonstrated itself to have been a wise decision. The young lad from the valley is proving himself on the track. Now Nathan has his eyes set on the international racing circuit. While the competition may be fierce, so is Nathan's determination to be the best.

It is my pleasure to extend sincere congratulations to proud parents Steve and Sandra Blok from their son's biggest fans here in the valley. I wish their son Nathan great success as he pursues his dream to be Canada's finest race car driver since Jacques Villeneuve. Go, Nathan, go.

* * *

[Translation]

KRAFT HOCKEYVILLE 2012

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in my constituency, in Amos, people are passionate about hockey. These days, my fellow citizens are battling hard in the corners to score the most important goal in the history of this sport in the region: they are campaigning for Amos's bid in the Hockeyville 2012 competition.

Organized by Kraft and the CBC, this contest could enable Amos to receive a small part of the funding necessary to renovate the municipal arena and to host a pre-season National Hockey League game.

Two hundred and twenty-seven communities are participating in this competition, 29 of them in Quebec. It is truly sad for the other 226, but Amos is going to win. Inspired by passion worthy of a first-line centre, our team is heading straight for victory. They almost touch the trophy.

I invite the entire population of the region to receive the pass from the city of Amos and drive to the net with us to stir things up and take a few good shots to the top corner of the net.

Let us encourage the people responsible for this splendid initiative and we will win the game without even going to overtime. Go, Amos, go.

*Statements by Members**[English]***UNIVERSITY OF REGINA STUDENT UNION**

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my Saskatchewan Conservative colleagues and I were extremely disappointed to learn of the University of Regina student union's recent one-sided resolution calling on the university to join the boycott, divest and sanction movement against Israel.

The state of Israel as a western liberal democracy is not perfect but considering the human rights abuses now taking place in Israel's neighbour Syria, it is saddening to see the U of R student union's use of alarmist language like "war crimes", "oppression" and "occupation" against Israel. The student union has taken a simplistic and prejudicial view to an issue that deserves a far more mature and balanced approach.

Canada's Conservative government remains committed to a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East through a negotiated two-state solution. That can only be achieved through an agreement negotiated by both sides and not through one-sided rhetoric and finger pointing by outsiders.

I therefore call on University of Regina president Vianne Timmons to do the right thing and condemn this irresponsible resolution.

* * *

2012 NSERC AWARDS

Mr. John Carmichael (Don Valley West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, earlier this week the Governor General and our government honoured Canada's top researchers in natural sciences and engineering at the 2012 NSERC awards. Nineteen individuals and teams were the winners of seven prestigious prizes for their research that ranges from unlocking codes that control human genetics to using the characteristics of carbohydrates found inside cells in combating disease.

I would like to recognize the winner of NSERC's highest honour, the Gerhard Herzberg Canada Gold Medal for Science and Engineering, which was awarded to W. Richard Peltier. Dr. Peltier has helped pioneer earth system science, a science that studies interactions between the land, atmosphere, water and biosphere as an integrated system.

Our government has invested in science and technology not only to create jobs and economic growth at home, but also to put Canadian ingenuity to work for the world. We will continue to make important investments in science and technology—

● (1410)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie.

* * *

*[Translation]***RIGHTS OF THE CHILD**

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, at least 430 children are detained in Canadian prisons every year. These are children of refugees, children of war, children of famine and violence. Yet what are we offering them? A stay in prison with no education and no psychological support. Why?

Because an officer felt that their parent could not appear before the authorities or because that parent could not satisfy the officer as to his or her identity. Is this going to improve? Certainly not.

Bill C-31 would lengthen prison sentences for refugee claimants who arrive by boat with a so-called smuggler or, worse still, a group designated directly by the minister. And so dozens more children will be languishing in our prisons.

The Canadian Council for Refugees, an organization in Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, maintains that this incarceration is contrary to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the international Convention on the Rights of the Child.

You can be sure that the NDP will be working hard to mobilize public opinion to ensure that Mr. Harper's new prison cells never become filled with dozens of children—

The Speaker: It is important to point out that it is not the practice of the House to use proper names. The names of the ridings or the titles should be used instead.

The hon. member for Mississauga-East—Cooksville has the floor.

* * *

*[English]***BELARUS**

Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon (Mississauga East—Cooksville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the authoritarian regime in Belarus forced the European Union head of delegation and the Polish ambassador to leave the country. In an expression of solidarity, all EU countries responded by withdrawing their own ambassadors and tightening sanctions against the brutal Lukashenka regime. Canada applauds their united stand against tyranny.

Under our Conservative government, Canada has steadfastly stood up for the rights and freedom of the citizens of Belarus. We have condemned the recent fraudulent presidential elections and the ongoing oppression of political dissidents. We have also acted in support of democracy-promotion projects by funding the work of free media such as Belsat which provides independent television programming to the people of Belarus. Yesterday the German foreign minister appropriately called Belarus Europe's last dictatorship. I am proud that Canada will continue to stand up with our European allies in their efforts to bring freedom and democracy to Belarus.

Statements by Members

[Translation]

STATUS OF WOMEN

Ms. Manon Perreault (Montcalm, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this week I had the honour of meeting with the regional president and four local presidents of the Association féminine d'éducation et d'action sociale in the riding of Montcalm. These women initiate individual and collective analyses relating to the rights and responsibilities of women and engage in activities to promote social change. These women are protecting their hard-won gains and standing up for women and families.

They want to be clear that they practice a social egalitarian feminism whose goal is equal status, freedom of choice and autonomy, to overcome the persistent inequalities in our society. They are calling on all of us in this House to help them, to amend all the legislation that keeps inequality between men and women alive.

These women maintain that every individual plays an important role in society and that enhancing equality between men and women should be made a true societal goal, so that no one is left behind. Let us work together to create a Canada that is more just and more egalitarian.

* * *

[English]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Greg Rickford (Kenora, CPC): Mr. Speaker, improving the water quality on reserve is a top shared priority for our government and first nations leadership across the country.

Since 2006, we have made significant investments in water and waste-water infrastructure and in improving capacity for reporting, monitoring and maintenance of water infrastructure on reserve. However, as the recent independent national assessment showed, adequate legislative protection is essential to the effective monitoring of water quality on reserve.

[Translation]

That is why I am happy to point out that our government is taking concrete action to protect the first nations' drinking water, by introducing the safe drinking water for first nations bill in the other house.

[English]

This legislation represents a vital step toward ensuring that first nations have the same access to safe drinking water as the rest of Canada. This new bill is the product of hard work, collaboration and partnership by all stakeholders. I want to applaud the Alberta Assembly of Treaty Chiefs and the Atlantic Policy Congress for their leadership on this issue.

* * *

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on the eve of a visit to Canada by Israel's prime minister, I would like to acknowledge the important work of the UJA Federation of Greater Toronto in partnering with IsraAID, an Israeli humanitarian organization, to help South Sudan fight violence against women.

A group of Israeli experts is travelling to South Sudan today to conduct the first gender-based violence training program for social workers in the world's newest country. The workshop will provide social workers in the Juba region with intensive training on the delivery of social work, gender-based violence and post-trauma assistance in a country where sexual abuse and other forms of gender-based violence continue to put women and girls at risk. The program is funded primarily by the UJA Federation of Greater Toronto and, by extension, charitable donations from Toronto's Jewish community. It is an example of the close level of co-operation between Canadians and Israelis on important global issues. I applaud the UJA and IsraAID for this important contribution to nation building and—

● (1415)

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Saint Boniface.

* * *

41ST GENERAL ELECTION

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Saint Boniface, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in the last several days the NDP and the Liberals have launched smears against dozens of Conservative MPs and candidates, alleging misleading phone calls in the last election. They do not have any information on which to base their malicious attacks. It is obvious that the Conservative Party of Canada was not involved with the alleged calls in Guelph. If something improper did occur, we expect that those responsible will be held to account.

The Conservative Party of Canada is co-operating with Elections Canada in every respect. The Conservative Party of Canada categorically denies any involvement in any deliberately misleading calls. These are baseless smears brought by sore losers who are unwilling to accept that they lost the election. If the Liberals and the NDP have any information at all, I would ask that they bring it forward to Elections Canada so it can—

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier.

* * *

[Translation]

LANGUAGE OF WORK IN QUEBEC

Ms. Éline Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday this House failed Quebecers who count on their elected representatives to protect their fundamental right to work in the language of their choice in their own province. The Conservatives voted against our bill, the purpose of which was to protect the French language in enterprises subject to federal regulation in Quebec. That was to be expected, given how little respect they exhibit for francophones. Yesterday, they once again proved that promoting French is of no importance to them. Their phantom puppet committee on French is just a smokescreen.

Oral Questions

The Conservatives were not the only ones who turned their backs on Quebecers yesterday. The Liberals did the same, and even the Bloc members lost their reason for being here. New Democrats are the only ones working for Quebecers and taking concrete action to protect French. Quebecers can count on the NDP to protect their French language and stand up for their interests. They can also count on our team to replace the Conservatives and form the next government, a government for all Canadians.

* * *

[English]

LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on Monday the interim Liberal leader offered an unreserved apology in the House for the anonymous smear directed at the Minister of Public Safety. However moments later he stepped outside the House and changed his position. The Liberal leader said that disgraced Liberal staffer Adam Carroll was a “perfectly nice, hard-working individual” who was upset by some comments. Let us face it, the debate has been soured by some of the things that have been said.

The member for Papineau also offered an apology and said that he in no way endorsed this sort of activity, which is a bit strange given his tweet mere hours after the launch of the vikleaks smear.

Then the Liberal House leader said that even though this party was behind vikleaks30, it was really no big deal since they were all publicly available documents.

It is clear that Adam Carroll did not act alone. Which other Liberals knew about it? When did they know? There is not an ounce of remorse in the Liberal caucus for this sleazy dirty trick. Liberal caucus members need to come clean and answer our questions, and offer an unreserved apology. Canadians deserve no less.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

41ST GENERAL ELECTION

Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have news for the member for Saint Boniface. The scope of the criminal investigation into electoral fraud has expanded well beyond Guelph. The RCMP is questioning people who worked for RMG in Thunder Bay. The Edmonton court order mentioned calls to Windsor.

Yesterday, the Prime Minister had the nerve to say that the people who received the calls are lying.

Why is the Prime Minister not taking electoral fraud more seriously?

• (1420)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have said repeatedly, calls made by the Conservative Party of Canada were legitimate. All of the calls were documented, and those documents have been made available to Elections Canada.

The fact that there were not many complaints during the election—next to none, in fact—and that all of this is happening nine months later suggests that this is a smear campaign by a party that lost the election.

Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is surprising because the number of subpoenas continues to rise.

Let us talk about the Conservatives' electoral fraud. Today, we learned that the Conservatives laundered money through ridings in Quebec, money that was used to pay for RMG calls.

After pleading guilty to the in and out scandal, the Conservatives have struck again.

Why did the Prime Minister abandon all ethical principles during his last election campaign?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is completely untrue. The local candidate said, “The contract was signed by my official agent and RMG. Our campaign received the services promised: RMG identified voters in my riding.”

That was the candidate's statement.

[English]

Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, evidence is mounting and the number of subpoenas is growing. The RCMP is going to Thunder Bay. Court documents mention calls to Windsor. Ridings spent thousands for no work in Quebec. The Prime Minister knows the investigation has grown well beyond Guelph.

Has the government handed over all the information about its work with RMG and RackNine, or are the Conservatives waiting for their subpoenas?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the statements just made by the leader of the NDP are completely untrue. The fact of the matter is there is an investigation in one particular riding that has been going on for some time with the assistance of the Conservative Party. Beyond that, these complaints had their origin nine months after the election, which is obviously a deliberate smear tactic by a party that lost the election.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives want proof. How about this letter from 83-year-old Florence Grottenberg from Calgary?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, I do not know what is so funny.

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Winnipeg Centre has the floor.

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, I have a letter from 83-year-old Florence Grottenberg of Calgary. The day before the election, the Conservative campaign called her and asked for her vote. She said, “No, I don't support the Conservative Party”. On election day she got the phony phone call that said her voting station had moved 20 blocks away to a school in south Calgary. “How strange,” she writes, since she voted at the real polling station which was in the lobby of her apartment building.

Oral Questions

I wonder if someone on the Conservative benches would like to stand up and apologize to Florence Grottenberg for lying to her and cheating her out of her vote.

The Speaker: There is too much noise.

The hon. parliamentary secretary to the Prime Minister.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, he might be the only member in the House silly enough to suggest that we would have to suppress votes in Calgary to win seats.

The NDP has suggested that we need to see some evidence. Here is some evidence as to what may have gone in the last campaign.

For example, in the riding of Eglinton—Lawrence, we have heard that Joe Volpe, the Liberal candidate, reported in a CBC story that voters were upset because they were being contacted and asked to support Joe Volpe or take a lawn sign and the calls were based in North Dakota. What we learned is that Joe Volpe paid over \$25,000 to Prime Contact, a calling company with offices in North Dakota.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Florence Grottenberg's brother laid down his life in World War II to make the world safe for democracy, and it makes me sick that some Conservative fraudster with a speed dialer has tried to cheat her out of her most democratic freedom and right which is to cast her ballot free of interference in a general election.

Does the Prime Minister think that Florence Grottenberg is part of the drive-by smear? Why does the Prime Minister not get RackNine to robocall Justice Gomery and get busy trying to restore the integrity of our electoral institutions because they have been compromised by some very bad people?

• (1425)

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we said yesterday and we can demonstrate very clearly that the opposition has no evidence. This is an unsubstantiated smear campaign and the member has played a role in that.

We know that Elections Canada received 30 complaints nationally. That is what the report of the Chief Electoral Officer says and now some nine months later the NDP is coming forward with new complaints and new evidence. It is all nonsense.

This party ran an ethical and clean campaign and we were proud to do so.

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is perhaps appropriate that the RCMP has declared that March is fraud prevention month. I would like to ask the Prime Minister in light of that fact, is he suggesting for one moment that there is some kind of statute of limitations with respect to complaints on electoral fraud? Is he suggesting that the people coming forward and providing evidence are not being sincere? Is he suggesting that the thousands of Canadians coming forward are in fact conducting a smear campaign?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday and other days the Liberal Party said that it had received these misleading phone calls from numbers in the United States. We have done some checking. We have only found that it was

the Liberal Party that did source its phone calls from the United States. I wonder if the reason the hon. leader of the Liberal Party will not in fact show us his evidence is it will point out that it was the Liberal Party that made these calls.

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister and his colleagues have a remarkable ability to turn themselves into victims at the same time as they literally smear thousands of Canadians who are now complaining because they are aware of a pattern. The Prime Minister cannot deny the fact that two of the companies that are involved with respect to activities are now under serious investigation, nor can he deny the fact that there is an RCMP investigation ongoing with respect to what happened in Guelph.

Would the Prime Minister not agree that any form of voter suppression is in fact reprehensible?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, of course it is, which is why we encourage voter turnout and why we won the last election campaign.

Back to what I just said, yesterday the leader of the Liberal Party said that these erroneous calls claimed to be from the Liberal Party. In fact, the evidence points to the fact that they actually did come from the Liberal Party. When is the leader of the Liberal Party going to show the phone list and demonstrate where in fact these calls came from and the fact that they came from the Liberal Party itself?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to report to the Prime Minister that we are fully prepared to share all of our information on the last Liberal election campaign. We are prepared to hand over all information on any questions asked, to disclose who we called and why.

Is the Prime Minister prepared to do the same thing, yes or no?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for the past few days, I have been trying to get this information from the Liberal Party. The Liberal Party said these calls came from the United States, but only the Liberal Party made such calls from the United States. It is up to the Liberal Party to prove that it did not make these calls to voters.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative Party is a bit like a Russian nesting doll: sometimes one scandal might be hiding another. Just a few months after Conservatives pleaded guilty to election fraud, here we go again: another in and out scheme. Last May, it seems that Conservative campaigns in Quebec were used as puppets to pay RMG thousands of dollars in order to get around the law. Neither the candidates nor any official agents seem to know what RMG was paid to do.

Please, is there someone across the way who can tell us who concluded these agreements with RMG, instead of hiding behind Pierre Poutine and Michael Sona?

Oral Questions

• (1430)

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member wants to know whether anyone can explain who signed this contract. I can. I have before me a direct quote from Bertin Denis, a Conservative candidate:

The \$15,000 bill from RMG was a local campaign expense. The contract was signed by my official agent and RMG. Our campaign received the service as promised. RMG was asked to identify voters in my riding.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I get the impression that the Conservatives have been doing damage control for the past few days. The first version from the Conservative candidate in Rimouski was that the campaign paid \$15,000.01 for services he was unaware of and about which he was never consulted. What is more, Mr. Duplessis said that one must never offer round numbers because they are not credible. In other words, the party gave him money and told him who to make the cheque out to. That is called fraud, plain and simple. The official agent from another campaign confirmed it, saying it was an in and out scheme.

We want to know why Elections Canada is conducting an investigation in Thunder Bay. Are they going to answer our questions?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the article in question is wrong and we have already proven that.

I have a question for the opposition. The opposition parties said that calls were coming from a telephone company with offices in North Dakota. The only party that hired a firm with offices in North Dakota was the Liberal Party: Joe Volpe, \$25,000; Shafik Ruda, the Liberal candidate for Edmonton, \$2,800; and the candidate for Ottawa-West—Nepean, Anita Vandenberg, \$21,000.

Let them explain why.

[*English*]

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives need to get some better researchers, because there is a firm in North Dakota with the same name but it actually does not work for the Liberal Party. Let us get back to the real issue, which is electoral fraud.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: The hon. member for Timmins—James Bay.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, we are talking about electoral fraud. We asked very specific questions about the shenanigans in Thunder Bay, and the Conservatives' response was, "Catch us if you can." We asked again and they said, "We just changed the polling stations," but no polling stations were changed.

Yesterday the Conservatives said it was a smear. Now that the police are investigating, will they come clean with who in the Conservative Party is behind the hijinks in Thunder Bay?

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs,

CPC): Mr. Speaker, in a letter to the editor, Diane Janzen, the Liberal candidate in Chilliwack—Fraser Canyon, indicated that they used First Contact and "First Contact relies on patented technology....The patent and the server are based in the U.S."

We have heard a number of people come forward and suggest that there were calls made, and that these calls were made on behalf of the Liberal Party and that those calls originated in the U.S. In fact, we heard such a statement about Ottawa West—Nepean yesterday. What we can say is that Anita Vandenberg paid \$21,000 to First Contact to make calls for her campaign.

If they said they were calling on behalf of the Liberal Party and asked for these things, they were.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague is spending so much time trying to sing the golden oldies of Tricky Dick he did not listen to the question, which was about the shenanigans in Thunder Bay.

When the Conservatives were caught out in Guelph, they tried to throw a 20-year-old under the bus and blame him for an elaborate scheme, which is now apparently not working.

We will go back to the fact that there is an investigation into Thunder Bay. Will the member come clean? Will he talk about their role in Thunder Bay, or are the Conservatives going to try to throw RMG under the bus to try to hide the crooks in the Conservative Party?

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Again, Mr. Speaker, this party ran a clean and ethical election campaign. Those are nothing but unsubstantiated smears from the NDP. Canadians will have no tolerance for that type of behaviour.

We know the Liberal Party has claimed that a number of calls were made into its ridings, often late at night. These calls sometimes offended people. The callers indicated that they were calling on behalf of the Liberal Party. They were asking for things like lawn signs. It turned out that they were in fact calling on behalf of the Liberal Party, at least that is what it appears.

• (1435)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP): Mr. Speaker, he is quite right that Canadians will not tolerate that kind of attitude.

It makes no difference whether we hand over all our information to Elections Canada, because it does not have the power to ask political parties for documents. It seems that the Conservatives did not appreciate being caught using the in and out scheme. The message this sends to Canadians is that the Conservatives absolutely do not want the Chief Electoral Officer to be able to discover other scandals.

Why are the Conservatives refusing to give Elections Canada the power it is asking for? What do they have to hide?

Oral Questions

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague is asking why. Because we have already given the evidence to Elections Canada. It has all the documents pertaining to this situation. We are ready to co-operate by answering all questions. It is the opposition that is making unfounded allegations. After a week of attacks and allegations, they should have some proof. They lost the election and now they are making false allegations to justify losing.

[English]

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member just said that they were willing to co-operate with the Chief Electoral Officer, but a question remains. If they are interested in ensuring that all evidence necessary is brought forward, why did they refuse to give the authority that they requested of the Chief Electoral Officer to demand any documents they need to ensure that everybody here is being honest? If they are not willing to give him that power, which they have now proven they are not, what else are they hiding?

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in a letter to the editor, written by Diane Janzen, a Liberal candidate in Chilliwack—Fraser Canyon, she indicated that First Contact relies on patented technology. The patent and server are based in the U.S.

I read a story just a few minutes ago out of the riding of Northumberland—Quinte West about an individual who had received numerous annoying phone calls from a caller indicating the call was on behalf of Liberal candidate Kim Rudd. Kim Rudd, in fact, paid \$11,300 to First Contact to conduct research work in that riding. It turns out—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques.

* * *

[Translation]

SERVICE CANADA

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, election fraud on one hand and the in and out scheme on the other. And now, the Ethics Commissioner is investigating the relocation of the employment insurance processing centre from Rimouski to Thetford Mines, an investigation that directly targets the Minister of Industry. The Conservatives could save us a lot of time and money by answering our questions.

Did the Minister of Industry use his influence to have Service Canada jobs moved to his riding or not?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Mégantic—L'Érable was very clear: the member's allegations are unfounded and unsubstantiated. No decision was made about the new offices in Thetford Mines during the consolidation of employment insurance activities. These decisions were made by Public Works employees as part of a clear, transparent and fair process.

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Industry is so afraid of what will be revealed that he is threatening to take me to court. It makes me think of RackNine.

The minister boasted to a local newspaper that he lobbied to have the employment insurance processing offices in Rimouski moved to his riding. Now, he is saying that he had nothing to do with the decision to transfer these offices, which according to the same article are to be located in a building in Thetford Mines belonging to his former and his father's current associate. Nevertheless, the Ethics Commissioner is investigating. We want to know if he interfered.

Will the minister finally tell us the truth, or do we have to wait for the results of the investigation?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, these allegations are unfounded and are not based on any evidence. All of the decisions about where the employment insurance offices would be located were made by Public Works and Government Services Canada employees as part of a regular, transparent, fair and competitive process.

* * *

● (1440)

ASBESTOS

Mr. François Lapointe (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, NDP): Mr. Speaker, perhaps the minister thinks that moving an employment insurance processing centre to his constituency is a transition plan for asbestos.

Yesterday, *La Presse* reported that, between 2005 and 2010, more than 45% of work-related deaths in Quebec were associated with asbestos. An industry that is no longer socially acceptable clearly has no future. Out of simple respect for his office and for his fellow citizens, the minister must come up with an answer that is different from the same old tune about safe handling.

What is preventing the Minister of Industry from announcing an economic transition plan? Is the reason that he has sunk to courting votes or that he has no influence in his caucus?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada has been promoting the safe use of chrysotile for more than 30 years. Recent scientific studies prove that chrysotile can be safely used in a controlled environment.

* * *

[English]

41ST GENERAL ELECTION

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know that fraudulent calls were made to over 80 residents of Guelph on election day, each of which I immediately reported to Elections Canada, as well as 37 other ridings, to confuse and suppress the vote.

Oral Questions

Elections Canada evidence shows that the Conservative campaign in Guelph had bought and recorded messages from RackNine and did not claim them as an election expense. The staffer who Conservatives offered to Elections Canada as the perpetrator of this national voter suppression campaign has denied executing such a sophisticated and pervasive scheme.

When will the government disclose to Elections Canada who the real culprit is?

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Party has known all along which companies it contracted to do voter contact during the election but it has allowed this to go on. It has not just allowed it to go on but it has made baseless smears against our party for more than a week, despite the fact that it knew the companies that it had hired, U.S.-based companies, were calling on behalf of the Liberal Party, just like it probably knew who was making the smears against the Minister of Public Safety long before you determined it, Mr. Speaker.

I would say to the leader of the Liberal Party, no more dirty tricks.

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government has a duty to ensure the integrity of Canada's voting process. Fraudulent calls also harassed Liberal voters in Vancouver Quadra and we reported it at the time.

The independent Elections Canada returning officer in Vancouver Quadra wrote, "The Vancouver Quadra campaign office did inform me by phone of inappropriate calls during the 2011 election".

Is the Prime Minister now going to accuse Elections Canada officials of launching, in his own words, "a deliberate smear tactic?"

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, a Liberal candidate from Chilliwack—Fraser Canyon wrote a letter to the editor saying that she relied on First Contact and that First Contact uses patented technology based in the United States. We see that candidates who were running for the Liberal Party used this very company to do voter contact information for them.

The Liberals are saying that misleading calls went into Vancouver by callers claiming to be from the Liberal Party. It is pretty clear that they were in fact calling on behalf of the Liberal Party because the Liberal Party hired this company to do it.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, John from Sudbury said that he received a robocall telling him to report to a different polling station than the one indicated on the card from Elections Canada. He went to the office indicated on his card and was able to vote. He was angry because this was an intentional move to influence the outcome of a democratic election.

Does the parliamentary secretary think that John lied and is conducting a smear campaign?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in the Eglinton—Lawrence riding, Liberal Joe

Volpe said that he had received calls from North Dakota. They were fraudulent calls. We have now learned that he was the one who signed a \$25,000 contract with PrimeContact, a company with offices in North Dakota. The Liberals have known this for some time. Why did the Liberals try to hide this information instead of being open and transparent?

* * *

• (1445)

GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives continue to deceive Canadians. They did it with election fraud, and they are doing it with the budget.

They are releasing spending estimates, but they are refusing to show us what major cuts they are planning. We know this is coming, and Canadian families are worried. The minister is saying that he will make cuts. He does not care about families. On our side, we think that Canadian families have the right to know which services will be cut.

Why is the minister refusing to be transparent? Why is he hiding the truth from Canadian families?

[*English*]

Mr. Andrew Saxton (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board and for Western Economic Diversification, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our upcoming budget will build on our low tax plan for jobs and growth, which has already created over 610,000 net new jobs for Canadians. Our government is working to reduce wasteful and inefficient spending across the government. Before the recession, we paid down debt as we emerged from the fragile global recovery. We are on track to eliminate the deficit in the medium term.

As members know, we want to avoid a debt crisis like the one that has paralyzed other economic zones in other countries.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, fake lakes, fake new citizens, fake election officials and now fake job figures. At least the Conservatives are consistent on that side of the House. They have lost 60,000 in a few months. They will not say what they are cutting but we know from the estimates that food inspection, transportation safety, environmental assessments and veterans services are all on the chopping block. Why? So they can pay billions and billions of dollars for failed jets and expensive prisons.

Budgets are about choices and the Conservatives are making the wrong choices. When will they stop cutting services that families count on and when will they start putting—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

*Oral Questions***THE BUDGET**

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is one of the more dramatic examples of the truth, which is that we all know that the NDP members cannot count.

The OECD can count. The IMF can count. The G7 can count. The G20 can count. The banks and the economists in our country can count, thank goodness. However, it appears the member opposite cannot count.

We have 610,000 net new jobs since the end of the recession in July 2009, verified by all those international bodies.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the IMF can count all right. It ranked Canada for economic projections in 2012 152nd worldwide. That is a failure.

Now the OECD, Moody's, Fitch, and the IMF all say that the cuts will drive the economy back into recession and yet the Conservatives want to steamroll their ideological agenda over this fragile economy by slashing government services instead of investing in vital services that families need.

Why will the Conservatives not do what is right, protect our fragile economy and put Canadian families first for a change?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the IMF and the OECD both project Canada to have the strongest growth in the G7. The World Economic Forum rates our banking system the best in the world. *Forbes* magazine ranks Canada, not second or third, but as the best country in the world in which to do business.

What do the credit agencies say? Just last month, Moody's said:

Canada is in that group of countries that are seen as not only safe because they're triple-A rated as well as having strong fundamental characteristics...

We believe that compared to other triple As...Canada is seen more as a haven....

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Just more fine, empty words from the Conservatives, Mr. Speaker. People have had enough. This is why thousands of people, all across the country, are taking part in the Public Service Alliance of Canada's national day of action today to say no to the Conservatives' reckless cuts to services that families need.

Cuts in services to families are unacceptable.

Now that we know the date on which the Conservatives will bring down the budget, can we also know if they will commit to maintaining services that are essential to Canadians?

• (1450)

[*English*]

Mr. Andrew Saxton (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board and for Western Economic Diversification, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our upcoming budget will build on our low tax plan for jobs and growth, which has already created over 610,000 net new jobs for Canadians.

It is no surprise that self-interested public sector union bosses would promote big and wasteful government. These self-interested union bosses do not diminish the honest work performed by public servants every day.

Mrs. Stella Ambler (Mississauga South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, since 2006, our government has brought forward six straight budgets to promote jobs and economic growth in Canada, including cutting taxes 120 times. Since 2006, over one million new net jobs have been created, but the global economy remains fragile. That is why we are moving forward with our long-term plan for jobs and economic growth, not the NDP plan for higher taxes and massive deficit spending.

As we approach economic action plan 2012, would the Minister of Finance inform the House when he will present budget 2012?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our Conservative government is focused on what matters to Canadians, and that is jobs and economic growth.

The economic action plan 2012 will focus on making Canada's economy stronger for today and tomorrow with prudent, pro-economic growth initiatives, keeping taxes low and responsible spending of taxpayer dollars.

I would be pleased to request the designation of an order of the day to present budget 2012 on Thursday, March 29 at 4 p.m.

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[*Translation*]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as the Conservatives head off to Washington to try to avoid the worst-case scenario with the F-35s, it is funny that, here, they are no longer talking about the cost, they are no longer talking about delivery dates, they are no longer saying how many F-35s they are going to buy. All of a sudden, we hear that no contract has been signed and, in his answers yesterday, the minister no longer even mentioned the F-35s.

I wonder if, at last, the Conservatives have had some common sense knocked into them.

Is the minister finally going to reconsider the F-35 purchase?

[*English*]

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is more of the daily diatribe against the interests of the Canadian Forces and their families and against the interests of the aerospace industry. I do not know why the New Democratic Party continually demonstrates that it is so out of touch with our country's defence needs.

That member, among all members present, should know that this is the only fifth generation aircraft available to the Royal Canadian Air Force. This is the plane that Canada needs now and into the future.

Oral Questions

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if I seem a bit grumpy today, it is because my BlackBerry was abuzz late into the night last night with media reports that the associate minister had at last changed his talking points: no mention of the F-35s and emphasis on the fact that no contract had been signed yet. We know that no contract has been signed as of yet and that is why we continue to call for this contract to go out for tender.

Does this signal damage control or a climb down? Will we finally see a plan B come out of the emergency meeting in Washington?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada and the associate minister are showing leadership on this issue. We are meeting with the partners and with the industry.

What we do know, and the Minister of Justice has reminded me, is that the New Democratic Party is against efforts to send a strong signal to those who would violate the justice system. That party is against the development of the energy sector, the aerospace sector and definitely against the interests of the Royal Canadian Air Force. It is against development.

That party is the no defence, no deterrents, no development party. That is what we see time and time again in the House.

* * *

●(1455)

TRANSPORTATION SAFETY

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Transportation Safety Board today said that the tragic train crash in Burlington was caused by high speed. If Canada mandated a positive train control system, the train would have slowed down automatically and avoided the crash and saved lives. The U.S. made PTC mandatory a few years ago. Why not Canada?

The Conservatives have money for jets, but nothing to help Canadians and keep them safe. How many preventable accidents will have to happen before the Conservative government acts?

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we followed the implementation of this matter in the U.S. A., but have tasked the Advisory Council on Rail Safety on an urgent basis to look again into the matter of installing voice recorders in locomotive cabs.

Once Bill S-4, which will be very well supported, is adopted, we will have implemented 83% of the recommendations made by the review panel on the Railway Safety Act and 100% of the recommendations of the committee of which the member is part.

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I asked about the positive train control system and I have not heard an answer to that. That will save lives and put the brakes on these trains that go too fast. It is something used by the U.S. It has been mandatory since 2008.

As to the voice recorders, the Transportation Safety Board has been saying since 2003 that they are necessary and would help investigate crashes. When will the government act?

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and Minister of the Economic Development

Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this has been discussed in the past, but as the member knows, that involves many partners, including unions and managers of rail companies, who will continue these discussions because it was tasked to have further discussions. We are very close to an agreement and to adopting a piece of legislation.

I would like to remind my colleague that for her party an opportunistic election was more important than ensuring the safety of hard-working Canadians. The previous version of Bill S-4, Bill C-33, died on the order paper on March 21, 2011. It went through first reading, second reading, committee stage and was reported to the House. We were so close.

* * *

41ST GENERAL ELECTIONS

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on the election fraud front, the Prime Minister and the Conservatives say that they want proof. The proof is there, but the government refuses to look at the proof.

I would like to provide a quote from an individual living in Saint Boniface, who stated, "My wife reports that she also received a robocall telling her that our polling station had been moved".

The proof is there. We are trying to get the Prime Minister and the Conservative government—

The Speaker: The member is out of time.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): It is very interesting, Mr. Speaker. Once again, the Conservative Party conducted a clean and ethical campaign and we have absolutely nothing to apologize for in that regard.

What is clear also is that the Liberal Party has known for some time that it hired these firms, firms that made calls from the U.S., firms that used robo-dialing, and indicated they were calling on behalf of the Liberal Party because it appears they were, including in the riding of Saint Boniface, as referenced. The Liberal Party did in fact hire that same company.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, here is more proof. A voter from Kitchener—Conestoga wrote in an email:

In light of the voter suppression allegations I would like to inform you that the Kitchener-Conestoga riding was also plagued with the misleading phone calls. I know this because my home was one of the homes contacted.

Does the parliamentary secretary think this voter is lying and is just part of a smear campaign?

Oral Questions

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): No, not at all, Mr. Speaker. In fact, it appears the Liberal Party spent a significant amount of money in the Kitchener area on these U.S.-based companies to make robocalls on its behalf. For example, Karen Redman alone spent some \$22,600 on First Contact. I would assume these companies were making calls on behalf of Karen Redman and the Liberal Party. The Liberal Party has known it for some time, but, instead, carried on its unsubstantiated smear campaign on this party and its candidates. It is reprehensible.

* * *

● (1500)

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will tell members what is not clean: first nations drinking water. The government has cut \$186 million from the first nation water and waste water action plan and sunsetted the entire program. Last year, the auditor general roundly criticized the government for ignoring her decade of calls for greater investment to provide first nations with the basic services other Canadians had become used to.

Could the government explain how cutting the water program addresses the Governor General's calls for expedited action into drinking water, including to the more than 100 communities still suffering under—

The Speaker: The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Greg Rickford (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, for the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, improving access to safe drinking water on reserve is a top shared priority for this government and for first nations communities across the country. We have made significant investments in two important regards: capacity, reporting, monitoring and maintenance of water infrastructure on reserve; and critical water infrastructure on reserve.

Yesterday we introduced the safe drinking water for first nations act to create enforceable standards that would guide future investments in water infrastructure and its related activities on reserve.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yes, the government did table its latest version of the first nation drinking water law. However, the bill would provide no real standards, no time line and no funding guarantees. Contrary to the promised new way of doing business with first nations, the new law would not require government to consult first nations on the water standards and rules. First nations and legal and technical experts say that regulations without resources are meaningless.

Could the government explain why it is requiring first nations to ensure better water standards, while in the same breath it is yanking the moneys needed to comply?

Mr. Greg Rickford (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, for the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern

Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can tell the member that our water action plan has resulted in real improvements in water systems on reserves. For example, increasing and improving training and certification for first nation operators and managers is one of the essential components to a comprehensive water strategy for first nations.

We remain committed to ensure first nations people on reserve have access to the same quality of safe drinking water as all Canadians. That is why we have reintroduced this important legislation, building on our government's unprecedented investments in water and waste water infrastructure.

* * *

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the oil sands are incredibly important to Canada's economic future. Over the next 25 years, they are projected to create 700,000 jobs and contribute over \$3.3 trillion to Canada's economy. Our government supports the environmentally responsible development of these resources for the benefit of Canadian workers and their families.

Could the Minister of Natural Resources please update the House on any recent developments which will improve the sustainability of Canada's oil sands?

Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada is fast becoming an energy superpower, which will mean prosperity and security for generations of Canadians to come. Today, industry members announced an important—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Cardigan.

* * *

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Cardigan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, DFO's fleet separation and owner-operator policy ensures that Atlantic Canadian inshore fishers remain independent and productive. It also ensures that the communities in Atlantic Canada receive the benefits of these thousands of inshore fishermen.

Could the minister stand in his place and ensure the House and the people of Atlantic Canada that the owner-operator policy in DFO is there to stay?

Hon. Keith Ashfield (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada's fisheries used to be the economic driver of many small communities and many coastal communities. We believe that fisheries should still significantly contribute to the national and regional economies.

Oral Questions

We are presently conducting a consultation, both in the field face to face and through online consultation, to get feedback from Canadians as to how we should proceed in the modernization of the fishery.

* * *

HEALTH

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, OxyContin is being pulled from the shelves. This is going to particularly impact first nation communities.

Let us look at northern Ontario. In Cat Lake First Nation alone the addiction has affected 70% of the community and in the Sioux Lookout zone of 25,000 members, an estimated 9,000 are addicted to OxyContin. Enforcement and health agencies are ringing alarm bells about the potential of the serious withdrawal crisis.

What exactly is the government doing to work with enforcement and health agencies to deploy a plan to prevent this looming health crisis?

• (1505)

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are taking this situation very seriously. Contrary to the fearmongering of the member across, the issue goes far beyond the direct intervening of health care services on first nation reserves. Provinces and territories are taking action for their jurisdictions as well. My department continues to fund prescription drug abuse prevention and treatments for first nation communities, including committing to the level of support and services.

* * *

JUSTICE

Mr. David Wilks (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are concerned about crime, which is why they gave our government a strong mandate to keep our streets and communities safe.

Residents in my riding of Kootenay—Columbia were particularly concerned when a young four-year-old boy was kidnapped from his home. This is one reason why I introduced Bill C-299, which proposes a tougher penalty for those who kidnap a young person under the age of 16. Unfortunately, every opposition MP voted against the tougher penalty for kidnappers of children.

Can the minister please inform this House about the importance of my legislation and why the opposition should reconsider their position?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is a good question.

In 2007, all opposition parties supported a five-year mandatory sentence for those who use a firearm in the commission of a kidnapping. I find it confusing and disturbing that they now oppose the same five-year mandatory sentence for someone who kidnaps a child.

I guess we should not be surprised. They also refused to support the safe streets and communities act despite the fact that it contains

tougher penalties for those who commit sexual offences against children, and goes after drug dealers.

Canadians can expect this government to get tough on serious and violent criminals with or without the support of the opposition.

* * *

[*Translation*]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier-Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government will soon be introducing a bill to implement the Convention on Cluster Munitions, a convention that is comparable in scope to the Ottawa convention on anti-personnel mines.

However, we have reason to fear that the Conservatives will water down the convention and allow Canadian personnel to use and transport cluster munitions on joint missions.

Can the minister assure us that this will not happen?

[*English*]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government participated actively in the negotiation of this important treaty and was pleased to be among the first countries in the world to sign the treaty.

Preparations are well under way for ratification. In fact we tabled it in this House on February 15. In order to fully ratify the treaty, legislation is required, which we will be introducing shortly for full debate by my colleague opposite.

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40TH GENERAL ELECTION

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, like most Canadians we do not want to make accusations but to get to some answers.

I wrote Elections Canada on May 19, 2011, asking for a full national inquiry into what was clearly a troubling pattern of efforts to confuse voters via phone calls allegedly from Elections Canada.

I am sorry, I am having trouble being heard.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, order. The hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands has the floor.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, if they are looking for evidence, there was an abundance of evidence of a very disturbing event in the 2008 election in Saanich—Gulf Islands. Elections Canada and RCMP officials were unable to get to the bottom of it.

That is why I am asking if the Prime Minister—

The Speaker: The member is out of time. The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a B.C. Liberal candidate wrote in a letter to the editor that Liberals rely on First Contact. First Contact relies on patented technology. The patent and the server are based in the U.S.

That is very interesting because, when I review information on the Liberal Party and its efforts in British Columbia, I see that they have used this company quite a bit. It seems that they were robbing the quite a number of people on behalf of the Liberal Party. They were indicating that they were calling on behalf of the Liberal Party, because it appears that they were.

Nonetheless, the Liberal Party has conducted an unsubstantiated smear campaign. It is reprehensible.

* * *

• (1510)

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as you can tell from my voice, I am going to be very brief this week, as opposed to some other weeks. At the outset I would like to note that we have now gone five full sitting days with no time allocation by the government. I want to encourage the House leader on the government side to continue to follow that pattern, perhaps maybe even give us some assurances today that he will follow that pattern.

I have to say, however, that his colleagues in the other House have not been quite so willing to follow that pattern, since I understand that either today or yesterday they began to move a motion for time allocation in the Senate on Bill C-10. I was expecting that we would see Bill C-10 on Tuesday next week. Will that still be the case or will it be coming later?

In addition to that bill, we have had indications from the government that Bill C-30 would be sent to committee before second reading, and I wonder if the House leader could advise us as to when the motion to send it to committee prior to second reading will be coming back to the House.

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do want to express my amusement, I guess is the best word, at the opposition House leader's great interest in the democratic process in the Senate. Of course, his party's position is that body should be abolished. The one benefit is that if he had his way, Bill C-10 would already be law today. That is something we hope will happen very soon.

[Translation]

Let me begin by thanking the hon. member for asking for the business of the House in the upcoming week. I am happy to provide it to you, Mr. Speaker, to him and, indeed, to all Canadians. This afternoon we will continue debate on Bill C-28, Financial Literacy Leader Act.

[English]

Continuing our week focused on jobs and economic growth, because that is what this week is about, tomorrow morning we will resume debate on Bill C-28, the financial literacy leader act, and in the afternoon we will debate the Canada-Panama economic growth and prosperity act, Bill C-24. That bill implements a free trade

Points of Order

agreement that was signed almost two years ago, which will create new jobs for Canadians by opening new markets for Canadian exporters and workers. The bill was studied and passed by the international trade committee in a previous Parliament and has been debated on numerous days at second reading in this Parliament.

Monday will be the fifth allotted day, when I understand we will debate an NDP motion. I know members of the House would appreciate it if the opposition House leader could tell us what motion we will be debating at that time. I know I am certainly interested.

On Tuesday afternoon, we will begin debating the protecting Canada's immigration system act, Bill C-31. I also understand that the safe streets and communities act, Bill C-10, will be returning from the other place very soon. We will consider Senate amendments on Tuesday morning and Wednesday. The amendments relate to the civil remedies for terrorism portions of the act, which I understand enjoy support from all parties. Thus I would invite the opposition to agree to move quickly on those items that we all support, so that we can get those provisions into law as soon as possible.

[Translation]

As the House knows, the government committed to passing this bill within 100 sitting days, and we will keep that commitment. Thursday, March 8, will be the sixth allotted day of this supply period, which will also go the NDP, I understand.

* * *

[English]

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskwasing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. During question period, I asked a question of the minister and she accused me of fearmongering. I would appreciate an apology for her false allegation, given the fact that the information I actually provided was from the Nishnawbe Aski Nation, which basically indicates the situation in its communities. Again, I respectfully ask for an apology.

The Speaker: I am afraid that is not a point of order. If the member has additional information she might want to bring to the House, she can do it at a different question period.

The hon. member for Wascana on a point of order.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pertaining to matters that arose during question period, there was a fair bit of confusion, indeed obfuscation, about a company called First Contact. In fact there is a Canadian telephone company by that name that does business entirely in Canada. That is the company that was engaged by Liberals and Liberal candidates across the country. There is, unfortunately, another company by exactly the same name that does business in the United States. That company, the Liberal Party did not do any business with.

Government Orders

• (1515)

The Speaker: That is not quite a point of order. It seems like it is a debate as to facts.

I see the hon. government House leader rising. Is this on a different point or on the same point?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the letter to the editor that was written by the Liberal candidate and read by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister actually stated that it is a Canadian company that uses American servers, and that is why American phone numbers showed up on the calls they made. That was the explanation and that is exactly what goes to the root of what we are talking about here.

The Speaker: I have not heard anything that pertains to the Standing Orders or procedures of the House. It sounds like members are disputing what the facts are in a certain situation. They are free to do so but only during question periods and if they are debating a motion relating to these facts. However, they cannot be raised after question period. We are already well past 3 o'clock and question period is over. Members have to make some kind of reference to the Standing Orders or some aspect of procedure they are rising on, not just debate what the facts may be.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

FINANCIAL LITERACY LEADER ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-28, An Act to amend the Financial Consumer Agency of Canada Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to point out some of the glaring problems in the government's bill, in its attitude to consumer protection in general and in regard to financial literacy specifically.

Obviously, a basic understanding of financial literacy is a good thing. Understanding how much the difference between a 5% and a 5.5% APR will cost over the lifetime of a loan, how long it will take to pay off a credit card if only the minimum payment is made each month, how much one needs to save each month for school or a car or to put money away for a down payment on a house or for retirement is clearly a benefit. The problem is that the government seems to think that encouraging these skills is a suitable substitute for a proper regime of consumer protection, retirement security and a proper strategy for economic growth.

This bill embodies the government's strategy or, more properly, the lack of strategy in addressing the issues that really matter to working and middle-class Canadians across the country. Specifically, the bill would create a financial literacy leader, a high level bureaucrat position, with the aim of encouraging financial literacy in the general public. At the same time, the government is calling on departments and agencies to slash spending. When the media is full of stories of tens of thousands of public servants being laid off, the government's answer to addressing this issue is to create a new, highly paid position. If we could guarantee that the position would

be successful, that would be defensible, but there are a number of flaws in this bill, which leads me to believe that this position has little chance of success to start with.

The terms of reference for this position are extremely vague. While the holder of the post would be required to advance financial literacy, there is no definition of what constitutes financial literacy within the bill, nor any attempt to define how we could or should advance it.

Moreover, the original recommendation to create this position was very clear on the need for an advisory council that would include labour, voluntary groups and educators, as well as business stakeholders. They would be there to direct the work of the financial literacy leader. This bill does not include any legislation to create this advisory council and, as such, there is very little in the way of accountability.

Additionally, there is no proviso in the bill that would ensure that this position would be filled by someone who is fluent in both official languages. To me, it would seem necessary that someone who is expected to teach and encourage Canadians about financial literacy would be able to communicate in both French and English.

How able are we to teach financial literacy to Canadians? Human Resources and Skills Development Canada stats tell us that 26% of Canadians struggle with basic numeracy and that 20% struggle with basic literacy. However, the same government that is trying to sell Canadians on financial literacy being the answer to the economic problem is the same one that cut \$17.7 million to adult literacy programs in 2006.

Without basic numeracy and literacy skills, how does the government expect Canadians to understand some of the more complex financial vehicles, which will apparently provide for them in their retirement.

Even for people who do not struggle with numeracy and literacy, finance is not a particularly comprehensible subject. As Barry McKenna, a business columnist for *The Globe and Mail*, states:

Looking to financial literacy to fill the void is like asking ordinary Canadians to be their own brain surgeons and airline pilots. The dizzying array of financial products, mixed with chaotic and increasingly irrational financial markets, makes the job of do-it-yourself financial planning almost impossible—no matter how literate you are. The average credit-card agreement is as intuitive as quantum physics.

• (1520)

It is clear from all the money spent by banks and other financial institutions on encouraging financial literacy that they see some benefit to it, but to what end? It does not take a genius to conclude that the banks like financial literacy because it allows them to expand their customer base. Encouraging people to take out savings and investment funds creates lucrative fees for banks and brokers. In fact, according to Morningstar, an investment research company, Canadian fees for equity funds are some of the highest in the world, being, on average, around two and a half times higher than fees in the United States.

Financial literacy, in this sense, is essentially a marketing exercise to create good customers. It teaches the benefits of saving vehicles but it is not necessarily critical of how financial vehicles work. It does not criticize plans where fund managers take a substantial fee regardless of the performance of the fund. It does not highlight how funds, like the CPP, regularly outperform private funds. It does not give enough weight to the inherent dangers of investing in the stock market.

As Paul Farrell, a MarketWatch columnist for *The Washington Post* puts it:

In spite of all the public hype about financial-literacy programs, the fact is Wall Street [or Bay Street] doesn't want smart investors.

Bottom line: The last thing [its] wants is 95 million investors who are wise to [its]...games. ...revenues would drop substantially if financially literacy really did work.

Even more worrying is the possibility that we increase the quantity of financial literacy available but without ensuring its quality. This has two dangerous and interlinked consequences. The first is that the model shifts all the blame off banks and onto consumers. At the individual level, people are to be blamed for their own uninformed choices and, at the national or even international level, systemic problems are no longer the fault of the banks that lend beyond their means but the individuals who borrowed too much. Obviously, individuals do have a responsibility to manage their own finances but the banks, hedge funds and other financial institutions have the ability to effect the economy in a much more profound way than individual consumers, and we must not forget that.

What do we do for the people who actually end up worse off due to financial investments that fail? We need to understand that some people will lose their savings when businesses go bust or when the stock market drops. This has been the way the stock market has worked since the first recognizable stock exchange opened in Amsterdam in the 17th century.

What about those people who simply do not have the type of disposable income required to invest in their futures, the people who live paycheque to paycheque, the people who have seen their wages stagnate and fall in real terms since the mid 1990s? For both of these groups of people, a social safety net and regulatory system based on so-called financial literacy is a failure.

Lauren Willis, a professor at Loyola Law School, sums up these problems. He says:

For some consumers, financial education appears to increase confidence without improving ability, potentially leading to worse decisions. When consumers find themselves in dire financial straits, the regulation through education model blames them for their plight, shaming them and deflecting calls for effective market regulation. Requiring consumers to act as their own financial experts is socially inefficient.

What should the government do to fix Canada's broken system of financial consumer protection? For a start, it could build on what it is already doing, rather than trying to reinvent the wheel. The Financial Consumer Agency of Canada has already been commended for the work it has done in regard to financial literacy by earning a public service award of excellence in citizen-focused service delivery from the Treasury Board in 2010.

Government Orders

If the government feels that financial literacy is something worth pursuing, why does it not spend money on programs that have already proven effective, rather than starting from scratch in a program that we cannot be sure will be successful and will likely be more expensive due to the financial literacy leader's salary and office costs?

• (1525)

The government should recognize that for a large portion of Canadians a lack of savings is a reflection of the disparity between the rise in the cost of living and the rise in wages over the last 15 years or so. Encouraging savings is fine for people who have disposable income after they have paid for essentials. Unfortunately, however, for all too many people, taking on debt is not a choice. It is the only way to survive.

An OECD report published in 2011 pointed out that the trend toward a less progressive tax structure and a more unequal society here in Canada began in the mid-1990s under the then Liberal government and has continued since 2006 under the Conservatives.

As Canadian economist, Jim Stanford, noted in his submission to the national financial literacy task force:

Personal savings will never constitute an important source of financial security for the strong majority of Canadians who cannot save, given the paucity of their incomes.

This argument was reported by numerous submissions to the task force but these points were noticeably absent from the final report. It simply did not meet the goal of the task force to point out that the very thing it was pushing may not have all of the answers. Financial institutions already make a large amount of money from these individuals who are forced to carry credit card debt from month to month and who are unable to keep the significant balance in their current accounts required by banks to waive the monthly service fees. If the government really wanted to give these people an opportunity to build up their own savings, then it would regulate these types of fees and the level of interest that is charged on credit cards in order to allow people to put aside a bit of money every month.

Similarly, if the government wants to ensure that Canadians have adequate savings when they retire, the way forward is not to create a new and inherently risky vehicle for private savings. There are already multiple methods for Canadians to save for their future, as RRSPs and TFSA's spring to mind, if they have the funds available to invest, and these vehicles are already supported and funded by the government. Studies have shown that the highest earning 11% of Canadians contribute more to RRSPs than the bottom 89% of tax filers combined. Because of the tax benefits of investing in RRSPs, Canadian taxpayers subsidize that contribution by the top 11% of earners to the tune of \$7.3 billion in annual net tax expenditures.

The creation of pooled registered pension plans, or PRPPs, would only benefit those people who are already able to invest in their retirement. They would do nothing for the 30% of Canadian families that lack any form of retirement savings outside of the CPP.

Government Orders

Encouraging people to invest in a risky vehicle on the stock market is not real leadership on financial planning. It simply passes the entire risk and blame for an individual not having adequate retirement savings onto that individual. Now we have the Conservatives musing about delaying the age at which Canadians are eligible for OAS from 65 to 67. How can Canadians properly expect to plan for their retirement when the government tries to change the rules of the game?

If the government were truly interested in Canadians' retirement security and in allowing Canadians to properly plan for their retirement, it would make far more sense to say categorically that it will not change the eligibility age for the OAS and commit to the NDP plan to expand the guaranteed Canada–Quebec pension plan by phasing in an affordable doubling of benefits to a maximum of \$1,920 a month. This plan has been called for by provinces across the country as it would give Canadians both the ability to plan for their retirement and a guaranteed income to ensure they can retire with dignity.

Moreover, the CPP is a much safer investment than market-based private funds and consistently outperforms the market. Even business columnists, like the aforementioned Barrie McKenna at *The Globe and Mail*, have pointed out the benefit of such a policy, stating:

And Ottawa could beef up the CPP, mandating Canadians sock away more money for retirement, while benefiting from the CPP's low costs.

● (1530)

However, so far the government and the Minister of Finance in particular have not listened to this appeal for a real and proven way of ensuring Canadians can retire with dignity.

In summary, it worries me that so much time and effort will be taken up by this piece of legislation which is little more than spin carried out by the government. If this were such an important thing for the government to move forward with, I wonder why it could not be included in the financial system review act rather than being a stand-alone act. It appears to me the only reason these did not go together was that the government hoped it could get some positive media out of this legislation. However, as I have pointed out, this legislation is deeply flawed because it does so little to address the real problems affecting Canadians. This so-called solution is the equivalent to using a band-aid to fix a broken leg.

The NDP believes in real measures to protect consumers, seniors and low-income Canadians. Unfortunately, the government is not interested in anything more than spin and publicity when it comes to this issue. At a time when the government keeps talking about spending cuts, I think there are far better ways the government could spend the funds that would be spent to bring forward this proposal.

My colleagues in the official opposition and I will continue to stand up for policies that really help hard-working Canadians. Unfortunately, this is not such a policy, which is why I will be voting against the bill as presented.

Ms. Lois Brown (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased that we are having the opportunity to debate this piece of legislation. I personally think that knowledge is power and the more often we

can educate Canadians on their financial literacy, the better off we are going to be in the long run.

I am very pleased that many of the banking institutions in Newmarket—Aurora have seen fit to open their premises to hold seminars for constituents. They too believe that knowledge is power and that every opportunity to give people more information about financial literacy is going to be of assistance to them. I am sorry to hear that the opposition is not going to assist.

I note the bill says that we are going to collaborate and coordinate activities with stakeholders to contribute to and support initiatives to strengthen the financial literacy of Canadians. Could the member speak to institutions in his riding which may be looking to partner with us on these initiatives and work with the banking institutions that are there?

● (1535)

Mr. Glenn Thibeault: Mr. Speaker, I agree there are many institutions right across the country that are having to hold seminars and town halls because of the government's inaction on protecting consumers, because of the government's inaction on making sure that consumers understand their credit card bills.

The government is all talk. I said earlier that it is like cotton candy. The government's action on consumer protection is like cotton candy: it is sweet and fluffy, but there is absolutely no substance.

When we look at the financial task force report, when it talked about creating a financial literacy leader, one thing it said very clearly in the original recommendation was that the leader have an advisory council that includes educators, the banking institutions and business leaders. What is not included in the bill is that recommendation. That being said, we cannot support the bill unless there are more teeth in it.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I must thank my hon. colleague from Sudbury. I admire his candour and his clear-sightedness in the field we are discussing.

As I read the bill, basically I ask myself what the government's objective is. It is entirely laudable to want to educate people about financial matters, but there is no way that the government can offer any lessons in that regard. It has created an undue proliferation of absolutely needless tax measures and has enormously complicated the federal tax return. The proof is statistics published a few months ago indicating that roughly half of Canadians do not complete their own tax return because it is too complicated for them.

Finally, what is the good of trying to educate people about a system that is already too complicated? I would ask my colleague what he thinks of this observation, and doubtless to elaborate.

Government Orders

[English]

Mr. Glenn Thibeault: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for the question and, as our small business critic, for all of his great work on that file. This relates to small business, to consumers and to all Canadians.

Everyone in this House will agree that financial literacy is truly an important subject and an important issue for all Canadians. However, this bill does not make financial literacy the priority. It makes creating the leader of a financial literacy organization with costs that go with it the priority. There is no talk in this bill about terms of reference that are going to point to what we should be bringing forward, how we should define it and how we should advance it. Those are the things this bill needs to include.

As I mentioned before, the original recommendation from the financial literacy task force talked about ensuring there is an advisory council. This bill does not include that. If we are taking the recommendations of the financial literacy task force, which we also had some concerns with, then we need to ensure those recommendations are there. The member asked his question in French and while I am working on my French, one of the most important things is that this bill does not include a proviso that the person should be able to speak in both official languages.

Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when I first read this bill I had a lot of trouble trying to figure out what the heck it was about. What on earth are the Conservatives trying to accomplish? They have created a bureaucracy with apparently no goal. There is no definition anywhere in the bill, so far as I can tell, and perhaps the member can tell me what the goal of a financial literacy leader is. What is his or her mandate? What are his or her powers? What are his or her abilities? Who are the stakeholders the person should be consulting? What the heck are they doing? Could the member help me with that?

Mr. Glenn Thibeault: Mr. Speaker, I too had a similar reaction when I first read the bill. I thought that this bill had actually become a job posting.

The Conservatives are talking about creating, bringing forward and hiring a new financial literacy leader. As the member mentioned, when we go through the bill, the mandate and the terms of reference are extremely vague. There is no definition in the bill of what constitutes financial literacy. We are not talking about how it is going to be advanced, how we are going to move forward with this. Are we going to have an advisory council like the recommendations from the national financial literacy task force brought forward?

We need to ensure that we are consulting with the people who know how to bring forward the topic of financial literacy. Let us have the business community involved. Let us have industry leaders. Let us have educators. Let us have labour. Everyone who would be involved with this needs to be able to have a say and to guide the financial literacy leader. That is not currently in the legislation. That is why we on this side of the House cannot support it, when there is no mandate and it is just spending money.

● (1540)

Ms. Lois Brown: Mr. Speaker, I am surprised that members say they have read the legislation, because it starts by saying that this is “An Act to amend the Financial Consumer Agency of Canada Act”,

which means that this is just a small portion of what that act is all about. I wonder how the member can say that it does not specify, because it states:

“(g) collaborate and coordinate its activities with stakeholders to contribute to and support initiatives to strengthen the financial literacy of Canadians”.

This should be no surprise to the members on the opposite side of the House. We said we were going to bring this forward. It was part of our throne speech. We have been very specific about helping Canadians to understand some of the complexities of what is going on in financial markets and how they can respond as individuals to the things that are happening there.

Does the member not think that helping people get that kind of knowledge, in whatever form it comes, is going to be of benefit to his own constituents?

Mr. Glenn Thibeault: Mr. Speaker, once again I will reiterate that of course everyone in this House agrees that financial literacy is important; however, the bill does not express that in its mandate. The hon. member talks about collaboration and coordination. It does not specifically talk about the recommendations that were brought forward by the task force. We cannot go with, “Trust us, it's in there”. We have too many examples where it has not happened.

We are saying that right now as it is presented this bill does not do what it is supposed to do, which is provide a complex and mandated way forward for Canadians to improve their financial literacy.

Mr. Tarik Brahma (Saint-Jean, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague from Sudbury made a comprehensive speech. One detail which he pointed out was that financial literacy should not be a substitute but a complement to actions and real measures from the government. Could he comment on that?

Mr. Glenn Thibeault: Mr. Speaker, it is so true. Financial literacy cannot be the one crutch we lean on to say that we have made sure everyone is educated so now we can wash our hands of what we need to do.

We need a strong economic plan. We are not seeing that. We need to ensure that consumer protection is a priority. We have seen that whittled down by Liberal and Conservative governments time and time again. We need to ensure we are standing up and protecting Canadians. This bill does not do it. We have a plan that will.

[Translation]

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we all agree that financial literacy is important, that it is a good thing, but that is not the subject of today's debate. The issue is whether or not this bill is going to strengthen financial literacy. And on that point I must say that I have many doubts about this bill.

● (1545)

[English]

As I said, we are supportive of financial literacy. Who would not be? We are deeply concerned about the lack of information in the bill. It is my hope that the government will clarify further detail in the course of this debate.

Government Orders

We can all agree that increasing the financial literacy of Canadians is an important goal for government, both federal and provincial. A more financially literate population would be a more prosperous population. But financial literacy is not the panacea that the Conservative Party seems to pretend it to be.

Far too often over the past six years we have been told by the government that problems like increasing post-secondary education costs and rising household debt can simply be solved by waving this magic wand of financial literacy. This is simply incorrect. There are a number of policy levers the government can operate to help solve the issues of rising household debt or runaway student debt. Increased financial literacy is one of them. My goal is not to downplay the importance of financial literacy but only to point out that it is not the only policy solution available to the government.

Let me turn now to the contents of the bill. I get the distinct impression that Bill C-28 was written on the back of an envelope, that the primary motive was probably to have an “announceable” for Financial Literacy Month last November, because it is virtually content-free. I will explain.

The bill and its supporting documents are completely devoid of any detail as to how the office of the financial literacy leader would even work. The bill does not specify if there would even be an office of the financial literacy leader or if he or she would simply be one more employee at FCAC.

Bill C-28 was a response to the recommendations of the Task Force on Financial Literacy. The task force was created as part of the 2009 budget. It reported back to the minister early last year. The task force had 30 recommendations. This legislation satisfies only a part of one of the recommendations.

The first recommendation was that the government create the position of financial literacy leader and that this person be charged with improving financial literacy across Canada. It also said the financial literacy leader should report directly to the Minister of Finance. Under this legislation this position would report to the commissioner of FCAC. Let us give the government half a point for getting recommendation 1 half right. Its total score then is one-half of one point out of thirty. If I were back in my professor days, I do not think that would be a passing grade.

The bill would also give FCAC the power to impose a levy on the banks in order to pay for its efforts in improving financial literacy. But it would also give the Minister of Finance the power to spend government money to achieve the same objective. As parliamentarians, we are yet again being asked to vote on a bill that causes the government to incur costs, spend money and perhaps tax banks without being given even a hint of the numbers involved.

Liberals, indeed all parliamentarians, should not have a problem with spending resources to improve financial literacy. However, we do want to know the order of magnitude these expenditures and the related taxes would be on. Are we talking about \$100,000, \$500,000, \$1 million, \$10 million? We have no idea, because there is nothing in the bill to tell us what this process would involve other than the naming of this one person. The question of how much things would cost is important because many of the other recommendations from

the task force's report would require additional effort and financial commitment on the part of the government.

For example, recommendation 2 requires the government to establish an advisory board on financial literacy. The advisory board would help the financial literacy leader to develop a national strategy on financial literacy.

Recommendation 4 requires the national strategy to incorporate financial literacy in the school curriculums across Canada and at all levels of education. This would obviously require coordination with provincial governments and may I suggest the direct ministerial mandate asked for in the task force's first recommendation.

● (1550)

Recommendation 9 suggests that financial literacy material be delivered to Canadians through programs that reach Canadians directly, such as EI, CPP, OAS or the universal child care benefit. There are many such requirements and they will all cost money.

Surely the government must have some idea of the anticipated costs. Yet there is no mention of any of these recommendations or any actions to be taken or not to be taken in the bill. Therefore, we are all left totally in the dark as to what, if anything significant, this leader would accomplish, how much money it would cost and what the scope of the mandate would be.

This is not the first time that the House of Commons has been asked to vote on legislation without knowing the cost. The most prominent case that comes to mind is Bill C-10, the tough on crime compendium of bills. The government did not tell us what the additional costs would be for new prisons. We know from the Parliamentary Budget Officer that it is many billions of dollars. We know that some of those billions would be downloaded onto the provinces. The government did not come clean on that and it was a far more important case in terms of expenditure of funds than this would be. However, it is the same principle. The government wants us to pass legislation, but tell us nothing about what it would actually do and what it would actually cost.

This similar issue has caught the attention of the government operations committee, which is currently conducting a study on how Parliament considers supply and more broadly how we as parliamentarians are presented with information on the government spending plan. I would certainly suggest that not knowing the cost of bills before we vote on them is just one part of this problem.

Back to the contents of the bill, there are other existing mechanisms at the disposal of the federal government to promote financial literacy. For example, the Canadian Foundation for Economic Education was created in 1974 as a non-profit, non-partisan organization with the goal of promoting greater financial literacy. It already has tremendous buy-in from government and from the private sector. A quick scan of its website indicates that its list of board of directors include prominent members of the private, post-secondary and labour sectors. On the government side, the CFEE has relationships with the federal Department of Finance and numerous ministries of education provincially.

Government Orders

I know this group from my earlier incarnation with the Royal Bank as their chief economist and I had several meetings with this group. I know that they were working diligently. However, it certainly is not obvious from the bill, which tells us virtually nothing, why the addition of one more body in the bowels of the federal bureaucracy would improve financial literacy better than the work being carried out by the Canadian Foundation for Economic Education.

In the end, the issue I have with the bill is that we simply do not know what the government is planning to do. We do know that it may involve taxing banks. We know that it may involve spending more government funds, but we have no idea how much. We do not know the size of this new organization. We do not know which of the other recommendations from the Task Force on Financial Literacy would be carried out. We know very little, virtually nothing about it.

As I said at the outset, improving financial literacy is an important task for the federal government. However, we have concerns on this side of the House that the newly created financial literacy leader would not be able to carry out his important task.

There is another side of this coin. We can talk about the need for greater financial literacy on the part of Canadians, but we can also talk about the problem of financial illiteracy on the part of the Conservative government.

I would like to say a few words on the financial illiteracy of the Conservative government. I think if there needs to be a course in financial literacy, the first ones to enrol in such a course should probably be the members sitting opposite.

My first example of Conservative financial illiteracy goes way back to 2006. Prior to the arrival of the current government in 2006, for many years Canadians had to have at least a 5% down payment on a mortgage. The longest mortgage they could get was 25 years. What did these financial wizards do in 2006? Instead of a 25 year maximum period, they made it 40 years.

• (1555)

Instead of a 5% minimum down payment, they made it zero. Brilliant. Magic. People could get a zero down payment mortgage for 40 years under the Conservative government.

Now, the problem is that this is like the subprime mortgages in the U.S. Eventually, they found out, but did not admit it because the Conservatives would never admit they made a mistake. They discovered they had made a mistake, so they put it back from 40 years down to 35 years, and they brought the minimum payment up from zero to 5%. Then they claimed credit for tightening the system.

However, the system is not back to where it was when the Conservatives arrived. It is still looser. That is the first example of financial illiteracy.

[*Translation*]

So I suggest that the Minister of Finance and some of his colleagues enrol in financial literacy 101. If they do, maybe their performance will improve.

[*English*]

The second example of financial illiteracy is the fact that the Conservatives were so lucky when they inherited a massive \$13 billion Liberal surplus when they came to power. Then they proceeded to spend like drunken sailors. They are the biggest spenders in Canadian history, to the point where these Conservatives actually ate through all that surplus and went into deficit before the recession began.

That is a second reason for the Minister of Finance to enrol in that course which I shall call financial literacy 101. It is important to have a prudent fiscal policy. It is not good financial literacy to blow through a \$13 billion surplus by spending madly when the economy is strong. One might have a deficit when the economy is weak, but one should not run through a surplus when times are good, with massive spending just before a recession begins.

[*Translation*]

I have a third example of this government's lack of financial literacy. That is its plan for massive cuts in government spending at a time when the Canadian economy is very fragile. It is suggesting reductions on the order of \$4 billion or even \$8 billion in public spending and reductions of government services to Canadians. It will be doing this at a time when the economy is very weak.

Let us not forget that unemployment remains high; let us not forget that there is a crisis in Europe; let us not forget that the U.S. economy is extremely weak.

We are living in a world where the unemployment rate remains too high and where the level of risk is very high everywhere, compared with the past.

[*English*]

In this context of a hugely fragile weak economy, anyone who went through financial literacy 101 would know that this is not the moment to have massive cuts in government spending, massive layoffs of public servants and massive reductions in the services provided to Canadians. It is not a good idea.

Members do not have to believe me, I will invoke the name of Christine Lagarde, managing director of the IMF. The IMF is the mother of all fiscally prudent people. Typically the IMF calls for countries to cut. Christine Lagarde recently said that countries which have room, and this might not include Greece but it certainly includes Canada, should in the short run focus on measures to create jobs and support the economy, and in the medium term they should have a credible plan to balance the books and bring down debt. That is not me talking, that is the head of the IMF. The chief economist of BMO had said something similar, that making massive cuts at this time is as crazy as what Herbert Hoover did in the U.S. during the Great Depression.

As I said earlier, I think members of the government, maybe even the Prime Minister, might like to enrol in this course which we could set up called financial literacy 101.

Government Orders

[Translation]

If they do this, there will be at least three subjects. The first is that it is not smart to have mortgages amortized over 40 years with no capital outlay. That makes no sense. We saw this in the United States, but this government changed the system for the worse in 2006. Second, when you inherit a \$13 billion surplus, it is not financially prudent to spend all of those funds when the economy is strong and to go into deficit even before the recession. That is not a good example of financial literacy.

That is what this Conservative government did: it did not demonstrate sound financial literacy. As I just said, it is not a good idea to make massive budget cuts in government investments and have monumental job losses in the public sector when the economy is weak and the global economic system is very fragile. That too is not a good idea.

● (1600)

[English]

In conclusion, in terms of the mark that the bill deserves, it got 1 of the recommendations out of 30 half right, so is one-half of one out of 30, which is a failure. Also, in terms of the three subjects for a financial literacy class 101, which I recommended for the government, it fails on all three.

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I always listen with attention and sometimes amusement to my friend across the way who has a self-exalted position of being the financial guru of the western world.

It is easy to run a surplus when one has unlimited powers of confiscation and taxation. In bragging about the \$13 billion surplus, I would remind the hon. member that it was courtesy of the \$60 billion confiscated from pension funds for the public service, RCMP and the Canadian Forces, and another \$50 billion confiscated from the EI fund. It does not take a financial genius to run a surplus with that kind of power.

Has the hon. member understood or listened to any of the people around the world whose main comment, when talking about Canada and the strength of the Canadian economy and its unemployment and employment situation, is they wish they were in fact in Canada?

I know we can never come up to the hon. member's self-exalted standards, but will he admit that financial literacy is important and that any step in that direction is valuable, whether it comes up to his marvellous standards or not?

Hon. John McCallum: Mr. Speaker, I consider myself a relatively modest person. I am not claiming exalted status.

In response to his question, may I remind the member that the two main reasons for Canada's relatively strong position are both thanks to the Liberal governments of Paul Martin and Jean Chrétien. When we came into power in 1993, we inherited a \$42 billion Conservative deficit. In relative terms, that was much bigger in those days than it would be today. We got rid of that deficit pretty fast. We paid down debt. That is why, instead of inheriting a \$42 billion deficit from us, as we did, the Conservatives inherited a \$13 billion surplus and then blew it.

Also, we saved the banks because we refused to deregulate. Those guys over there wanted to go all the way to bank deregulation. That would have been a disaster.

Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I, too, note that the one-half recommendation of the financial literacy report in the bill is the appointment of yet another civil servant to oversee something. We are not exactly sure what, except to collaborate and coordinate activities with unknown stakeholders. Many other recommendations having to do with financial literacy have apparently been completely ignored by the government, such as training people, actually including it in school programs and including it as a skill that is required of the federal government.

What does the member say to all of the things that are missing from the legislation that makes it very difficult for anyone to support it, if this is all we are going to get?

● (1605)

Hon. John McCallum: Mr. Speaker, I certainly agree with the spirit of what my colleague is saying. The only way I can explain a bill that contains virtually nothing is that the Conservatives did it at the last minute. Maybe they thought that since next month would be financial literacy month, they had better have an announcement, so they decided to make a bill. It has a bill that says one person who will report not to the minister, as the commission suggested, but to someone else. They have nothing on the 29 recommendations, many of which make a whole lot of sense.

We are left knowing essentially nothing about whether the person in this job would actually carry out those recommendations or not, or whether as I said earlier, \$1 million, or \$100 million or \$100,000 would be spent. We know virtually nothing and I can only conclude that the bill must have been written on the back of an envelope to prepare for an announcement in financial literacy week.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I enjoyed my colleague's remarks and the facts that he laid out and how he indicated that maybe the finance minister should take financial literacy 101. He is the biggest spending finance minister with the biggest deficit in Canadian history with more wasted money during the last couple of years, everything from gazebos to whatever, with no open tendering in terms of the F-35s and the list goes on and on. I agree with the member's comment.

Is this just another bill of smoke and mirrors, which we see so often from the government, where it tries to allege it is really doing something, when in effect it is doing nothing? One thing that is clear in the bill is the appointment of another person. We have several boards with patronage appointments where the appointees are virtually doing nothing but spending money.

Is this really another bill in which the government will try to message that it is doing something when it really is not?

Government Orders

Hon. John McCallum: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his very convincing preamble. There is a risk that he is right, that we might just be creating yet another empty office. Remember other cases where new jobs were created but never filled, so taxpayers would be spending millions of dollars on an office that was empty and not doing anything.

There is a risk of this, especially when we are told nothing about the mission, the parameters around this or the number of employees. There is a real risk that the government is trying to create the impression of activity using at least some taxpayer money and potentially creating nothing.

Ms. Lois Brown (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we could spend the afternoon poking accusations across the floor. There are \$40 million still unaccounted for under Liberal budgets. I am sure Canadians would like to know that.

I would like to get back to the essence of what the legislation tries to do. I have two daughters, both successful young ladies. My hope is they will be financially successful and understand the mechanisms available to them to make wise choices with their money, to be educated about those opportunities and to have the opportunity to invest their money to create their own futures.

Because much of what my colleague said earlier rests with the provinces, because of a curriculum for schooling being a provincial responsibility, does he have any suggestions for the government as to how we might work with those partners to ensure that the financial portion of this education could be included in perhaps high schools or in college education? Does he have any suggestions for the government to work on?

• (1610)

Hon. John McCallum: Mr. Speaker, first, in relation to the member's earlier comments about her daughters, of course, we on this side agree that financial literacy is very important not only for her daughters but my children and all Canadians. There is a lack of it and a need for more.

Our question is not that. Our question is whether the bill would make any difference or whether the existing agencies, which I described in my speech, are doing the job. There might be duplication and it might not make the situation any better. Since the bill does not tell us anything about how many people or what the mandate would be, it is unclear to me what the answer should be.

Working with provincial governments to improve financial literacy, including in areas of provincial jurisdiction, through some sort of national committee might be a good idea, but there is no statement by the government in the bill as to whether that is involved or not. Its absence suggests it is not involved.

If the member is asking whether, in principle, a co-operative body involving different levels of government to address financial literacy in different areas involving both levels of government jurisdiction is a good idea, yes. However, if that is the case, why was it not in the bill?

Mr. Brian Jean (Fort McMurray—Athabasca, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to speak on this subject. I especially want to take the time to thank the member for Edmonton

—Leduc, the chair of the finance committee, who was very instrumental in the initiation of this bill.

I understand why the member from the Liberal Party does not want this bill to go forward, a seriously co-operative bill resulting from working with the provinces and territories. The Liberal Party's idea of co-operation was to take \$25 billion from the provinces back in the 1990s for social care, education and infrastructure.

As we know, when the Conservatives came to power, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities actually identified that there was a \$123 billion deficit. The Liberals are the third party and they clearly indicated that the \$123 billion deficit on infrastructure in the country was as a result of past practices of federal and provincial governments. For the most part, we all know why provincial governments could not invest in infrastructure. It was because \$25 billion were taken by the previous federal Liberal government, of which the member was an active participant.

Before I continue, I would like to move the following motion. I move:

That this question be now put.

• (1615)

Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP): Mr. Speaker, having read the bill, I am curious as to how big the envelope was that the Conservative Party wrote this on. It seems to be very hastily and shabbily put together legislation that does not do justice to the report of the financial literacy task force, which made 30 recommendations, not 1, a report that had a great deal of depth and detail to provide a framework for financial literacy in Canada. We believe that framework for financial literacy is not met by this bill. The bill therefore is woefully lacking in detail, its objective, the mandate of the individual and in any of the other 29 recommendations made by the task force.

Where are the remaining 29 recommendations?

Mr. Brian Jean: Mr. Speaker, I am glad to see this particular New Democratic member not criticize the issue as it relates to financial literacy, as the Liberal Party did previously. We all clearly know now that the global economic recession is causing significant problems in the world economy as a whole. That is a result of personal finances primarily and the inability of people to keep track of their personal finances and to be able to manage those properly. That is why this bill is so important.

However, before we start with the entire 30 recommendations, I would say it is just like picking a coach for a hockey team. Before one picks the entire team, one first picks the coach so that the coach can be part of the rest of the team. In this particular case, I would say that is exactly the issue, and I hope that answers the member's question.

If people do not know that, though, I would point out that this particular bill deals with the importance of having tools and knowledge so that Canadians will be able to make responsible financial decisions for their future. Clearly, our belief as a government is that Canada's future is based on Canadians as a whole and their success depends on their own good management decisions, and we are going to help them with those decisions.

Government Orders

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am a little surprised by the motion that the question be now put. Just as we were starting to really get into the meat of the bill and to find out what was wrong with it, the government found another way of invoking closure, shutting down debate so that questions could not be asked on this bill.

I would suggest that this bill is really a shell with no meat in it, other than to perhaps appoint someone else in a patronage appointment and leave the impression that the government is doing something about financial literacy when it is not.

Financial literacy is important; we know that and we agree with it. The problem and the question that we need answers for, which the member is now trying to shut off debate about, is that the bill really does nothing to add to the tool chest of recommendations that a former member talked about and to actually exercise financial literacy and get that job done.

Could the member answer two questions? Why is he in a roundabout way trying to invoke another method of closure and shut down debate? Could he also tell me what else is in this bill from his perspective, because I do not see it, other than making another appointment and spending money without providing the tools to do the job?

Mr. Brian Jean: Mr. Speaker, I always find it amusing when the member for Malpeque stands on his feet because, of course, I am from western Canada and that particular member wants to make it legal to sell marijuana but wants to keep it illegal to sell wheat. I have always found that to be interesting from that member's perspective.

I am not going to take any lessons from that particular member who was part of a government that cut \$25 billion in social transfers to the provinces and, certainly, I am not going to take his expertise—

• (1620)

Hon. Wayne Easter: What about the \$40 billion health transfer? Do you remember that?

Mr. Brian Jean: Mr. Speaker, I am glad he brought up the amount of \$40 million, as I think I heard, because that is still what is missing as a result of the sponsorship scandal of a government he was a member of at the time. I am not going to take lessons from him.

However, we have a government with a Minister of Finance who is the number one finance minister in the world. We have a country that is the best off of any country in the world, and that is under the leadership of this Prime Minister, this Minister of Finance and this cabinet. We do not need to take lessons from someone who left us far behind and left the provinces far behind. We are going to move forward with a government and a cabinet that shows leadership in the world and clearly has a strong economy for Canadians.

[Translation]

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we can say a number of things about this bill, things that the hon. member is unfortunately incapable of saying. There is a reason that he insists on cutting off debates.

The bill talks about financial literacy, but the reality is that it contains no definition. The government does not even care about finding out what it is. There is no accountability mechanism for the financial literacy leader, and there are no initiatives to increase financial literacy itself.

I really wonder where we are going with this. Frankly, we are going to provide Canadians with a fake institution, with a puppet that will not even be able to help them. What is that? It is a waste of public money and an abuse of the trust of all Canadians.

I would like to ask the hon. member to reassure me on another matter. With the government in such a rush, does it at least have a financial literacy marketing plan for its puppet in order to improve the government's image? I even worry about that.

[English]

Mr. Brian Jean: Mr. Speaker, I could not help but snicker when the member talked about this government wasting money, because nothing could be further from the truth. An NDP member suggesting that a Conservative government would waste money is bizarre indeed.

We know that many of these initiatives are currently under way in Canada and have been for some time. In fact, some things are taking place in high schools across this country with web-based systems.

Clearly, the task force that launched public consultations with Canadians in February 2010, with its over 17 sessions in 15 communities across this country, did receive input from Canadians.

We are not starting off from ground zero. We clearly know what caused the global economic recession. We clearly understand that we have to help Canadians educate themselves on how to move forward with their own personal finances and how to be more successful, so that we can continue to have that leadership position in the world not only as a government that is keeping a strong country and keeping Canadians safe, but also as a country that continues to enjoy an excellent quality of life, second to no one else in the world. Canadians can do that by being educated with our help.

[Translation]

Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what the hon. member is saying is very interesting. But public funds were spent to create this task force, whose membership was widely criticized by Canadians. With this government, that does not surprise me at all. But, most of all, after spending taxpayers' money and taking time, the government is accepting only one of the task force's recommendations. Is that really going to help people who need to learn about this, people likely with low incomes, who pay no taxes and so will not be able to take advantage of the tax credits? They say that the NDP spends taxpayers' money for nothing, but here we have taxpayers' money being spent on a job that has not been done.

• (1625)

[English]

Mr. Brian Jean: Mr. Speaker, I hope we never get to see what an NDP government could do with public funds. It would be pretty embarrassing indeed.

Government Orders

The proposed amendments to the Financial Consumer Agency of Canada Act aim to establish the financial literacy leader within the agency. There is already an agency involved. It is a key step in addressing the task force's recommendations.

However, the difference between our government and a potential NDP government is not just that our government would not waste taxpayers' money on wishes and wants, but also that the NDP or the Liberals would impose what they wanted, what its leadership wanted, on Canadians instead of listening to Canadians as we are doing with this legislation. We are going to appoint a coach, someone who can listen to Canadians, someone who can understand and work with stakeholders and other agencies across Canada, including financial experts.

We are going to listen to them and then bring forward legislation based on stakeholders' best wants and desires in the best interests of Canadians.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): 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 Winnipeg North, aboriginal affairs; the hon. member for Montcalm, persons with disabilities; and the hon. member for Brome—Missisquoi, the firearms registry.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Tarik Brahma (Saint-Jean, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to start off by responding to the hon. member for Fort McMurray—Athabasca. In light of the events we are currently seeing, he should not be so confident because he might be disappointed in the next election if he ends up in the opposition.

I would like to speak to Bill C-28 as the deputy critic for consumer protection. I would first like to criticize the parliamentary manoeuvre that we have just witnessed, which sought, once again, to reduce the time allotted to the opposition members so that they do not have an opportunity to point out the shortcomings and flaws in the bill. The Conservatives use this method constantly, and it is our duty to denounce it.

This bill has a number of obvious flaws. The first one that jumps out is that the financial literacy leader will not be required to be bilingual. Being bilingual does not just mean knowing a few words in French or being able to read a few documents in French. Being bilingual also means being able to explain provisions, to present choices, to listen and to meet with people across Canada, especially in provinces with francophones, not just Quebecers.

Hon. members from Quebec and from other francophone regions in Canada and I myself, as the member for Saint-Jean, want first to know where in the bill is the provision that ensures that the financial literacy leader is capable of communicating in both languages correctly, using decent French, and is capable of putting himself at the level of the people he intends to serve.

Above all, I do not want to hear the government say that we should not worry because, once he is appointed, the leader will take French courses, which is what we have been hearing over the past few months in the House. The government claims that it is possible to learn French and that there is no need to worry. No. That is not true. It takes years, it takes skills and a will to learn a foreign

language. So that is an obvious flaw in the bill. That goes against the bilingualism requirements of this country and against Canada's will to stay bilingual and able to serve all its people in both official languages.

Now, let us talk a bit about financial literacy programs. Their goals are often criticized. We know that, more often than not, these programs are not intended to give consumers the tools that will enable them to pay fewer fees and have more control over their expenses. Instead, they are used by large financial institutions—banks and insurance companies—to gain more clients who will spend more money.

One of the things that should grab our attention about the famous task force on financial literacy is who is on it. It has 13 members. Don Stewart, the CEO of Sun Life Financial, is the chair of the group, and his vice-chair is Jacques Ménard, the chairman of BMO Nesbitt Burns and the president of BMO Financial Group Quebec. The very make-up of this task force should give us an indication of its objectives. The recommendations clearly show that they are basically designed to help financial institutions boost their clientele, obtain more clients. They do not aim to give consumers the ability to manage their money better and save by using what banks or financial organizations have to offer.

• (1630)

This is an important element. This is the make-up of the famous task force. Beyond that are the recommendations. This task force issued 30 recommendations, from which the government has plucked only one. The only one it took was the first, which involves appointing a financial literacy leader. It is too bad, because the second recommendation was much more worthwhile. It focused on creating a task force, an advisory board, that would give the leader direction and would have control over the actions of this financial literacy leader. So the task force would lend the financial literacy leader greater legitimacy because he would be accountable. This is an important part that this government ignored, intentionally in my opinion, because it is the second recommendation. It is not some subsidiary recommendation tucked away at the end of the document; it is truly the second recommendation.

Another aspect of this legislation is that it attempts to lay a guilt trip on consumers by claiming that they are not competent enough to properly manage their money. But it is absurd to try and educate consumers about how to save money when they do not have any. That is the main problem: consumers, currently, do not have money and, therefore, do not have the ability to save. They can be taught as many strategies as possible, but when the average family is indebted to the tune of over 150% of their income, in other words, the equivalent of half of their income in debt, how can this family of average consumers save money when they do not even have the means to pay off their debts? What is most striking about this legislation is that it does not deal with the problem, but with the consequence, the consequence being that now that consumers are in debt, we are going to explain to them how to avoid going further into debt.

Government Orders

A French comedian once said: “Write to us and tell us what you need, and we will explain to you how to make do without it.” That is this government’s logic: do not create ways to help consumers; instead, explain to them, after the fact, how to get out of their predicament.

Another very interesting aspect of this report is that it confuses a complement and a substitute. Indeed, what we call financial literacy, which is also known as “financial education” or “financial knowledge”, must complement any government measures to assist consumers. It must not be a substitute.

A very interesting report was published in 2009 by the OECD and is entitled “Financial Literacy and Consumer Protection: Overlooked Aspects of the Crisis”. This report was prepared by the OECD following the financial crisis in order to demonstrate that the fact that consumers had started to use increasingly complex financial mechanisms that they did not understand jeopardized not only consumers’ financial security, but the financial security of the whole system. Moreover, this very interesting report states that some recent financial innovations are incomprehensible not only to consumers, but also to bankers themselves.

• (1635)

One of the things mentioned was floating interest rate loans. When the time comes to choose between a floating rate and a fixed rate loan, most consumers are unable to understand the difference between them and how their choice will affect their future indebtedness. And yet, they are the ones who make the choice.

Subprime mortgage loans were what caused a crisis that had never been seen before, mainly in the United States. Why? Because consumers were given the opportunity to get involved in innovative mechanisms that were different from traditional financing mechanisms. The end result was that their own financial health as consumers was endangered, as well as the financial health of the whole system. As it happens, the whole system collapsed because some little financial geniuses devised instruments that are very difficult to understand.

If most people who work in the field of finance cannot understand them, how can the average consumer avoid being confused? The very interesting OECD report stated that most consumers greatly overestimate their financial skills. Here is a personal example. In a previous life, I was in charge of a team that conducted social population surveys for Statistics Canada. One of the projects was to evaluate the literacy and numeracy of the people being surveyed.

The results of these surveys were disastrous. Not only that, but what does not show clearly in these studies is that most people who are unable to respond will not respond, because they are ashamed. Quite simply, people who are unable to add or subtract will not participate in these studies. This means that the pool of respondents is biased from the very outset. When the sample is biased at the outset because those who are not capable of responding are ashamed of taking part in the study, then the results clearly do not reflect just how disastrously uninformed most consumers are.

This proposal is meaningless not because it would be impossible to do something worthwhile with it, but because the government has decided to blame indebtedness on consumers, households and

families who find themselves unable to control their spending because they do not have enough money, rather than take action that would truly enable consumers to first get themselves out of debt and perhaps then set money aside for the future.

Unlike the Conservatives, who think that education and financial literacy are substitutes for programs, the NDP proposed concrete measures in our election platform in May 2011. For instance, we proposed—and it was our leader, the late Jack Layton, who drew attention to this—capping interest rates at 5% above prime, which is based on the Bank of Canada’s key interest rate. The NDP proposed this concrete measure, which would give all Canadian families who are struggling with record debt levels—that is what Statistics Canada is reporting—a little breathing room and hope that they will one day get out of debt.

• (1640)

One interesting thing that came out of the 30 recommendations in the task force’s report was this: “the Government of Canada... integrate a financial literacy component into the Canada student loans program for students receiving funding.” Helping students, most of whom have a lot of debt, would be very beneficial. This report recommends that the Government of Canada integrate programs, concrete measures to help students manage and deal with their level of debt, which can be huge. That is recommendation number 10 in the report. But where is that recommendation in the bill before us today? It is missing. Why is the government ignoring things that could help change the lives of consumers?

Instead, the Conservatives prefer to create a very well-paid executive position, but they will not even give that individual an advisory board to make recommendations and give the position some legitimacy. Of the 30 recommendations, the Conservatives took only one, and they drafted a bill that is nothing but a smokescreen. That is how I would describe it.

In closing, the NDP will not be supporting this bill, because we believe we can do better. The resources that resulted from the deliberations of the task force—even though it seems to favour the financial institutions—could be put to better use. We cannot support this bill today.

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as many of us know, there is a major movement against tuition hikes in Quebec. Student debt is also a hot topic of debate. Could my colleague tell us what would be more effective than this bill when it comes to helping students improve their financial literacy and reaching them for that purpose?

Mr. Tarik Brahmi: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Abitibi—Témiscamingue for her question. There is a problem in Quebec. The younger generation does not understand that previous generations had certain privileges, such as no tuition hikes. The younger generation is also asking for help to get out of this situation.

Government Orders

The NDP suggested increasing federal transfers to the provinces to help the provincial governments increase loans and bursaries. That was the principal measure in our platform, because the federal government cannot meddle in the provincial management of loans and bursaries.

• (1645)

Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like my colleague to comment on two things. First, most government tax credits will not benefit those most in need. There is a disconnect. We are going to help people better understand the system and make good decisions. And yet, those most in need, those targeted by these measures, will not even be able to take advantage of tax credits. Their income is so low that they do not pay tax.

Would it not be smarter for the government to start by helping people find a job and pay taxes instead of spending public money to put together a group that is totally useless and whose recommendations will not even be put into action?

Mr. Tarik Brahmi: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for La Pointe-de-l'Île. That is a very good question.

The non-refundable tax credits are just more smokescreens. Most of the time, non-refundable tax credits are used for making announcements so that the government can say it provides tax credits. That being said, as the hon. member pointed out so well, these tax credits do not benefit the people who need them the most.

For example, in the NDP platform, financial institutions would be required to lower their transaction fees, since we know that the cost of transactions is practically nil. The infrastructure carries a certain cost, but every individual or additional financial operation costs nothing. Those are indeed the measures that the NDP has proposed. They are concrete measures and not smokescreens, as my colleague was saying when she was talking about non-refundable tax credits.

[*English*]

Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my colleague's comments on this apparent attempt at a bill. When I read it, I could not find anything captivating in it. However, having read the recommendations from the task force, I realized that the bill was smoke and mirrors to try to keep what we really need out of the legislative agenda of the government. What we really need are these recommendations.

A number of individuals in my riding could really use some financial literacy when it comes to their daily banking and their ability to exchange their cheques for money. We have payday loan companies that operate with a 1,000% interest but there is nothing in the bill that talks about how we would put those payday loan companies out of business, which is what we should be aiming at. We should be aiming at financial literacy in a way that helps the poorest of the poor in this country but the bill does none of that.

Would my colleague like to comment further on that?

Mr. Tarik Brahmi: Mr. Speaker, it is absolutely absurd to try to teach consumers how to save money that they do not have in the first place. That is the problem with the bill. It contains no measures to help consumers save money and to get more money in their pockets. Teaching people to save money that they do not have is useless.

• (1650)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, another point in my colleague's speech that raises questions is that bilingualism is not a requirement for this new position. Since my colleague is bilingual, I would like to ask him his opinion on this. When a text is translated, a simple change in a modifier can completely change the meaning of the sentence. Financial documents are rather complex to understand.

If a person who does not speak French is analyzing a translated text or is trying to analyze a French text with only limited knowledge of the language, does this not pose the risk that the person will miss certain traps or aspects that are misleading to the consumer and that are found in the details?

Mr. Tarik Brahmi: Mr. Speaker, my colleague is absolutely right. She identified one of the bill's major shortcomings: not only does it not require the financial literacy leader to be able to interpret very complex texts, it does not even require this person to have the vaguest idea of what the texts are about.

My colleague was absolutely right when she said that there can be subtleties in either language or in translation that might be missed by someone who understands just one of the two official languages.

Mr. Jean Rousseau (Compton—Stanstead, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his excellent speech.

In his opinion, how can a segment of the population be educated about a very complex subject when their main concerns are the business of day-to-day living, providing enough food for their families, and solving truly essential survival problems? The gap between rich and poor is getting bigger, and as we all know, the poor are always less well educated than those who are better off. So there is also a problem with access to education. There are some things that the government always forgets, and now it wants to educate a segment of the population with extremely complex legislation.

Someone in my riding told me that if he called the government, the person answering the phone would not even be able to explain the legislation and what he should do about it.

Can my colleague explain why the government is determined to introduce hastily conceived bills without even considering the people these bills are for?

Mr. Tarik Brahmi: Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Compton—Stanstead hit the nail right on the head. It is right there in black and white in the OECD report entitled "Financial Literacy and Consumer Protection: Overlooked Aspects of the Crisis": "...consumers have low levels of financial literacy and often overestimate their skills, knowledge and awareness when it comes to credit products." That sums up the situation nicely.

Government Orders

Consumers are being asked to be their own doctor and their own neurosurgeon. Average consumers cannot be expected to make informed decisions about such complex subjects. It is up to the government to implement measures that restrain financial institutions and prevent them from developing products that, though innovative, are impossible to understand and can trap people, such as subprime mortgages.

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am going to share my precious time with the hon. member for Vaudreuil-Soulanges. This is another one of the government's tactics. It wastes the precious time of the servants of the people of Canada by limiting debate. It is very important to fully debate the meaning and consequences of Bill C-28.

I would like to start with what I could call my conclusion. It is extraordinary and unbelievable to see this government's stubbornness and its unwavering willingness to completely abandon the people of Canada to the forces of the market or what we might call the market to use classic economics terms. The word "abandon" is not too strong.

Some government members—self-professed libertarians—convey what seems to be a respectful message by saying that they are going to lower taxes and give people back their money because they know how to spend it. However, in reality, they are abandoning and letting people down. People have to deal with their own problems and, if they are not able to watch their own backs, then too bad for them. They will freeze to death. The government will be subject to more and more attacks in this regard. If it refuses to pay attention to this type of message and warning, the anger will continue to grow. This government should beware because it is facing hard times ahead, and I will be there to remind it of its turpitude. The word "abandon" could just be an empty word that I am throwing around, but it is not. It is supported by facts.

I am not going to repeat the eloquent speeches that my colleagues made about Bill C-28's shortcomings and problems. Instead, I would like to illustrate my point in a different way.

It is absolutely unbelievable that this government, which created total chaos by handing over the reins to the large financial institutions—banks, insurance companies and all sorts of investment companies—has the audacity to tell people that it is going to appoint an official who will give them all the documentation available, whether or not they are literate and whether or not they have the ability to understand the complex financial products that exist today. It is absolutely unbelievable. I can say this because my statements are based on real and substantiated facts.

The government is talking out of both sides of its mouth. On one hand, it is running a marketing ploy—yet another one—and, on the other, the budget is coming. The government will likely continue to announce useless little tax measures that are unnecessarily complex and that most taxpayers are unable to understand let alone use.

A number of months ago, a poll showed that half of all Canadians do not prepare their tax return themselves because it is too complicated. Preparing one's tax return is a duty that is as essential and as basic as voting. This government has no qualms about treating that with contempt, but it throws up its hands in horror and gets indignant about the revelations, each one based in fact, about

problems during the recent election. We could probably go back to the beginning of the 2000s and find all kinds of completely dirty electoral tricks.

• (1655)

One out of every two Canadians is not even able to fulfill a basic requirement, preparing his income tax return, by himself. He has to rely on a family member or friend or pay a professional to do it. There is something really scandalous in that. I know, because one of the greatest gifts my father gave me when I was growing up was to make me prepare my tax return myself, to make an effort as a Canadian to do it myself and to understand what it represented. Now that I have a reasonable idea of what to do—and I will not hide the fact that it is still a decent challenge—I still do them for people close to me.

If I did not fill out their tax returns for them for free—we are talking about people who really do not have a lot of money, who earn less than \$20,000 a year—they would be paying a professional accountant \$25 or \$30 an hour to do it. They do not even have a high enough income to claim tax credits, like that darned public transit credit, for example. I know, I see it, I fill out their tax returns. It is a sham of a tax credit, it is totally useless, and it does absolutely nothing to help our cities develop their public transit systems. The people whose tax returns I fill out have nowhere near the resources to qualify for it.

This government is just laughing in the face of most Canadians. That is the reality. Bill C-28 is another insult to Canadians everywhere. I am as comfortable with it as I am watching hon. members with their noses stuck in their papers or their computers and pretending not to listen to me. It is really extraordinary. We are here debating the future of our fellow Canadians, debating the fact that they are going to be buried in documents, which they will only half understand. They will be the victims of all kinds of tricks. There is no need to go looking for very complex financial products.

I recently had to shop for a credit card that would give me additional benefits. In connection with that, an expert showed me that credit cards with points and bonus systems are an excellent trick to attract a clientele that will be eager to use the cards again and again, which then increases their level of spending. One explanation for the famous household debt in Canada is this type of credit card, and that is just one example. When we visit the website of any Canadian bank, not to mention the astronomical number of offers we get in our mailboxes for new and supposedly exceptional cards, we cannot help but notice the extraordinary number of cards offering all kinds of incredible advantages, with all kinds of different fees and totally different interest rates.

Even the experts can get confused. One of my colleagues talked about this and he is absolutely right. It is complicated. Given that the government does not put a cap on this type of bloat, which is completely useless and counterproductive, except for the institutions that benefit greatly from it, to the detriment of the most vulnerable, it is basically using Bill C-28 to tell the Canadian population to take a hike. It is truly outrageous.

Government Orders

I can no longer stand watching this government pose as the poor victim when it has a majority and, in addition, use every possible means to shut us up, when we are defending true Canadian values and all of our fellow citizens. The government should not be surprised if we systematically refuse, for all its bills, to be truly complicit in immoral and, ultimately, almost criminal actions.

• (1700)

Before I get carried away, I will leave it at that. I think I have made my point.

[*English*]

Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened to my colleague's comments which I found to be erudite, a word that maybe is known to members on the other side of the House.

As far as we can tell, this bill has not done the job that needs to be done for most Canadians. I am talking about Canadians who are not in the upper echelons of the 1%, shall we say. I am talking about people who may need some financial literacy but they are managing money that most of the people we represent could not dream of. The financial literacy that is necessary is not being provided.

There is no definition of what financial literacy is, for one thing. There is no indication of a mandate or what the goal of the individual would be. The person would spend a considerable sum of government money, we assume, because he or she is not going to work for nothing. The person would need an office and staff and may need some language training.

What is missing from this bill? What is it that we would be considering if we were to present this bill?

• (1705)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raymond Côté: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his question and comments. Actually, he has really hit the nail on the head. From the outset, this bill introduces a position that does not have a really defined objective. The so-called financial literacy leader has no goal to achieve and no obligation to be accountable.

Those are basic principles that should be in any bill worthy of the name. The fact that the government introduced this type of bill is simply a joke.

Of course, I would like to tell the hon. member that the New Democratic Party has no greater duty than to say that it agrees and that something of the kind can always be considered. However, before planning to create a new position, we would look at what is already in place. And let me point out that there is already an organization that takes care of financial literacy.

If we ever needed something else, we would set goals, but we would first look at what is already up and running, what are the strengths and weaknesses, in order to support what is being done right now. There are resources already available and the government chooses to ignore them.

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have examined the bill several times. The only thing I see is that it will give one person a job, but it will not help people generally.

I would like to know if my colleague can see how this bill will help ordinary Canadians.

Mr. Raymond Côté: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from Nickel Belt, because that is a very pertinent question. He would not believe how pertinent it is.

In addition to creating a somewhat phoney position—perhaps my interpretation is a bit harsh; I will let God be the judge of that—I think the main objective of this bill is to serve the government's fondness for self-promotion. The bill is so devoid of any substance that, apart from forming the foundation of a marketing ploy, like other monumental projects the government has developed for its own self-glorification, I really do not see how this could help ordinary Canadians in any way. That is what is utterly shameful. The government is going to waste public money not only to create the position, but also, no doubt, to launch a multi-million dollar ad campaign to tell us how wonderful the government is for creating this position, which will basically be useless.

[*English*]

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will start off by looking at the problems the national task force on financial literacy had from the very beginning.

First, it was headed by a former banker. I have nothing against bankers. My mother was a banker. She worked as a bank manager for the Bank of Montreal for over 35 years. She worked in human resources. I had an aunt who worked for the Bank of Montreal for the same period of time. My mom's friends worked for a bank. I am familiar with bankers and I have no problem with them.

The *raison d'être* of bankers is to market financial products. I know this because I lived in a banking family. Bankers sell financial products. There are certain marketing seasons when they sell RRSPs or different financial products. They have quotas. There are things that they have to sell. They are salespeople. That is their *raison d'être*. Often the financial products that they sell to consumers increase the profits of their institutions.

That is not a balanced way to start a group dedicated to the idea of financial literacy. It is similar to putting McDonald's in charge of nutrition policies. It is not a balanced way to do things.

Members know as well as I do that consumers sometimes get burned by financial products because they do not quite understand them. A case in point is the RESP.

Government Orders

I want to make a transparent declaration to the House. When I was in my early thirties and took out an RESP for my daughter, I did not quite understand what I was getting into. The marketing material made it look like I could squirrel away money for my daughter and by the time she was 18 there would be enough money for her university education. I was conscious of the fact that when she did reach university age it would be quite expensive to put her through post-secondary education with the rising costs of education and the rising costs of living. I was really scared and I wanted to find a financial product that would allow me to pay for her education without any worries.

What I did not know was that I could lose that money easily. Call me a fool, but I did not know that the RESP would lose so much money when the market took a dive. My mother the banker did not tell me that fact either until I had lost half the value during the downturn in 2008. There was \$12,000 in that plan and it went down to about \$5,000 or \$6,000. I worked hard to put that money aside. I believed that I was doing the right thing. The bank told me I was doing the right thing. The government told me I was doing the right thing. I believed them.

What we need in terms of financial literacy is somebody who will tell the people of Canada the whole truth, not just the marketing truth.

The Minister of Finance denied that we were in a downturn until the very end of 2008, but I felt it much earlier. I remember the government initiatives to boost people's contributions to RESPs in 2006 and 2007. There was quite a marketing drive by the banks and government. They were telling people to put their money into RESPs so that their kids could go to school.

I am sure people will say that I was a fool not to know how it worked before I put my money in the RESP. With raising a child, working full-time, taking care of my family, I did not have the time to sit down and look at what the RESP was about. It was never taught to me in high school. It was never taught to me in university. I was to teach myself from the bank's own marketing products and from the government literature. None of those things told me that I could lose my money just like that.

● (1710)

I know I am not alone in that. I know there are plenty of Canadians out there who have gone through similar experiences to me. Therefore, as much as we might say that I am a fool, if I am a fool, thousands of Canadians are fools. They need help understanding these financial products.

[*Translation*]

Francophones may find it even more difficult to learn about these financial products through this group because bilingualism is not a requirement for the position of financial literacy leader. Obviously, what the government wants to do is create a single consumer protection agency. However, that is not really within the purview of this bill. Consumer protection is not really included in the bill.

Instead, I would like to talk about one of the greatest problems for Canadians: savings.

● (1715)

[*English*]

If we are looking at the issue of financial literacy, I must agree with my colleague in the third party who said that the financial leader of the government was not quite literate, because we have serious problems. One of those serious problems is the savings of Canadians and it is one of the things that is effecting the competitiveness of our economy.

The former governor of the Bank of Canada said, in a report quite a while ago, that Canadians needed to save more. He said that they needed to save between 10% and 21% of their pre-tax income each year and that they needed to save consistently for 35 years to have comfortable retirement incomes.

According to a report prepared by the C.D. Howe Institute, which is not exactly a socialist organization, people who earn between \$42,000 a year and \$150,000 a year need to save between 11% and 21%.

What I see in Bill C-28 is the creation of a group that will try to market financial products, like credit cards, RRSPs and RESPs, without fully explaining what those products do or explaining it in a way that will promote those products to promote the profits of those institutions and banks. I do not think that is the way to teach Canadians how to be financially literate. We need to find a way for Canadians to save more money.

The Conference Board of Canada, looking at the World Economic Forum's 2011 report on competitiveness, said that Canada's macroeconomic environment rankings were weak. It said that a number of fiscal pressures were restricting Canada's economy from achieving its full potential. For example, Canada ranked 80th in terms of its gross national savings as a percentage of GDP and a lowly 129th out of 142 countries in terms of its overall government debt levels as a percentage of GDP.

It is clear that we need to help Canadians become financially literate but that starts with telling them to save more and finding efficient ways for them to save without marketing these financial products to them. I do not think the task force would be able to sufficiently explain these financial products to Canadians when it is obvious that the composition of the board would be compromised in that it would not be necessary for the head of the task force to be bilingual.

I have problems with the bill. I do not think it would do what the government states it would do, which is increase financial literacy. We need to take a serious look at how we can actually improve the financial literacy of Canadians. Looking at the statistics, I can see that we have a long way to go.

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague said something toward the end of his speech, which I hope I did not hear correctly. Was the member saying that the financial literacy leader and his or her office would be marketing and selling products to Canadians?

Government Orders

Clearly, that is ridiculous. That is not the job or the mandate of that person or that office. That is done by financial institutions, by people who have the expertise. He explained that he had some problems with his RESP, which is too bad, but, having been in the business for a number of years, a good financial advisor is essential.

Could the member clarify whether he thinks that this office would actually be marketing and selling products?

• (1720)

Mr. Jamie Nicholls: Mr. Speaker, no. What I was implying was that, because of the composition of the working group being mostly former bankers, having their *raison d'être* for their careers the marketing of financial products, they would be amenable to not fully explaining these products.

I was not implying that they would be selling these products. However, they will have done that in their careers, that will be what they know and it will not be in their interests to steer Canadians away from products that might not give the results their former institutions promised in the past.

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I commend my colleague from Vaudreuil—Soulanges for his excellent speech. During his speech he mentioned the word “fool” a couple of times. I certainly would not call him a fool but I would call this bill a foolish bill.

He also talked about poverty and about trying to save for RRSPs. I know that is very difficult. I know a lot of seniors are living in poverty right now because when they were raising their kids they could not put money aside for their retirement.

Would it not have been a better idea if the government had invested in the Canada-Quebec pension plan to help people, especially seniors, who are living in poverty?

Mr. Jamie Nicholls: Mr. Speaker, I do believe that if we were to invest more in our CPP and QPP, if we were to beef that up, Canadians would find more money at the end of their careers when they retire.

I mentioned that my mother worked for over 30 years for the Bank of Montreal and believed in all the financial products that she sold. She was quite a fan. However, in her retirement now, I am helping her out with the day to day, simply because she could not save enough money during her career, even with all the financial products that she used, for her retirement.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague from Vaudreuil—Soulanges for making his speech very relevant. I would also like to reassure him right away. Although he had an unfortunate experience with his RESP, he is not less intelligent than the average person. Mr. Rousseau, the former CEO of the Caisse de dépôt et placement du Québec and a former CEO of the Laurentian Bank, also admitted that he does not understand the ultra-sophisticated savings products that led to the 2008 crisis.

Now the government is introducing a defined contribution pension plan, which also has pitfalls similar to those of the product central to my colleague's unfortunate experience. What does he think of the

government's ability to assess financial literacy? Is it qualified to do so?

Mr. Jamie Nicholls: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the question. When I spoke candidly, I heard someone on the government side say that they could see why I had lost my money. That says a lot about the government's attitude. It is saying that if we lose our money and are poor, it is our own fault. The government will carry on with its agenda. It will make one group of people rich and not care about the rest. That is completely unacceptable. We must protect both the poor and the rich of this country.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Resuming debate. The hon. member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue has six minutes remaining.

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we cannot talk about this bill without a clear understanding of what happened in the beginning. In budget 2009, the Minister of Finance created a national task force that was mandated to provide the minister with advice on the issue of financial literacy. So the group went to work. It was made up of various stakeholders from different sectors, including workers, volunteers and teachers, as well as people from the business and financial sectors.

The task force submitted a report containing 30 recommendations. One recommendation was to create the position of financial literacy leader. This bill completely disregards all the other recommendations. To me, that does not make any sense. The report gave 30 recommendations and the government adopted only one of them.

Furthermore, this bill could have described very concrete measures. For instance, one of the recommendations was this:

The task force recommends that the Government of Canada, as part of the 2011–12 renewal of its urban aboriginal strategy...make financial literacy training programs for young aboriginal Canadians eligible for funding.

This could have been a concrete recommendation in terms of financial literacy and it could have helped. We all know that aboriginal youth and aboriginal communities have problems stemming from poverty.

Often, one of the problems, when we talk about financial literacy, is that they do not understand the terms accurately. If someone needs to buy a car and does not understand the actual terms of their loan, they go into debt and go bankrupt. If they use a credit card to buy food, but they do not have a good grasp on financial literacy, they have the impression they are paying 10% interest when really it is 28%, because sometimes the advertising is hard to understand. I think help is not being given.

So this is a community that could have been targeted for this. The task force also recommended that the government of Canada provide recent immigrants with financial information and education services tailored to their needs, as part of the orientation services offered both abroad and in Canada by the Immigrant Settlement and Adaptation Program and the language instruction for newcomers to Canada. So this is another group that could have been targeted, but that has absolutely ignored. Those recommendations are not taken into account in the bill.

Private Members' Business

Some of these immigrants are coming from countries like Africa where, and I apologize for the expression, about 1% of the population has a credit card and a debit card and where bartering is still done with food and that sort of thing. They also use cash, but they still use the barter system. They find themselves in Canada, with a system that involves handling a mountain of paperwork and where they may not understand the language very well. They may not have a significant level of education, and they find themselves in this kind of system and having to manage to understand. They have to understand an income tax system, which is entirely new to them.

The government is choosing to target only the financial literacy leader, instead of applying a recommendation like that one, which could have been more concrete. I do not understand the priorities; it is impossible to understand. When they have 30 excellent recommendations and they choose not to pay attention to them, that seems to me to be rather unusual.

The possibility was also recommended of working side-by-side with provincial and territorial governments in order to provide teachers with the tools they need to teach financial literacy to children and to their students. If financial literacy is taught gradually and in a language that is familiar to children, teenagers, college and university students, there is a chance that they will understand it. That could, therefore, be the way forward. It could facilitate a beneficial exchange between provinces, so that teachers are able to teach the material and have the tools they need at their disposal, instead of having to invent them. That was another recommendation.

• (1725)

It was also recommended that employers be able to offer financial literacy training, so that their employees fully understand, for example, their pension programs and the importance of investing in an RRSP. But this recommendation has not been followed. That strikes me as incomprehensible. In my opinion, budgets and key recommendations should have been the focus of this bill.

Granted, the bill creates the position of financial literacy leader, but it is just as essential to implement the key recommendations, and it is crucial, as of now, to take into account these recommendations, and that things do not drag on. Otherwise, the work of the task force will largely fall short of its objective.

In my opinion, this smacks of a lack of logic and a failure to adequately prioritize. Positions should not be created without prior knowledge of the objectives, without knowing how to proceed, and what the priorities are for implementation. There needs to be some direction when that kind of position is created, otherwise it is tantamount to sending a cheque to a senior official who is acting rudderlessly.

• (1730)

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.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*Translation*]

DEMOCRATIC REPRESENTATION ACT

The House resumed from December 2 consideration of the motion that Bill C-312, An Act to amend the Constitution Act, 1867 (democratic representation), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my NDP colleagues why they have begun to mimic one of the most unpleasant traits of the Conservatives, which is to fail to respond to objections to their party's proposals.

We saw this again during question period. When we ask the Conservatives to tell us the number of fighter jets and tell us when the aircraft will be ready, they do not reply. When we ask them to explain why they want to cut pensions when the OECD and all the experts say that it is not necessary, they do not respond.

I would like to invite my NDP colleagues to take pride in not acting like the Conservatives and to answer my objections to this bill, even though they have not responded thus far and have behaved as if these objections had not been raised. This is precisely the same attitude my NDP colleagues took with respect to the abolition of the Senate. The last time I rose in the House, perhaps six or seven times, and asked each NDP member to tell me what majority would be required to abolish the Senate, whether it would be the majority of all Canadians or the majority in each of the provinces, as required in the Constitution, they never responded. So we will see this time.

[*English*]

The first question that I would ask the NDP about this bill is this. If the NDP thought that the House motion of November 27, 2006 meant that Quebecers, being a nation within a united Canada, should have more weight than other provinces' voters, since the other provinces' voters are not part of a nation within a united Canada, why did the New Democrats not say that when they voted for the motion in the House on November 27, 2006?

[*Translation*]

Why did they not come straight out and say that they would be voting for this motion and that this would mean that Quebecers, as members of a nation, should have more weight than the other provinces' voters? And why did they not say so in French and in English everywhere in Canada? That is my first question.

[*English*]

The second question is this. Both the Liberal plan for 308 seats in the House and the ballooned 338-seat plan of the Conservative Party, which has become the law of the land unfortunately, accept the rule that ensures that any currently overrepresented province will not become under-represented. Bill C-312 does not include this rule. Does this mean it would be acceptable to the NDP if, perhaps, either Manitoba or Nova Scotia became under-represented and, if so, why? Is that because they are not nations? Is that the logic of the NDP?

Private Members' Business

[Translation]

And if that is the logic, then they should say so, in English and in French, in Nova Scotia, Manitoba and everywhere else.

[English]

They would just have to say to Manitobans that they would be under-represented because they are not a nation within Canada. They should say that everywhere. I want to hear that from my colleague from Compton—Stanstead, the sponsor of this bill. Can he confirm that he is speaking on behalf of his NDP colleagues from Manitoba, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick? Are they okay with the view that their provinces may be under-represented in the House, since they are not nations? I hope to get an answer to this question.

[Translation]

The third question is the following: is the NDP going to produce some numbers at last? According to its plans, how many members of Parliament would make up the House? It has no reason not to release its numbers. All the other parties have. When you propose something, you have to say what it will look like. Actually, it is a bit difficult to understand what it would look like. If the representation of a province is set in stone, regardless of demographic trends, it can lead to rather complex arithmetical complications.

If Quebec is guaranteed 24.35% of the seats in the House, regardless of what the demographics of Quebec are, that means that other provinces will go down in percentage, since the total has to add up to 100%. Otherwise, it is an arithmetical impossibility. Only in hockey can we have 110%. The NDP has to understand that.

The New Democrats have to show us their numbers. How do they get 100%? Which provinces have to give up seats so that one province is overrepresented based on their calculations?

• (1735)

[English]

I want to mention that in this bill, the NDP would keep the rule of equitable representation for the fast growing provinces. They want to correct the under-representation of Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta. I think it is right to do so. They would keep the Senate clause that no province can have fewer seats than its existing number of senators. It is in the Constitution: we have no choice and have to respect that rule. They would keep the grandfather clause, like the Conservatives, which is a mistake, because then we cannot subtract from the number of seats of provinces but only add to them. They also have a fourth rule that Quebec will remain at 24.35%.

The first three rules mean there will be 30 more seats in the House. That is what the Conservatives decided to do, and so the next time there will be 338 seats. The additional rule of Quebec at 24.35% means that we would then have six more seats, or 344.

[Translation]

But if we add those six seats for Quebec, then Alberta, British Columbia and Ontario are underrepresented again in terms of the objective. Alberta is no longer making any progress. So we end up with 344 seats and we do not achieve the objective we were seeking. So we have to add seats for Alberta, British Columbia and Ontario.

But then, Quebec will no longer have 24.35%. So we have to add seats for Quebec. And in this little game, even if there were 350 seats, we would not be able to satisfy the four rules proposed by the NDP in its plan. And that is for 2011. Imagine how distorted things could get in 2021 and 2031.

[English]

Each national party has an obligation to say the same thing in English and French throughout our great country. I challenge the NDP to do so in this matter, starting by releasing its numbers.

The fourth and last question is whether this bill is constitutional. In permanently fixing the percentage of seats of a province, the NDP is asking Parliament to contradict the principle of proportionate representation of the provinces in the House of Commons. This principle is well entrenched in our Constitution. Yes, Parliament has some leeway in how it applies the principle of proportionate representation of the provinces when dealing with the effective representation of communities and provinces in relative decline. That is true. However, that leeway has its limits: parliament cannot run afoul of the principle of proportionate representation. That would be unconstitutional.

While Bill C-312 mentions the Supreme Court decision of June 6, 1991, we have said again and again to our NDP colleagues, but without receiving any answer from them, that this ruling applied to the delimitation of ridings, not to the representation of the whole province. All democratic federations try to accommodate communities while delimiting ridings, but no democratic federation gives extra representation to a whole constitutional jurisdiction on the grounds of its cultural or national character. That would be an extraordinary decision, requiring a constitutional amendment that Parliament cannot do alone without the consent of its constitutional partners, the provinces. In other words, the NDP and the Bloc are asking Parliament to show disrespect for provincial constitutional jurisdiction.

The NDP and the Bloc are asking Parliament to exceed its jurisdiction regarding House of Commons reform with Bill C-312. The Conservatives are asking Parliament to exceed its jurisdiction regarding Senate reform with Bill C-7. Only the Liberals are consistently respecting the Constitution.

We urge all our colleagues in this House to show respect for the basic law of the land, the Constitution of Canada. In the meantime, we Liberals will as always remain consistent in principle. We will oppose this bill because it is unconstitutional and impractical.

The next time there is an opportunity, we urge all members of Parliament to support the Liberal plan to freeze the number of seats in this House, because otherwise we will have to extend Parliament as far as the Rideau Canal if we are to fit in all members in the House.

• (1740)

[Translation]

In conclusion, I have asked my questions. Will I get any answers?

Private Members' Business

[English]

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to start by responding to some of what the member for Saint-Laurent—Cartierville said.

The member's vision of the country has never convinced Quebec nor the other provinces. When he was at the head of his party, he lost lots of seats. I have no problem with more seats as long as the people in those seats actually have power.

Hal Herbert, the member for my riding in the 1970s, wrote an excellent little memoir called "Confessions of a trained seal". He called himself a trained seal because the prime minister he served under exercised centralizing powers on his members. We have seen that increasing over the years under Trudeau, Mulroney, Chrétien, Martin and the current Prime Minister. They have all centralized power within the Prime Minister's Office, so I take none of the questions from this member seriously.

[Translation]

I am very pleased to address the bill introduced by the hon. member for Compton—Stanstead. This bill reflects our values as Quebecers and Canadians, namely the values of justice and of a just country. I am a Quebecker and I am proud of that. I am a 14th generation Quebecker. The St-Maurices arrived in the 17th century with the Carignan-Salières regiment. The Nicholls arrived in the 19th century with the great migration of British, Scottish and Irish people.

I am proud to be a member of the Quebec nation. I am proud to say that it was the member for York—that was the name of my riding in the 18th century—Michel-Eustache-Gaspard-Alain Chartier de Lotbinière, who introduced the use of French in the Parliament of Lower Canada. He was Speaker of the House at the time.

• (1745)

[English]

Asking permission to use French in government is a tradition that continues today. It points to some historical realities. The first was that there were not large populations of anglophones in the colonies at that time. The second was the idea of fairness that existed at that time.

I would like to quote the member at that time. He stated:

Since the majority of our constituents are placed in a special situation, we are obliged to depart from the ordinary rules and forced to ask for the use of a language which is not that of the empire; but, being as fair to others as we hope they will be to us, we should not want our language eventually to banish that of His Majesty's other subjects.

[Translation]

This moment in our history is immortalized on a painting located above the Speaker's chair in Quebec's National Assembly. I am mentioning it because this is something that gives concrete expression to the notion of a Quebec nation. I should also point out that the second Marquis de Lotbinière referred to a Canadian idea of justice that existed in our country at the time and which is unique to Canada.

I want to refer to another painting. That one is hanging on the wall of our caucus room, the Railway Committee Room. It shows our

nation's founders, the Fathers of Confederation. It was their idea that this new experience, this Confederation, should be a partnership between nations. John A. Macdonald and George-Étienne Cartier were able to create a nation based on the principles of peace, order and responsible government. The term "order" replaced the word "well-being", which reflected the concept of Canadian justice, of fairness, which is fundamental to this country.

The painting to which I am referring is from Robert Harris. It shows the Fathers of Confederation, but it also shows the flaws in this vision of justice, because there are no women or aboriginals. It may also have marked the beginning of new injustices.

[English]

I will return to these injustices in a little while.

The two partners of united Canada, Canada East and Canada West, were fearful of American expansion at the end of the American Civil War. Macdonald was afraid of getting overwhelmed by the American juggernaut. Likewise Cartier went against the grain of those who were asking for republicanism in French Canada. The predecessors of the member for Saint-Laurent—Cartierville were asking for republicanism in the presence of his party. Cartier was afraid of his home becoming Louisiana, a state that had been assimilated over the years in a nation that did not value bilingualism. They came together as partners. Cartier was assured by his partners in Canada West that the nation would go forward as equal partners. Here I would like to talk of the injustices of Confederation.

The idea of fairness was not only the right to language but also right to religion, continuation of one's culture and communities of interest.

[Translation]

Exactly two years after Confederation, we had the Red River standoff, in what is now Manitoba. As we know, the Canadian administration was not fair to the francophones and Metis of these camps.

The government wanted to put in place a townships system, instead of concessions. This would erase a culture built over a period of more than 300 years, as well as an agreement between the British, the French and the aboriginals. This sent the message to Quebec that it should shut up and be a quiet partner.

The execution of Louis Riel, following the Northwest Rebellion in Saskatchewan, had the effect of cooling relations between francophones, anglophones and aboriginals. The rebirth of Quebec nationalism dates back to that era. Canada's westward expansion was achieved at the expense of francophones and aboriginals to promote the English culture, with a Canadian touch.

So, our partnership suffered setbacks. We accepted the changes. We are open to an increase in the number of seats for the other provinces, but the agreement between the three founding nations must be respected. We must respect the 24.35% rule.

Private Members' Business

[English]

We have to continue the idea of fairness and carry forward a progressive vision of this country, a vision that includes all three nations. I am supporting my colleague's bill because it does support this foundation of the country in 1867 for a certain amount of seats for Quebec to show the importance of this founding nation within a united Canada.

I would like to conclude by saying that the proposed law would be the beginning of the future of our country. It would build a country that would heal the tensions that have built up since Confederation as well as the problems we had after Confederation between francophones, first nations and anglophones. It would recognize that Quebec holds a special place within our Confederation. Quebec needs to be recognized in terms of the seats it has in this House in order to continue the message of Quebec for the rest of the country.

[Translation]

Ms. Isabelle Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise in this House today and I thank my colleague from Compton—Stanstead for introducing this bill. I know he is very concerned about democratic, fair representation everywhere in Canada. I thank him for his passion.

The bill my colleague has introduced supplements the government's Bill C-20. The population is growing in the West and in Ontario, and we agree that the number of seats in those regions needs to be increased. That is not the problem. However, we want to protect the voice of minorities.

Under our Constitution, there must be geographic, demographic and community of interest representation. Quebec is a community of interest by reason of its language, its culture and its difference from the rest of Canada. We saw that in the last election, in fact. It is a distinct community from the rest of Canada. On this side of the House, we think it is important to stand up for that community.

The Supreme Court of Canada has held that factors like geography, history, the interests of the community and the representation of minority groups must be taken into consideration in order to guarantee that legislative assemblies truly represent the diversity of the Canadian mosaic. That is what is in issue in my colleague's bill.

Certainly there is an imbalance; it has been observed in recent years. There are ridings where there are a lot of people. That is the case in my riding, where the population is much larger. It is easier when ridings are all equal or there is more or less the same number of people. That is why we agree on increasing the number of seats in Alberta and Ontario, but we think that three seats for Quebec are really not sufficient.

My colleague's bill is an attempt to meet these Canadian needs. What is essential is to recognize the province whose population is considered to be a nation. My colleague from Vaudreuil—Soulanges who just spoke made a connection with the three founding nations. So we cannot wave the Quebec nation away with the back of our hand. Quebec has 24.35% of the seats, but what is wanted now is to increase the number of seats in other provinces. No more thought is being given to the fact that this province is a distinct nation and its

number of seats is not being increased so it retains the same weight in the House. My colleague's Bill C-312 supplements the Conservatives' bill, to build a strong and united Canada, where everyone feels they are represented.

The motion to recognize Quebec as a nation was adopted five years ago by the Conservative government, with the help of all the other parties in this House. It is time to take action to protect that nation within our country. The government's bill weakens the Quebec nation. It is time to work together to protect that nation.

For some time, we have seen that the Conservative government does not like Quebec very much. There is the firearms registry, and the contempt for the French language. A letter was sent on January 12 by a Mr. Paul White, the president of the Conservative Party Association in Brome-Missisquoi. He is a Conservative. I am going to quote what he says in his letter, in which he seems to be quite angry:

• (1750)

[English]

Today the voice of Quebec is virtually absent in Ottawa's halls of power, or if present, it is a voice grown mighty small, and mighty easy to ignore.

He continued:

Since the election of May 2, 2011, many Quebec observers have concluded that [the Prime Minister] has consciously decided to ignore Quebec, now that he has convincingly demonstrated that he can win a majority without it.

[Translation]

He closes his letter by saying:

[English]

In politics as in life, you deserve what you tolerate. And most Quebec Conservatives are fed up.

[Translation]

It was a Conservative member who said that. This tells us why Quebecers feel rejected.

The bill of the hon. member for Compton—Stanstead strikes a balance by stating that Quebec is a nation, which has been recognized by all the parties. In 2012, the National Assembly of Quebec even unanimously passed a resolution recognizing "that Quebec, as a nation, must be able to enjoy special protection for the weight of its representation in the House of Commons".

Even my New Democrat colleagues who do not live in Quebec are in full agreement with that. Quebec is not the main priority for some parties right now. This is not a matter of partisanship, but of acknowledging our history; Canada has three founding peoples and, traditionally, Quebec has always carried a certain weight. When we voted to recognize Quebec as a nation, this weight was 24.35%. On this side of the House, we think it is imperative to maintain this percentage because it is what gives a voice to the people of Quebec.

Currently, questions are being raised about the French language and we are trying our best to defend the voice of Quebecers, but we are being rejected by the government, which wants to add a large number of seats in provinces other than Quebec and further reduce Quebec's weight. We condemn this behaviour.

Private Members' Business

I support my colleague's bill fully and in good conscience. I hope that the Conservatives and the Liberals will vote with us for this bill that defends Canadians—not just Quebecers—and our history. It is important that at some point we say that Quebec's voice needs to be defended.

• (1755)

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am particularly pleased and proud to be able to rise in the House to support the bill introduced by the hon. member for Compton—Stanstead.

I feel that this bill addresses some major concerns of Quebecers and that it is a step forward. As the hon. member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine has just pointed out, this bill is a logical, concrete and direct extension of recognizing Quebec as a nation. Otherwise, this concept, adopted by the House, would become an empty gesture and of no benefit to Quebecers.

I would also like to point to the questions and comments of the hon. member for Saint-Laurent—Cartier, who, in my view, asked some legitimate questions that can add value to the discussion and to this debate.

First, why did the New Democrats not say right from the start in 2006 that they wanted to go in this direction? I cannot answer for the people who were there at the time. I have been the elected member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie since May 2, 2011. But I can give you a recent example that explains why the NDP voted against the Conservatives' Bill C-20. There were a number of reasons, but one of the main reasons was that the bill reduced Quebec's political weight in the House of Commons. And as Quebecers and New Democrats, we considered that it made no sense and that the Quebec nation was not respected. That is the first answer I can give him.

Second, for many years, the Constitution has provided for situations in which certain parts of the country are under-represented, with the rule that a province cannot have fewer members of Parliament than senators. Prince Edward Island is an example. So are communities in different situations, such as areas in the north, which are huge, but very sparsely populated. No strict mathematical rule, whereby every voter has the same weight, applies at the moment to the representation of Quebecers and Canadians in the House. That does not exist and it is reasonable for it not to exist because it would be unfair in historical, linguistic, cultural and sociological terms. That is what the bill introduced by the hon. member for Compton—Stanstead is trying to accommodate.

So there is no arithmetical rule, as the Supreme Court acknowledged in its 1991 decision. I hope I will have the time to come back to that. As there is a straight line back to factors that have already been recognized by the Supreme Court of Canada, there is no problem, in our view.

The hon. member wants exact figures. I have no figures to give him, but I have a formula. Politics and demographics are a bit like chemistry: they react and move.

The proposal is that an electoral divisor will be calculated after each decennial census, that is, in 2011, 2021, 2031. The former divisor is multiplied by the total population of the provinces according to the most recent decennial census. That product is then

divided by the total population of the provinces according to the previous decennial census. The present electoral divisor would be 108,000 people. With that formula, Quebec's political weight remains at 24.35% of the population. I doubt if that last section will necessarily get me quoted on the national news because it is not really exciting. But the important concept is to repeat an exercise every 10 years in order to make sure that Quebec's political weight in the House remains the same. For us, it is vitally important that the recognition of Quebec as a nation does not become either a dead issue or a fine example of words in the House that lead to no concrete change.

On November 27, 2006, the House of Commons recognized Quebec as a nation. In order to give meaning to this recognition, there must be some concrete action. We are open to proposals that will allow British Columbia, Alberta and Ontario to get a number of seats that will adequately reflect their demographic growth. However, it is critical that Quebec's representation in the House remain at 24.35%, because the Conservatives are systematically showing contempt and disregard for Quebec, for the vision of Quebec and Canadian progressive and social democrats in the House.

I am going to provide a few examples before quoting court rulings, and also Quebec and Canadian laws which show that the recognition of a community of interest must sometime take precedence over mere numbers and arithmetic rules.

• (1800)

This exists and this is where we are headed. If we recognize communities of interest, what about a nation, which is indeed a very powerful community of interest?

Let us get back to the fact that the Conservatives are not doing anything to meet Quebec's demands. They are even doing the opposite of what Quebecers are asking. The Conservative government is definitely not respecting Quebecers' fair share when it comes to the opportunities fund for persons with disabilities. Indeed, since it was created, only 3% of the subsidies have been given to Quebec, while 85% of the \$67 million allocated by the federal government were paid in Conservative ridings.

The Conservative government definitely did not give its fair share to Quebec's shipyards. The Conservatives chose companies in Nova Scotia and British Columbia for the construction of new warships but, once again, there was nothing for Quebec, which was ignored.

The Conservative government did not respect Quebec's position and its approach to rehabilitating young offenders. That approach works and it is a model for the world. The Quebec justice minister, Jean-Marc Fournier, clearly opposed this bill, which absolutely does not reflect Quebecers' values and their approach to justice. On December 5, the Conservatives turned their backs on Quebecers yet again.

The Conservative government did not respect Quebec's position on the environment. December 12, 2011, was a dark day. That is when the Conservatives decided that Canada would pull out of the Kyoto protocol, which is supported by a large majority of Canadians and also a majority of Quebecers. Climate change is an important issue for all those who look to the future and who want our planet to remain healthy.

The Conservative government definitely did not respect Quebec's position on the gun registry. On February 15, the Conservatives passed a bill abolishing the register. They even celebrated their victory. That register was created at the initiative of Quebecers, following the evil and despicable killings at École Polytechnique.

The Conservatives rejected at second reading the bill to protect French in Quebec companies under federal jurisdiction. Yesterday once again, the Conservatives turned their back on Quebecers. Remember that on April 22, 2010 the Quebec National Assembly passed a unanimous resolution reaffirming that Quebec, as a nation, must be able to enjoy special protection for the weight of its representation in the House of Commons. That resolution calls for elected members here, from all federal political parties, to abandon the passage of any bill whose effect would be to reduce the weight of Quebec's representation in this House.

This is a clear message that we as New Democrats want to send to all Quebecers and also to all the elected members of the National Assembly: we are going to carry this message and defend Quebec's interests.

The weight that Quebec had when it was officially recognized as a nation by this House was 24.35%. That proportion adds value to any calculation of the representativeness of seats in the House of Commons. Why? Because any good researcher in fact knows that social science calculations must of course take account of numerical, of arithmetic factors, but also of qualitative factors. Quebec is Canada's link to the Francophonie, the extension of its culture throughout the world, the influence of its social policies all across the country and even beyond.

That is why this strength, this solidarity that characterizes us, requires effective representation in the House of Commons, that is to say, electoral legislation that will take account of the following three factors in its calculations: demographic representation, appropriate geographic representation, and representation of a community of interests. In that regard, it is my pleasure to quote from the 1991 decision of the Supreme Court:

The content of the *Charter* right to vote is to be determined in a broad and purposive way, having regard to historical and social context. [Recognition of the nation of Quebec is the historical and social context.] The broader philosophy underlying the historical development of the right to vote must be sought and practical considerations, such as social and physical geography, must be borne in mind....

The purpose of the right to vote enshrined in s. 3 of the *Charter* is not equality of voting power per se but the right to "effective representation". The right to vote therefore comprises many factors, of which equity is but one. The section does not guarantee equality of voting power. [There is a distinction between "equity" and "equality".]

Relative parity of voting power is a prime condition of effective representation. Deviations from absolute voter parity, however, may be justified on the grounds of practical impossibility or the provision of more effective representation. Factors like geography, community history, community interests and minority representation may

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need to be taken into account to ensure that our legislative assemblies represent the diversity of our social mosaic.

• (1805)

In Canada, with the aboriginal nations, we are a nation with two founding peoples. I want to return to the spirit of the Laurendeau-Dunton Commission with a binational, bicultural spirit. The best way to respect the notion of two founding peoples is to vote in favour of Bill C-312 and secure the weight Quebec carries.

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a golden opportunity to speak today to Bill C-312. My colleague from Compton—Stanstead introduced this bill when were still debating Bill C-20 on readjusting the number of seats in the House. The NDP introduced Bill C-312 as an amended version.

We were unshakeable in our opposition to the government's bill. It rebuffed any attempts at conciliation. As a result, our party voted against Bill C-20, even though it contained desirable elements. Bill C-20 was of course referred to the Senate and it went through like a shooting star with no sign of resistance.

Is it at all useful to continue to debate and promote our version? Yes, it certainly is. This is definitely a very good time to restate how we differ from the government. Most of all, this discussion will allow us to warn the government on several points, and one in particular. The Constitution of Canada is very old in terms of politics. How many different constitutions have most European countries had since 1867? Ours was written at a time when most Canadians lived in Ontario and Quebec. From scattered British colonies, an attempt was made to build a political entity that was considered more viable and competitive given the rise of the United States of America. Visionaries built a railway across the continent and flew a Union Jack at each end. And there you have modern Canada. That is the country we live in.

When drafting the Constitution, the Fathers of Confederation sought above all to strike an equitable balance between the interests of the two most populous provinces, Ontario and Quebec. They had lived side by side ever since the conquest of New France, and the dynamics were well established.

I believe that the very soul of the 1867 Canadian Constitution was the harmonization of the interests of Upper and Lower Canada in a venture that included the maritime provinces. The Constitution was what led to a sovereign country that had legitimacy in the eyes of the outside world. Any discussion must be firmly anchored in the foundations established in 1867; otherwise it would be meaningless.

For a few months now, the population in the west of the Confederation has exceeded the population in the east. This is a first in our country's history. I would like to take advantage of my opportunity to speak to congratulate our fellow citizens at the other end of Canada. Alberta, whose beginnings were so difficult, is now a prosperous and progressive land. It contributes enormously to the country through its wealth of human and physical resources. British Columbia, which had initially resisted joining Confederation, became a symbol of Canada's beauty and open-mindedness. For all these reasons, I congratulate them.

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This Parliament is finally getting around to providing them with a more flexible way of giving them more seats in the House. It was decided to increase their relative weight within our democracy to allow for a fairer distribution. Representation by population is one of the foundations of our current system; the NDP is delighted that this should be the case. The House will also be more crowded than the kitchen in a Soviet apartment on a holiday, but that is all to the good. The more the merrier.

However, these additions are made to a system that is ill-suited to them. Indeed, there is a clear opposition between rep by pop and communities of interests. Rep by pop is a calculation, it is the beginning of the distribution and sharing. Communities of interests are the adjustments that are necessary so that the sense of belonging, which is the most fundamental aspect of politics, is respected in this sharing. Again, Bill C-20 did not at all take communities of interests into consideration. By contrast, Bill C-312, adds this fundamental notion.

If someone does not understand what I am saying, he or she should pretend to be a Quebecker for a moment. Whether he or she chooses to be Alexandrine, Jean or Pierre for a minute, he or she will see what I mean.

We are a distinct nation in a supranational entity. The dynamics are different. Anyone who refuses to see this obvious fact is deeply mistaken. Consequently, it often happens that one goes to the right while the other moves to the left. If we do not consult each other, we could end up doing more or less anything.

That said, it is obvious to the outside world that we are all passengers on the same big ship. Whether we want or not, wherever Canada goes, Quebec follows: that is the nature of things. At least, we try with all the goodwill in the world.

However, this time we are facing a very serious problem, precisely because we did not consult each other. Bill C-20 went through Parliament like the Millennium Falcon. The Conservatives are adopting an overly simplified attitude, whereby they think they are right and good, while we members of the stubborn opposition, are bad and wrong. There is no room for discussion.

Meanwhile what does the Quebec wing of the government do? It shuts up and continues to look shameful.

• (1810)

If people still have trouble seeing things from our perspective, let me explain briefly. The government decided, without consulting us, that Quebec's democratic weight within the Canadian Confederation can be reduced. Since 1982 and the constitutional capers that led to years and years of bickering, and ultimately to *neechee vo nyet*—nothing at all—it is my job to warn the House.

What about the Quebec members of the Conservative Party? Why have they not said a word about this move to cripple Quebec's democratic status? I do not want to be a Cassandra crying “Death, Death!” but I do believe that the bill was an almost deliberate attack on Quebec. The government goes about this quietly and gradually in order to weaken Quebec. As I have said before in the House, they are taking away a tiny piece now, but they will not stop there. Quebec members are opposed to this, or at least those who can express themselves freely are.

I am really upset about this. As a Quebecker and as a Canadian, I cannot help but think of the opportunity this House missed to fully embrace the best that Canada has to offer. Over the past few months, the NDP has clearly demonstrated that its understanding of the Canadian question is utterly unlike that of the Conservatives and Liberals. Over the past few weeks, it has become obvious that toxic old-school politics are still going strong in Ottawa. In fact, it is getting worse, with cheating, fraud and bickering ruling the day. This comes as no surprise, because it is the only political culture they understand. It is in their DNA. We will see whether the Canadians who have been lied to remember. To Quebeckers, the answer will come naturally: “Je me souviens”. I remember.

To us, difference and diversity are our collective wealth. We have to respect, protect, cherish and, above all, fight for it.

I have some examples. One: the inability to protect French. The bill introduced by my colleague from Trois-Rivières on the use of French in federally regulated enterprises was defeated. This is a bilingual country, but only sometimes. Two: the inability to protect the first nations—the sorry example of Attawapiskat and the last minute resolution to Shannen's dream. Fortunately, the government was smart enough to follow our lead on that initiative. Three: the unilateral reduction of Quebec's weight in the House. I could go on.

Maintaining Quebec's political weight in the House of Commons at the same level it was when the motion recognizing Quebec as a nation in a united Canada was adopted, is more than just a number or a number of MPs. It is a guarantee that my difference is respected. In essence, Bill C-20 is the government's way of telling Quebec that resistance is futile.

Respect for the French language, respect for Quebec, respect for first nations civilization: that is the NDP's vision for this country. That is our plan for a truly strong and united Canada.

As a result of this pell-mell approach, Canada will fall apart. A nation is a group of people who see themselves reflected in a common past and who want to extend that experience into the future. Will we think otherwise one day? That question might never be answered.

In closing, I would say that after successive Liberal and Conservative governments, the image of a great and beautiful Canada that was created in 1867 is starting to crack. That bothers me. I will leave the status quo of petty politics to the other parties because we have better things to do in the NDP. Here is to the new generation of politicians who will bring this country back to its rightful place. Here is to a party that respects difference and democracy.

• (1815)

Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am in fact very pleased to rise today in this House and to tell all my colleagues, particularly those from Quebec, just how proud I am that we are able to stand up for Quebec's level of representation in our democratic system and champion the Quebec culture and what it brings to Canada from an historical standpoint.

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Allow me to put things into context. As everybody knows, Bill C-20 was passed before Christmas. This brought Quebec's representation in this House from 24.35% to about 23%. In fact, the bill provided for the addition of seats in several provinces of Canada, which is quite legitimate, while reducing Quebec's political weight within the House of Commons.

For the Conservatives, who love to talk about laws and law enforcement, I would like to present an argument that has never been successfully challenged and that is still contemporary. It is very important to understand that the Supreme Court stated that, according to the Constitution, representation by population is a constitutional principle. However, this is not called into question at all by this bill. The governments, parliamentarians and legislators must also take into consideration historical and cultural criteria when it comes to the representation of members in this House.

For example, there was a debate on Bill C-7 regarding the selection of senators. I made a number of remarks when I rose to speak about that bill. I stated that the role that the Constitution conferred upon the Senate is one of regional representation. In fact, the Senate was created to enable the regions that had less weight in the House of Commons to be better represented in another chamber. But that was never achieved; it was never honoured. The idea, of course, was to ensure that rights are conferred upon our country's minorities, to some of its cultures and its peoples, in order that they may have a voice in our democratic system.

We have had to fight. The NDP had to fight to get the government to give Quebec more seats. We reminded the government that in 2006 it had passed a motion recognizing Quebec as an integral part of Canada while maintaining its nationhood status, in other words, that it is a distinct nation within a united Canada. The government was very clear about this. Yet, today, the government once again refuses to give Quebec the place it deserves within the House of Commons. The NDP and my colleague from Compton—Stanstead want to fight so that Quebecers maintain the voice to which they are entitled in this House.

This bill does not render invalid the addition of other seats in other provinces: on the contrary. What does this do? It tells Quebecers—in line with everything this government has claimed since it was elected in 2006—that Quebec has a place here, that it has the right to a percentage of representation. And we want it to keep that same percentage of representation, since the Government of Canada has itself recognized Quebec as a nation within Canada. That percentage is 24.35%. Bill C-20 reduces this percentage by a little more than one percentage point. But what are they thinking, on the government side? They are being asked for a little more than one percentage point. It is not as if we were asking for an increase from 24.35% to 50%. We are simply asking them to keep their word.

• (1820)

It is quite simple: let them keep the promise they made to all Quebecers in 2006 when they recognized that Quebec is a nation. And the Supreme Court said in 1991 that consideration must be given to historical and cultural criteria when talking about democratic representation within Canada. So this is clear. I fail to understand why the government wants to flout these principles. It is clear, plain and specific. Quebec is a nation. The Conservatives

recognized this in 2006. In 1991, the Supreme Court recognized that account must be taken of cultural and historical criteria. It is clear and specific, it is in our democracy and in our history, it is right there in front of them.

Once again, I hope that my colleagues in the government will vote in favour of this bill. If they do not, it will show that they are once again going to flout not only Quebecers' and Canadians' desire to have democratic representation in the House, but also a Supreme Court ruling and principles that have been established for years.

The government is inconsistent in its actions. In 2006, it claimed that Quebec is a nation. Everyone was happy; we had been asking for this for a long time. Thank you very much. But right after that, we saw that respect for the French language in this Parliament completely collapsed. I am truly outraged today, for I am ashamed to see the government's scorn of language rights. We saw this yesterday, when they refused to vote for a bill that would allow Quebecers to work in certain federal institutions in their own province in compliance with their language rights.

The government is not even prepared to recognize this or to take action to help Quebecers and ensure that the French language is respected. It claims that French is part of our country and our history, but that is where it ends. There is no action, no funding. The government claims that there will be a commission to examine the French language, but it has never been created, and no funds have been invested for that purpose. It will probably be created in 2014 or 2025, or who knows when. Perhaps it will never be created at all. Empty words.

Emptiness is what the government gives us. I hope that the Conservatives will wake up, give themselves a slap in the face and realize that it is time they recognize that Quebec is part of Canada. Even though Quebecers refused to vote for the Conservatives, the Government of Canada is supposed to represent all Canadians. Whether in British Columbia, the Yukon or Quebec, it is supposed to respect the rights of all Canadians.

Mr. Jean Rousseau (Compton—Stanstead, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would sincerely like to thank all the MPs of this 41st Parliament who took part in this democratic exercise, which was made possible through the reading of a private member's bill. Given how this government operates, it is almost a miracle that we are still entitled to speak in the House. I do not have the impression that the Conservatives have ever listened to how they sound when they speak; otherwise they would ask themselves questions about the meaning of the words "honesty" and "democracy".

I would particularly like to congratulate my colleagues who supported the undertaking set in motion so long ago to grant nation status to the province of Quebec. Indeed, this nation, Quebec, which was recognized in 2006 in a motion moved by the current Prime Minister, and adopted by a large majority during the 39th Parliament, is at the core of this bill. In giving recognition to this status, Canada's Parliament gave Quebec the historic weight it deserves as one of the founding peoples.

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Subclause 2(3) is the important one. The proportion of members from the province of Quebec shall remain unchanged from the representation that it had on November 27, 2006, when the motion was adopted in the House of Commons recognizing that the Québécois form a nation within a united Canada. However, I sometimes get the impression that the current government is trying to divide Quebec, and that is extremely regrettable.

Nevertheless, the introduction in the House of Commons of Bill C-312 for readjusting the number of members of the House of Commons in order to ensure that Quebec should maintain the same relative political weight is of key importance in the stability and unity of our country. It is important to mention here that the distribution of seats in the House of Commons has always taken the following into consideration: the community of interests, which was mentioned by several of my colleagues; historical development; the electoral quotient, which we recognize; and ensuring that a riding should not be too vast in size.

As a result, the addition of more representatives to the House involves a number of special arrangements that must be factored in. Giving consideration and value to one evaluation criteria rather than another must be judicious and in harmony with our traditions and customs. Among other things, the representatives elected to Canada's Parliament must reflect our Canadian realities, which pertain to geography, demography, identity, history and culture.

It is important to admit that this exercise of adjusting the number of seats and, therefore, adjusting the democratic representation may be unpleasant and difficult, considering all the factors hitherto enumerated. In any event, nobody doubts the importance of new legislation, which is long overdue both in the eyes of the public and our elected representatives. The urgency stems from the demographic explosion of provinces such as Ontario, Alberta, and British Columbia.

That does not present a problem in our eyes. Those regions of Canada deserve a readjustment of representation in the House in order to better reflect variations in population. The historical weight of the Quebec nation is hugely important at this time when calculating these modifications. Quebec's place in Canada, especially its representation in the House of Commons must be respected in order to ensure that Quebeckers can see themselves reflected in the composition of the House.

In closing, Bill C-312 is extremely simple. It includes a clause that is extremely important. The purpose of bill C-312 is to enable Quebec to keep its rightful place within the great Canadian family. Quebeckers are, however, increasingly worried about this government that was elected—and listen closely to what I am about to say—by 39% of Canadian voters. For those who have tried to convince us over recent days that 900,000 more people voted in the last election, I would tell them that the total number of voters did not even exceed 60% of those electors entitled to vote.

This government listens to neither elected representatives nor Canadians, and especially not Quebeckers. Thank you to everybody, including my wife who is listening to me on CPAC. I wish everybody a long and prosperous life!

•(1825)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): It being 6:30 p.m., the time provided for the debate has expired.

The vote 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): Pursuant to Standing Order 93, a recorded division on the motion stands deferred until Wednesday, March 7, 2012, immediately after the time provided for private members' business.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

•(1830)

[*English*]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to have a discussion on the important issue of housing and the condition of homes in rural and remote areas in the province of Manitoba and on reserves and in other communities. I want to take this opportunity to highlight what I think is really important.

We acknowledge the need for the federal government to play a role with respect to housing. There is a direct need for the federal government to play a role with respect to aboriginal communities. There are places such as Attawapiskat, and in Manitoba places such as Red Sucker Lake and many other first nations reserves where there is a great need and a high demand for housing.

I would also like to provide some comment with regard to the subsidies that are given to provinces through non-profit housing organizations, and that includes ongoing annual operational costs for housing. It was estimated at one time that there were 20,000 non-profit housing units in the province of Manitoba.

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The federal government has played a fairly significant role in the past. It needs to look at ways to address the needs of today, whether it is with respect to on-reserve housing or whether it is with respect to the larger picture of non-profit housing. Many would argue that the first priority has to be first nations housing. I represent the riding of Winnipeg North and I could speak to the housing needs there. Whether it is infill housing, life lease programs, housing co-ops, or non-profit housing, the government has a role to play with respect to development.

To give hope to individuals, the federal government needs to play a stronger role. Could the parliamentary secretary provide an explanation or some rationale as to what he believes the Conservative government's intentions are with respect to housing? We are getting closer to March 29, budget day. How does the government see housing here in Canada?

I would like the parliamentary secretary to provide comments with respect to two important areas: one, housing conditions for first nations; and two, non-profit housing and low-income housing, which are issues in all cities and municipalities across Canada.

Mr. Greg Rickford (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, for the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member was right about something. Very recent governments have been doing a lot of work on that. I have a sense of this having lived in isolated first nations communities in the province of Manitoba, some 5 to 10 years ago. Considerable progress has been made. There is more work to be done, so I am pleased to rise and speak to the question from the hon. member for Winnipeg North.

Our government recognizes that access to safe and affordable housing is essential for improving economic and social outcomes and for supporting healthy, sustainable first nation communities. The Government of Canada recognizes that there are still challenges in on-reserve housing and that these conditions must be improved. That is why we have a plan and we will continue to invest in practical solutions with real results. We are focusing our efforts on making a real and measurable difference in the lives and in the communities of first nations people.

The Government of Canada's annual investments through the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation and Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada translate to tangible results. These investments support the construction of approximately 1,750 new homes and the renovation of some 3,100 homes per year in first nations communities, as well as supporting social housing, capacity development and other housing related activities.

Since 2006, the Government of Canada has provided approximately \$1 billion in on-reserve housing to support first nations communities. On-reserve housing projects are an important part of community development and we will continue to provide support for first nations in this regard.

Our government will continue to work in partnership with first nations to address housing requirements and ensure that sustainable and flexible options are available for first nations communities in new and innovative ideas around housing development on reserve.

On January 24, our government reinforced its commitment to focus on real progress and issues that mattered to first nations at the Crown-First Nations Gathering. Both the Government of Canada and the Assembly of First Nations committed to advancing a constructive relationship based on the core principles of mutual understanding, respect, ensuring mutually acceptable outcomes and accountability and, of course, shared priorities. Five important steps for immediate action were agreed upon for practical ways in which we could improve the quality of life and long-term economic prosperity of Canada's first nations, building on the Canada Assembly of First Nations joint action plan launched with the minister and the national chief of AFN last summer.

One of the steps agreed upon was renewing the relationship with the first nations and the Canadian government, improving lives of first nations people and their communities across the country and the ongoing commitment that would require a sustained and dedicated effort from all levels of government, from all first nations leaders, whether we are talking about housing, water, infrastructure and things like education, which have recently been debated in this place.

We are fully aware of the challenges facing first nations in the area of housing and we are working to address those changes. Clearly, this government is committed to helping first nations meet their housing needs.

• (1835)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, there is a great deal of need to recognize the current housing stock and conditions on our first nations. I think there was an underlying theme in regard to whether the government was aware of the numbers.

Could the member provide us with the numbers of homes that are in need of repair and the number of homes that are needed to meet the needs and demands on first nations?

There seems to be a great deal of goodwill from our aboriginal leadership to try to get to the bottom of those numbers. Does the government have any of those numbers and would he be prepared to share those with us this evening?

[Translation]

Mr. Greg Rickford: Mr. Speaker, clearly our government has repeatedly demonstrated its commitment to the First Nations, by making investments and taking concrete action to enable them to continue to contribute to Canada's prosperity and benefit from that prosperity. That is why our government is determined to help the First Nations meet their housing needs.

In the last five years, Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada has spent an average of \$155 million per year on housing on reserves. That is also why we have announced, as part of Canada's Economic Action Plan, an additional investment of \$400 million for housing on reserves. That investment will come from Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada and the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation.

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It is clear that our government is making efforts to bring about concrete changes in the lives of members of the First Nations in the area of housing.

● (1840)

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Ms. Manon Perreault (Montcalm, NDP): Mr. Speaker, with all due respect for my colleagues in the House, I have to admit that I was very disappointed by the remarks made by the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development on December 5. She told this House that to meet the needs of persons living with functional limitations, her government had created the registered disability savings plan.

I would like to draw the minister's attention to the fact that a majority of the people targeted by this measure are low-income or living below the poverty line. This measure therefore simply does not correspond to the reality of the lives of persons with disabilities in Canada and does not meet their needs at the present time.

I would like to remind the minister that one Canadian in seven lives with a functional limitation. That is why I reiterate that we need a real action plan that will enable these individuals, in a tangible and immediate way, to enter the labour market. I strongly believe that in order to achieve this, they need support and resources to help them.

I know very well that access ramps alone do not solve all the problems, as the minister seems to think. When we talk about workplace accessibility, we have to think about adapting workstations. We can consider, for example, persons with hearing loss, for whom flashing lights must be provided in case of fire, and installing adapted software for individuals living with a visual impairment.

I would like to come back to a particularly shocking point. In response to a question on the order paper, we recently learned that since the Enabling Accessibility Fund for persons with disabilities was created, in 2007, Quebec has received barely 3% of the grants allocated under the fund. If we examine those documents, we find that nearly 85% of the \$67.4 million granted by the federal government has been spent in Conservative ridings in Canada. This situation is unacceptable and Quebecers find it hard to understand why they have received such a meagre share of that money.

I remind members once again that I am asking for nothing less than a fair division, without a hint of political partisanship, as this assistance is vital to those living with a functional limitation who need a hand to get a job. It is possible to support disabled people from a social perspective by ending their isolation and enabling them to play an active role in their communities.

If this Conservative government's intention is to truly improve the living conditions of disabled persons, I do not understand why the Canada pension plan disability program systematically turns down 55% of initial applications. This makes the process longer and more difficult. It is easy to understand why most of these people would never take the steps to appeal this decision. In my opinion, it is an act of bad faith to refuse to give first-time applicants the disability benefit when they really need it.

Having said that, if the government believes, by avoiding a census of those persons living with functional limitations, that it will make the problems these people face go away, they are hugely

mistaken. It would be wrong to underestimate the potential and drive of all those people with disabilities who wish to improve their living conditions and get back into the workforce.

It is my view that this government must develop a concrete action plan to truly support all those disabled Canadians in their effort to re-join the workforce.

[English]

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to respond to the question of the member for Montcalm on the issue of data collection to support individuals with disabilities.

In order to modernize data collection, in April 2010 the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development announced that the Government of Canada had developed a new strategy to collect and disseminate data on people with disabilities. We are currently working with Canadian national disability organizations and experts, as well as with the provinces and territories, to implement the new data strategy. Because information is gathered more regularly, the strategy will enable our government to be more responsive, timely and targeted when addressing disability issues, allowing us to see trends earlier than if we were only collecting the data every five years.

● (1845)

[Translation]

The new strategy will ensure that information about income, demographics, education, the job market and health continues to be available.

[English]

Our new approach to data collection is in line with our obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which was ratified by Canada in March 2010. The Government of Canada is committed to promoting the full inclusion and participation of Canadians with disabilities in all aspects of society.

Each year, the government invests to help address the needs of people with disabilities in different areas. Accessibility, for example, is a high priority for our government. Through the enabling accessibility fund, we are helping Canadians contribute to and participate fully in their communities by improving access to facilities, activities and services. Our government is providing accessibility funds to make more than 600 buildings throughout Canada, such as community centres, more accessible.

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Our government also supports the income security of people with disabilities through the registered disability savings plan, the Canada disability savings grant and the Canada disability savings bond, as well as a range of tax measures, including the disability tax credit, the first-time homebuyer's tax credit and the working income tax benefit disability supplement.

I hope members of the House will join me in supporting our improved strategy for data collection and celebrating the progress we have made as our society in Canada moves toward full inclusion and participation of people with disabilities.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Manon Perreault: Mr. Speaker, we heard our colleague attempt to praise our government for data collection, but that does not explain why it stopped tracking them. If we cannot track people, it is difficult to help them. It is clear that we have a difference of opinion.

What I am asking for from my colleague is a real understanding of the problems faced by Canadians living with disabilities and the realistic, appropriate and very immediate solutions to these problems for these people. What I am asking for is a real commitment from this government and a concrete action plan, one that will meet the basic needs of these people—such as putting a roof over their heads and food in their cupboards—foster their independence, and provide them with support when they return to work. That is what disabled Canadians are entitled to expect from their government, nothing less.

[*English*]

Ms. Kellie Leitch: Mr. Speaker, the government has made a full and real commitment to individuals with disabilities. Part of the reason I decided to run as a member of Parliament to support this government was because of my previous involvement with individuals with disabilities and their focus on it.

Another empowering experience for people with disabilities is finding meaningful employment. Each year our government transfers over \$218 million to provinces through the federal-provincial labour market agreements for people with disabilities. These agreements support a broad range of programs and services that respond to the labour market needs for people with disabilities. This helps people with disabilities get the training and jobs they need. About 300,000 people are assisted through these agreements each year.

Our government also invests almost \$30 million each year through the opportunities fund. This fund supports projects that help people with disabilities who are not eligible for employment insurance. It helps them prepare for, get jobs and become self-employed.

We are all working toward all Canadians having the opportunities to participate in the economy and share in our country's success. I hope the NDP is going to join us in that strategy instead of voting against it.

[*Translation*]

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Mr. Pierre Jacob (Brome—Missisquoi, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on November 4, I received a contradictory response from the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety. I hope that this evening the minister will enlighten us as to his position. The

fact that this bill was passed on February 15 in this House and the government trumpeted victory at the conclusion of that vote in no way detracts from the scope of this evening's adjournment proceedings. The legislative process of Bill C-19 is following its course.

My question dealt with the preservation of the firearms registry data. I must admit that I am quite puzzled by this government's attitude toward crime. On the one hand it adopts a repressive approach, and on the other it is in the process of destroying an effective tool for police officers. This is a tool to control the use of long guns in Canada and to track the owners of such weapons.

It also curbs the trafficking of illegal weapons and serves to prevent the use of firearms in violent crimes against vulnerable persons such as female victims of domestic violence. Ending the registry is going to make things worse, and it runs counter to the effective combatting of crime. In reality, it is going to increase the number of victims in this country. For all these reasons I deplore this initiative of the government, who wants not only to abolish the firearms registry but to destroy the data collected, and who is categorically refusing to transfer it to the provinces, including Quebec, which is holding out its hand to the federal government.

This province is prepared to take over and manage this data. All Canadians and Quebecers still remember the slaughter at the École polytechnique, the 22nd anniversary of which was marked last December. That blow to the heart of everyone argues in favour of transferring the data to Quebec. The federal government's objection to proceeding with this transfer is inconsistent with an effective battle against crime.

Given the lack of co-operation between the federal government and Quebec, the provincial minister of public safety announced in a press release on December 13, 2011, that, if Bill C-19 were passed, he would go to court to recover the data from the registration certificates of non-restricted firearms owned by Quebecers, data that are found in the Canadian firearms registry.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety said that the long gun registry does nothing to prevent criminals from obtaining firearms. I would like to challenge that statement. Certainly, criminals will always find backdoor methods of obtaining weapons, but the registry nevertheless constitutes an effective safeguard. Thanks to this registry, certain licence holders who presented real risk to public safety were deprived of the use of their firearms. Crimes were thus prevented. The registry protects both the public and police officers, and prevents them from becoming victims.

• (1850)

[*English*]

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as we have already mentioned in this House, none of us want to see guns fall into the hands of violent criminals. This is why we want to preserve and enhance the measures that work to reduce crime and protect Canadians.

Adjournment Proceedings

The hon. member refers to horrible incidents that should not be forgotten. Such arguments appeal to the very strong reactions we have to tragic events involving grievous gun crimes. It is understandable that some people wish to resort to massive controls by government in the hope of preventing such terrible violence from ever occurring again.

I should be clear that registering long guns does nothing to prevent such incidents. Our government is committed to getting tough on crime but the criminalization of our hunters, farmers and sport shooters will not have an impact on crime in Canada's major cities. We do not support treating them as criminals.

The May 2006 report of the Auditor General stated that the Canadian Firearms Centre could not demonstrate evidence-based outcomes of its activities, such as reduced threats from firearms, injuries and deaths, or helping to minimize risks to the public.

The facts are that the long gun registry has been ineffective, costly and wasteful. It has done nothing to help prevent gun crime in Canada or to help increase the safety of our communities. Canadians want gun control measures that enhance safety on our streets by preventing firearms from falling into the hands of dangerous people and by setting severe consequences for those who commit violent gun crimes. That is what our government is doing.

As we have said, the most effective gun control tool we have in this country is our current gun licensing system, which remains unchanged in Bill C-19. Every individual who wishes to possess and acquire firearms must take the required Canadian firearms safety course and pass the related test. Those wishing to possess and acquire restricted firearms must pass the Canadian restricted firearms safety course.

Firearms licence applicants are also subject to a screening process by the Chief Firearms Officers or their representatives, including a criminal background check, which determines if they have committed a serious criminal offence or if they are prohibited from owning firearms by a court ordered sanction, or if they present a risk to themselves or others. If any of these conditions exist, they will not be granted the privilege of possessing a firearm.

Canadians gave our government a strong mandate to end the long gun registry once and for all, and that is exactly what we will do. The successful vote on the third reading of the bill on February 15 marked a leap forward toward fulfilling our promise to scrap the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry.

We are delighted to be closer than ever to doing away with the \$2 billion boondoggle that criminalizes law-abiding Canadians, like those long gun owners in my riding of Simcoe—Grey. Unsurprisingly, the NDP and the Liberals once again reminded Canadians that, while they oppose tougher sentences for real criminals, they will

never miss an opportunity to criminalize law-abiding farmers and duck hunters.

Law-abiding Canadians know that only this Conservative government will stand up for their rights.

● (1855)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Jacob: Mr. Speaker, Quebec simply wants to maintain the data in the registry, which have already been paid for by Quebec taxpayers. I asked this question in order to come to a better understanding of this government's position. I am trying to understand the Conservative government's logic. It is saying that it is on the side of victims and yet it continues to refuse to co-operate with Quebec with regard to the transfer of this data, which would be helpful in preventing crime and protecting victims. It is a contradictory approach. Quebec is of the opinion that, if the data were transferred, it would help in the fight against crime and thus provide long-term protection to victims.

[*English*]

Ms. Kellie Leitch: Mr. Speaker, this government believes that violent gun crimes in Canada will be prevented by tougher criminal laws and sanctions, not by maintaining useless and incomplete databases on long guns.

Our government is committed to combatting gun crime, as well as other forms of serious violence, and maintaining the safety of our streets and communities. We have long recognized that these objectives cannot be realized through ineffective measures, such as the long gun registry which targets law-abiding hunters, farmers and sport shooters.

February 15 was a great day for rural and northern Canadians, like those in my riding of Simcoe—Grey. It was also the day that the NDP members from Thunder Bay—Rainy River and Thunder Bay—Superior North stood up to the NDP's downtown big union bosses and voted to scrap the long gun registry. This shows that the NDP punishes MPs who speak for their northern and rural constituents while rewarding MPs who break their word.

What worries me is that this is just another example of the NDP's reckless and irresponsible choices that hurt law-abiding citizens like those in my riding.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): 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 6:58 p.m.)

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