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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, June 19, 2007

—
Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, June 19, 2007

The House met at 10:00 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)

[*English*]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

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

* * *

PILOTAGE ACT

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-64, An Act to amend the Pilotage Act.

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

* * *

INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1) I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian interparliamentary delegation of the Canadian section of the Inter-Parliamentary Forum of the Americas, FIPA, respecting its participation in the 16th meeting of the executive committee of the Inter-Parliamentary Forum of the Americas held in Brasilia, Brazil, from May 31 to June 1, 2007, and to the mission to the 37th regular session of the general assembly of the Organization of American States held in Panama City, Panama, from June 3 to June 5, 2007.

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COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Mr. Gary Goodyear (Cambridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to stand today and present the 56th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. I must say that the committee worked very hard this year and I want to thank all

members. It was a very cohesive and hard-working committee and all the peripheral staff worked so hard getting a number of things done. Indeed, this is our 56th report.

The report is regarding the order of reference of Monday, May 28, 2007, Bill C-54, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act (accountability with respect to loans). The committee considered the bill in great detail, heard from a number of witnesses and experts and reports the bill with some amendments.

* * *

ITALIAN-CANADIAN RECOGNITION AND RESTITUTION ACT

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-461, An Act to recognize the injustice that was done to persons of Italian origin through their “enemy alien” designation and internment during the Second World War, and to provide for restitution and promote education on Italian-Canadian history.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am tabling a bill entitled “an act to recognize the injustice that was done to persons of Italian origin through their “enemy alien” designation and internment during the Second World War, and to provide for restitution and promote education on Italian-Canadian history”.

The history is too long to explain at this time. It will be done during second reading but during the second world war immigrants and Canadians of Italian origin were incarcerated and designated as enemy aliens. I would like to highlight that no charges were ever laid.

I tabled the same bill in 2005 prior to the Liberals signing a deal with the Italian community to create the well-known ACE program that would have righted these wrongs. However, in typical Conservative fashion, the government has denied the existence of the program and has decided not to honour the signed deal.

Therefore, I have no choice but to retable the bill. The bill is not unique or unprecedented in comparison to deals made with other cultural communities.

Why will the government not do the right thing and apologize to the Italian community for past injustices. Why does the government favour one community over another and pit Canadians against each other?

I thank the member for Eglinton—Lawrence for supporting the bill.

Routine Proceedings

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

* * *

●(1010)

PETITIONS

YOUNG OFFENDER LEGISLATION

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my honour, on behalf of Dylan Cole McGillis, an unsuspecting victim of an unprovoked, violent and fatal attack, and on behalf of thousands of other Canadian citizens who were victims of violent crimes, to present this petition.

The petitioners request that the House of Commons introduce legislation whereby violent young offenders would be subject to mandatory minimum sentences regardless of age. A part of this, of course, we have done and more will be done.

This petition has about 20,000 signatures and more are being collected. Many of these signatures are from the constituency of Battlefords—Lloydminster and many others from Vegreville—Wainwright. Anyone who would like to add their names to this petition can do so online at www.dylanmcgillis.ca.

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I wish to table today a petition on behalf of the residents of Prince Edward—Hastings and the surrounding area who are calling upon Parliament to end the registration requirement for non-restricted long guns.

After continuous delay with clearly no definable results, this petition is long overdue.

INCOME TRUSTS

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present this income trust broken promise petition on behalf of Peter Folkes of Markham, Ontario, who remembers that the Prime Minister was boasting about his apparent commitment to accountability when he said that there was no greater fraud than a promise not kept.

The petitioners remind the Prime Minister that he promised never to tax income trusts but that he recklessly broke that promise by imposing a 31.5% punitive tax which permanently wiped out over \$25 billion of hard-earned retirement savings of over two million Canadians, particularly seniors.

The petitioners, therefore, call upon the Conservative minority government to, first, admit that the decision to tax income trusts was based on flawed methodology and incorrect assumptions; second, to apologize to those who were unfairly harmed by this broken promise; and finally, to repeal the punitive 31.5% tax on income trusts.

TORONTO ISLAND AIRPORT

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to introduce three petitions. The first one is very timely, as we are about to debate the Aeronautics Act, Bill C-6.

The petitioners state that the Toronto Island Airport is heavily subsidized by taxpayers and has been losing money every year for

the last 15 years. They note that the Toronto Port Authority lost \$6 million this year in a \$10 million business, that operating an airport is contrary to the vision of a clean, green and vibrant waterfront, and that the Toronto Port Authority is an unaccountable and rogue agency that was created against the wishes of Torontonians.

Therefore, the petitioners are calling upon the Government of Canada to first, abolish the Toronto Port Authority; second, close the Island Airport; and third, return the waterfront to the people of Toronto.

●(1015)

CHILD CARE

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is from a large number of parents across Canada who say that high quality child care is a benefit to all children, that it enhances health and school readiness, that it reduces family poverty, that it promotes social inclusion and workforce productivity and that cancelling funding for new child care after a year eliminates the plans of communities to expand affordable child care to rural and other high needs communities in developing their child care plans.

Therefore, the petitioners call upon the Government of Canada to increase the funding for a national child care program and also protect child care and make it accountable by enshrining it in legislation with Bill C-303, the national child care act, to be a cornerstone of Canada, like the Canada Health Act.

INCOME TAX ACT

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the third petition is from petitioners also from across the country who say that many tradespeople can be out of work in one area of the country while another region suffers from temporary skilled labour shortages simply because the cost of travelling is too high, and that out of work tradespeople currently have to finance their own travel and accommodation should they wish to move to another region where there are jobs available.

Therefore, these petitioners are asking us to support Bill C-390, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act, which would allow tradespeople to deduct travel and accommodation expenses should they need to move to a new region for employment.

INCOME TRUSTS

Hon. Robert Thibault (West Nova, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I present this income trust broken promise petition on behalf of Tracy Whiteside from Clarksburg, Ontario, who remembers the Prime Minister boasting about his apparent commitment to accountability when he said, “The greatest fraud is a promise not kept”.

Routine Proceedings

The petitioners remind the Prime Minister that he promised never to tax income trusts but that he recklessly broke that promise by imposing a 31.5% punitive tax which permanently wiped out over \$25 billion of the hard-earned retirement savings of over two million Canadians, particularly seniors.

The petitioners, therefore, call upon the government to admit, first, that the decision to tax income trusts was based on flawed methodology and incorrect assumptions; second, to apologize to those who were unfairly harmed by this broken promise; and finally, to repeal the punitive 31.5% tax on income trusts.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the following questions will be answered today: Nos. 210 and 213.

[Text]

Question No. 210—**Mr. Wayne Marston:**

With regard to programs and spending by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) within the riding of Hamilton East—Stoney Creek: (a) what was the amount spent in 2006; (b) what is the projected budget for 2007 and 2008 (if applicable and available); (c) how many CMHC-funded housing units for singles and families currently exist; (d) how many CMHC-funded housing units for singles and families are planned for 2006 and 2007; and (e) what is the amount that CMHC has provided to housing co-ops in the riding for maintenance over the last two years and what will be the amount over the next two years?

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, CMHC administers housing programs through agreements with provinces and does not compile or analyze expenditure information by electoral district. Information on CMHC program spending is disclosed in annual reports. However, over the course of the 39th Parliament, CMHC has undertaken efforts to identify federal expenditures by postal codes which it has then summarized by electoral districts using a tool developed by Statistics Canada. While there is some promise in this approach, there is also a significant potential for error. However, CMHC has, to the best of its ability, verified the location of the units and program spending contained in this answer to try to ensure they are in the riding of Hamilton East—Stoney Creek.

With respect to programs and spending administered by Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, CMHC, within the riding of Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, CMHC does not administer any co-operative housing units in the riding of Hamilton East—Stoney Creek. It is to be noted that the responsibility for the administration of the bulk of the CMHC subsidized projects off reserve was transferred to the province of Ontario under the Canada-Ontario social housing agreement signed in 1999. There are additional units in the riding receiving ongoing federal assistance under the social housing agreement administered by the province of Ontario which are not included above. The province has the lead role for these units and does not report subsidies by project to CMHC.

Under federal renovation programs, some \$566,600 was committed for 43 units in the riding between January 1, 2006 and December 31, 2006. CMHC is unable to provide a forecast of how

many more units and dollars will be committed in 2007 and 2008, since this will depend on the number of applications approved.

The province of Ontario administers the Canada-Ontario affordable housing program agreement. According to information provided by the province of Ontario, there was not any commitment under this program in the riding of Hamilton East—Stoney Creek in 2006. It should be noted that the province of Ontario is not required to provide forecasts of units planned by riding to CMHC.

Question No. 213—**Mr. Richard Nadeau:**

With regard to leases signed by the government in the National Capital Region, what is: (a) the number of such leases expiring in 2006 in the Ottawa region and in the Outaouais region; (b) the number of such leases expiring in 2007 in the Ottawa region and in the Outaouais region; (c) the number of such leases expiring in 2008 in the Ottawa region and in the Outaouais region; and (d) the number of vacant premises in the Ottawa region and in the Outaouais region in 2007?

Mr. James Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the response is as follows: Office Space: a) Expiring leases in calendar year 2006: 68* (57 NCA Ontario and 11 NCA Quebec) b) Expiring leases in calendar year 2007 : 64 (56 NCA Ontario and 8 NCA Quebec) c) Expiring leases in calendar year 2008 : 93 (87 NCA Ontario and 6 NCA Quebec) d) Vacant premises in NCA for 2007: 5 (4 NCA Ontario and 1 NCA Quebec)

Commercial Space: a) 125 leases signed by the government expiring in 2006 in the NCA Ontario and 43 leases signed by the government expiring in 2006 in the Outaouais region; b) 115 leases signed by the government expiring in 2007 in the NCA Ontario and 15 leases signed by the government expiring in 2007 in the Outaouais region; c) 28 leases signed by the government expiring in 2008 in the NCA Ontario and 9 leases signed by the government expiring in 2008 in the Outaouais region d) 34 vacant premises in the NCA Ontario and 1 vacant premises in the Outaouais region in 2007.

*For this report, we assumed that each available option would be exercised. Between June 2006, the date on which question No. 59 was answered, and December 31, 2006, PWGSC amended four leases that were expiring in 2006 to postpone the end date to a subsequent year. The consequence of doing this was that the number of expiring leases was reduced on response a) of question No. 213.

* * *

[English]

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if Question No. 207 could be made an order for return, this return would be tabled immediately.

Privilege

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Text]

Question No. 207—**Ms. Colleen Beaumier:**

With regard to the Department of Canadian Heritage's Plans and Priorities for the Multiculturalism Program: (a) for the fiscal years 2005-2006 to 2009-2010, what is the actual and planned spending for all multiculturalism programs falling under the program activities "Promotion of Intercultural Understanding" and "Participation in Community and Civic Life"; (b) for the fiscal years 2005-2006 to 2009-2010, was any multiculturalism funding reallocated and will any multiculturalism funding be reallocated and, if so, (i) to which departments, (ii) how much funding has each department specifically received or will receive, (iii) to what purposes specifically; (c) for the fiscal years 2005-2006 to 2009-2010, was any multiculturalism funding allocated or will any multiculturalism funding be allocated and to what purpose; (d) what was the total value of multiculturalism funding authorized and released by the Minister's Office on the last two days of the 2006-2007 fiscal year; (e) in 2006-2007, what was the total value of multiculturalism funding allocated by the Department but not released to reimburse actual expenditures occurred by the organization; (f) who specifically is the "Multiculturalism Champion" and what is his or her mandate; (g) who specifically sits on the Departmental Steering Committee on Multiculturalism and what is its mandate; and (h) once multiculturalism is mainstreamed into the day to day operations of the Department, will the Multiculturalism Program exist as an independent program or department and will it or will it not receive funding directly as an independent program?

(Return tabled)

[English]

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, finally, I ask that the remaining questions be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Speaker: The Chair has notice of a question of privilege from the hon. member for Selkirk—Interlake.

* * *

PRIVILEGE

PRESS RELEASE BY MEMBER FOR ETOBICOKE CENTRE

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege based on a press release issued by the member for Etobicoke Centre in which he makes false statements, and accuses me of plagiarism and voting against a motion I did not vote against.

I believe this allegation by the member for Etobicoke Centre is an action taken with the intended affect of having me withdraw my private member's bill, Bill C-459, which directly affects the representation of my constituents and performance of my privileged parliamentary duties.

In order to begin to correct the public record on this issue, I want to outline the factual course of events culminating in the presentation of my private member's bill, Bill C-459, An Act to establish a Ukrainian Famine and Genocide Memorial Day and to recognize the Ukrainian Famine of 1932-33 as an act of genocide. All of these events can be backed up by emails sent and received by my office and those of my colleagues and legislative services.

First, as someone of Ukrainian heritage, I was in communication with other members of this House as early as last year on my interest

in working on issues related to the Canadian Ukrainian community and my interest in Ukrainian issues.

In the spring of this year it was suggested to me that recognizing the Ukrainian famine as genocide with a memorial day in November would be an important issue to address this year, as it is the 75th anniversary of the famine of 1932.

I discussed this with Lisa Shymko of the Canadian Friends of Ukraine and my colleague Senator Andreychuk. I was also part of a meeting with the executive director of the Shevchenko Foundation on various issues related to the Ukrainian Canadian community in Canada and holodomor was discussed. I recently received an appreciative letter from this organization for my work on presenting this bill.

I want to give full credit to Senator Andreychuk who moved a similar motion a few years ago in the other place which was adopted unanimously. The senator shared her expertise and encouraged me to proceed with a similar motion or bill in the House, and provided assistance to me with the wording and communications strategy for my bill.

I consulted with two of my colleagues over the wording and whether it should be done as a motion or bill. I decided it should be a bill and I submitted my wording and requested legislative services on May 3, 2007 to have the bill drafted. My office received a rough draft of the bill on May 8 and it was approved on May 16. The request for final formatting and translation was made May 16, 2007. I gave notice of my bill on May 31, 2007, before the member for Etobicoke Centre gave notice of his bill, and I introduced the bill for first reading on June 13, 2007.

The member for Etobicoke Centre did not give notice of his bill until the day after I gave notice of my bill and he did not introduce it until much later. The notice paper, legislative services and my office emails can confirm all of these dates.

As is clear from this record of dates, I could not have possibly known of the content of his bill and therefore his accusations of plagiarism are truly false. I was only informed that there was a bill related to mine, but that the two bills were substantially different from each other and that there was no problem in proceeding with my bill.

I want to make it very clear that the wording of my bill was established in consultation with my colleagues in April and submitted for drafting on May 3, over a month before I heard about the member for Etobicoke Centre's bill and more than a month before his introduction of Bill C-450 only after which I would have first had the opportunity to see the text of his bill. Clearly, I could not have possibly plagiarized his bill.

On the evening of June 13, 2007 in the House, I sought further confirmation from the table officer on duty on the determination of any substantive difference between my bill and the bill of the member for Etobicoke Centre, who I was now aware had given notice of and introduced a similar bill.

I received confirmation on Monday, June 18 that the decision on whether a bill is substantively different is made by you, Mr. Speaker, after an initial assessment by the journals branch.

I am therefore raising this point of privilege because I believe, based on the events as outlined above, that it is clear that the member for Etobicoke Centre, who knows full well that I could not have seen the text of his bill when I gave notice of my bill, Bill C-459, and yet proceeded to issue the press release in question.

Further, when I submitted my wording and asked for it to be drafted in April of this year as a private member's bill, I had no knowledge of the member for Etobicoke Centre's intention to submit a similar bill.

Further to my question of privilege, he states in his press release that I voted against his motion to adopt his bill at all stages when he knows that I did not vote against his motion. That is the normal procedure for both Conservative and past Liberal governments not to fast track private member's bills, whether it be my own bill or an opposition member's bill.

The order paper is full of worthy bills and they all follow a uniform process of debate and vote in a fair system of precedence. The member for Etobicoke Centre is trying to queue jump in front of others in the order of precedence.

I would like to point to a statement made by a previous Speaker that I think applies to this situation. Speaker Fraser said:

The unjust damaging of a Member's good name might also be seen as constituting an obstruction. The privileges of a Member are violated by any action which might impede him or her in the fulfilment of his or her duties and functions. It is obvious that the unjust damaging of a reputation could constitute such an impediment.

• (1020)

I think the statement makes it clear that my privilege has been violated by the member for Etobicoke Centre's slanderous and intimidating acts.

There are further examples where items published in newspapers and actions taken outside the House have been found by Speakers to establish a prima facie question of privilege due to their intimidating and chilling effect upon a member's ability to perform parliamentary duties. I point to Speaker Bosley's ruling of May 6, 1985, where a newspaper advertisement was deemed to impact a member's privilege. He said:

Any action which impedes or tends to impede a Member in the discharge of his duties is a breach of privilege. There are ample citations and precedents to bear this out.

Further examples include Speaker Jerome's ruling of December 6, 1978, as well as a ruling on a March 9, 1998 question of privilege where a newspaper article was argued to constitute an attempt to intimidate the Speaker and collectively the House. Speaker Parent ruled that there was a prima facie case of privilege.

On March 16, 1983 Mr. Mackasey raised a question of privilege in order to denounce accusations made in a series of articles appearing in the *Montreal Gazette*, to the effect that he was a paid lobbyist. On March 22, 1983 on page 24027 of *Hansard* the Speaker ruled that he had a prima facie question of privilege. The reasons given by the Speaker from page 29 of *Selected Decisions of Speaker Jeanne Sauv e* state:

Not only do defamatory allegations about Members place the entire institution of Parliament under a cloud, they also prevent Members from performing their duties as long as the matter remains unresolved, since, as one authority states, such allegations bring Members into "hatred, contempt or ridicule". Moreover, authorities and

Privilege

precedents agree that even though a Member can "seek a remedy in the courts, he cannot function effectively as a Member while this slur upon his reputation remains". Since there is no way of knowing how long litigation would take, the Member must be allowed to re-establish his reputation as speedily as possible by referring the matter to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections.

On page 251 of Joseph Maingot's *Parliamentary Privilege in Canada, 3rd ed.* there is a reference to members. It says:

The House of Commons is prepared to find contempt in respect of utterances within the category of libel and slander and also in respect of utterances which do not meet that standard. As put by Bourinot, "any scandalous and libellous reflection on the proceedings of the House—" and "libels upon members individually—".

I would also refer to a Speaker's ruling from October 29, 1980 at page 4213 of *Hansard*. The Speaker said:

—in the context of contempt, it seems to me that to amount to contempt, representations or statements about our proceedings or of the participation of members should not only be erroneous or incorrect, but, rather, should be purposely untrue and improper and import a ring of deceit.

I also want to object to another factual error in his press release which is damaging to my reputation in the community. The member for Etobicoke Centre stated that I and the government House leader voted against his motion to pass his bill at all stages. Neither of us voted against his motion.

I therefore insist that the member for Etobicoke Centre immediately issue an apology and a retraction request to the Canadian and Ukrainian press for libellous claims and false statements. Further, I ask that he apologizes in the House for making a statement so damaging to my reputation.

Finally, I am very disappointed in the member for Etobicoke Centre for not even approaching me to discuss this issue and to get his facts straight before launching his offensive and slanderous press release.

• (1025)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, these matters have come before the House in the past. There are some details which have been put on the record by the hon. member. I will undertake to get the blues to him as soon as possible, so that he can consider the appropriate steps that the member has suggested.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask that you withhold or defer your decision until the member has had an opportunity to address them.

The Speaker: There is no need to withhold a decision. I have listened with care to what the hon. member for Selkirk—Interlake has had to say.

I have stressed previously that in my view press releases issued by members are not things that are subject to questions of privilege in the House. All the examples that he cited in his argument were printed newspaper articles. He has not cited a single case where this press release has made it into print. It may be that people who saw the press release knew more about the facts than as suggested by the hon. member and did not think it was accurate, and so chose not to print part of it. I have no idea.

Government Orders

However, unless the hon. member has some evidence that this has been printed, and even then I may have doubts about this one, there appears to be a dispute as to facts. The hon. member has raised the issues. He has made clear what his position is in respect of allegations that were made by another colleague. It is a dispute as to facts. I do not think it is a matter of the member's privileges being breached.

The fact that somebody has suggested that because his bill is a copy of somebody's else's that this somehow constitutes a breach of privilege, to my mind, is unlikely. He has made it clear that it was not, for whatever reasons. He has given his reasons, and he has indicated the dates of filing and all that. It seems to me the matter has been cleared up by his statement and I do not think it is necessary for either the House or a committee to get involved in a discussion about the details of all these disputes.

If the hon. member wishes to go to the committee and raise the matter there, I am sure the committee can decide whether it wants to bother hearing the issue. However, from the point of view of the House and the Speaker making a ruling whether the hon. member's privileges have been breached, I am afraid I am at a loss to see a breach of privilege in the fact that some other member said something else outside the House about what somebody else did.

That is the position I have taken on these kinds of disputes for some time now, as the hon. member, I am sure, is aware and I take it again now. In my view, there is not a question of privilege raised in the issues that he has brought to the House today.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

AERONAUTICS ACT

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-6, An Act to amend the Aeronautics Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, as reported (with amendment) from the committee.

[*English*]

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: There are 16 motions in amendment standing on the notice paper for the report stage of Bill C-6.

[*Translation*]

Motions Nos. 1, 3 and 13 will not be selected by the Chair as they could have been presented in committee.

[*English*]

All remaining motions have been examined and the Chair is satisfied that they meet the guidelines expressed in the note to Standing Order 76.1(5) regarding the selection of motions in amendment at the report stage.

Motions Nos. 2, 4 to 12 and 14 to 16 will be grouped for debate and voted upon according to the voting pattern available at the table.

[*Translation*]

I will now put Motions Nos. 2, 4 through 12 and 14 through 16 to the House.

● (1030)

[*English*]

MOTIONS IN AMENDMENT

Hon. Loyola Hearn (for the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities) moved:

Motion No. 2

That Bill C-6, in Clause 8, be amended by deleting lines 1 to 25 on page 8.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP) moved:

Motion No. 4

That Bill C-6 be amended by deleting Clause 12.

Motion No. 5

That Bill C-6, in Clause 12, be amended by deleting line 35 on page 11 to line 5 on page 16.

Hon. David Emerson (for the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities) moved:

Motion No. 6

That Bill C-6, in Clause 12, be amended by replacing, in the French version, line 15 on page 13 with the following:

“(8) Les normes et les règles établies par”

Motion No. 7

That Bill C-6, in Clause 12, be amended by replacing, in the French version, line 9 on page 18 with the following:

“à qui que ce soit des renseigne-”

[*Translation*]

Hon. David Emerson (for the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities) moved:

Motion No. 8

That Bill C-6, in Clause 12, be amended

(a) by replacing line 26 on page 21 with the following:

“(5) Information reported by an employee under the program”

(b) by replacing line 28 on page 21 with the following:

“used against the employee to take any reprisals,”

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP) moved:

Motion No. 9

That Bill C-6 be amended by deleting Clause 35.

Motion No. 10

That Bill C-6 be amended by deleting Clause 36.

Motion No. 11

That Bill C-6 be amended by deleting Clause 43.

Motion No. 12

That Bill C-6 be amended by deleting Clause 44.

Motion No. 14

That Bill C-6, in Clause 49, be amended by deleting lines 14 to 16 on page 78.

Motion No. 15

That Bill C-6, in Clause 49, be amended by replacing line 14 on page 78 with the following:

“(2) Sections 5.31 to 5.393 of the Aeronautics Act, as enacted by section 12 of this Act, shall not have”

[*Translation*]

Hon. Loyola Hearn (for the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities) moved:

Motion No. 16

That Bill C-6, in Clause 49, be amended by replacing lines 14 and 15 on page 78 with the following:

“(2) Despite subsection (1), sections 5.31 to 5.38 of the Aeronautics Act, as enacted by section 12 of this Act, come into force three years after the day on which this Act receives”

[English]

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate your ruling. However, I think it is fair to say it is difficult at report stage to debate what are essentially contradictory amendments. We have a series of amendments from the NDP where we attempt to address some of the egregious mistakes made in Bill C-6, either intentional or otherwise, that diminish air safety in our country. There is also an amendment from the government that essentially guts whatever good work the transport committee was able to do. Essentially we are debating two different series of amendments, a series from the NDP which attempts to save Canadian lives, and a series from the Conservative government which will diminish our safety even further.

It makes no sense what the government is proposing as amendments today, particularly in light of what we have seen with rail safety over the last few years. The railway companies were basically given responsibility to manage their own safety systems. The former Liberal government basically got out of the safety business.

What do we have today? We have an epidemic of derailments across the country. Many communities have been impacted, particularly in British Columbia because some companies, having been given that responsibility to manage their own safety without oversight, have been irresponsible. Lives have been lost. There has been environmental devastation.

Instead of learning from that experience of the erosion of safety that took place under the Liberals in railway transport, the Conservative government is trying to do the same thing with the airline industry. What is wrong with this picture? At a time when Canadians are increasingly concerned about derailments in the railway system, the Conservatives are moving forward to do the same irresponsible things to our airline industry. Nothing embodies that recklessness, that irresponsibility of the Conservative government more than the amendments the government is bringing forward.

Let us see what the Conservatives are trying to strike from the record. I am sure Canadians who are watching the parliamentary deliberations today will be very interested in learning what the Conservatives want to take out of Bill C-6. It is already a bad bill for a number of reasons. It is a bad bill because it gives a get out of jail free card to companies that violate with impunity safety in maintenance and safety generally. An airline company that does that, as long as it follows some sort of internal process, will get a get out of jail free card. Airline companies can be irresponsible. They can even cost lives. However, if they have set up some sort of internal mechanism and they say that they are following the dictates of that internal mechanism, they get a get out of jail free card. The CEOs can be as irresponsible as they want and the government is giving them a get out of jail free card.

Also, the government is not providing any sort of whistleblower protection in any real form. We were able to get some amendments in committee but it does not in any way protect a whistleblower who has raised real concerns about company irresponsibility.

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In addition to all that, the Conservative government is moving forward and rather than having just two exemptions to the Access to Information Act, we will now be looking at nine areas that are cut off forever from access to information. The Canadian public will never find out what companies are being irresponsible and what companies are putting Canadians' loved ones in danger.

These government amendments that are coming forward today take out the safety management systems that any internal programs that companies set up have to have a responsible executive. The government is taking that out. There will not be a responsible executive for whatever purported safety mechanism that is set up.

The government wants to remove the appointment of an executive who has to be responsible for operations and activities authorized under a certificate issued pursuant to a regulation made under the act and accountable for the extent to which the requirements of the applicable safety management systems have been met. The government wants to take away the requirement of putting in place remedial action required to maintain the highest level of safety.

• (1035)

Canadians are finding out that the government presented a bad bill. The government wants to repeat the same errors we have seen occur with our railway system, the derailments, environmental devastation and death. Seeing what the Liberals did there, the Conservatives have decided to do the same thing with the airline industry. They are taking out the reference to the implementation of remedial action required to maintain the highest level of safety.

If we could have a clear picture from Conservative members, if they walked around with a sign on their foreheads, it would say “We want to make sure that we don't maintain the highest level of safety”. That is what the Conservative members are attempting to do with this bill. By bringing forward these amendments, they are gutting a section that requires a responsible executive of the company, to which they are turning over safety management, to put in place remedial action required to maintain the highest level of safety. The Conservatives are saying they do not want the highest level of safety maintained.

What else are the Conservatives taking out? They are taking out responsibility for continuous monitoring and regular assessment of the level of safety achieved. They are taking that out. What could be a clearer notice of intent of where the Conservatives want to go with this?

For those Canadians, quite rightfully, particularly in British Columbia, who are concerned about what they have seen in the railway system, now the Conservatives are doing the same thing with the airline system. They are taking out references to continuous monitoring and taking out the requirement for remedial action to maintain the highest level of safety.

Finally, the government amendment is also taking out the involvement of employees in the development, implementation and ongoing operation of the applicable safety management system. The transport committee heard testimony which was conclusive, clear and constant that for any safety management system to work, the employees have to be involved.

Government Orders

Reference to a responsible executive is being taken out. Implementation of a remedial action required to maintain the highest level of safety is being taken out. Continuous monitoring and regular assessment of the level of safety achieved is being taken out. The involvement of employees and their bargaining agents in the development, implementation and ongoing operation of the applicable safety management system is being taken out. Let us gut whatever minor protection existed in the bill. Let us just go to the wild, wild west of air safety.

We heard testimony from witnesses saying that this was exactly the wrong way to go. The Conservatives are saying, "No, that is fine. We do not care about Canadians' safety. We do not care about ensuring that there are high standards. We do not care about all of that". What the Conservatives want to do is just get out of the safety business, just turn it over to the companies and in addition, if they break the law, there will be not be any punishment or consequences. As long as a company is incorporated, it would seem to be able to do anything in Conservative land. For individuals, the full breadth of the law will be brought down on their heads, but as long as a company is incorporated and has wealthy corporate lawyers protecting it, it can do anything it wants in this new, strange, bizarre world that the Conservatives seem to want to bring forward.

The Conservative amendment is absolutely outrageous. It is gutting what components might have existed in Bill C-6 which is already a pretty reckless and irresponsible piece of legislation. Now the Conservatives have brought forward an amendment to gut what provisions may have existed to actually require companies to maintain a high level of safety, to take remedial action when there were problems, to ensure that employees were involved, employees who are at the front line.

If anything was revealed by that terrific series on air safety done by *The Hamilton Spectator* journalists who basically went in and saw the various levels of safety violations that occur even now with Transport Canada oversight within the Canadian aviation system, it was the importance of having employees involved. Now we have a so-called safety system, we call it self-serve safety, where corporate CEOs can take whatever they want and leave whatever they want behind.

•(1040)

By gutting these amendments that were put in place by the transport committee, essentially to assure at least some measure of safety, what the government is doing is revealing its agenda, and that agenda is not to protect the loved ones of Canadians. The agenda is not to increase the confidence that Canadians may have in the airline system after what we saw happening to the railway system. No, the agenda seems to be purely ideological: to simply gut those safety systems and hand them over to the companies and see if it all works out.

We oppose that. We oppose this amendment. We had hoped to have discussion on the NDP amendment separately from these irresponsible government amendments.

[Translation]

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague for his speech. He made an excellent comparison between what is currently going on with the railway

system and what is going to happen with the airline industry. Everyone knows that there are a growing number of accidents in Canada's railway system because of decisions made by the Liberal government in past years and because of the refusal to take employee recommendations into account.

I would like my colleague to speak more about the ideology that underlies the amendments he spoke about, an ideology that would leave the fox in charge of the henhouse.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Victoria for her question.

What the Conservatives want to do makes no sense and should concern people across the country. We have already seen the consequences of all these rail accidents, in Quebec and elsewhere. The companies were given responsibility, and the result was many more derailments in cities such as Montmagny.

Now, the Conservatives want to do exactly the same thing with the air transportation system. This amendment, which is clearly and completely irresponsible, seeks to eliminate continuous monitoring and regular safety assessments and prevent the appointment of an executive responsible for all the operations of the safety system. The government also wants to do away with the involvement of employees and their bargaining agents in the development, implementation and ongoing operation of the system.

The Conservatives are removing the whole aspect of responsibility that the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities put in place. The only possible reason that I can imagine is that this is an ideological choice.

•(1045)

[English]

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am going to reserve my own substantive discussion for my own 10 minutes.

This is not really a question. It is more a comment than anything else. I know that the member has allowed himself to be transported by his desire to be very partisan on this. He has made some suggestions and allegations about the continuity of a government position that goes back to the time when I was in government, so I feel duty-bound to defend those aspects of this discussion that refer back to my colleagues in government, who of course cannot be captured by the member's desire to paint all members of government as those who are deliberately out there to do damage to the Canadian public.

Because I am standing up in defence of a government that was trying to be progressive and that was making every effort to ensure that the quality of life and the standard of living in the country were constantly improved, I ask myself where the government members who were concerned with Bill C-6 are on this particular amendment, because the amendment is being spoken to and defended by somebody who has voted against the bill. It is not really a question the hon. member can answer.

Government Orders

I am just asking myself if I am going to be debating something that is important for Canadians, both in quality of life and standard of living, because the hon. member has scared off all government comment on this issue.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I enjoyed working with the member for Eglinton—Lawrence on the transport committee.

I referred to the former Liberal government simply because I think it is a matter of public concern. We saw what happened with the railway system when SMS was brought in with railways. That should point the Conservative government in a different direction. If something has failed, we do not fix it by doing the same thing.

The hon. member's point is a very valid one. Why are Conservatives not standing up on this issue? I think the answer is very clear. They themselves are embarrassed by the government's position. What members of the Conservative Party can stand up in the House and say that they are fighting for less safety for Canadian families and fighting to put Canadian families in danger? What Conservative MP could do that?

They are silent. They may not agree with the government's direction, but we know that the Conservative Party is centralized. The Prime Minister's office gives the orders and Conservative members just follow. The reason why they are not speaking, the reason why they are silent, is that they simply cannot defend the position they have taken and it will be very difficult for them this summer, I think, to—

The Deputy Speaker: Order. I think this would be the appropriate time to resume debate and recognize the hon. member for Lethbridge.

Mr. Rick Casson (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is indeed a pleasure to stand and speak to this as a member of the government. The member who spoke previously said we would be embarrassed to stand and support what we are doing on this bill. I have done it previously on comments directed to the aspects of this bill that deal with national defence and the safety and aeronautics aspects.

It is a pleasure to rise and offer some comments today on behalf of the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport.

Bill C-6 is an act to amend the Aeronautics Act. The Aeronautics Act establishes the Minister of Transport's responsibility for the development and regulation of aeronautics and the supervision of all matters connected with civil aeronautics, as well as the responsibility of the Minister of National Defence for military aeronautical activities.

First and foremost, the intent of Bill C-6 is to provide for a modern and flexible legislative framework to further enhance aviation safety and to reflect the needs of the aviation community. The bill will update the act to make it more consistent with other transportation acts.

The standing committee began studying the bill in February and has heard testimony from dozens of witnesses, all of whom have a sincere interest in the safety of Canadians and Canada's aviation industry. I would like to touch briefly on a few of the major issues that were discussed during the study.

One of the amendments agreed to at committee includes a progressive enforcement program, which includes assurances of compliance and notices of violations without penalty. Transport Canada can and will continue to take enforcement action when necessary and audits can still be conducted if required.

With respect to resources, the number one priority within the department has and will continue to be providing effective safety oversight of the industry by allocating resources to those activities that will provide the greatest safety benefit.

It was also made clear at committee that the concept of designated organizations is being considered only for segments of the industry that do not carry fare-paying passengers or are considered to represent a low level of risk in relation to aviation safety. This was covered in an amendment to the original proposal.

Reporting systems were also discussed at length. To encourage voluntary reporting of safety related information, amendments to the act propose a universal, non-punitive, voluntary reporting program, as well as protections for information that may be obtained by Transport Canada when assessing or auditing the internal reporting system of a certificate holder. Data, once de-identified, is available to all for more analysis and distribution.

However, it is important to note that protections will never prevent enforcement action for deliberate and wilful commission of violations for which Transport Canada would have obtained evidence through its own investigations.

Whistleblower protection also formed an important part of this discussion. The amendments put forward are in the spirit of this type of protection, while at the same time holding true to the intent of encouraging the cooperation of employers and employees to proactively work together for safety.

I now would like to take a moment to address the five government motions that we have put forth in order to align Bill C-6. The amendments are all very technical in nature.

First, during committee deliberations, an amendment was introduced to clause 8 to establish a new rule-making authority for safety management systems. However, upon further review, we see that this same authority is already provided for in section 5.39. Therefore, it will create a redundancy in respect to the enabling authority to make regulations regarding safety management systems.

The paragraphs in section 5.39 are much broader and are consistent with the definition of management systems adopted by the committee in the definitions section of the act. It is more logical to keep the enabling authority under section 5.39 because this provision is followed by a series of other provisions dealing specifically with management systems.

Second, there are three motions at clause 12, all of which are editorial in nature and meant to correct inconsistencies between the French and the English. These changes are meant to ensure that both versions have the same meaning and, therefore, equal weight. The purpose of these motions remains consistent with the deliberations at committee.

Government Orders

Our final motion affects clause 49. The intent is much clearer than the proposed NDP motion for this clause and it still meets the intent of the committee, which is to delay by three years the implementation of designated organizations. This motion will also serve to correct the versions of both languages since as presented they do not have the same meaning.

In conclusion, Canada has one of the safest aviation systems in the world. This bill will go a long way toward ensuring that the required tools are in place to maintain and enhance the safety of Canadian aviation systems for the future.

• (1050)

Through due diligence, hard work and cooperation, Bill C-6 is now better than it was when originally introduced to Parliament last year. I want to thank committee members who gave their input and support to this bill. The standing committee has indicated support of Bill C-6 with the recommended amendments.

I would therefore encourage members of Parliament to adopt the motions and recommend the amended bill for third reading.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened attentively. It is good to finally have a Conservative stand up. Of course, the member did not speak to any of the issues of diminishing safety, and he did not address any of the concerns raised by Justice Moshansky or the many witnesses who came before the committee and raised serious concerns about the direction the government is headed in.

He did not even address the government amendment that essentially guts any oversight of having a responsible executive that has to look to the implementation and has to ensure there is remedial action required to maintain the highest level of safety. He did not talk about why the government essentially is trying to move to gut what safety provisions were in this bill.

He did not in any way address why the government is moving ahead with the issue of diminishing airline safety when we have seen what happened with the railways. That is where the government has been completely incomprehensible about this. We saw what happened with railways. In fact, Transport Canada said it had to make changes because when railways violate with impunity the whole issue of safety, as they have, what we see now is the government having to take the railways to court in order to get action to protect the lives of Canadians.

Now we have the same sort of reckless and irresponsible behaviour taking place with the government proposing Bill C-6 and then trying to gut the few components within the bill that actually protect Canadian safety.

I am going to give the member a chance to actually address the issue. I will give him a chance to try to justify why the Conservatives—

• (1055)

The Deputy Speaker: Order. I will give the hon. member for Lethbridge the chance.

Mr. Rick Casson: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate this chance you are giving me.

Witness after witness who came to committee, and I would say almost all the witnesses who appeared, said that the safety management systems being considered here will create a far safer environment in the aviation industry in Canada than already—

Mr. Peter Julian: That is simply not true.

Mr. Rick Casson: Mr. Speaker, I gave that member a chance to do his ranting and I listened to him. Committee members had to listen to him week after week. I wish he would be quiet and listen to me for a second. After indicating that nobody from the Conservative Party would get up and talk, now he is trying to shout me down. It is very typical of that member.

Witness after witness who came to the committee indicated that safety management systems will create a better system in Canada and that 400% to 500% more reports would be brought forward. Once these reports are tabled and once they are available, all in the industry can access them. That, to me, is the key. That flow of information will allow other people involved in the industry to be able to access it to make the industry safer.

The International Civil Aviation Organization indicated that Canada is a leader in safety in the aviation industry and will continue to be a leader in this industry with the adoption of this bill.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the only thing I would like to say to my Conservative colleague is that it is important to understand the whole safety management system.

I was one of the people who were opposed to this bill on first reading. However, I have been convinced of the value of this safety management system, which is being put in place to meet international standards.

The main problem is that the government is setting aside Canada's existing inspection system, the only one of its kind in the world. That is what the Conservatives want to do. Motion No. 2 introduced by the government seeks to abolish, limit or remove the definition of the safety management system on page 8. In so doing, the government is threatening the entire inspection system.

It is wrong to say that clause 5.391 replaces this paragraph, because the paragraph on page 8 stipulates that every carrier must perform continuous monitoring and regular assessment of the level of safety and mentions the involvement of employees and their bargaining agents in the development, implementation and ongoing operation of the system. I hope the member is aware that deleting this from the bill will endanger Canada's existing inspection system.

[*English*]

Mr. Rick Casson: Mr. Speaker, I do not believe it will at all. The spirit of the amendment is to allow everyone involved in industry to learn from the reports of other people. Having that ability will create a database and a collective ability to address issues before they arise. If one organization or provider finds a problem, everybody in the industry will be aware of it in a matter of time and will be able to take corrective actions.

Government Orders

I believe, as we move down this road, that Bill C-6 will make the aviation industry in Canada far safer than it has been. As we look over the history of the aviation industry as it grew from the early days until now, a lot has been done to improve it. Canada has one of the safest systems in place and it will continue to be that with this bill when it is enacted.

● (1100)

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I made an intervention a few moments ago about where the government members were to speak on these amendments. I am still left with the question, and I guess anyone who is watching this debate is wondering, whether the government is interested in getting the bill through the House.

What did the government do? It has presented an amendment, which I would have expected the government would try to defend. If I read the mood of some of my colleagues, it has no chance of passing. In Motion No. 2 the government tries to delete clause 8, lines 1 to 25. There is no chance of that happening, none whatsoever. Therefore, I have to ask myself whether the government is interested in getting the rest of the bill through.

The committee worked for four full months on the bill. I reject, outright, the rhetoric of the member from the NDP, the member for Burnaby—New Westminster, who suggests that people have a desire to wreck the system instead of improving it. As a member of the committee, we worked for four diligent months on improving a bill to ensure the safety of Canadians, who trust the aviation industry to get from point A to point B. While we were trying to improve the bill, he has suggested we were trying to do something negative. It is absolutely insane that someone would do that. It is absolutely irresponsible, hypocritical at the very least.

I will tell the House why. The NDP presented a series of motions. The fourth one says that the bill be amended by deleting clause 12. Clause 12 is the heart of the entire bill. Judge Moshansky, to whom the member referred, said that we could keep this bill and we could make improvements if we wanted, but if we touched clause 12, then it would be all for nothing.

The committee members heard him and went through a series of debates. Colleagues from three parties, except the NDP, looked for ways to ensure that clause 12 could be improved. We looked for ways to ensure that accountability practices and transparency would be available throughout the bill. Yet today the NDP members come forward with a decision to gut clause 12. In addition, they put a series of other motions to delete other measures that would improve the bill. Then, with the greatest of chutzpah, they say that another party, which refused to stand up in its own defence, is interested in gutting the bill. They even get it done up in one of the papers in southern Ontario. There was obviously a lot of research done, but I cannot believe it. The government members are sitting there saying that it is okay, that they will vote on this and something will happen.

Those of us who had a desire to make improvements to a bill, which looked for amelioration of conditions for travellers in aviation in Canada, an industry that is growing by leaps and bounds, we are absolutely outraged that the NDP members would have proposed their amendments and that the government would have suggested

that we remove clause 8, after we had debated this in committee at great length.

I think my colleagues on this side of the House are probably going to feel the same sense of outrage. We could not have worked this closely for that long and that precisely to have the government then come back and say that it does not matter that we did all of that, that the committee approved all of this and that it wants to take it out.

Why? It is nonsensical. The clause the government wants to amend is reflected again in subsection 5.9(3), which reinforces a ruling oversight, a structure that says as we receive information on an SMS system, we will put the system in a position to safeguard those people and the system itself against frivolous actions or legal actions.

● (1105)

One could say the bill is designed to ensure that information comes forward freely. It is the ultimate whistleblower legislation. Those who bring forward information they might not otherwise bring forward will not be penalized for looking out for the greater interest of the public. The greater interest of the public is what the SMS system is supposed to address. Judge Moshansky has said that we could avoid a lot of things as people come forward with more information about how to improve the system, but we have to give people an incentive and protection when they come forward with that information.

We put that in subsection 5.9(3) and in section 4.9. The government is now going to pull it out of section 4.9. Why? Where is the sincerity in wanting to make the parliamentary system work and the safety management system that the government wants to put in place?

When we were sitting on the government side and presented legislation to initiate this process, we were open enough to recognize that there would be other views and that those views would come before the House and committee. That bill did not survive the election of 2006, but it did come back in three different formats. This is one of those. To try to link this legislation with rail safety, which the committee also dealt with, is doing a disservice to the integrity of members of Parliament who want to improve aviation safety.

Most of us are getting on in years. I have some grandkids, Isabella, Gianluca, Alessandro, Stefano, Tazio and Amedeo, and I know they are watching this. I know in a few years they will ask if those members of Parliament, who were with their granddad, were looking out for their interests when they travelled. We see the famous commercials about dad not drinking and driving, and we see the little child on the poster tugging at our heartstrings.

Government Orders

Now the member from Burnaby is saying that the rest of us are being irresponsible for wanting to do something with this legislation. I am offended because the government introduced a motion to gut an important element of the bill after agreeing to it in committee. The only member who voted against the amended legislation was the NDP member from Burnaby. The Conservatives voted with all other members. Now the government comes before the House and wants to gut one of the most essential elements in the legislation. That is insane. This is the story of the kettle and the pot. I do not know how NDP members can look at themselves in the mirror in the morning. They introduced a series of 12 motions.

The bill, as amended, would improve a structure and would build an architecture for safety management systems in the aviation industry. Those who came before committee said that if we did these things, they would support the bill. Now the NDP members are now saying that those of us who spent four months trying to improve the bill are being nefarious in our intent because we are trying to produce something that, as one of the members already said, set the fox among the chickens. That is absolutely outrageous.

All colleagues should vote against the government motion and against all the NDP motions so we can get on with a serious discussion about amended Bill C-6. It is designed to do something in the interests of Canadians, not serve the political partisan interests of those who engage in rhetoric for the purpose of, I guess, filling in some time on a Tuesday morning.

• (1110)

Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, obviously we are all concerned about safety in our air space as we travel back and forth to our own ridings each week. In the globalized world in which we live, air traffic is of utmost importance.

It is my understanding that a great number of the amendments proposed in the bill are described as technical or editorial in nature. There were some serious amendments and efforts, as the member mentioned, during the four months of hard work by the committee, and I applaud the committee's efforts. However, I would like to ask the member opposite whether there was a consensus among the pilots represented at the committee.

From my understanding, if there is anybody who would want to ensure there is safety in the air, it would be the men and women whose livelihood is flying these aircraft. Were the pilots in favour of the amendments being proposed to the bill?

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Speaker, I have a two part answer for a two part question. First, I do agree that some of those motions, such as Motions Nos. 6, 7 and 8 on the government side and Motion No. 16, are really technical amendments. They use language with which I think everybody agrees. They try to clean up the language that we agreed in committee needed to be cleaned up but they are not germane to the actual bill itself.

I would never support Motion No. 2 from the government side because, as I said, that guts an essential element of compromise that was reached among all committee members. I say that because it is important for all of those who are following the debate to understand that if one is to answer the question of the member opposite about

the acceptability of what the committee was doing for those who are actually engaged in the industry then the answer has to be yes.

Those people, the pilots especially, could only support the legislation if in fact the committee had listened to all of the interventions by interested parties, by expert witnesses and by those who are experts on oversight, and then acted accordingly.

I think the committee acted accordingly in the main. What happened, of course, is that the committee amended the legislation to reflect the concerns of all of the interested people and all of those who are experts in the area of aviation safety and in the area of safety management systems and their outcomes. I would be surprised if the amended Bill C-6 would not receive the support of the aviation industry and the pilots' association.

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member probably knows more about this than I do since he sat on the committee and was actually in the government that initially introduced the bill, but is this not the thin edge of the wedge in terms of a move to actually privatize the oversight of safety in the air industry in a way that we have seen in other jurisdictions, such as rail where now we see derailments day after day across the country putting lives at stake and actually whole communities at risk as those railways go through the towns?

There is nothing more at risk and fragile than an airplane in the air and particularly one that is not safe. It surprises me. I see the government on one front, and particularly where air is concerned, going over the top with now a no-fly list and the rigour that is exercised when we go through security to get on a plane, the backups and the lineups that we all experience. I have no difficulty with those things because I think we do need to ensure that when we fly, and thousands of people fly every day, we feel confident and we feel safe.

However, to turn the oversight of the safety of airplanes to the companies themselves that actually run them, given the very competitive nature of that industry now, it does not seem to me to be very much in the public interest. I would like the member to respond to that.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Speaker, I came from the government that introduced the father legislation to this. At the time, our view was, first, that we would have no diminution in the authority of the government's regulatory power.

Our second view was that an inspectorate to provide the appropriate oversight would actually have increased mechanisms and resources to get the job done. We are in no way supportive of devolving the authority for both oversight and the resources to ensure that the inspectorate works.

I took that into the committee and the committee's amendments to the initial act reflect that fact. In other words, an SMS works but the inspectorate and the ability of the government to regulate the industry and provide inspection to ensure there is compliance remains not only untouched but actually improved.

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•(1115)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak on behalf of the Bloc Québécois on the subject of Bill C-6, which amends the Aeronautics Act and makes consequential amendments to other acts. It is a pleasure because our party, the Bloc Québécois, opposed the first version of the bill tabled here in the House.

We opposed the bill because of the actual wording in the bill. Statements made by senior Transport Canada officials suggested that the intent of Bill C-6, with respect to safety management systems, was to replace Transport Canada's inspection service. The inspection service consists of a mechanic-inspector, a mechanic-engineer-inspector and check pilots, that is, over 800 people who can, at any time, intervene without giving prior notice to any company, to check the condition of the aircraft and to ensure that the pilots are qualified for that type of aircraft. Thus, it was a genuine inspection system. Thanks to that inspection system, in recent years, Canada has been one of the top countries in aviation safety.

We wanted to ensure that this system was protected. There were statements from Transport Canada, including from Merlin Preuss, the director general of civil aviation. He told his own employees that down the road, Transport Canada's inspection service would be replaced by the safety management system. He also said that the number of inspectors would be cut by half around 2010.

Transport Canada was already planning to replace the inspection system that was so successful and still is. Furthermore, the inspection service was not enhanced even though there are more planes, the industry is doing well and there are more airports accommodating the planes. Nothing was done to increase the number of people working for the inspection service. Obviously, we were concerned about that.

In committee, we heard witnesses and we were finally able to make some changes. We were hearing two different things. Transport Canada told us that this service would be added to the inspection service, but this is not what we were hearing from those in the field. Earlier, I heard a Conservative member ask a question about the pilots. The Canadian Air Line Pilots Association came to tell us in committee that the inspection service should be changed and that the inspectors should probably do something other than monitor the pilots.

I could understand that the pilots did not always like being subject to some sort of inspection of their work, without notice. They were not too happy about it, but it is something they are going to have to live with. When we have a safety system, we are not there to avoid frustrating air line pilots or anyone else. We are there to have a pre-established system. The Bloc Québécois' goal always was to ensure that the inspection system, which has made Canada famous, is maintained.

In the course of the discussions, work and witness appearances, the government decided to take this line. Thus, changes were made to Bill C-6 that will guarantee some things. Personally, before the changes and the amendment put forward by the government, I could say to my colleagues in my party that we can indeed change people's minds because the government did decide to maintain the inspection

system and the safety management system, as recommended by ICAO.

The International Civil Aviation Organization representative told us that all over the world, countries are implementing safety management systems that have to be added on to their inspection systems. We were on our way to having a bill that recognized the desire to maintain inspection services when we found out a few days ago that the government wants to get rid of clause 8, which it had agreed to in committee. Clause 8 is the very definition of a safety management system.

We should take the time to read clause 8, because it provides definitions of the safety management system.

(c.1) safety management systems and programs that provide for

(i) the appointment of an executive—

(ii) the implementation, as a result of any risk management analysis, of the remedial action required to maintain the highest level of safety,

(iii) continuous monitoring and regular assessment of the level of safety achieved, and

•(1120)

(iv) the involvement of employees and their bargaining agents in the development, implementation and ongoing operation of the applicable safety management system or program;

All of the parties discussed this and negotiated a definition. They wanted to ensure that all airlines understand what a safety management system is. Furthermore, they wanted to make them understand that they will have to have, among other things,

(iii) continuous monitoring and regular assessment of the level of safety achieved.

Transport Canada's inspection service can ensure that the safety management system functions as an added layer of safety. It must be maintained. Ongoing monitoring will facilitate the inspectors' work. That way, we can guarantee that all airlines will offer improved safety to Quebecers and Canadians.

Today, the government wants to remove clause 8 and replace it with clause 5.39, which states:

5.39 The Governor in Council may make regulations respecting

(a) the establishment and implementation of management systems by holders of Canadian aviation documents to provide for the safety of aeronautical activities and compliance with this Part

(b) the designation by a holder...of an individual—

Clause 8 named the person responsible and listed all the obligations to be met by the airlines. It will be replaced by a paragraph that says that all the airlines have to do is to name the person responsible. It is difficult to understand.

Today, I have a better understanding of why the government was in a hurry to adopt Bill C-6: it decided to make itself look good in committee and then to return to the House to propose amendments that will change the meaning of what was discussed.

That will change the whole meaning of the discussions and Transport Canada will have won. The pilots who were not happy about having check pilots to oversee their work will have won. The airlines that were not happy about having inspection and monitoring systems will have won.

Government Orders

As I said, the inspection system allows for an inspection to be carried out without warning. The Bloc was concerned because for business reasons, many airlines are established and fail practically in the same year. We are committed to ensuring that our citizens are safe.

When we explained to ICAO what Transport Canada was trying to do, it did not understand. It believes that an inspection system must be kept. Today, all that could be set aside. I understand that the government is in a hurry to finish up with Bill C-6. However, there is a problem.

I feel that this motion sets aside the entire aspect of inspection. Thus, Transport Canada could go ahead with its initial plan, which was to reduce the number of inspectors, check pilots, mechanic-inspectors and engineer-inspectors by replacing them with just a safety management system. That worries me.

The Bloc Québécois will vote against the motion in amendment tabled by the government. There are also the motions tabled by the New Democratic Party. I think that the NDP members must talk to one another. Initially, the Bloc was opposed to the entire safety management system because we believed that it would take the place of an inspection and monitoring system. We want to ensure that the inspection and monitoring system is kept.

If the Liberals, the NDP and the Bloc defeat the government amendment, the opposition will have knocked some sense into the Conservatives. We will force Transport Canada to keep the inspection and monitoring system, as recommended by ICAO.

And we will have been the responsible ones. The Conservatives decided not to be responsible. That is their problem and, besides, it is typical of them. The Conservatives are closer to companies that do not want to be monitored and inspected. It costs money to always be on the lookout and ready to receive inspectors at any time. But that is what is needed. That is what our constituents want. Quebeckers want to be assured that, when they get on a plane, the airlines have made every effort to offer better safety.

This will be guaranteed by voting against the government motion, thereby ensuring that the current inspection system is maintained, and forcing businesses to conduct better analyses and to consider everything that is important. Thus, Transport Canada's inspection service will be more effective.

The inspection may not take as long, because businesses will have upgraded everything to ensure that the aircraft are in good condition and that the pilots have received proper training. Furthermore, these inspectors could fly with the pilot to ensure that he or she is properly qualified and that the aircraft is in good shape.

• (1125)

This is what we want to ensure and what we will do. As for the NDP motions, they demonstrate that the NDP is not quite there yet. We are convinced that the safety management system adds yet another layer to the safety net. I can assure this House that the government's amendment, Motion No. 2, which amends the very foundation of the definition of the safety management system, will be defeated in order to ensure that Quebeckers and Canadians can fly safely.

[English]

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I note that the member's caucus will not be voting in support of this bill. Does he not agree with us that from its very inception, which was brought in by the Liberals, this has been part of a trend to turn absolutely everything over in government to the private sector because it is felt that it can do things more efficiently and cost effectively without any real consideration to the public good, the public safety or the protection of citizens?

This is more about saving money, pulling government out of areas that require further expenditure and more effort by government to protect its citizens. If this is not another step down that road, but a very alarming step because there is nothing, in my view and experience, more fragile than an airplane full of people crossing the country at a great height and if something should go wrong, there is absolutely no turning back, no way to deal with it without the possibility of great tragedy. I am wondering if that is part of the reason that the member's caucus will be voting against this bill.

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Mr. Speaker, perhaps I was not clear. Our caucus will vote in favour of the bill, but against the amendment introduced by the government that would reduce the level of safety. We will also vote against the amendments introduced by the NDP, because they still do not see that the safety management system is an extra layer.

We are satisfied with the bill, as amended by the Bloc Québécois and other parties and passed by the majority—the NDP voted against it. We want to maintain an adequate inspection system, which has been Canada's strength, and to add an extra layer of safety in order to force companies to have an internal management system to facilitate the work of inspectors.

This is what we want to do and it is what we will do, so the government's amendment will have to be defeated. Once again, the purpose of this amendment, Motion No. 2, is to allow Transport Canada to abolish its inspection system and replace it with the safety management system. The Conservative members did not understand this. They once again listened to Transport Canada. Transport Canada's desire was expressed in 2006 by Merlin Preusse, Director General of Civil Aviation, when he told his employees that they would see their services decrease by about 50% by 2010.

This is not what we want. We want an inspection and monitoring system like the existing one, which would enable someone to arrive unannounced at any airline to ensure that everything is in order—the aircraft, the pilots and the mechanics—and that everyone working there has the necessary training. This is what we want, and it is what we thought we had before the government introduced Motion No. 2, which we will make sure we defeat in this House.

There are also the NDP amendments to consider. I can definitely try to convince my hon. colleague that what Bill C-6 really proposes is an additional layer of safety. That is where I stand, but the NDP are not there yet. Perhaps by rereading it, trying to analyze it and talking to us, they will come to understand it some day.

Government Orders

• (1130)

[English]

Mr. Don Bell (North Vancouver, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I, along with my colleague from Eglinton—Lawrence and the Bloc member for Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, sit on the transport committee and we were part of the discussions that went on. We heard from the various witnesses and I would like to clarify one thing and see if the Bloc member agrees.

In our discussions and in the work we are doing with respect to rail derailments across Canada, one of the things that was pointed out to us on the committee is that the Railway Safety Act lacks the muscle and the teeth that the Aeronautics Act presently has. The suggestion was that when the time comes we will be recommending changes to the Railway Safety Act to put more teeth in it so that the safety management systems that are in place in the rail industry can be enforced in the way they can be with the Aeronautics Act right now.

However, I think it is also fair to say, and the member from the Bloc may comment on this, that all members of the transport committee have expressed a high concern for air safety in terms of the passengers, the crews, the pilots and in terms of the safety issues that are referred to by air safety at the airport, just generally the whole concept of air safety, and that was the nature of the discussions that occurred.

From what I can see, the amendments that the NDP has proposed really restate issues that were raised in debate among all the committee members following the presentation of information from the witnesses. They were debated in the committee, voted on and decisions made. Therefore, this is a re-entry.

I think the government's Motion No. 2 does attempt, as has been said by both my colleague and the Bloc member, to change the nature of the bill and we will not be supporting it.

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Mr. Speaker, my colleague is right to make the comparison with the railway system, since even the Transportation Safety Board representative could not confirm that the railway safety management system has reduced the number of accidents. This is, quite simply, because the railway inspection system created by Transport Canada has only 25 inspectors for all of Canada. Imagine the kilometres of tracks to be inspected. One day, that legislation will have to be amended. We must not make the same mistake as the Conservatives, however, by trying to reduce the aviation inspection service, which consists of 800 employees, to 25 inspectors, like the railway inspection service.

When the time comes to amend the legislation to enhance rail safety, it will be important to ensure that the inspection and monitoring system can guarantee that the safety management systems created by the railway companies are adequate.

An inspection and monitoring system is therefore needed, and that is what the ICAO is talking about. Every country must have an inspection and monitoring system so that, when safety management systems are in place, it is easier for inspectors to ensure that companies are in fact safe.

[English]

Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the privilege of speaking to Bill C-6, which is clearly a bill that would lead to improved aviation safety in our country.

Once we cut through all the rhetoric we hear in this House, the bill would move us a huge step forward in improving the safety of aviation in Canada. As a member of the transportation committee, I had a chance to hear all the witnesses who appeared before us, and there were many of them. They represented the different aspects of the industry. They represented, of course, Judge Moshansky, who was involved in an earlier inquiry into the Dryden tragedy.

What came out very clearly from all the witnesses, even those who were perhaps opposed to the direction in which this bill was going, was that if we pushed them far enough, the witnesses would admit that safety management systems are a good thing for the aviation industry. SMS, as we call it, clearly improves safety. It is another level of safety that we superimpose upon the already existing regulatory and enforcement framework.

When we were at the committee, the members of the committee know that, as a result of the testimony of the witnesses, we as a government brought forward amendments, as did the other parties, the NDP, the Bloc and the Liberal Party. Quite frankly, I believe we were able to accommodate most of them because all of us had a common goal: to ensure that aviation safety in Canada is improved.

The committee also heard from representatives from the International Civil Aviation Organization. When asked what Canada's record in civil aviation safety was, they said that Canada was the leader in aviation safety. When asked where Canada was in terms of implementing SMS, they said that Canada was the leader in adopting SMS, which is a good thing. It is not a bad thing, as the NDP would have us believe.

We heard a lot of rhetoric in this House several minutes ago about how this legislation was essentially a get out of jail free card, that this legislation was full of holes and that it would actually lead to a reduction of current safety levels. That is not true.

One of the big objections was the suggestion that this bill and the safety management systems were, in effect, self-regulation or deregulation of the industry. In other words, the suggestion was that the government was washing its hands of the whole safety issue when it came to aircraft. However, that is not the case at all.

A number of very good suggestions were made at the committee and we as a government said that they were excellent suggestions. To ensure there was no doubt that we still had a strong regulatory oversight, we agreed to amendments that were brought forward by the other parties and other members of the committee that would ensure there was no step backward, that the existing enforcement mechanisms would still be in place, and that superimposed on that would be the safety management systems that each organization would need to adopt.

Government Orders

The beauty of safety management systems is that we are now empowering companies, airlines, small aircraft operators and their employees to identify safety concerns and report those on a non-punitive basis. That means that if I, as an employee of an airline, find that someone missed a bolt here or someone else did not do the work correctly on the aircraft, I can report that and not worry about being punished for that.

It is quite clear from the evidence that we heard at committee that implementing SMS and engaging the front line workers in the airline and aviation industry will lead to an increase in the number of reports made about safety issues by 400% to 500%. That is excellent news.

• (1135)

The other thing is that the new authority in the Aeronautics Act will not allow the minister to abdicate his oversight responsibility to an industry body. These designated organizations will be allowed to monitor the activity of a specific segment of the industry, but only in those areas that represent a low level risk in relation to aviation safety.

I would like to address a number of the motions that have been brought forward by the NDP. Unfortunately, as usual, NDP members had an opportunity at committee to bring forward amendments. The amendments were defeated, or the NDP members did not think of them. Now after the fact, the bill is back before the House and they want to bring these same motions forward again.

There is a process in place. If a specific issue has not been addressed when the bill is at committee, surely this is not the place to bring it up, unless it is of critical importance. Quite frankly, all the critical issues were dealt with at committee. We came to a consensus with all of the opposition parties, notwithstanding that the NDP in the end opposed it.

For example, the first motion brought forward by the NDP has the effect of limiting the definition of a violation to mean only a contravention of the act or of an instrument, and would therefore create a void since it would exclude a security measure and an emergency direction. More important, the impact of the motion would be to remove the minister's ability to issue an administrative monetary penalty for contravention of a security measure or emergency direction. That is why we do not support this motion.

There is another motion which eliminates the regulatory authority of the Minister of Transport to require designated organizations to carry insurance. During committee discussions this motion was presented, but it was not approved. All concerns in regard to designated organizations were adequately addressed. Where? At the committee. They are found in the reprinted version of the bill.

Furthermore, there was also an amendment that the committee would review designated organizations in three years. We are going to live up to that commitment. That is good. That is healthy for aviation safety.

A third motion, again that we as the government oppose, came from the NDP and it deletes the substance of Bill C-6. It is trying to essentially remove clause 12 which contains important amendments that introduce the concept of designated organizations, in other

words, organizations that industry can work through to ensure that safety measures are being implemented throughout the industry.

This clause also deals with expanding the enabling authority for management systems. Everyone, including international bodies such as the International Civil Aviation Organization, have determined that these amendments are an important step in advancing safety.

Canada has been called a leader, as I mentioned earlier. To carry this motion would be a cause for embarrassment with countries that are following our lead. Our lead is one that leads to greater, not less, aviation safety within our country.

There is a fourth motion the NDP brought forward which again we oppose. It is similar to the previous one. It is deleting all sections that deal with designated organizations. We had a good debate at committee. The majority on the committee agreed that designated organizations were a huge step forward in adding another level of accountability, responsibility and monitoring.

There is a fifth motion, which again we oppose, which imposes new compliance tools. The amendments contained in this motion are also meant to make the administrative compliance activities more consistent with other transportation acts, such as the Canada Shipping Act. This clause addresses how the minister will handle notices of violation, assurances of compliance and monetary penalties. It does not make any sense to remove this clause from the body of the bill. We would be gutting it. We would be taking away some of the essential elements of implementing safety management systems in Canada.

There are other motions. For example, there is a motion that would remove all protection from access to information sought in the bill. Canadians would like to see accountability in government. They want access to information that is important.

• (1140)

What our bill does is it strikes a great balance between confidentiality where employees are concerned, to make sure that they are willing to report safety problems and that they are not afraid. Otherwise we will find cover-ups. As I mentioned earlier, we expect that this legislation is going to increase the reporting by 400% to 500%. That is great news.

All members of this House should be supporting this bill and opposing the motions put forward by the NDP.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will carry on and ask my colleague a question.

When the ICAO representative told us that Canada was a leader, he also said that our inspection and monitoring service was the key to our success and that our entire inspection, assessment and monitoring service must be kept in place along with the safety management system.

Government Orders

The Bloc Québécois has always stood behind that goal, and that is why we were against the bill as tabled by the Conservatives. This bill has been amended and changed. Now that the Conservative Party has decided to backtrack with its Motion No. 2, I have a problem. My problem is that the member thinks everything Messrs. Reinhardt and Preuss and the Transport Canada people say is gospel truth. Yet it was Mr. Preuss who, during a convention in August 2006, told his employees that staffing levels would be cut in half by 2010.

After that, the Conservatives in the committee decided to go along with us, to go along with the Bloc's recommendations, and the Liberals also supported us with respect to maintaining the inspection system. But that is not what will happen if we get rid of clause 8, which clearly defines the safety management system to enable better monitoring and inspection.

I have a problem with this clause, because I know that Transport Canada asked the government to do this. The member did not do this on his own, because in committee, he supported us.

Why do we always have to believe everything that Messrs. Reinhardt and Preuss tell us?

• (1145)

[*English*]

Mr. Ed Fast: Mr. Speaker, unfortunately at the committee there was some confusion about the number of inspectors that Canada had in the past and the number that we have today.

Initially the suggestion came from the NDP, the Bloc and a couple of the witnesses that supposedly at one time there were 1,400 inspectors. That number had gone down to somewhere around the 750 mark. In fact, later on, evidence at the committee, as the member knows, showed very clearly that of the 1,400, a very significant number had been reclassified. They were still in the system. In fact, the evidence at the end of our committee meetings made it clear that if anything, the number of inspectors that are in place today is higher than it was 10 years ago. We have not in any way taken away from that.

I wanted to point out to the member that when we were discussing the amendments at committee, we acknowledged that there was a clear role for the minister to oversee aviation. We introduced an amendment that the minister shall continue to carry out inspections of the aeronautical activities of holders of Canadian aviation documents.

We are not saying that the designated organizations are going to take over the role of government. The amendments that we accepted at committee make that very clear. At no point in time do we ever want to compromise aviation safety. The purpose of this bill is to actually enhance aviation safety considerably.

When we heard evidence from international organizations, such as ICAO, they confirmed that Canada is a leader in aviation safety and it is a leader in implementing SMS. The world is looking to us as the model to follow. I think that is encouraging news for the member. I encourage him to support this legislation.

Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague from Abbotsford made an excellent dissertation. He clarified some of the concerns that were raised by a

few members in the House, specifically on the transparency, accountability and quality assurance that this legislation and the amendments being proposed will bring to air safety in our country.

As one of our Liberal colleagues mentioned earlier, we all have family. I have a grandson travelling across the country today. We are all concerned about safety. It is the government's number one priority, the safety of all Canadians and air travel.

The member for Abbotsford mentioned that Transport Canada and our airline industry is recognized around the world for its safety record. I would ask the member to expand on what the International Civil Aviation Organization is saying about safety management systems and the proposed amendments to the legislation before us today.

Mr. Ed Fast: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned earlier, the International Civil Aviation Organization, which is the organization that represents all the major airlines around the world, gave testimony at the committee. When asked where Canada stands in terms of aviation safety, the response was that Canada is the leader. When we asked what safety management systems are going to do to our already excellent record, the ICAO said that they would just enhance it considerably. In fact, safety management systems are being implemented in the United States and around the world. Canada is one of the leaders and this legislation is leading legislation.

What is also remarkable is that not only does ICAO support it, not only does Transport Canada support this legislation, not only do the airlines support this legislation, but the two airline pilots associations that appeared before committee strongly support SMS. They wanted to make sure that there was strong regulatory oversight. The amendments that we adopted at the committee, as the members will know, do exactly that. We are not trying to bail out of our responsibility as government. We are insisting that we move forward to enhance aviation safety, not move backward.

• (1150)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Carrier (Alfred-Pellan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak today at the report stage of Bill C-6. After first reading and the debate at second reading, the Bloc Québécois was opposed to the bill. We had a lot of concerns about comprehensive safety management systems, which came with no guarantees that the detailed inspections by federal check pilots could continue. At the same time, there were many signs that the number of check pilots would be reduced in the future.

My colleague from Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel and I studied the bill carefully. The committee held 11 meetings to hear witnesses from all the stakeholder groups—pilots, federal officials, lobby groups—and six special meetings to examine the bill clause by clause. After studying all the clauses, we wrote a report, which was recently tabled in the House and proposed 20 amendments to the bill.

The Bloc's concerns have to do with the safety management system and the designated organizations, because we did not have a clear idea of what responsibilities they would have in the overall system.

Government Orders

We heard the different parties, including Justice Moshansky, an aviation expert who even conducted an inquiry into a plane crash. He said that the clause on designated organizations should be kept, but with provision for oversight. This is what we did, as it was clear to us that, in light of all the positive comments we had heard, this safety management system could give good results.

However, we made sure government inspections would continue, in particular by means of the Bloc amendment, which stated:

The Minister shall maintain a program for the oversight and surveillance of aviation safety in order to achieve the highest level of safety established by the Minister.

We proposed this amendment, which was included in our committee report, because we wanted to ensure that the inspections that are already part of the air transportation system would continue, despite the more general implementation of safety management systems.

In this way, we made sure that Transport Canada would not just have audits of the systems themselves done and not carry out its own visual and technical inspections of aircraft. By doing this, we are bringing about what the minister and the department were talking about—a dual safety system—and not just replacing inspections with a safety system. Continuing with the inspections and implementing the systems across the board ensures that, as a basic principle, all companies will be governed by a safety management system. We can at least rest assured, thanks to the continuing inspections, that the system itself will improve safety overall within companies.

However, I am particularly disappointed that 16 last-minute amendments are being introduced at this stage. Of these, 10 or 12 have been moved by the NDP. One amendment asks for the elimination of clause 12. We studied designated organizations together at length and now, all of a sudden, we are told that all that will be eliminated, at the last minute, even though these views were not accepted when the bill was studied in committee.

The most surprising is the government's amendment No. 2, which seeks to eliminate everything pertaining to safety systems. The NDP, the Bloc and the Liberals worked together to come up with a good definition, which was not in the legislation. It is a matter of regulations, establishing regulations for safety management systems.

• (1155)

We went to the trouble of spelling out the definition of these systems. Suddenly, at the last minute, just before the vote, the government wants to eliminate this definition—which is very binding for the government, it is true—that allows us to give our full support to this bill.

My colleague read it earlier, but I think it is important to read it again:

(c.1) safety management systems and programs that provide for

(i) the appointment of an executive

(A) responsible for operations and activities authorized under a certificate issued pursuant to a regulation made under this Act, and

(B) accountable for the extent to which the requirements of the applicable safety management system or program have been met,

(ii) the implementation, as a result of any risk management analysis, of the remedial action required to maintain the highest level of safety,

(iii) continuous monitoring and regular assessment of the level of safety achieved, and

(iv) the involvement of employees and their bargaining agents in the development, implementation and ongoing operation of the applicable safety management system or program;

This is a set of obligations for companies and their staff to ensure real involvement in this safety management program.

We also looked at railway safety, where safety management systems were implemented roughly five years ago.

We heard from a number of witnesses during consideration of safety. Most of the witnesses said they had never heard of a safety management system in their company.

With this legislation, we want employees and bargaining agents to be involved and play an active role in the safety management system. We do not just want to have a nice system that comes from management and is in the company's files, but does filter down to the core to ensure full involvement of the entire company.

Today, the government is proposing to eliminate this entire nice definition that we worked on together. It is not very reassuring as far as any wish they might have to implement a good safety management system, which we subscribed to only after examining it and hearing from all the witnesses.

I noticed earlier that the representatives of the official opposition will not support such an amendment. They took part in this, just as we did. We do not want this amendment to be adopted. They put forward three or four other admissible amendments that simply make corrections to the text.

I hope this amendment will not be adopted. I also hope that after the bill has been considered by the other place, there will not be any surprises, like the ones we had with Bill C-11.

[*English*]

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments of the member who just spoke as well as his participation in this very important debate about public policy. This ultimately could affect all of us in a very negative way if we do not do the right thing.

I am wondering how the Bloc finds it possible to support a bill that takes us further down the road to the privatization of the ability of government to monitor, inspect and participate actively in guaranteeing the safety of our transportation systems and, in this instance, the airline industry in particular.

I find this passing strange as well. We have a government that is over the top in concern about safety, particularly in our airlines with some of the moves that it is making now, such as the no-fly list, which I oppose, as it is arbitrary and has no appeal process attached to it.

Government Orders

We have seen a trend, first from the Liberals, who introduced the bill originally, and now we see it from the Conservatives as they push this forward more and more toward pulling government out of the responsibility that it traditionally and historically has had in this country and turning it over to the private sector. When we turn these responsibilities over to the private sector, our experience has been that the private sector begins to impose its priorities, which are more about the bottom line, cutting corners and being more cost effective and so on, and I believe that is a risk for the safety of the public and the common good.

I would ask the member to explain a bit further for me this morning why it is that the Bloc members will support the bill. They are not supporting the amendment that has been put forward today, but why is it that the Bloc will support this bill when in fact, as we see it, it is taking us down a road that really will be hard to travel back up again once we have gone in that direction?

• (1200)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Carrier: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. It gives me an opportunity to clarify this important point.

Obviously, at the beginning, as I said earlier, we did not support the bill, which would establish a safety management system. To us, it was somewhat abstract, and it seemed to be beyond oversight, in terms of government responsibility. However, we satisfied ourselves that all inspections of the system done by federal inspectors would be continued.

I have read the amendment that is part of the report tabled, and it is quite important. It says "the Minister shall maintain a program for the oversight and surveillance of aviation safety in order to achieve the highest level of safety established by the Minister".

This means that obligations were added that were not there in the bill at the outset. It simply referred to establishing the safety management system in a general way, even by designated organizations for companies that were able to set it up themselves. That was of considerable concern to us in the beginning, as it was to you.

However, by maintaining the minister's obligation to continue all inspections that are in fact done, we made the bill acceptable, particularly given that safety management systems have already been set up in a majority of the major airlines. It is therefore a system that has been tried and tested.

We heard testimony from pilots. They told us that it was a good system. They were reassured by the fact that their companies had their own safety management systems, that they were not simply relying on a federal inspector who makes regular visits, although I do not know exactly what the frequency of the inspector's visits are. Still, if we are completely assured that at least the same level of inspections will be maintained by the government, the system put in place once and for all should provide us with better safety in future. We certainly must not simply rely on an inspection that may be done every six months or once a year.

Therefore, with a system that is kept in place permanently, we should be even safer. We must not, however, eliminate the companies' obligation to submit to inspection by the federal

inspector who is really there to check that everything is as it should be.

[*English*]

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak on this very important bill before us. It will have ramifications both in the short term and the long term if we allow it to go through the House today. I think it will put at risk the safety of travellers who fly by air across the country and those flying internationally.

It disturbs me deeply that we are moving with such haste and in a direction that we have seen in other jurisdictions has proven to be not good, and in some instances disastrous.

First of all, I commend and thank my colleague, the member for Burnaby—New Westminster, for the very vigilant effort he has put into this and the oversight that he has provided. The contribution that he has made to this committee, as it has struggled with the bill, has been nothing but outstanding and he continues right to the last minute to put on the table all of those concerns that we as an NDP caucus in the House have raised about the bill.

The member speaks very effectively on behalf of many people and particularly those who work in the airline safety industry, groups like the Canadian Union of Public Employees, the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers, airline inspectors, and other representatives from the trade union movement. They know directly. They have to sleep with this every night. We will have to sleep with this as well if their ability to act on behalf of the common good, in the interests of safety for all Canadians, is in any way jeopardized by the interests of the airlines themselves.

We have seen this on a number of occasions in the not too far past. Many of us will remember the demise of an airline company called Jetsgo in this country. After it was grounded it was found that the safety record that it had was pretty alarming. Just by way of some commentary, I wish to quote what was said in a newspaper at that time:

Interviews with former employees, incident reports filed with Transport Canada and the Transportation Safety Board, and internal government documents paint a picture of an airline so badly run that some considered a major accident inevitable.

It went on to say:

The Jetsgo experience underscores some of the major findings that are part of an ongoing investigation into aviation safety by the Toronto Star, Hamilton Spectator and The Record of Waterloo Region. The probe has found a system struggling to keep up with the demands of higher passenger traffic and a disturbing number of mechanical problems.

To simply say that if we pull some of the government oversight out of this and turn it over to the companies themselves that somehow it will correct itself is, I believe, simplistic at its worst.

For the government to be moving down that road and with the support of the Liberals in particular who brought the bill forward in the first place, I think, is quite irresponsible.

Government Orders

We have our own member for Trinity—Spadina raising issues with the minister and the ministry in the context of this bill that speaks to her concern about an airport right in the middle of downtown Toronto. It already presents all kinds of safety and environmental challenges, never mind if that company, as it struggles to find its niche, gets a toehold in the very competitive market of the airline industry, and begins as well to cut corners where safety is concerned in order to be successful and profitable.

It concerns us deeply in this caucus that we would allow ourselves to be manipulated, led and driven in this way by the industry itself knowing what happened in the railway sector where we have done this, where we went down this road. There was very similar legislation in place in terms of safety oversight. Now we see day after day, week after week, railway accidents, some very close to communities. One of these days one of those accidents will be disastrous. If we have an accident in the air it is automatically disastrous by the nature of the way that business happens.

●(1205)

In light of what we know and what we have seen, our past experience, and the road we have gone down with other privatizations of this safety oversight and other privatizations of government operations, why would we continue to support a bill such as the one we have in front of us today?

I mentioned just a few minutes ago about the member for Burnaby—New Westminster who has worked really hard on this bill. In fact, given that it looked like the bill was moving through anyway because the Liberals, the Bloc and the Conservatives have now agreed that they are going to support, it did make some substantial progress.

However, I think our concern, and perhaps that little bit of progress, needs to be put on the record. These are major policy initiatives that would have a direct impact on Canadians who travel by air.

The financial bottom line of Air Canada and WestJet will be a factor in setting safety levels in the sky. Transport Canada will be relegated to a more distant role as a general overseer of this new safety mechanism that we are putting in place, namely, adequate safety costs and money, but the safety management systems, SMS, would foster a tendency to cut corners in a very competitive aviation market racked by high fuel prices. What would happen to safety when the need to make profits and save money becomes paramount, as in fact it already has?

Bill C-6 enshrines safety management systems which would allow industries to decide the level of risk they are willing to accept in their operations rather than abide by the level of safety established by a minister acting in the public interest.

Safety management systems would let the government transfer increasing responsibility to the industry itself to set and enforce its own safety standards. It is designed in part to help Transport Canada deal with declining resources and high projected levels of inspector retirements.

While the NDP passed an amendment at the transport committee that emphasizes a reduction of risks to the lowest possible level,

rather than just accepting or tolerating these risks, we are still concerned about the delegation of safety to corporations.

Some of the amendments that we were able to get through committee included: a new legislative requirement for the minister to maintain a program for the oversight and surveillance of aviation safety in order to achieve the highest level of safety, a new legislative obligation for the minister to require that aeronautical activities be performed at all times in a manner that meets the highest safety and security standards, and a new legislative requirement for the minister to carry out inspections of operators who use SMS.

The NDP supported a government amendment to give the transport committee the unprecedented ability to review Transport Canada regulations that may have a reported safety concerns.

Under pressure from the NDP, the government was compelled to introduce extensive amendments to limit the scope of designated organizations, the bodies that would assume the role of Transport Canada in setting and enforcing rules on airline safety.

One such amendment would require proper government inspection of these designated organizations while another would require the minister to approve any rules made by these bodies.

The designated organizations provisions were also delayed three years before taking effect, as well as being subject to annual reporting to Parliament and the review by the transport committee after three years.

An amendment was successfully pushed through to ensure that the Canada Labour Code would prevail over the Aeronautics Act in the event of possible conflict. An amendment was added that would ensure employees and their bargaining agents are included in the development and implementation of SMS.

The government was compelled, after extended debate, to introduce a form of whistleblower protection for employees who report to Transport Canada. A new definition of safety management system was put in the legislation, emphasizing a reduction of risks to the lowest possible level rather than just accepting and tolerating these risks.

We claim, as I wrap up, that without constant and effective public regulation corporations would constantly push the limits of safety operations, at growing risk to the travelling public. This was said by Dave Ritchie, general vice-president of IAMAW.

While the government's intention to download the regulation and monitoring of safety to the private sector is dangerous, we are particularly concerned about the use of SMS in foreign repair stations. If the monitoring of Transport Canada and SMS in Canada is problematic, it is even more unlikely at foreign work sites. So, we continue to be very concerned and will in fact be voting against this legislation when it comes forward.

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• (1210)

Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for his intervention but, of course, I disagree with him profoundly. It is interesting that at committee stage even the Bloc members initially opposed our legislation, but once they understood what it was about, once we introduced some amendments, and once they were able to introduce some amendments, we actually came to a consensus and realized this legislation was good for Canada and aviation.

One of the things the member just mentioned was his concern about this being a disaster waiting to happen. I believe he talked about moving in a direction that will be disastrous. Then he referred to privatization. There is nothing in this bill that I can see that refers to privatization, nothing.

I challenge the member. He is not a member of the committee and may misunderstand certain parts of the legislation, but if he is speaking in the House today I am sure he has read through the legislation. I would challenge him to point me to the sections which actually move Canadian aviation in the direction of privatization, move the whole issue of safety management into the private sphere. I do not see it. Maybe he does.

• (1215)

Mr. Tony Martin: Mr. Speaker, right off the bat I want to say to the member that I am always offended in this place when somebody suggests that just because a member does not sit on a particular committee he cannot intelligently participate in the debates that happen in the House.

I represent my constituents here. I was elected in the same election that the member was, so I have every right to get up in the House and state my comments and concerns on any issue that comes before the House in debate. I resent any comment that I somehow do not have the right or knowledge of the information necessary to put my perspective on the record.

The member for Burnaby—New Westminster, the hardest working member on the committee, has informed us consistently and constantly over the last few months as this bill worked its way through committee, so I have no difficulty putting the NDP position forward.

I say to the member that if it walks like a duck, if it quacks like a duck, if it looks like a duck, then it is a duck. We may not be talking privatization here, but everything in this bill smacks of and speaks of the privatization of the safety oversight of our airline industry, and we oppose that.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I tend to agree with the member. One does not have to be on a committee to be aware of some of the issues.

The member referred in his speech to alleged safety and environmental problems of an airport in the middle of downtown Toronto. I am aware there is an airport there. It is not exactly in the middle of downtown Toronto. The island airport is south of Toronto. Air Canada has regular flights to the island airport, as well as Porter Airlines, which is new. We are talking about another competitive situation.

In view of the fact that he has raised this as a relevant issue with regard to safety issues, is he aware of any specific example of an accident, alert, complaint or anything that would indicate there was any real safety concerns with regard to the Toronto Island airport?

Mr. Tony Martin: Mr. Speaker, I have seen the Toronto Island airport. It is located right in the heart of downtown Toronto. One cannot get to that airport without flying over major parts of that very important city in the province of Ontario. The potential for a disaster to happen is definitely there, particularly if we go down the road of turning over safety oversight in this industry to the companies themselves. There is only one company operating out of that airport right now and it is trying desperately to grab on to some piece of that industry, which is very competitive and very difficult.

Given a choice between hiring more people and making sure the best qualified people are working on those airplanes and bringing in people who are not quite as qualified in order to save money is where the privatization happens. It seems that the Conservative members do not understand, and thousands and thousands of people are put at risk in the heart of downtown—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Resuming debate, the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very interested to speak to this bill and I am very pleased to be following my colleague, the Sault Ste. Marie. When we are called upon to look at legislation, we inevitably look at it through the prism of our region and our experience. What I have seen in northern Ontario, which reflects rural regions across Canada, is the general abandonment at the federal level of a vision for transportation in our country. I want to speak to that first because it ties into the bill.

We have three key areas of transportation in northern Ontario. We have rail, we have a very thin ribbon of highway, which masquerades as the Trans-Canada trucking route but often it is two lanes for 18 wheelers on icy roads with rock cuts on either side, and we have a series of airports. A number of years ago two decisions were made. One was at the provincial level and one was at the federal level, which cut loose key airports from the economic life of our communities.

One was a decision by then Premier Mike Harris that we did not need the norOntair air service, which was a vital service linking all the communities in southern Ontario. The private sector could step in. The private sector did not step in and key airports were left without carriers and without service.

At the same time, the federal government was making a decision to walk away from its traditional role of supporting the infrastructure of airports, leaving these airports on their own. In my region, the airport at Earlton has always played an essential role. Also the airport in Kirkland Lake played an essential role in terms of medevac services, connecting the communities in the central Témiscaming region with southern Ontario. The loss of carrier service and the loss of federal support for those airports has seriously challenged economic development. If we are trying to bring new business, new families and entrepreneurs into a region, and the best thing we can offer them is two lanes of highway and icy roads, they are going to think twice.

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We have asked again and again where the government plan is to ensure that not every single airport, but key airports in key regions are given some level of support in order to maintain themselves. Clearly the issue of the Earlton airport and the Kirkland Lake airport speaks to a lack of vision in the country and about the need to ensure we have infrastructure to support airline service and airline access in all regions, including our rural regions. The lack of support for Earlton and Kirkland Lake is indicative of a lack of vision for the larger transportation issue.

At the same time, we see in northern airports that Transport Canada and the federal government no longer mandate the same level of emergency services. For example, at the Timmins airport, which is very busy serving the James Bay coast and the De Beers project with numerous flights in and out, there is no longer the obligation to maintain fire services there. Therefore, this is a question of risk management, that we believe the odds are with us and that nothing will go wrong. If something does go wrong, if we do not have fire services at those key airports, the tragedy would be immense.

I want to speak to this bill because the New Democratic Party members have looked carefully at the transportation agenda being brought forward by the government and by the former government. We have a number of concerns that link to the larger issue of the abandonment of the federal responsibility to set a certain level of standard to ensure the transportation links, whether they be rail, road, or by air, are maintained.

We brought forward a number of amendments to Bill C-6 because we found it fundamentally flawed from the get-go. At the end of the day, we still believe those problems remain. As far as we can see from having gone through this legislation, this is about allowing industry to set the level of risk, not government.

That is a fundamental problem for us. Look at the Jetsgo situation. Jetsgo was considered a model. Any upstart airport business is considered a great thing when it happens and we support that, but there were major problems with Jetsgo. I can refer to the *Toronto Star* investigative report that said when it was offering fares as low as \$1, a price was going to be paid and that price was in safety, training and maintaining a level or standard with which all Canadians would feel comfortable.

• (1220)

Canadians assume the federal government is taking that role. However, we saw Transport Canada do very little to address serious issues. In fact, over a two and a half year period it dismissed the troubles being brought forward on safety. It said that it was part of the growing pains of a start-up operation.

It would be quite the growing pain if something did go horribly wrong, and they can go wrong. Given the risks of airlines, being much greater than any other form of transportation, we have to ensure we have the standard in place. This will ensure that either a start-up airline or a long-standing airline has to meet a certain standard of safety.

We believe the issue brought forward in Bill C-6 is that we will let companies set their level of what is acceptable risk, and that is simply not good enough. We are concerned about why the

Conservative government would bring this forward right now. There are key areas that the Conservatives campaigned on. One was access to information, which they said would bring accountability. They also talked about whistleblower protection, again for accountability. Then there is the larger issue of simple accountability.

If we look at the bill and the flaws in it, the New Democratic Party's research on the bill has found that instead of allowing for access to information on flight safety, it heightens secrecy. It restricts access to information on the safety performance of airlines. Canadians will be left in the dark when it comes to important safety information. Public access under the Access to Information Act to safety information and reports to Transport Canada by air operators will be totally unavailable.

That is not acceptable, especially for a government whose members, for example on the issue of accountability, are running around saying that they are going to give out every Wheat Board meeting note, yet on the issue of Canadians of being able to ask clearly for the records of what is happening with airline safety, they are not going to give them that.

On whistleblower protection, we have always thought we would believe it when we saw a government commit to whistleblowers. However, for airline safety, whistleblower protection is vital. We need people to come forward to tell us if there are problems. Otherwise we only will find out the problem after the fact. While some form of whistleblower protection for employees has been introduced, there is no effective redress mechanism for employees who have had reprisals taken against them, other than a warning or a possible fine of the offending employer. We believe there has to be really clear and committed protection so people bring forward problems.

On the overall issue of accountability, we believe the safety management system in place is not acceptable to the larger issue of public safety. We are allowing the airline industry to increasingly define what its comfort level is.

As members of Parliament, we fly a great deal, and I have learned a lot more about flight safety from flying. I fly on the large jets, but I also fly on the little puddle jumpers like the little Bearskin tube planes that fly into Sioux Lookout and Thunder Bay. There are also the little planes that I take to the James Bay coast. Therefore, I have begun to reflect a great deal more about the issue of safety. As travellers and passengers, we always assume safety is the first and foremost requirement. However, when we are dealing with an extremely competitive market, when we are dealing with the extreme high costs and the need to get into markets, any industry is going to be challenged.

The issue of safety perhaps does not become an issue of negligence, but cutting a corner here and a corner there can lead to problems. This is why we need that objective body. We need a really clear presence of Transport Canada acting. In terms of railway safety, it has failed to act. We have seen the incredible number of rail accidents that have taken place in the last three years. Clearly this system is not working. We need greater accountability and a greater sense of protection for the public

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•(1225)

That brings me back to the whole Jetsgo issue. We looked through the reports that were done in the media on it. It was very disturbing that a key maintenance document was more than a decade out of date. There were no engineering orders to demonstrate that three safety orders relating to engines had been complied with. There was no evidence that a quality assurance audit, due in the latter half of 2004, was ever completed. The review uncovered a 2004 internal Jetsgo audit that found numerous examples of missing or inappropriate entries on maintenance release forms that allowed the planes to fly in the air.

•(1230)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): We will have to move on to questions and comments now as the time for the member's speech has expired.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Sault Ste. Marie.

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to commend the member for Timmins—James Bay for always being engrossed in his material and for delivering some of the better speeches that we hear in this place. He is always on topic, very informative and interesting.

In the last 10 or 20 years, the deregulation of the airline industry has had a huge impact on remote parts of the country. Northern Ontario has suffered due to the lack of service that has ultimately transpired. We used to have an excellent government operated airline, norOntair, that connected in a safe and coordinated way all the major communities in northern Ontario. Since the deregulation and the pulling back of government from the airline industry, we have found we no longer have the service that we need and deserve. In fact, airports are barely hanging on.

If we parallel that with this move from the Conservatives to deregulate, where safety and safety oversight is concerned, what concerns does my colleague have about these?

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague has nailed the discussion here. Deregulation is based on the principle that there is enough of a market to allow more competition. Areas not being adequately served right now will actually be better served with increased competition and increased deregulation.

The reality is there are very few profitable sectors in terms of airline transportation in Canada today, where there are enough numbers to generate the kind of capacity building needed. With large level deregulation, we will end up with one or two giant carriers that pick up the key routes and the smaller ones will be left by the wayside. This is the way markets work, but is that necessarily the work of government?

The vast majority of our country, in terms of land mass, does not exist between the Windsor-Quebec City corridor, although certain politicians believe that is the full extent of our country. In fact, the vast majority of our country is composed of outlying regions that are harder to service. Those areas are not economically unviable. For example, exploration is key in my region, with its immense resources in diamonds, gold and copper. To bring in either value added or new business, people have to be able to fly there. It is not

good enough to fly them three hours away and then have them drive the rest of the way. That does not work.

We had excellent air service in northern Ontario. The air service covered off all the key communities so people could travel and businesses could develop. That was lost by a decision made by then Premier Mike Harris and by the government when it walked away on its obligation, not to continually fund airports but to ensure a basic infrastructure program so municipal, rural and regional airports could access it.

I want to get back to the issue of the Earlton airport and the Kirkland Lake airport. These are key examples of the kind of airports across the country, which serve important links. Right now they are fending for themselves. They have been downloaded to the municipalities and their ability to continue to provide needed service is highly questionable.

Where is the government vision for rural airports across the country?

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for a minute I thought we were talking about whether airline flights served Bits & Bites or Oreo cookies. We are talking about air safety and the bill before us. Every witness who appeared before committee said that Canada had the safest aviation safety system in the world. Does the member agree with that or not?

He makes it sound like planes are falling out of the sky and inspectors are getting pink slips. There is a commitment in the bill for a robust inspection system, which his party supported. Nothing has changed. It is going to be better.

Does the member agree that Canada has the safest aviation system in the world?

•(1235)

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, it is an excellent question, but I would like to pose it for the member. Does he believe we have the best rail service protection in the world for the public? We in the NDP certainly think there are serious problems.

The serious problems have to go back to Transport Canada. Transport Canada has the obligation to ensure that we have the best airline record in the world. Fortunately we are not talking about tragedies that have happened, but about how to prevent the tragedies from happening.

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we have found out that 80,000 passengers have been put at risk over the past five years when planes have come dangerously close to each other in Canadian skies. These findings are based on Transport Canada data. That includes more than 800 incidents between 2001 and mid-2005 in which planes were getting too close to each other. In some cases, they were seconds away from colliding.

What should happen? We are saying that the Transport Canada guidelines will need to make sure devices are put into the planes to ensure there is a system to make sure the planes do not come close to one another.

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Why do I raise this? It is because through access to information my office was able to find out that recently in downtown Toronto at the island airport we had an incident on March 13, 2007, I believe, when a Cessna 150, a training school type of plane, was doing circuits around runway 26. There was a Porter Airlines flight, a Dash 8 400, approaching the runway. The plane doing circuits on runway 26 cut off the Dash 8, overshooting, and the two aircraft came within 400 feet vertically or a half a mile horizontally of each other. That is very close. How did I get that information? I obtained it from access to information.

Under clause 7 of this bill, no one, no member of the public, whether it is a member of Parliament, a journalist or a person concerned about airline safety, would be able to get this kind of information. The *Toronto Star* did a series not long ago, in September 2006, recording all of the problems that various airlines, the industry and the passengers had. What will happen after Bill C-6 passes is that all of this information will not be allowed to become public.

Where is the accountability when there is no transparency and no openness? What is the government afraid of? Why is the government shutting down the public's right to know about airline safety? If the government is not doing that, then we should cancel clause 7 and get rid of it. The bill is very clear. Clause 7 says that we cannot continue to have this information.

Earlier there was a question about Toronto's downtown airport and Porter Airlines. Parts of Bill C-6 say that it is now going to be up to the industry to decide the level of risk that the industry is willing to accept in its operations, rather than it being done through the level of safety established by a minister acting in the public interest. It allows the government to transfer the responsibility from the minister and from government so that the industry itself would set and enforce its own safety standards.

That is not the way to go. Why?

Let me describe Toronto's island airport for members. The island airport is in downtown Toronto. It has a large number of pilot cautions. I will tell members what they are. It is stated that all arriving and departing aircraft are instructed to avoid flights over the CNE and Ontario Place. The wind turbine at the CNE grounds is listed as a hazard. There are two large chimney stacks that are noted as hazards, the Hearn power generating plant and the incinerator on Leslie Street.

Pilots also are instructed not to fly over surrounding neighbourhoods, including the entire Bathurst Quay, the residential condominiums along Queen's Quay, and the island community. There are close to 20,000 residents in that downtown area. There are high-rises, some of which are 40 to 50 storeys high. Some of them are within a few seconds to a few minutes of the airport.

• (1240)

Pilots are also warned about vessels with 120 foot masts in the vicinity of the final approach to all the runways. There is frequent banner-towing activity over the CNE, which is a hazard. The flagpole in Confederation Park is listed as a hazard. As well, pilots are cautioned that a number of new high-rise buildings have been approved around Fort York. Also, a building on Fleet Street is 44

storeys high, so just along Fleet Street there are at least five to eight new high-rise condominiums that have been approved and are going in.

That area is surrounded by large buildings. Also, because it is right by the lake, people have observed that lake fog in the spring and fall sometimes causes poor visibility at the airport. There is severe weather, such as crosswinds, wind shear and air turbulence, creating difficult landing conditions. In fact, in just the short while that Porter Airlines has been flying into the island airport, there already has been one incident in which the aircraft could not land at the island airport and was told to go to Pearson International Airport.

The aircraft flying into the island airport, the Q400, is certified to operate in crosswinds of up to 60 kilometres per hour. During February 2006, wind gusts of over 60 kilometres per hour were recorded on 11 different days, so in one month alone there were 11 days when the crosswinds were too strong.

There is also another problem at this airport. The runway is incredibly short. The Q400, when fully loaded, requires 1,402 metres for takeoff and landing, which is almost 200 metres more than the longest runway at the island airport. That is how short the runway is. These are the safety requirements at the downtown Toronto Island Airport. Even Bombardier, which manufactures the Q400, has said that 1,400 metres of runway is required only if one of the two engines fails on takeoff.

There are a lot of problems at the downtown island airport. There is also a problem with the large number of birds in that area. There is a bird sanctuary nearby. Occasionally people have to shoot off some guns in order to scare away the birds. Transport Canada statistics show that the shore birds, and gulls in particular, account for the greatest number of bird strikes and that 80% of bird strikes occur during takeoff and landing. There are all sorts of problems.

Also, the island airport is run by a port authority that this year at the annual general meeting declared a loss of \$6 million in a \$10 million business. It is quite incredible that our government is continuing to subsidize a money-losing business and that this rogue agency continues to run an airport that is not welcomed by the citizens of Toronto and definitely has a lot of safety problems.

We are seeing a pattern in Bill C-6, which deals with airline safety. We have other bills like this before us, such as Bill C-45, the proposed fisheries act, which basically allows corporate polluters to dump toxic substances without fines. The new act allows the minister discretion to give alternate measures to big polluters instead of criminal records as mandated in the old fisheries act. Environmentalists and people who are concerned about the Great Lakes, for example, are appalled. There is a big campaign against the bill because it is seriously flawed. That is one of the patterns.

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Other things are happening. Last week we discovered that at least 90,000 toys in Canada have dangerous levels of lead and again the government is asking the industry to determine what the safety level is, just like it is doing for the airline industry. We are asking companies to detect toxins and lead in toys and asking them—

• (1245)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Resuming debate. The hon. member for London—Fanshawe.

Mrs. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, like my NDP colleague, I find the bill seriously flawed.

I want to be clear: we know that from the outset this was basically a Liberal government bill. It is roughly the same bill that was placed before the House in 2005 by the Liberals. Back then it was known as Bill S-33. It was slated to go through the Senate before the House of Commons. It was introduced in the Senate by a Liberal senator but subsequently was ruled out of order because it was a money bill. Interestingly enough, it was challenged in the Senate by Conservative senators.

The bill then reappeared magically as Bill C-62 in the fall of 2006 and of course died on the order paper because of an election. Apparently there were forces at work that made this very bad bill disappear.

However, we have it back again. This time it is Bill C-6 and not much has changed from the bad old days of Bills S-33 and C-62. It is still flawed. It is the same old bill with the same problems.

Needless to say, there have been numerous concerns about the way in which governments, both the Liberals and the Conservatives, are dealing with this area of aeronautics policy and safety management.

One of the biggest concerns that we and other Canadians have is about accountability, accountability to Parliament, accountability to the people of Canada, and open and transparent decision making, all the things that the Conservatives said were intrinsic to their mandate and inherent in their philosophy and would be fundamental to the work of the House, the work that they would do here.

Yet here we are again, as we have been on so many other occasions over the last little while, with another example of the Conservatives renegeing on accountability and the interests of Canadians because of expediency. On a fundamental issue of accountability and safety and security of the people in the country, the government once again is going the route of expediency rather than route of what is in the best interests of Canadians.

While we have made substantial progress, Bill C-6 emphasizes cutting costs rather than improving safety standards. There can be no compromise on airline safety. Let me repeat: there can be no compromise on the safety of Canadians. These are major policy issues that will have a direct impact on Canadians who travel by air. The financial bottom lines of Air Canada and WestJet unfortunately will be a factor in setting safety levels in this country.

Transport Canada will be relegated to a more distant role as general overseer of safety management systems, or SMS, as we have heard it called. Adequate safety costs money, but SMS will foster a

tendency to cut corners in a very competitive aviation market racked by high fuel prices.

That of course will lead to concerns about the profit margin, with a lot of money for fuel and less money for profit. We know that in business profit is paramount. It is called bean-counting. That is where corporations analyze the degree of risk they are willing to take in order to make money. But when it comes to airline security I say that any risk is unacceptable, and I say not in Canada, no bean-counting when it comes to airline security.

In collaboration with stakeholders such as the Canadian Union of Public Employees, the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers, airline inspectors and other representatives from the trade union movement, the NDP transportation critic successfully fought for a number of amendments to Bill C-6 in the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities.

Unfortunately, serious flaws still remain in Bill C-6. The bill will enshrine SMS, which will allow industries to decide, as I said before, the level of risk they are willing to accept in operations rather than abide by the level of safety established by a minister acting in the public interest.

• (1250)

The SMS would let the government transfer increasing responsibility to the industry itself to set and enforce its own safety standards. It is designed in part to help Transport Canada deal with declining resources and high projected levels of inspector retirements. This just cannot happen. The Government of Canada has to be responsible. It cannot relegate and slough off its responsibility to the industry.

While the NDP passed an amendment in transport committee that emphasizes a reduction of risk to the lowest possible level rather than just accepting or tolerating these risks, we are still concerned about the delegation of safety to corporations.

The NDP did manage to improve this legislation somewhat in committee. A new legislative requirement for the minister to maintain a program for oversight and surveillance of aviation safety in order to achieve the highest level of safety was passed. A new legislative obligation for the minister to require the aeronautical activities be performed at all times in a manner that meets the highest safety and security standards was passed. A new legislative requirement for the minister to carry out inspections of operators who use SMS was passed.

The NDP supported a government amendment to give the transport committee the unprecedented ability to review Transport Canada regulations that may have a reported safety concern.

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Under pressure from the NDP, the government was compelled to introduce extensive amendments to limit the scope of designated organizations, the bodies that would assume the role of Transport Canada in setting and enforcing rules on airline safety.

An amendment was successfully pushed through to ensure that the Canada Labour Code would prevail over the Aeronautics Act in the event of a possible conflict.

An amendment was added that would ensure employees and their bargaining agents were included in the development and implementation of SMS.

The government was again compelled, after extended debate, to introduce a form of whistleblower protection for employees who report to Transport Canada that their employer is violating the law.

A new definition of safety management system was put into the legislation, emphasizing a reduction of risks to the lowest possible level rather than just accepting or tolerating risks.

We still have a number of concerns with Bill C-6 and the fact that it compromises the safety of Canadians. We believe that the travelling public and aviation workers deserve better.

We are also concerned with issues involving SMS secrecy, weak whistleblower protection and a lack of airline accountability. These compromises are unacceptable. They are unacceptable to the NDP, and I believe they are unacceptable to Canadians.

The airline industry would be permitted to increasingly define the safety levels of its operations. While the scope of designated organizations has been restricted, significant loopholes still remain. Unfortunately, an amendment ensuring these designated organizations respect key laws in their rule making was defeated.

There is no three year review clause for SMS, as is the case for designated organizations.

There is still no real accountability because this legislation seeks to heighten secrecy. It restricts access to information on the safety performance of airlines. Canadians will be left in the dark when it comes to important safety information. Public access under the Access to Information Act, the ATIA, to safety information reports provided to Transport Canada by air operators will be totally unavailable. We have heard about this.

The NDP amendments sought to preserve operations like ATIA in key areas. Unfortunately, these were defeated.

This new hands off enforcement policy by Transport Canada under SMS would mean that there would be no action taken against corporate offenders if there were problems. The government contends that companies will no longer divulge safety problems without this provision. We find this very unconvincing.

We believe there has to be protection. We believe this bill does not afford that protection. We demand that the government and this House consider the safety of Canadians first.

• (1255)

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to ask my friend a question regarding the whistleblower piece she

just talked about. An article in the *Toronto Star* of June 23, 2006, states:

More than three-dozen airline pilots, mechanics, air traffic controllers and Transport Canada employees say they are afraid to speak out about serious safety concerns in Canadian skies—an industry code of silence that has triggered calls for whistleblower protection aimed at aviation workers.

While U.S. airline workers have a federal law upholding their right to speak out without fear of reprisals, their Canadian colleagues say sharing what they know would jeopardize their livelihoods and careers in aviation.

Let me give an example. Four Air Canada Jazz mechanics were suspended in June of last year when they warned of poor maintenance of the airplanes that threatened passenger safety. The pilots, various mechanics and air traffic controllers are saying that the management of the airlines would rather not know about any of these safety issues. There is a long list of information saying there is pressure to cut corners, something that all mechanics encounter in the industry as a known stigma, and other mechanics have said there are serious problems. They are over-burdened and underfunded. There are somewhat inefficient government regulatory bodies, et cetera.

Why is it that the U.S. prohibits retaliation? It has very clear legislation, called AIR 21, directed at the airline industry. It prohibits employers from retaliating against employees involved in raising concerns of reporting violations of airline safety rules and regulations.

Why is it that Canada does not have such legislation? There are so many examples of airline mechanics and others being fired. Is that fair? Would this bill make it even worse?

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Mr. Speaker, very clearly the safety of airlines is compromised by the very weak whistleblower piece in Bill C-6. It is clear to me that the Americans understand that employees must be protected. When it comes to losing their jobs, being reprimanded, or finding themselves out in the cold, many employees think about the security of their families and feel obligated to consider the loss of a job and the consequences on the family first.

Unfortunately, it is very cold comfort for those of us who utilize airlines in this country. It is absolutely essential that whistleblowers, airline employees, be able to report with impunity the problems they see. The risks are incredible.

I am sure members have found themselves on airplanes in the last little while. That feeling of vulnerability is profound in terms of travelling by that mode of transportation. No matter what the record may say, we are talking about the past in terms of airline security. We are not talking about a new regime which would occur under Bill C-6.

There has to be security for workers, pilots and those who would do their duty to the travelling public. There has to be stronger whistleblower protection. That is a given. We do not see that in Bill C-6.

Government Orders

• (1300)

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today with very strong concerns regarding Bill C-6. We heard earlier how this bill has come back to haunt this place on several occasions. It began in the other place where it was first introduced, on May 16, 2005, if I recall correctly. At that time the Senate Speaker withdrew the bill because it had funding implications which of course were not appropriate. The government of the day subsequently followed with Bill C-62.

The current bill that is before this place today, rather than improving safety standards, the safety management system will allow the airlines to decide what level of risk they are prepared to take. Each member of the House travels regularly. I wonder how members are going to feel as they board the planes knowing that a lot of the accountability is no longer there and that the industry itself, an industry that is under extreme financial pressures, is going to decide what maintenance to do and when to do it. For myself that raises some very tremendous concerns.

Almost daily in this place we hear government members talk about accountability and in various areas we agree with them. We hear about accountability that has to do with a violent offender and whether people have a right to know when the violent offender is in their community and things of that nature.

Section 7 of Bill C-6 flies in the face of all of those statements. We hear the Conservatives going on ad nauseam about accountability, but section 7 takes away the right of Canadians to have access to information. Let us think about that for a moment.

Recently at the Hamilton airport there were two incidents where planes that were set to fly overseas had to return to the airport. The very next day in the *Hamilton Spectator* and other news media across the country, there was a story which told what had gone on and what was being done to account to the passengers and allow them to have some peace of mind as they set about their journey later on.

If that company had not understood that somewhere behind the scenes there was a sense of accountability, where the company knew that whatever decisions were made regarding those flights would come back and rest on its shoulders in the near future, perhaps those stories and the accounts from that company might have been less forthcoming with the information as to what had happened and what went wrong.

It is amazing to me that the government would actually entrust the safety of Canadians to this industry. It is not that the industry has proven to be irresponsible, and I am not suggesting that, but on the other hand when they are looking at the balance sheet and they have shareholders and people with great interest in the bottom line where, is the cut-off point? Where does it become truly in the interest of the public as opposed to the interest of the company when they are trying to decide the cuts?

I often refer to a very wise, I would even go so far as to call him a sage, writer. His name is Kris Kristofferson. He wrote songs in the 1960s and 1970s and still is a well-known performer around the world today. In fact, he is an activist on many fronts. By the way, he

is no relationship to the member for Hamilton Centre. He wrote in the 1970s that the law is for the protection of the people.

In my experience, and I think of many members of the House as we review the legislation that has evolved through this place over many years, we would agree with that statement, that the law is for the protection of the people, but in this case with Bill C-6, is that truly the case? We have to ask ourselves that. I am not so sure. In fact, I cannot quite understand how they could get to this place.

• (1305)

Many members present will likely remember the confrontation in the United States in the 1980s between President Ronald Reagan and the air traffic controllers. At the time, Mr. Reagan took what I think was an amazing stand when he actually had all the air traffic controllers in that country fired. How inconsiderate, to say the least, to the safety of the public, but following that there was the deregulation of the airlines in the U.S. and the number of air crashes and near misses went up tremendously. I am very concerned that we are facing the same thing in this country.

There are all kinds of problems when we look at the various information that comes to us. We talk about Jetsgo's problems and how it was ignored and the probe into the death of the discount airline not that long ago and how it revealed shortcomings in existing legislation and here we are talking about weakening the legislation that protects people.

The NDP in committee put forward a number of amendments and one was a requirement for the minister to maintain a program of oversight and surveillance of aviation safety in order to achieve the highest level of safety, and that was passed. I cannot imagine a person in this place who would disagree with something as fundamental as the government having accountability and authority over the airlines to ensure they follow safety practices.

Coming from the labour movement, I will give an example that I use quite often. We have worker health and safety committees throughout the workplaces in Ontario. I will use a hospital as an example. Many hospitals are moving to offloading or contracting out the health services because they see it as a fundamental work and that it is easy for someone to come in to do. Today, when a CUPE member or an SEI member is doing the work, when people go to the hospital and see a problem they take it to their health and safety committee which carries it to the company where it gets a response. Hopefully, in due course, whatever the issue is it gets resolved.

If workers are there earning minimum wage, that worker will see that same thing but because they are under the gun of the low wage, the lack of accountability and not having that health and safety committee to protect their interests, they will simply keep their head down and keep working. Whatever the problem is remains and grows and grows. In the hospital systems throughout this country we are fighting varying forms of bacteria and other things that are taking residence in the hospitals.

Government Orders

Let us take that same view of health and safety to the airline industry. When we are flying at 35,000 feet we want to be sure that the person who has worked on that aircraft has followed every bit of due diligence and has had no directives to cut corners or the benign neglect that can come from legislation like this where the employer will tell employees that they have so many minutes to get that aircraft ready.

I do not know if members are aware of this but the people who put the aircraft in the air and the ticket people who pass us on to the airlines are not well-paid. Air Canada has contracted out that work and if the aircraft is late in leaving they are not even paid. The emphasis is on getting the plane into the air. If we transfer that same kind of thinking to the mechanics, the pilots and the ground crews, we will be putting the airlines at risk, which is precisely what Bill C-6 does. It opens a door at all levels and puts the Canadian public at risk, and we cannot have that. I assume and expect that the members present will totally disagree with Bill C-6.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Carrier (Alfred-Pellan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have listened to my NDP colleague and I will forgive him his lack of familiarity with the bill because he does not sit on the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities. In particular, he spoke against the safety management systems in the present bill that are not being eliminated by any amendment currently before us.

We in the Bloc Québécois had the feeling that we ought not to eliminate all aircraft inspections. That is why the NDP and the Bloc moved an amendment specifying that the Minister had to maintain a program for the oversight and surveillance of aviation safety.

I think that this amendment, which is part of the committee's report, assures us that the government will not be divesting itself of its responsibilities even though a safety management system is being put in place. Rather, I believe he is talking about the designated organizations that he would like to eliminate from the bill with his last amendment.

The minister's obligation to do all these inspections is being retained. Whatever safety management system is put in place that enhances safety, the government will not be divesting itself of any responsibility and will thus be protecting the safety of the entire population. I would like to hear my colleague on that subject.

• (1310)

[*English*]

Mr. Wayne Marston: Mr. Speaker, I am quite pleased to hear that the member opposite from the Bloc is satisfied with the NDP amendment. I think, when we peruse the various amendments, there has been a sincere attempt to fix a very flawed piece of legislation.

I am also concerned that in response to a number of good pieces of legislation that pass here, some sit for endless amounts of time without being implemented. I am not absolutely sure that we understand, as a House, the motivating factors behind why these bills have repeatedly come to this House. My concern lies in who is influencing the public policy.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I and I think all Canadians appreciate the presentation by

the member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, and all the other members who have spoken here today, the members for London—Fanshawe, Trinity—Spadina and Sault Ste. Marie.

NDP members are standing in this House, and it is curious, but important to note, that the Conservatives are not speaking to this because they are embarrassed themselves about where the government is going on this.

The member from Hamilton referenced an excellent article in *The Hamilton Spectator* entitled “Dangerous Skies”. Judge Virgil Moshansky, the original justice who conducted the Dryden, Ontario investigation that became an inquiry into aviation safety, said the following:

What stands out is that the current deterioration in the state of aviation safety in Canada, as chronicled by these investigative reporters, is coincidental with Transport Canada's progressive reduction in the number of its aviation inspectors since Dryden and its ongoing withdrawal from regulatory enforcement.

This is an ominous sign for the future of air safety in Canada, particularly if Bill C-6 is allowed to proceed in its present form.

Would the member tell me who Canadians should believe: the Conservative government or Justice Virgil Moshansky?

Mr. Wayne Marston: Mr. Speaker, it is such an easy question. This judge was the person who thoroughly investigated a very serious accident case, and in doing so, enlightened himself to a great degree on the issues in the airline industry, particularly the issues and challenges faced at the level of safety. I certainly, without equivocation, would stand with the opinions of that particular judge.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is with mixed feelings that I rise today to speak to this bill. I say that because we should not have to deal with this kind of inferior legislation, particularly when we are looking at the safety of our citizens, our constituents.

We are entrusted with the responsibility to make public policy and to make legislation that takes into account many different aspects and facets when we look at the bills that have been in front of us recently, be it on trade bills or on voting bills. One of the most important facets in the area of transportation is safety. Protecting the safety of Canadians is one of the key issues that we are here to deal with in this bill.

The reason the NDP has put forward so many amendments and the reason we are standing today to speak to the bill is that if the bill were to go ahead without any changes or amendments it would be a colossal disaster.

It is incumbent upon all of us to foresee, and perhaps it is the unintended consequences of the government, but we need to foresee the consequences of any legislation that passes in this place. On Bill C-6, we need to look at the consequences for air safety.

An issue that has been important in my riding is the integrity of being able to support those men and women who work in our public service to come forward and be protected when they see wrongdoing happening. We know it in the popular term as whistleblowing.

Government Orders

I was proud to work with my colleague from Winnipeg Centre and other colleagues in this place on the committee dealing with the accountability act, Bill C-2, to strengthen whistleblower legislation. We believed it should have gone further but we made some important and positive changes.

When I see this bill, one of the things that stands out that will shock and should appall many Canadians is what the bill does. It takes away that whistleblower protection. We are not talking about maintenance of bicycles, as important as that is. We are talking here about aviation safety. We are talking about very complex mechanisms that most of us would not have the slightest idea of how to get around, whereas with bicycle repair we might.

We need to ensure that those men and women who see wrongdoing are protected. That is a value and a principle that I thought the government believed in. If we listen to the rhetoric, it suggests that it does but then we look at this legislation and we see that it does not seem to be the case.

It was already mentioned by my friend from Hamilton that many people have spoken out. They are not lay people. They are experts in the field. They are telling us that Bill C-6 does not get the job done. They are saying that Bill C-6 opens up, not only the safety of Canadians but the reputation that our country has on the world stage.

My understanding of the bill is that not even our friends to the south, who perhaps have more of a laissez-faire view of things like air safety, would contemplate going this far. It really begs the question as to why we would believe that, in the area of air safety and this idea of changing things to this extent, we would be better off going with less control and oversight than our friends to the south and in other jurisdictions. It really does beg the question of what we believe we know better than others.

● (1315)

I certainly would not submit to the House that we should do things our own way. Our party suggests that the Canadian way is often the better way of going about things. However, when we are talking about aeronautics and aeronautic safety and we look at this industry, and the fact that it is global in proportion and needs to be carefully viewed, we have to look at this bill and ask, "What is it that the government believes it is helping Canadians with?"

Again, I go back to experts in the field and, if I may, cite an article that I believe has already been referenced but is one that I think bears repeating. The headline says it all: "Judge calls for review of 'sliding' air safety". I think that says a lot about where we are going here.

We know that the 1989 report on the Dryden crash in which 24 people were killed led to many improvements in air safety. We had fears, and I remember that instance very well, that we were in fact backsliding, that we needed to strengthen air safety. We heard from one of the authors of the report who looked at air safety, and the quote is pretty straightforward:

I believe the government is moving away from more vigorous inspection and enforcement strictly as a cost-cutting measure, much as was done in the mid- and late-1980s preceding the Dryden crash.

If that is not a call for oversight and to review more thoroughly this file, I do not what is. What the good judge was saying, and he was given an Order of Canada for his work in this area, was to not

repeat the mistakes of the past. When we allow things to be deregulated without the proper oversight, without protection, for instance, as already mentioned for whistleblowers, we are essentially saying that it is okay to allow for further crashes, for further mishaps.

I point to what we have seen in the rail industry as of late. Since we have given over rail maintenance, and it is not regulated to the extent it should have been, we have seen, and we just have to turn on the radio or read the paper, more crashes and derailments, be it passenger or cargo trains.

I want members to think about this because I think it is important. There is a connection between what has happened with rail safety and what is contemplated with aeronautic safety in Bill C-6. It is the following proposition. When we had the tools and the oversight, and we had the regulation involved in rail safety, we were able to be more nimble, to be stronger in our response when we had instances where rail safety was failing. We had citizens and people, be it in unions or in management, et cetera, who were able to cite problems in rail safety, be it at crossings or, and we see this presently, with cargo trains that have too many cars on their load.

We need to do something about it. It used to be that we had the public sector there to respond. Unfortunately, what we did is we gave that up. We gave away the tools to properly respond vis-à-vis rail safety.

What has been the consequence of that? As I said, just turn on the radio, read the paper, and look at the evening news, the consequence is cargo and passenger derailments. There is a lack of confidence. At the very time we need to be more reliant on our rail system, we now have problems with rail safety.

In fact, many of my friends who would like to see our government go further in building the capacity for more rail as a form of transportation see that we have problems because of lack of oversight. So, let us take that lesson from the problems with rail safety and oversight, and the fact we gave that up and gave it away, and let us take a look at—

● (1320)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Questions and comments. The hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, again we have the NDP standing up in this corner of the House and actually fighting for safer air travel in Canada. It is surprising to me that only the NDP members seem to be standing up on this issue against the Conservative government. This is an extremely important issue.

Since the Conservatives are not standing up to defend the absolutely reckless and irresponsible actions of their government to put Canadian families in dangerous situations because a few lobbyists told them to do it, I am going to take the opportunity to read into the record more witness accounts that were given at the transport committee.

Government Orders

We have Mrs. Kirsten Brazier, the president of Dax Air, who came and testified. She said:

If we are really concerned about safety and truly want to become the safest country in the world, then we need to start sharing information with a view to discussing and learning from our mistakes.

She comes from northwest Ontario which suffered in the Dryden air crash. Ken Rubin, a public interest researcher, said:

Bill C-6, clause 43, places air safety reports in a permanent secrecy category...It's being placed in the same category as tax information. Even cabinet confidences are only 20 years, and security intelligence information doesn't get exempted forever.

Canadians will never get to learn about the safety violations that put their family members in peril. It is absolutely absurd.

My question for the hon. member is this. Why are the Conservatives pressing ahead with something that witnesses have told them is irresponsible, reckless and puts people's lives in danger?

• (1325)

Mr. Paul Dewar: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague not only for his question but for the work he has done on this issue. I would submit that if my friend from B.C. had not been as tenacious and vigilant on Bill C-6, Canadians would not know about the problems that are in the bill. In fact, it reminds me of the softwood sellout.

To answer the member's question, I do not know why the government wants to put all of this important aeronautic safety information in a locked box for no one other than those who are involved in the industry to know about. It really begs the question as to whose side the government is on. Is it on the side of everyday Canadians or is it on the side of citizens who every day put their trust in government, in fact in all of us, to ensure air safety?

Yesterday we saw this whole idea of a no-fly list which has been given attention and prominence by the government, when in fact what it should be doing is sharpening its pencils, or in fact taking out erasers and doing this bill over again because it is not up to speed and not good enough for Canadians.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Carrier (Alfred-Pellan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I share the concerns that my colleague in the NDP expressed about air safety. However, in view of the fact that these safety management systems already exist in actual practice, one of the things that we wanted to ensure in committee was that the government oversight and inspections would continue. This is not always the case now. This provision was added in response to the representations made by federal inspectors. We also added a detailed description of these famous safety management systems.

Insofar as the necessary safety and protection are concerned, this bill is effective and adds to the safety we should have. I would like to know what the hon. member's views are on this.

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Dewar: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member will know that there are a hundred vacancies right now for the positions that Canadians entrust for oversight inspectors.

Instead of the government put its time and money into a flawed bill, it should be getting out and putting the word out that it needs

people in these positions. It makes sense. Why does the government not hire the hundred new inspectors?

It is the same with rail safety. I have no idea and I cannot fathom why the government is so focused on selling out privacy, freedom of information, whistleblower protection and in the end the safety of Canadians, and not spending more time hiring the hundred inspectors that we need to make sure that our skies are safe.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise today in this debate on air safety. There is reason, though, to wonder why the government wants to rush this bill through despite its many flaws. I think that Canadians are right to be concerned. They should be seriously concerned about this bill.

It seems that people can say anything these days and get anything passed so long as it will reduce government involvement, as if that were a good thing in itself, without any care for the consequences. In this case, the consequences are very serious because public safety is at stake. That is something the government has apparently forgotten. It would rather worry about the profits of the big corporations than the safety of the general public. We should wonder, though, what the effects will be on public safety.

Canada has often been recognized—as other hon. members have said—as a leader in the field of public safety. There is an expression that when something is finally perfect, people often want to start changing it. In this case too, I have the feeling that the changes are for the worse.

This morning, my hon. colleague, our transport critic, who has done a lot of work on this, compared what happened in the railway system with what could happen in the airline industry if the government's proposed amendments are passed.

In British Columbia where I come from, there have been many accidents, sometimes virtually weekly, on the railways. We know that these accidents started to increase after the safety system was simply handed over to the companies. The government more or less just offloaded its responsibilities.

• (1330)

[*English*]

The law that is proposed in Bill C-6 contains many flaws. The policy issue that is important to note is that this will have impact on Canadians who travel by air. The financial bottom lines of Air Canada, WestJet and others have been preferred and that is going to be the factor in setting safety levels in the sky.

Transport Canada will be relegated to a more distant role as a general overseer of safety management systems. That is why I asked, with the government saying it is going to reduce government intervention, is that in itself a good thing when public security is being sidelined for commercial interests?

Government Orders

Let us talk a bit about the impacts of Bill C-6. It seems to enshrine the safety management systems which allow industries to decide the level of risk they are willing to accept, tolerable levels of risk in their operations, rather than abide by the level of safety established by the minister acting in the public interest. Safety management systems allow the government to transfer increasing responsibility to the industry itself to set and enforce its own safety standards.

The government seems to think that because it says something it makes it true. We have seen that all too often in the way the government has acted on accountability and in the way it has acted on Bill C-30 in tackling environmental issues. The government takes half measures and proclaims it has acted in the interest of public. Canadians are not fooled by this kind of talk.

The bill does not exempt whistleblowers. A worker who identifies a problem, for example, a loose wing nut, and I will not talk about the kinds of wing nuts, reports it and no action is taken, he or she will be silenced. That is a problem with what the government has proposed.

Furthermore, the government would like us to think that companies will automatically report any problems to the public. Any of us who have negotiated with the private sector knows there are many financial interests to protect. The private sector is very guarded in anything that will affect its financial bottom line. I fear very much for transparency, for what Canadians will find out about some of the problems that can occur.

While the NDP agreed to an amendment in the transportation committee, which emphasizes reduction of risk to the lowest possible level rather than tolerating risk, we are still concerned about the delegation of safety to corporations. Acting in the public interest is still, as I see it, the responsibility of the government. It is not the responsibility of corporations. Their responsibility is to make money. By giving that responsibility over to corporations, the government is abdicating its own responsibilities.

Adequate safety costs money. Safety management systems will foster a tendency to cut corners in a very competitive aviation market racked with high fuel prices. What will happen to safety when the need to make a profit and save money is paramount? I do not think the bill adds to that and it does not answer that question adequately.

I will close by asking one last question. What happened to the government's responsibility to protect public interest?

• (1335)

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to my colleague's remarks. I am alive today because of aviation safety. My career has been in aviation. I have spent a lot of time in the front end of airplanes and now I spend a lot more time in the back end of airplanes. I know the guys who are in the front end of the airplanes in which I fly today. I do not have any problem with getting on any of their airplanes at any time. I always feel I am in safe hands.

The member made a couple of suggestions, as did other members of her party, that somehow there is a laissez-faire attitude toward safety, particularly in the United States. That is just hogwash.

Aviation is about risk management, with the emphasis on management and on safety. Those members somehow seem to think we are taking away whistleblower protection. In fact, Bill C-6 talks about non-punitive voluntary reporting. I am not sure what the member does not understand about non-punitive.

She also talks about the bottom line and suggests that airlines are only interested in making money. Airlines are interested in making money, but I suggest that the worst attack on an airline's bottom line would be the lawsuits, the loss of reputation and everything that goes with that as a result of a major aircraft accident, loss of life and so on. Airlines are very good regulators because that is their bottom line.

Does my hon. friend understand the relationship between safety and the bottom line from the positive point of view of the necessity to protect safety to protect the bottom line?

• (1340)

Ms. Denise Savoie: Mr. Speaker, I will answer with a question. I suppose it is the same mechanism that has encouraged CN to implement safety measures throughout Canada, especially in B.C., where rivers have been irreparably damaged by derailment after derailment.

I am glad my hon. colleague feels safe at the back of an airplane, but I suggest that is because of the rules we have had, which the government is about to change.

I also add that if my colleague feels the government is that interested in safety, then why have the hundreds of positions for aviation inspectors, which have not been advertised but they exist, have not been filled at the moment?

Mr. Roger Valley (Kenora, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the committee heard from a lot of people who came forward. The Moshansky report on the crash that happened in Dryden in 1989 has been mentioned many times in the chamber today. I was not on the airplane, but that is my home town and I was on the site shortly after that. I was the mayor of Dryden, serving 10 years later, and we did a memorial to that, so I know the issue well. I met Justice Moshansky a number of times.

What came out of testimony from people from my riding, who travelled to the committee on DaxAir, based out of Red Lake, was that a number of small commuters, a number of small operators, a large number in northern Ontario, were literally out of sight, out of mind. They are serving the communities in the north. They are under pressure constantly to adjust the regulations so the operators can make more money. The pilots and the passengers could be put at risk if this is allowed.

What would the member say about the small operators? When we use the safety management system, we do not have inspectors and we leave them to look after themselves. The problems they can get into—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I have to leave enough time for the member for Victoria to answer the question.

The hon. member for Victoria.

Government Orders

Ms. Denise Savoie: Mr. Speaker, I do not think I could have explained the NDP position any better. That is why we hold the position we hold. I agree that problem has not been considered.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to join the debate at report stage and third reading of Bill C-6, An Act to amend the Aeronautics Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts.

I want to begin by recognizing and paying tribute to my colleague, the member for Burnaby—New Westminster and the transport critic for the New Democratic Party, for being a stalwart champion of the interests of the consumer during this lengthy debate, the study of Bill C-6. It is generally agreed he has been a leader among the opposition parties to ensure that the voice and interests of Canadians are put front and centre as we go through this whole interesting debate about air transportation safety.

We are very concerned that both the tone and the content of Bill C-6 are really geared toward the financial bottom lines of these air transportation carriers and we could put at risk, or at least put back in the order of priority, the best interests of Canadians.

I should note that my colleague, the member for Burnaby—New Westminster, worked in collaboration with stakeholders such as the Canadian Union of Public Employees, which represents a great many airline personnel and workers, and IAMAW, the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers. Both these unions have advocated on behalf of the best interests of their own members, but also the best interests of the public at large when it comes to any changes that we make to the air transportation system.

A number of amendments were made at the committee stage, put forward by my colleague, the member for Burnaby—New Westminster. That is perhaps why so many of us are taken aback today. We made amendments at committee that we believed were progress, with the cooperation of the various stakeholders such as the unions. However, then today, we find the federal Minister of Transport making a bid to sweep aside the changes to the airline bill, which were intended to ensure safety in the skies.

We find it very troubling that the government has tabled a motion to gut the very critical amendments to Bill C-6, which my colleague, Burnaby—New Westminster, and other members of the transport committee so diligently put in place. We cannot understand how a minister of transport, in all good conscience, could undermine the work of the committee. Its earnest interest was simply to do what was right for Canadians. It certainly has my colleague, the NDP transport critic, scratching his head and wondering what possible motivation there could be. What possibly could be driving the government to, if anything, back away from safety as priority number one. It is a grave concern to us.

We are very critical of Bill C-6 in its current form. There are a number of issues, in fact too many issues for me to deal with in any depth in the 10 minutes that have been allotted to me. I will point out some of the concerns in which I have a particular interest. One is Bill C-6, as contemplated by the government, will actually undermine and reduce the freedom of information, the freedom of Canadians to know what the safety situation is of airlines, in that it withdraws seven sections of the act from the Access to Information Act.

I sit on the committee that is responsible for privacy, ethics and access to information. It troubles me greatly to see government in any of its activities pull back from freedom of information. On those grounds alone, I would criticize the bill. The public has a right to know what the government is up to and surely the public has a right to know the safety and maintenance information about airlines. Airlines and carriers of the general public are not just the average private business.

● (1345)

Canadians have a right to be more involved in airline safety and they certainly need more thorough information. I am critical that Bill C-6 would remove sections from the scrutiny of the Canadian public through freedom of information laws.

I am also critical that the systems maintenance regime would now be put under the scrutiny of the airlines. We believe this is a stepping back again of government scrutiny and government supervision of airline safety management and essentially the airline industry would be permitted to increasingly define its own safety level of its operations.

One would think that the airline would make this a priority and that safety interests would be the airlines' top key concern and priority, but in our experience it is a legitimate role of government to take responsibility for those things.

I am also very concerned that another element of this bill would become very weak or in fact non-existent, and that is the whistleblower protection. While a form of whistleblower protection for employees has been introduced, there is no effective redress mechanism for employees who might suffer reprisals as a result of blowing the whistle.

I would remind members that this is one industry sector about which, for heaven's sake, the public has a right to know. The public has an interest in knowing if there are any shortcomings in the maintenance regime, and whistleblowers should be rewarded, not criticized and certainly not suffer any form of reprisals. Those three things, piled together, give more than ample reason to be critical of Bill C-6.

The bill has a rather rocky history in that it was introduced in the last Parliament by a senator in fact. It came to the House first known as Bill S-33, introduced by the other place. We are always suspect, frankly, when bills come to us through that back door mechanism. After a great deal of debate there, it was later reintroduced as Bill C-62 under the Liberal regime in September 2005, but it died on the order paper and did not go past first reading.

When we came to it in this particular Parliament, I note that a great deal of time has been spent on this already. It was introduced on April 3, 2006 as Bill C-6. After a brief staff meeting, the NDP was disappointed that the Conservatives and the Liberals initially struck a deal to pass Bill C-6 without any further amendments. This is why I began my remarks by complimenting my colleague, the member for Burnaby—Douglas, for the yeoman's job he did, virtually alone at the committee, to overturn that alliance that was put together by the ruling party and the official opposition that they would somehow ram Bill C-6 through in its flawed state.

Statements by Members

There was clearly a lack of consultation with the stakeholders or these many amendments would not have been developed. I cannot imagine any government going forward with legislation like this without doing a comprehensive consultation with groups like CUPE and the IAM. When we received it back today and realized that this was not only not in its original form but that the amendments made at committee would be stripped back and undermined by the minister and that the Tory amendments intend to gut air safety, we could not help but stand up and be critical.

People will notice that a number of speakers from the NDP are speaking back to back on this bill because the public has a right to know and the public deserves to know. The public should know what is going on in our air transportation safety system and I do not believe, if it were left to the devices of the ruling party and its partners in crime, the official opposition, which has been absent, AWOL as it were, in terms of doing its job as official opposition and bringing the government to task for the glaring problems and oversights with this—

• (1350)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I have to move on to questions and comments. The hon. member for Eglinton—Lawrence.

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am standing as a member of the party that introduced a bill like this in the last Parliament. I take exception to a member suggesting that there was collusion between the Liberal Party and the governing party to ram a bill through without debate.

The truth of the matter, if the member can ever recognize it, is that there were four months of witnesses, debates and scrutiny that surfaced in the form of a series of amendments now before the House and the only party that voted against all of the amendments proposed by all the interested parties, all of the industry sectors, all of the labour unions and all of the client representatives was none other than the NDP.

In fact, today we are looking at a series of NDP motions that are doing exactly what the member is accusing the government of doing, which is a series of motions to gut the amended bill. The worst offender of them all is the clause that asks to remove clause 12. Clause 12 was asked by Judge Moshansky to be maintained and strengthened in order to give substance to Bill C-6 and the member from the NDP on the committee decided to say no, that they will not have that. Such hypocrisy, it is incredible.

• (1355)

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, the criticism that we have is focussed on the unprecedented and unacceptable decline in regulatory oversight by Transport Canada contemplated by Bill C-6, a bill that would allow a greater ability of the airline industry to set and enforce its own safety standards out of public sight and scrutiny. Those were the legitimate grievances that we brought forward.

The NDP moved more amendments than any of the other parties and we stuck to them, forced them through and worked with them, while the Liberals shed theirs as it was convenient after they had made the splash that they had put forward amendments.

We stuck to ours and got them through. We worked the committee as it should. However, we were disappointed with the Tory amendment today which would gut air safety. It is worth noting an article in *The Hamilton Spectator* in which retired Alberta justice, Virgil Moshansky, said:

I think it is very troubling that the government has tabled a motion that has gutted the very critical amendments to Bill C-6, approved by the committee after four months of hearings.

We concur that it is very troubling and that it should be condemned and voted against in this particular House of Commons. The Liberals are supporting the Conservatives' amendment to gut the bill.

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would point out that Judge Moshansky is the one who approved of the safety management systems.

My hon. friend from Victoria, who spoke before us, said that just because government or somebody says something it still does not make it so. Well, the opposite is true as well. Just because the NDP members read something into something does not make it so, and that is what they have doing all day throughout the debate.

I will point out once again that safety is an airline's bottom line. If it violates safety, its bottom line will be affected directly. However, I will point out one thing that keeps coming up. Members keep talking about the 100 vacant inspector positions. What they do not say is that there are 873 inspector positions and that 100 empty positions at any one time has been a relatively constant number for the last number of years through attrition and so on, and in fact the vacancies are advertised and this is not an abnormal situation. To take it to their numbers, there are still 773 aviation safety inspectors on the job.

I feel pretty safe and I think most people here do. The NDP will never get the relationship about risk management, safety and the practical common sense bottom line.

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, what we do not get, will not get and will not tolerate is any reduction in the public's right to fly safely in a safe air transportation system. Any efforts to undermine or diminish, in any way, shape or form, the safety of Canadians and our air transportation system, we will work against and we will in fact condemn.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

RIDING OF MACLEOD

Mr. Ted Menzies (Macleod, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am looking forward to spending time in my beautiful riding of Macleod this summer. I have represented Canada around the world but nothing compares to the natural beauty of Macleod.

From the southern Alberta Summer Games being held this year in the Crowsnest Pass in July to Longview's Bar-U Ranch, a national historic site celebrating its 125th anniversary this year, Macleod is rich in history and activity.

Statements by Members

Macleod's businesses and communities are at the forefront of local innovation and development, especially in the biofuels industry. In fact, Ag Energy Corporation in Vulcan and Western Biofuels in High River will benefit from the investments made by the federal government in biofuels.

This summer, farmers in my riding know that they will be able to market their barley outside of the Canadian Wheat Board.

Families and individuals will benefit from tax relief provided by the government's budget.

Business and industry will benefit from Canada's first free trade agreement in six years with the EFTA countries and the new FIPA with India.

I look forward to a great summer sharing these and all the other achievements of the government with my constituents in the beautiful riding of Macleod.

* * *

●(1400)

BIRTHDAY CONGRATULATIONS

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as chair of the Parliamentary Friends of Burma, myself and all other members would like to wish Aung San Suu Kyi a very happy and healthy 62nd birthday.

Aung San Suu Kyi, the leader of the National League for Democracy in Burma and a 1991 Nobel Peace Prize recipient, has been under house arrest for over 11 years and will be alone during her birthday as no one is allowed to visit or contact her.

Aung San Suu Kyi has been persecuted along with thousands of others for standing up to the military junta in Burma and trying to restore democracy in that country.

Today we acknowledge not only the birthday of one of the most admired and respected people in the world, but we salute Aung San Suu Kyi for her bravery and lifelong dedication to her country.

We are giving Daw Aung San Suu Kyi a great gift. All of us here in Canada's Parliament, one of the most respected parliaments in the world, have unanimously passed a motion calling for her release. We wish Daw Aung San Suu Kyi a happy birthday

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[*Translation*]**ECONOMIC AWARDS CEREMONY FOR THE SAGUENAY CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE**

Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in April, the Saguenay chamber of commerce and junior chamber of commerce held their 3rd Gala du mérite économique. Michel Paquin, president, and Alexandra Cormier, president, welcomed more than 550 representatives of Saguenay's business community to the awards ceremony.

CGI emerged the big winner, with three awards: one for company of the year, another in the financial, real estate and professional services category, and a third for international trade.

I would also like to congratulate the other winners that evening: Novelis Inc., Usine Saguenay, Nippour Géomatik, Paco, La Villa des Sables, Les Bergeries du Fjord and La Ferme A.B.G. Blackburn Inc.

Regional entrepreneurship is important to any community. I would like to take this opportunity to commend the entrepreneurs and businesspeople in Chicoutimi—Le Fjord and Saguenay on their talent and know-how.

* * *

[*English*]**CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION**

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, sham marriages and immigration fraud directly affect many Canadians who are exploited by spouses solely to enable immigration to Canada. To help, they call for new policies such as those in place in other countries which establish a defined period of temporary status for sponsored spouses.

Other Canadians who have sponsored spouses and family members from overseas have been victims of domestic violence and family breakdown. When marriages break down the sponsoring spouse remains financially liable for their estranged spouse under the sponsorship agreement. This includes social assistance payments. These payments, usually in the thousands of dollars, are made without the knowledge of the Canadian spouse. When provincial governments seek to collect, it causes terrible hardship, loss of savings and even family homes.

Canadians can be victimized twice, once by an abusive spouse and then by the state on behalf of the abuser.

Our policies must ensure that in cases of domestic abuse and family breakdown, Canadian sponsors are not further victimized by government.

* * *

DARFUR

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Calgary East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the situation in Darfur has been a major concern for Canadians and the Government of Canada. Canada is part of an international effort to end the suffering of the people of Darfur and has been at the forefront, both diplomatically and financially, to stop the killings and bring peace to the area.

Canada strongly supports the implementation of the AU-UN hybrid force as an essential step toward protecting people.

During my visit to Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt in May, I urged the Chinese foreign minister, on behalf of the Government of Canada, to assist the international community in bringing a lasting peace to this troubled region.

I recently made the same representation to the Indian government through its high commissioner to Canada.

Canada welcomes the Government of Sudan's acceptance of the AU-UN hybrid mission and encourages all parties to uphold their agreements to support its early and effective implementation.

Statements by Members

I hope that this is not an empty promise by the Government of Sudan but one that it fully intends to keep. All Canadians are urgently looking to end the bloodshed in Darfur.

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OCEAN ECOLOGY

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind-sor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am indeed proud of Jeremy Wedallas, a 12-year-old from Erin, Ontario, who recently wrote me a letter, visited my office, and was welcomed by the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans as well.

He outlined his concerns about ocean ecology. Jeremy pointed out three areas of importance to him related to the preservation of our fishery: shark finning, bycatch and bottom trawling.

He stated that he was pleased that Canada had banned shark finning, where sharks were caught, the fins were cut off, and the shark was thrown back into the ocean to die. He also outlined his concern about the millions of tonnes of bycatch that are discarded each year.

I congratulate this young man for bringing these important issues to our attention. I was most impressed with his in-depth knowledge of our ocean ecosystems. It is certainly commendable that this young man, at the very young age of 12 years, has such an interest in this important part of our environment.

I would like to congratulate Jeremy and urge him to keep up the good work.

* * *

• (1405)

PONOKA STAMPEDE

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada Day festivities feature picnics, parades and fireworks. In Ponoka, Alberta, we top all other festivals by hosting the largest and best six-day professional rodeo in the country.

For the last 71 years, the Ponoka Stampede has treated people from all over North America to top notch entertainment, exciting races and affordable family entertainment.

The stampede has become a tradition not only for the spectators but also for the 500 volunteers who come out every year, making this spectacular event one of Alberta's prime annual tourist attractions.

This year the animated mile-long parade, that harkens back to the days of the old west when gunfighters and yodelling cowboys roamed the Prairies, will be led by none other than the captain of Canada's gold medal hockey team and all-around good guy, Shane Doan.

There is something for all ages: superb stage shows, chuckwagon races, pancake breakfasts, rodeo clowns and much more. The high calibre of stock and contestants, plus the unsurpassed facilities, ensure a great show rain or shine.

I encourage one and all to come to Ponoka from June 26 to July 2 and experience some real western hospitality.

[Translation]

PHOENIX ENVIRONMENTAL AWARDS

Mr. Marcel Lussier (Brossard—La Prairie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on May 31, the Phoenix environmental awards were given out in the Quebec National Assembly's red room for the first time.

Created in 1998, the Phoenix environmental awards focus on people and organizations in Quebec whose actions respect the environment. Projects that took place in whole or in part during the year preceding the awards ceremony are eligible for awards.

Fourteen Phoenix prizes in six categories are given out each year to individuals, institutions or associations in Quebec that demonstrate a commitment to environmental protection. Among other things, the Phoenix environmental awards are meant to encourage the protection of natural places, like Gatineau Park, for future generations.

I would like to highlight the fact that thanks to initiatives like the Phoenix awards, organizations are being rewarded for their work and their commitment to the environment.

* * *

CANADA TRANSPORTATION ACT

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government introduced a bold bill to regulate the activities of railway companies, particularly to deal with noise in the vicinity of marshalling yards.

This bill was debated at length and was even improved by members of all parties in committee, after lengthy discussions, in order to protect citizens and to ensure that their rights are respected.

Unfortunately, the Senate diluted the bill by giving in to pressure from the railway companies. Consequently, Bill C-11 will not benefit from the improvements made by the members of this House. It is regrettable that some members of the Senate substantially altered a bill adopted by Parliament and did not respect the will of those elected by the people, even members of their own party.

Rather than playing ping-pong with the Senate and having the bill delayed indefinitely, we will forge ahead in order to provide Canadians with the means to limit unreasonable noise near marshalling yards, after years of waiting. Despite the obstacles, our government is doing its job.

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[English]

IMMIGRATION

Hon. Andrew Telegdi (Kitchener—Waterloo, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, immigration is, has been and will continue to be the lifeblood of Canada. We have built one of the most diverse and inclusive countries in the world.

After the 1956 revolution 200,000 Hungarians fled a brutal Soviet communist dictatorship, with 90% finding initial refuge in Austria.

Statements by Members

Canada did more than any other country in accepting 38,000 Hungarian refugees. Never before has Canada been as hospitable.

Fifty years ago today, my parents Nora and Sándor, my siblings Paul and Margaret, and I landed in Vancouver.

On behalf of my family and all refugees, I thank the Canadian people, with special thanks to family friends, the Hays, the Campbells and the Tanacks, for their immediate hospitality.

My passion for civil liberties, human rights, the charter and citizenship rights is grounded in my personal experiences.

The fact that a refugee could become a member of Parliament in this country speaks volumes about the kind of country we live in.

* * *

ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Nepean—Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, former public security minister Anne McLellan interfered with the Ottawa Police investigation into the RCMP pension scandal when she said, “there is no conduct on the part of the commissioner that needs to be investigated”.

That was after RCMP whistleblowers warned her of corruption, so why did McLellan, a minister responsible for the RCMP, prejudge a police investigation?

This entire scandal occurred during the Liberal reign. Liberal MP David Smith benefited from dirty contracts from his cousin and Liberal riding secretary, Frank Brazeau. Paul Gauvin, an RCMP CFO, is a former Liberal staffer who was later appointed to the RCMP also by the Liberals.

Anne McLellan must explain why she covered for Zaccardelli and why she did so little while Liberal insiders got away with so much.

* * *

• (1410)

DEVILS LAKE DIVERSION PROJECT

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, over a week ago, with no notice and in flagrant violation of the boundary waters treaty and a Canada-U.S. agreement requiring the installation of an advanced filter system, North Dakota opened the tap on its Devils Lake outlet dumping contaminated water into the Red River water system.

High chemical levels together with alien species, including at least three parasites, clearly pose a threat to the huge Red River ecosystem and the largest inland commercial fishery in Canada.

The Manitoba government has done what it can, calling for the 2005 agreement to be honoured and challenging North Dakota's decision to water down its environmental standards. But where is the federal leadership on this international crisis?

The NDP initiated an emergency Parliamentary debate, resulting in a unanimous motion for the strongest possible actions, but empty rhetoric and diplomatic niceties have to end on the part of the federal government. Canadians want action, not more shadowboxing.

Where is the plan to put the plug back into Devils Lake?

GOVERNMENT POLICIES

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with any luck, this time next week members of the House will be back home enjoying a barbecue with family and friends and talking to constituents about the session that was.

No doubt there will be questions about how a government can get things so wrong: detainees in Afghanistan, two disastrous environmental plans, the twisting of truth on the matters of income trusts and the Atlantic accords, and of course, the biggest spending budget in Canadian history.

Whatever happened and where did this train wreck come from? I believe it comes down to leadership. We have a Conservative leader who would rather be confrontational than cooperate, would prefer needless confrontation with the opposition as well as with the media, and would prefer confrontation with the provinces and even with his own caucus.

I encourage all members to enjoy their summer. With this government still at the helm it is the only peace they are lucky to enjoy until a Liberal government is back in power and we get rid of the rascals across the hall.

* * *

[*Translation*]

AUDRÉANNE CAMPEAU AND VINCENT RAINVILLE

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to commend the ingenuity of two senior high school students at the Saint-Joseph composite school in Mont-Laurier. They took top honours at the provincial finals of the Bell science fair. Auréanne Campeau, 17, from Lac-des-Écorces, and Vincent Rainville, 16, from Mont-Laurier, won a number of prizes with their “passive house” project, which was among the 100 best projects presented.

With 120 hours of work and a \$20 investment, they designed a model of an environmentally friendly home, along with pamphlets, posters and fact sheets, which won them the Université du Québec prize. They will be part of the Quebec delegation at the Canada-wide science fair and will participate in the international science fair in Durban, South Africa. They also won the Synapse silver medal, awarded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, and the Agence de l'efficacité énergétique bursary.

My colleagues in the Bloc Québécois and I wish them much success in the next round of competitions.

Oral questions

[English]

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Hon. Dan McTeague (Pickering—Scarborough East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week the member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo accused me in the House of trying to score cheap political points over the issue of extending VIP benefits to widows of deceased World War II and Korean War veterans.

In a letter to Joyce Carter, dated June 28, 2005, the current Prime Minister wrote that a Conservative government would immediately extend the VIP to these widows.

On October 28, 2005 the member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, as veterans affairs critic, also wrote Ms. Carter and said that she had been advocating for an extension of the VIP benefits and that this position was adopted by the Conservative Party.

War widows know who has acted to score cheap political points. After a year and a half in office, Canada's not so new government, the Prime Minister and the member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo clearly did not get the job done.

Must war widows now resort to taking the Prime Minister up on his challenge to the provinces and sue him over another example of breach of faith in order to get what was promised to them by these promise-breaking Conservatives?

* * *

JUSTICE

Mr. Gary Goodyear (Cambridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians do not want to wait any longer for mandatory sentences for gun crimes or for an increase in the age of protection for young people. They waited long enough while the opposition stalled and delayed at committee.

In fact, just this morning the member for Yukon filibustered a discussion on Bill C-32 which would increase minimum penalties for alcohol and drug impaired drivers.

Bill C-22, increasing the age of protection from 14 to 16 years, was held up at committee.

Bill C-18, the DNA identification bill, was held up at committee.

Bill C-10, the bill for mandatory sentences for gun crimes, was also held up at committee by opposition members who are so out of touch with Canadians and still prefer to coddle criminals.

The good news is these three bills have finally passed the House. The bad news is that they are down the hall at the Senate.

Will the Liberal interim leader tell his unelected senators who are preoccupied with protecting their terms to protect Canadians and pass these bills?

● (1415)

[Translation]

ORAL QUESTIONS**THE ENVIRONMENT**

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, despite the usual attempts at censorship, Professor Jaccard, the author of the C.D. Howe Institute report that I was talking about yesterday, was finally able to appear before the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development.

He confirmed what he said in the report, which was that the government's greenhouse gas reduction plan is so weak that it will not meet the targets and that emissions are likely to rise not just until 2012 or 2020, but until 2050.

Will the Prime Minister face the facts and join Professor Jaccard and other experts in acknowledging that his plan is doomed to fail?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for the first time in Canada's history, we have a plan to control and regulate greenhouse gases.

Obviously, there are different reports and perspectives. Now they are speculating about what will happen decades down the road. Nevertheless, I can assure my hon. colleague that the government will undertake consultations and consider all perspectives as it develops its regulatory program.

[English]

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, all the experts are saying that this plan will fail.

The Prime Minister should have some familiarity with Professor Jaccard since he appointed him to the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy. We know today from an access to information request that the government gave him sole-source contracts on the grounds that he is, and I quote the government, "one of Canada's preeminent policy advisors in the area of climate change and industrial policy".

Why does the Prime Minister not agree with the experts that his plan is doomed to failure?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition is obviously a little bit ahead of himself in condemning a plan to failure before we even have actually tabled and put the regulations into place.

The government is in the midst of consultation. The government's targets are clear. This government has been clear that, unlike the previous government, it is not going to rely on voluntary targets. These will be mandatory targets and we will reach them.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I invite the Prime Minister to stop distorting reality. I invite him to admit what is so obvious: that he killed the Liberal plan that had targets. According to the Pembina Institute, those targets were six to seven times more efficient than those in his plan.

He killed the Liberal plan. He cannot have invented a plan. If they speak about the Liberal plan that was six to seven times more effective than the Prime Minister's plan, it is because he killed the Liberal plan.

Oral questions

Can the Prime Minister stop distorting reality? Can he be honest with Canadians for once?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition talks about the obvious and goes on to speculate about what may or may not happen in the decades to come, but we know for a fact what occurred over the past decade.

What occurred over the past decade was that the hon. member committed Canada to the toughest environmental targets in the world, then did nothing to achieve them.

When this government took office, we were 35% above the target and rising. There was no plan in place. Everyone knows that. It is time the Leader of the Opposition admitted it to the country and to the world.

• (1420)

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for months Canadians have watched the government trumpet the targets of its so-called climate change plan. We have had the photo ops.

But last week the C.D. Howe Institute released the fourth independent report to conclude that this plan is a fraud. In response, a spokesperson for the environment minister says that it is premature to draw conclusions about the government's plan since it is still developing it.

Suddenly the government does not have a plan at all. Why is the environment minister engaged in premature self-congratulation instead of getting down to implementing a plan?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I read with great interest the reports produced by Marc Jaccard on climate change.

Here is what he had to say about the former Liberal government: "For 15 years" Liberal governments "have layered one greenhouse gas policy over another", including the 1995 action plan, action plan 2000, the 2002 climate change plan, and project green. He said of the Liberal plan that "it consisted primarily of offering information and subsidies to encourage voluntary reductions in emissions".

That is the member of Parliament who went right across this country saying that his own leader did not get the job done.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. We will have a little order. I would remind hon. members that it is Tuesday, not Wednesday. We will save some energy for tomorrow.

The hon. member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore has the floor. We will have some order.

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the environment minister has been in office for six months. We are tired of the show. We would like to see some action.

[*Translation*]

Internationally, the Prime Minister claims that we are reducing our emissions, but here at home, he has given us a plan that will allow emissions to rise for the next 40 years at least.

Has the time finally come to adopt a credible climate change plan with real absolute targets?

[*English*]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we strongly believe that absolute reductions in greenhouse gas emissions are essential to combat global warming. That is why a central part of our plan is to see an absolute 20% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.

We are coming forward with regulation on industry and we are going to take a very different approach than the talk of the Liberal Party. We believe in the fundamental principle that the polluter pays, something that the member's own leader abandoned when he was the minister of the environment.

* * *

[*Translation*]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, seven months ago and with much fanfare, the government announced a \$10 million program to prevent crime among street gangs in Quebec. Since then, not a single cent has been paid to community organizations, because Public Safety Canada changed the criteria for the program along the way. Does this not smack of other Conservatives boondoggles, such as the summer jobs program and festival funding?

Can the Prime Minister guarantee that these community organizations will soon receive the money promised for their prevention projects?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in Montreal last November, I announced \$10 million in funding for crime prevention projects in the Province of Quebec. I can assure the members of this House that projects totalling nearly \$5 million have already been approved. Some organizations have even received the money already. Over the next few weeks, I will be announcing even more projects that have been approved for the Province of Quebec.

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Public Safety's response shows his failure to take this seriously and is very telling. Yesterday, he thought all the money had already been distributed, and now he does not even realize that it is his fault that the agreement with Quebec is still not signed.

Does the Prime Minister agree that his minister's failure to take this seriously clearly proves that prevention is not a priority for the Conservatives?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, he is the one who must pay attention. He began by saying, during his first question, that there was no money. Thirty seconds later, he admitted the money was there.

It is very clear that the money is there and 22 projects have been approved. Some these projects have already received funding. Furthermore, with these 22 projects, Quebec has the highest number of projects approved of all the provinces of Canada.

Oral questions

●(1425)

Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the general consensus in Quebec is that prevention is key to fighting crime. This government does not believe in prevention, however. It is proving this once again by trying to eliminate the firearms registry.

Instead of getting rid of the registry, why does the government not get rid of the amnesty, which has not reduced management costs in the least and has turned the registry into a real sieve?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, every time I am in the Province of Quebec, I see that many people and local organizations support crime prevention programs, especially for reducing the youth crime rate and eliminating the firearms problem.

Why does the Bloc not support our proposal to impose mandatory sentences for people who commit crimes with a firearm?

Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it does not work, any more than the seven-year minimum sentence for importing marijuana did in the past.

The only logical choice for the government is to withdraw its Bill C-21, something being called for not only by victims' parents, but also by police, who still consider the registry to be an effective tool for prevention.

Will the Minister of Public Safety finally get out of his ideological bubble and withdraw the bill?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is interesting to hear the Bloc philosophy. If someone commits a crime with a firearm and we put them in prison, in our opinion they will not be able to commit another crime with a firearm. But the Bloc wants people who commit crimes with firearms to stay on the street and in our communities. We do not agree with that.

* * *

[English]

ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday's half measure that was announced by the Minister of Public Safety is another reason why Canadians frankly are losing faith and trust in the Conservative government. What we need is a full public inquiry into the RCMP if we are going to get to the bottom of the problems there.

There is a malaise that has set in and the government is unwilling to do the right thing. The task force it has suggested will not have any power to subpoena. There will be no public hearings. There will be no televised hearings. Canadians will not know what is going on. In fact, the task force will not even report to Parliament.

These are things that a full inquiry could do, so why is the government afraid of exposing the truth about what is going on with the RCMP?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, far from being afraid of the truth, the minister appointed Mr. Brown to study the RCMP and to look at the allegations. Mr. Brown produced a thorough, clear and very severe report on the state of the RCMP. He has recommended a series of important actions,

with a task force on management as well as a further look at the police investigation, things that this government will in fact undertake.

This government has absolutely no fear of uncovering what may have gone on in the past, but what this government is committed to is working as quickly as possible to rebuild the national institution that is the RCMP.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians want to see action, but they also want to get to the bottom of the whole story. That has been prevented by the approach taken by the government. What we need are objective solutions put together by an impartial judge, not some panel selected by the minister who is running the police force that needs the very reform that has to be investigated. This makes absolutely no sense.

What is the government afraid of? It can move on taking steps to make improvements that have been recommended while at the same time digging down deeply so that we can fundamentally transform this institution that is part of our history.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Once again, Mr. Speaker, this government is taking action and that action is sweeping. The government has recognized, for example, and the Brown report recognizes, the wrong that was done to whistleblowers, the recognition that has to be paid for what they did and the changes that have to be made.

We do not ask a judge how to improve the management. We do not ask a judge how to finish a police investigation. We are asking the appropriate people to do the appropriate work. We are getting on with fixing this institution in the interests of this country.

* * *

●(1430)

EQUALIZATION FORMULA

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind-sor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once more, two respected Newfoundlanders have provided clarity in this Atlantic accord betrayal. John Crosbie and Roland Martin said this today about the 2005 Liberal agreements: "The government of Canada intends to provide additional payments to the province", offsetting reductions, "to retain the benefits of 100 per cent of its offshore resource revenues".

They are arriving today to voice their displeasure with this government. Why is the Conservative government betraying this obligation and breaking its word on the Atlantic accords?

Ms. Diane Ablonczy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, contrary to what the member says, this government made all provinces better off by the changes to equalization. In fact, we went to a 10 province formula. We had other measures that were recommended by the expert panel.

What does the member have against making his province better off? I would like to know that.

Oral questions

**Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind-
sor, Lib.):** Very good, Mr. Speaker, and if we do not believe that from the government, it will sue us. How about that?

By imposing a fiscal cap, the government is breaking its own election promise in addition to changing the spirit of the accords. The minister's own Conservative colleagues from Atlantic Canada and Saskatchewan have said publicly that yes, they did break the promise. Even the minister from Nova Scotia says that "we are still negotiating", whatever that means.

Why does the Minister of Finance continue to think that he is so right when his Conservative colleagues think he is so wrong?

Ms. Diane Ablonczy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me quote a Conservative, the Newfoundland finance minister, Mr. Tom Marshall, who said:

There is a plethora of numbers and there is a plethora of assumptions that one would have to make to do these calculations....We are going to get caught in a debate involving the minutiae of our assumptions.

Let us talk about the real numbers. The real numbers say that Newfoundland and Labrador is millions of dollars better off because of the formula that was put in place by this government.

Mr. Paul Zed (Saint John, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Atlantic Provinces Economic Council has confirmed that the government's unilateral gutting of equalization hammers New Brunswick just as brutally as it does Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador.

This Conservative government is robbing New Brunswick of more than \$1 billion, and it has broken the trust of Canadians everywhere.

Will the Prime Minister get off his sanctimonious perch, stop his bullying and stop treating the Atlantic provinces as afterthoughts of Confederation?

Ms. Diane Ablonczy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals never saw a pot they did not want to stir.

The APEC report said—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. We will have some decrease in the talk for now. The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance has the floor and all members want to be able to hear her answer.

Ms. Diane Ablonczy: Mr. Speaker, APEC itself said that its figures are "not definitive". APEC said that they are based on "estimates, simulations and assumptions".

Why would the hon. member just want to make trouble when he knows very well that New Brunswick did so much better from the budget?

Mr. Paul Zed (Saint John, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in case the Prime Minister did not hear me, that was \$1.1 billion, not a million, but a billion, with a capital B.

His bumbling brood has engaged in buffoonery in their brutal budget bungles and their backstabbing and betrayal by these ministers of bark and bluster.

Will the Prime Minister restore the billion dollars that he robbed from New Brunswick and become a partner in our drive to self-sufficiency, or will he give us more "boonrush"?

Ms. Diane Ablonczy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has given a new definition to bluster, and something else that starts with a B, I might add.

The facts are that this year New Brunswick received \$200 million more than it received under the last Liberal budget, and \$100 million more this year than it did last year under our budget. That is pretty good for a province with a population of less than 800 thousand. That is a pretty good pay increase.

* * *

● (1435)

[Translation]

EXPENSES OF QUEBEC'S FORMER LIEUTENANT-GOVERNOR

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, at the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, a Conservative member said that it was an affront to Parliament for the Bloc Québécois member to call for the former Lieutenant-Governor of Quebec to appear in order to answer for her misspending. Later on, we were accused of lese-majesty. The old monarchist reflexes are never far away.

Does the Prime Minister also think that the Bloc Québécois' request to have Ms. Thibault appear is an affront to Parliament?

[English]

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I indicated yesterday when the same question was asked, the committee is free to call whoever it would like to call at its own discretion following proper process.

I reiterate that we have met with the Quebec government and the Quebec minister and have agreed to work together to address full accountability and transparency in providing the necessary resources to all of our lieutenant governors.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Government of Quebec took only two days to decide to have the Lieutenant-Governor appear every year to justify his or her expenses.

By refusing to act, is the Prime Minister not trying to protect the monarchy and to put his representatives in a class that cannot be questioned about spending?

[English]

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in my meeting with the minister from Quebec, he did reveal his plans. We are taking them into consideration.

As I say, we are working together to ensure going forward that we have full accountability, transparency and responsible use by lieutenant governors in meeting their responsibilities.

Oral questions

[Translation]

SECURITIES INDUSTRY

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today and tomorrow the Minister of Finance and his counterparts from Quebec and the provinces will meet to discuss establishing a pan-Canadian securities commission. The Quebec Minister of Finance has stated, and I quote, "There is no proof that it would be less expensive or more efficient and it would create too large a monopoly in Toronto". Only Ontario wants such an arrangement.

Why does the minister insist on ignoring the will of the majority in order to please Ontario and his Bay Street friends?

[English]

Ms. Diane Ablonczy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is nonsense.

In fact, there is a growing consensus across this country that a common regulator used among all the provinces will greatly benefit the efficiency of Canada's market. It will greatly benefit the province of Quebec and it will greatly increase the number of jobs in Quebec. I do not know what the member's problem is.

[Translation]

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary is turning a blind eye to Ontario's centralizing grasp and that is what is dangerous.

Does the minister realize that he should respect the will of Quebec and the provinces and put pressure on Ontario to adhere to the passport system rather than ignore the will of Quebec and the provinces?

[English]

Ms. Diane Ablonczy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the IMF in its last report on Canada made it very clear that one of the things Canada needs to improve is to introduce a common securities regulator.

The benefits of a common regulator would include clearer accountability, more responsive decision making, stronger enforcement and a more prominent international voice. That benefits all provinces, including the province of Quebec.

* * *

ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government's own investigator calls the RCMP "horribly broken", "a breach of fundamental trust", says David Brown. What is the Conservative response? "Another insider RCMP fix" says the *Edmonton Journal*.

When it comes to bringing so-called accountability and transparency to the RCMP, why did this Conservative government settle for a top secret, closed door task force? Where is the transparency?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals continue to want to delay the process of seeing important changes coming to the RCMP. After seven different types

of investigations, they now want a full inquest that could take years and would cost millions of dollars.

We have already done an independent investigation. We have a way forward to appoint a task force to look at a new governance structure. All of that will be public.

In terms of the areas of criminality, we have asked for another look at the areas of criminality by the Ontario police service.

We are fixing the problem. The Liberals did nothing when they had the opportunity.

● (1440)

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, David Brown indicted the culture of secrecy in the RCMP, but the truth is he could just as well have been talking about the Conservative Party.

Who is going to sit on this task force of so-called experts? How is a problem made by insiders going to be solved by insiders?

The minister said that there are fresh breezes blowing through the RCMP. It sounds like the minister is blowing smoke.

Why did the government invent a review panel with no transparency to fix an RCMP suffering from exactly the same disease?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, talk about not respecting the presumption of innocence. The task force has not even been named and already the member is condemning its members as being ineffective.

I believe this task force will be very effective. Mr. Brown as the investigator has recommended that there be some people who know what it is as a police officer to be effective. We also have people from the general population.

I am so open minded I am even willing to take suggestions from the member opposite on who would be good on this board, but do not condemn these people before we even announce them.

Hon. Sue Barnes (London West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to the RCMP pension scandal the minister talks about "fresh breezes blowing", but all Canadians get is the sour scent of Conservative incompetence.

"Closed door task force" says the *Globe and Mail*. Score one for the insiders. The public interest loses again.

Why did this Conservative minister choose a closed door task force to fix a scandal born behind closed doors, in secret, exactly the same situation as the minister's so-called solution?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, really those members should talk to their question period scriptwriters. We have not even named the members of the task force yet and already those members are condemning them. I continue to ask a question about one thing that came out of the investigator's report was that my predecessor, the former minister of public safety, was informed of this problem in 2003 and she did not even talk to the commissioner about it. What kind of performance is that?

Oral questions

Hon. Sue Barnes (London West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with answers like that, it is pretty clear that Canadians will not accuse that minister of being transparent. The minister wants to believe all of his problems walked out the door with the last commissioner, but what am I reading in the *Edmonton Journal*? It said that the minister believes that the best cure for the RCMP's "culture of secrecy" is "another hefty dose".

When this issue is so crucial to the public interest and to the rank and file, how can the minister justify a closed door process to fix a problem where those closed doors themselves in part are part of the problem?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, honestly, if the member opposite had spent as much time reading the report instead of poring over editorials and finally finding one, the *Edmonton Journal*, the source of all truth, that supported her position, she might have discovered that Mr. Brown said that the problems are not over just with the replacement of one individual, but the problems can be addressed by changing the governance structure, by having a task force look at how they can have an organization that is open, transparent and accountable.

That is much better than her approach, which was to do nothing as far as four years ago when the Liberals knew this problem was there.

* * *

AGE OF PROTECTION LEGISLATION

Mr. Patrick Brown (Barrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, not only have Liberal senators been threatening to delay a vote on the budget but they are also stalling legislation that will make Canada safer for our children.

Just yesterday we learned about a worldwide pedophile ring that involved some Canadian children who, thankfully, were rescued. Our government is taking action to make it harder for pedophiles to exploit our young people by increasing the age of consent from 14 to 16.

Could the Minister of Justice tell the House and the Liberal leader why this bill is important and needs to be passed before the summer?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the need for change in this area is absolutely clear. We cannot have a situation where 40 and 50 year olds can be preying upon 14 and 15 year olds who are in need of protection. That is why the Canadian Chiefs of Police, child advocacy groups and just yesterday, the attorney general of Alberta, said let us get Bill C-22 passed.

I say to the members of the Liberal Senate, do it for the children, do it for Canada and get Bill C-22 passed.

* * *

• (1445)

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, class actions and judicial reviews are under way by farmers and Friends of the Canadian Wheat Board. They want to know if the agriculture minister overstepped his bounds in his zeal to remove barley from the Canadian Wheat Board.

I would like to know whether the minister received an opinion from the Department of Justice on whether he could or could not use regulations to remove the single desk on barley. In other words, I would like to know where exactly the minister received his opinion that he could remove barley from the Wheat Board by order in council.

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, 10 days ago the minister was in Winnipeg to announce that we were going to open up the barley market for western Canadian farmers on August 1. That day the price of barley began to rise. The price of barley went up consistently until yesterday when it stopped. Why? Because the Canadian Wheat Board said it would try to take the government to court.

The Friends of the Canadian Wheat Board are not the friends of the farmers. This government is. We want to see farmers get freedom in marketing their barley on August 1 and get the benefits from doing that.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we have heard this spin over and over again as the scenario plays out. This is the last straw. The minister has been manipulating the outcome of the barley plebiscite from the beginning.

I want to know if the minister will finally do the right thing for farmers and put an immediate hold on the order in council until the courts can determine once and for all whether the government's actions are legal.

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister is doing the right thing for farmers. It was another area where farmers actually had some choice.

The best they can do under the Canadian Wheat Board, with regard to wheat, is to get producer daily price contracts. Yesterday, 650,000 tonnes of that grain came onto the market for farmers. In an hour and a half they took up every option on the 650,000 tonnes. It is the only small way that they have to respond to the market, in terms of their wheat production.

The minister has moved to protect western Canadian farmers. He will do more on August 1, and our producers look forward to that day.

* * *

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, not only has the DeSouza family called on the government to keep the gun registry, but the Premiers of Quebec and Ontario have also demanded the federal government abandon its plans to scrap gun control in Canada. The Canadian Professional Police Association and the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police have also told the government to back off on the gun registry.

Why does the government ignore every stakeholder, including the police, when it comes to the gun registry?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is simply not entirely true what the member says. She knows very well that many representatives of police forces across the country have in fact recommended the very course of action we are taking: to take the funds, the precious resources that are directed against farmers and duck hunters, and start to address those resources toward those who are committing crimes.

She should also quote those well-known police officers and police figures who support exactly what we are doing. I commend the Toronto city police for the action it has taken, with more police on the streets and more aggressive action against those committing crimes with firearms. It has seen those crimes go down.

* * *

[Translation]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, community crime prevention organizations in Quebec do not have enough money.

Seven months after the Minister of Public Safety and the unelected Senator Michael Fortier promised \$10 million to fight crime and street gangs, the money is still in the Conservative government's coffers.

An hon. member: Shame on them.

Mrs. Marlene Jennings: If they really intend to keep their promise, if they really want to fight street gangs, when will these organizations receive the money?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased that the Liberal member is still talking about the announcement we made in November about a \$10 million fund for Quebecers, nearly \$5 million of which has already been approved.

Some groups have received their funding. In the province of Quebec, 22 groups have been approved, and that is more than anywhere else in Canada.

* * *

• (1450)

AIR TRANSPORT

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the no-fly list is posing a number of problems and raising concerns about certain charter rights.

How does the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities plan to correct the mistakes and inaccuracies that could affect innocent Canadians?

Until a few days ago, Maher Arar was still named on the American no-fly list. How many other similar cases can we expect to see with the minister's new system?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, the hon. member appears confused in his question and his comments. He is jumping to conclusions about the new list that protects Canadian passengers, along with the American list.

Oral questions

In this case, he should rephrase his question, because, in our case, not only are we completely and entirely protected by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, but everyone was consulted in putting together this list.

[English]

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister consults, among others, the RCMP and CSIS when he draws up this list. Those same agencies consult with Homeland Security as it draws up its own list for the American no-fly list. Someone can be wrongly on the Canadian list and on the American list.

How does his office of reconsideration get Canadians removed from the American list? How long will it take and how much will it cost?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, had the hon. colleague taken the time to look at the way the list is put together, he would have noted that in every case the Canadian list had gone through three years of consultation.

The Canadian list has been put through scrutiny. Stakeholders have been in a position to make their opinions known. People who are civil libertarians have been able to make their comments known, as well as our air carriers throughout the country.

Our list is a solid list. It contains the names of those who have committed terrorist acts against—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Châteauguay—Saint-Constant.

* * *

[Translation]

EXPORAIL

Mrs. Carole Freeman (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on May 8, the Railway Association of Canada told the government that it supported the idea of recognizing Exporail as a national museum given that its collection, infrastructure and staff are of international calibre.

Can the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women explain why Exporail, with all the support it has received, is not on par with the Canadian Human Rights Museum in Winnipeg, which has been recognized as a national museum?

[English]

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have explained, I have met with the Exporail representatives and I look forward to hearing more of their plans as we continue our meetings.

The government has committed over \$267 million annually to museums across the country. We will ensure that our museums are supported adequately and continue to serve Canadians in every community.

Oral questions

[Translation]

TROIS-RIVIÈRES AIRPORT

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the City of Trois-Rivières has attempted to obtain funding from the federal government on several occasions in order to lengthen the airport runway. Unfortunately, the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities is refusing once again to adapt the criteria of the ACAP program to community needs.

In view of the intransigence of the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, is the Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec prepared to help the City of Trois-Rivières improve its airport infrastructure, just as he did for the Alma airport in his riding?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my honourable colleague. I have met on two occasions with the mayor of Trois-Rivières and individuals employed in economic development in the Trois-Rivières area to discuss this matter. I told the mayor that we would review a certain number of programs.

When I am in a position to make announcements, I will do so. Naturally, the member will also be consulted and informed of the decision.

* * *

● (1455)

[English]

AGRICULTURE

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, earlier the Minister of Agriculture parliamentary secretary's failed to answer the question on providing any legal opinion supporting his actions to use regulations to undermine the Canadian Wheat Board.

Will the parliamentary secretary confirm that justice officials warned against using regulations in his attempt to undermine the board, or is the government just flaunting the law? Further, is the minister now prepared to compensate producers for losses that occur as a result of the government's actions?

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member knows full well that the minister has acted as fully as he can. Barley producers look forward to August 1.

The member has consistently sided with the huge malting companies against western Canadian producers. Barley prices have gone up 20% in the last 10 days. He is trying to take that away from farmers. The real question we should ask is, why?

* * *

JUSTICE

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government has taken action to increase the level of safety for vulnerable people in our society. We have brought forward legislation increasing the age of sexual consent from 14 to 16. We established a federal ombudsman for victims of crime. We eliminated the use of house arrest for people who commit serious crimes.

Could the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration say what action our government is taking to further assist victims of human trafficking who have come to Canada from abroad?

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, those who are victims of the horrible practice of human trafficking deserve our protection and support, and they are getting it.

In addition to Bill C-57, today I am pleased to announce that we are introducing additional measures to help assist victims of human trafficking. These new measures will extend the temporary resident permits for victims of human trafficking from 120 to 180 days. For the first time victims will be able to apply for a work permit while receiving health care benefits, including medical treatment and counselling services.

While the previous Liberal government did precious little, we have listened and we have heard. We are getting the job done and we are addressing these concerns.

* * *

INFRASTRUCTURE

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last Friday the Ontario government made a \$300 million transportation announcement for Hamilton. If this is more than just a pre-election promise, it will be good news for commuters, jobs, Hamilton's infrastructure and the environment.

However, in Hamilton the Liberals are not known for keeping their promises. It looks like McGuinty is setting up the federal government to be the scapegoat for reneging on this money too. The premier expects one-third of the funding to come from Ottawa.

Will the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities commit to funding his share of our public transit so Dalton McGuinty will have to keep at least one promise he has made to Hamiltonians?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. colleague has just indicated, this government has committed an unprecedented amount of money to Canadian infrastructure, to help large and small projects from coast to coast to coast.

One of the commitments, on which we are very determined to see things happen, is on public transit. We have already started doing things for Ontario. We have financed the Brampton rapid ride. We have been able to finance the Mississauga project.

We will be looking at the projects from all our communities in terms of public transit.

Routine Proceedings

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for years the NDP has been calling on the federal government to regulate the offloading of crab catches to allow plant workers to use the fishing season to make them eligible for employment insurance benefits, but it still refuses. More than 700 plant workers are not eligible and four weeks of employment are not enough to make ends meet.

Will the Minister of Human Resources conclude an agreement with New Brunswick's labour minister and implement plans to allow these workers to accumulate enough hours to be eligible for employment insurance benefits?

● (1500)

[English]

Hon. Loyola Hearn (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what the member should understand is it is very difficult to regulate crab catches. Crab appears at a certain time. One tries to catch it at its peak quality. If one waits, the quality deteriorates and everyone loses.

What is needed, and I agree with him, is coordination between the harvester and the processor. If we do that, as we have been doing with some provinces in summit meetings, we will have a much better industry and everyone will benefit from it.

* * *

[Translation]

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada's railway heritage is being threatened by a lack of federal assistance for its preservation. Some items are frequently purchased by wealthy Americans for personal reasons.

Now we hear that the government just allowed an export permit for the sale, in the United States, of an important relic from the wreck of the *Empress of Ireland*—a permit that was refused by the former Liberal government.

Why does the current government have so little respect for Canada's history? Why is it putting Canadian heritage up for auction?

[English]

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me assure the House that the government is committed to protecting our cultural heritage and our properties. With regard to the *Empress of Ireland* bell, we understand there is an interest from a Canadian institution to keep it in Canada. However, there seems to be a disagreement on the price between the seller and the buyer. We will be monitoring this situation.

* * *

[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Luc Harvey (Louis-Hébert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, less than two weeks ago, the Liberal member for Honoré-Mercier, the Bloc

member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie and the NDP's star candidate got together in Montreal with some Cascades representatives.

Together, they demanded the resignation of the Minister of the Environment. This morning, that same company was found guilty—

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

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Louis-Hébert has the floor, despite the applause.

Mr. Luc Harvey: Mr. Speaker, perhaps my friends should listen to the whole question before applauding.

This morning, that same company was found guilty of having dumped effluent in the Chaudière River and was fined \$125,000.

Can the Minister of the Environment comment on the opposition parties' hypocrisy?

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have never seen so many Liberal and Bloc members stand up for corporate polluters

[Translation]

I would like to thank my colleague for his good question. Our super government has a real plan to reduce greenhouse gases and fight air pollution. It is scandalous to find that the Bloc Québécois and the NDP are ready to back a major industrial polluter.

If the Bloc wants to stand behind big polluters, that is its choice. Our choice is to protect our environment and to regulate against these industrial polluters.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS**COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE**

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS AND NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT

● (1505)

[English]

The House resumed from June 18 consideration of the motion.

The Speaker: It being 3:05 p.m., the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred division on the motion to concur in the sixth report of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development.

* * *

● (1510)

[Translation]

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

Routine Proceedings

(Division No. 209)

YEAS

Members

Alghabra	André
Angus	Asselin
Atamanenko	Bachand
Bagnell	Bains
Barbot	Barnes
Beaumier	Bélangier
Bell (Vancouver Island North)	Bell (North Vancouver)
Bellavance	Bennett
Bevilacqua	Bevington
Bigras	Bonsant
Bouchard	Bourgeois
Brison	Brunelle
Byrne	Cannis
Cardin	Carrier
Chan	Charlton
Chow	Christopherson
Coderre	Comartin
Crête	Crowder
Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)	Cullen (Etobicoke North)
Cuzner	D'Amours
Davies	DeBellefeuille
Demers	Deschamps
Dewar	Dhaliwal
Dion	Dryden
Easter	Eyking
Faille	Folco
Freeman	Fry
Gagnon	Gaudet
Godfrey	Godin
Goodale	Graham
Gravel	Guarnieri
Guimond	Hubbard
Ignatieff	Jennings
Julian	Kadis
Karetak-Lindell	Karygiannis
Keeper	Kotto
Laforest	Laframboise
Lavallée	Layton
Lemay	Lessard
Lévesque	Lussier
MacAulay	Malhi
Malo	Maloney
Marleau	Marston
Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)	Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)
Masse	Mathysen
McCallum	McDonough
McGuire	McTeague
Ménard (Hochelaga)	Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)
Merasty	Minna
Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)	Nadeau
Neville	Ouellet
Pacetti	Patry
Pearson	Perron
Picard	Plamondon
Priddy	Proulx
Ratansi	Redman
Regan	Robillard
Rota	Roy
Russell	Savage
Savoie	Scarpaleggia
Scott	Sgro
Siksay	Silva
Simard	Simms
St-Cyr	St. Amand
St. Denis	Steckle
Szabo	Telegdi
Temelkovski	Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les
Basques)	
Thibault (West Nova)	Tonks
Turner	Valley
Vincent	Volpe
Wappel	Wasylcia-Leis
Wilfert	Wilson
Wrzesnewskyj	Zed- — 146

NAYS

Members

Abbott	Ablonczy
Albrecht	Allen
Ambrose	Anders
Anderson	Baird
Batters	Benoit
Bezan	Blackburn
Blaney	Boucher
Breitkreuz	Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Barrie)	Bruinooge
Calkins	Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)
Cannon (Pontiac)	Carrie
Casson	Chong
Clement	Cummins
Davidson	Day
Del Mastro	Devolin
Doyle	Dykstra
Emerson	Epp
Fast	Fitzpatrick
Fletcher	Galipeau
Gallant	Goldring
Goodyear	Gourde
Grewal	Guergis
Hanger	Harper
Harvey	Hawn
Hearn	Hiebert
Hill	Hinton
Jaffer	Jean
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)	Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Khan	Komarnicki
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Lake
Lauson	Lemieux
Lukiwski	Lunn
Lunney	MacKay (Central Nova)
MacKenzie	Manning
Mark	Mayes
Menzies	Merrifield
Miller	Mills
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	
Moore (Fundy Royal)	
Nicholson	Norlock
O'Connor	Obhrai
Oda	Pallister
Paradis	Petit
Poilievre	Preston
Rajotte	Reid
Richardson	Ritz
Scheer	Shipley
Skelton	Smith
Solberg	Sorenson
Stanton	Storseth
Sweet	Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)
Tilson	Toews
Trost	Tweed
Van Kesteren	Van Loan
Vellacott	Verner
Wallace	Warawa
Warkentin	Watson
Williams	Yelich- — 114

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

[English]

The Chair has notice of a question of privilege from the hon. member for Toronto Centre

* * *

RESIGNATION OF MEMBER

Hon. Bill Graham (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my notes tell me I am to say that it is with considerable regret and some emotion, but I think the emotion has betrayed me.

Routine Proceedings

Mr. Speaker, I have advised you, Sir, that I will be standing down as member of Parliament for Toronto Centre, effective July 2. I do not wish to take a lot of time of the House to share that notice with you, but I did want a chance to say thank you to my electors.

The electors of Toronto Centre, known as Rosedale when I first ran, had perhaps the good sense to turn me down the first two times I ran. So, I learned something about democracy. They subsequently elected me five times. There will be members of the House who will think they were right the first time. Others will think they were right the second time. That is what makes a great democracy. I want to thank them for having had the chance to represent one of the great ridings and diverse ridings of our country.

I would like to thank my wife, Cathy, my children and my family and friends who have supported me. We all know we would not be here without that support.

• (1515)

[*Translation*]

I would like to say that it is a privilege to be elected to one of the best Parliaments in the world. It is a great privilege to sit in this House, it is very hard for me to imagine that I will no longer have access to this place that is so sacred to us all.

I would like to extend many thanks to the Clerk of the House and all the parliamentary staff. Far too often we go about our business without recognizing the work they do for us here and in committees.

[*English*]

Our capacity to do our jobs and represent our constituents is enormously enhanced by their work, and I thank them. I know from their applause, members thank them from their hearts as well.

I had the opportunity of serving as foreign affairs minister and defence minister. I could not leave this place without being thankful for the extraordinary efforts of the representatives of our foreign service who do us so proud as they work for us around the world, tirelessly and selflessly. I also could not step down without recognizing the fantastic privilege to have been the defence minister and to work with our young men and women in uniform, who every day risk their lives for us and their country and do it so well.

It is the Prime Minister's privilege to call a byelection. The people of my riding, I hope, will understand why I believe it is important that they be represented by a future voice rather than someone from the past. All parties in the House have representatives now nominated to run in that riding. I would ask that they have the opportunity to be represented in this place as early as possible for the sake of our democracy and our future.

In closing, I want to say one thing about the civility of this place. There has been a lot in the press recently about the lack of civility in the House. It may be attributable to the minority situation we are in and it may be attributable to a lot of causes, but surely we owe it to ourselves to disagree without being disagreeable. We do not need to do that.

I believe everyone in the House carries within him or her the desire to serve our country and, whether one has that desire or not, the capacity to affect the future lives of every citizen of this great

land, and to some extent others around the globe. Let us treat each other with the respect that thought brings. In what we bring to this place, let us respect one another and, in so doing, I believe our fellow countrymen will respect this institution and respect us for the work we do.

• (1520)

[*Translation*]

The Speaker: I believe we will have additional statements following the comments by the hon. member for Toronto Centre.

The hon. leader of the official opposition would like to say a few words about the question of privilege that was just raised. I am pleased to give him the floor.

[*English*]

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to the career of an exceptional member of Parliament.

The member for Toronto Centre has served this House in many roles, as minister of foreign affairs, minister of defence and most recently as leader of the opposition, but his most important role was unofficial. He served this House as the very model of a gentleman.

As he said, his own career is a kind of a model of perseverance. He first stood for election in 1984 and finished somewhat behind Mr. David Crombie. He ran again in 1988, this time coming much closer to victory, but close is never good enough, so in 1993 he ran a third time and won, and the House has surely been the better because of it.

He made his mark as chairman of the foreign affairs committee. He presided over a series of unanimous reports. Looking back over the current session of Parliament, the magnitude of this achievement should not be lost on any of us.

However, his greatest achievements were still to come. In 2001 he was appointed minister of foreign affairs. Consider the difficulty of this job in a world shaken by 9/11 and on the eve of the G-8 summit of Kananaskis, yet the member for Toronto Centre handled his new responsibilities with ease. Not only that, to those of us in cabinet, it seemed as though he had always been there.

Even more significantly, he was minister of foreign affairs at a time when Canada was debating one of its most historic and important decisions, whether to become involved in the coming war in Iraq. As we all know now, but could only guess at the time, our decision not to support that war was a momentous one for Canada. The member for Toronto Centre knew it was the right decision, and I applaud him for it.

His deep competence and his mastery of policy made him the right choice for minister of defence. He oversaw the single largest increase in Canada's defence spending in over a decade, an increase of \$13 billion in the 2005 budget. What a minister of defence he was.

When the previous prime minister resigned, it was clear that one man had the gravity, the strength of personality and the moral authority required to serve our party as interim leader and to serve the House as leader of the opposition. The member asked for nothing in return, save the chance to serve his party and his country, and serve them he did, with honour and distinction.

Routine Proceedings

In retirement the member will spend more time, much deserved, with his wife Cathy, their two children and their many grandchildren. He will also return to his previous career, but I know he will always stay very close to this House, to his party and to the service of his country. I wish him the best of luck in this modest enterprise and I hope he is able to make a living at it.

On behalf of every Liberal, every member of the House and every Canadian, let me thank the member for Toronto Centre for his service, his talent and his inspiration. I can only wish the next generation of leaders will learn from his example.

● (1525)

[*Translation*]

I will close in my language, because my colleague from Toronto Centre speaks French so admirably. To me he is a Torontonion through and through. He is a quintessential Torontonion, who is as cosmopolitan as the city itself.

That is why we like having him as a colleague so much, for everything he represented to Canada and the world. I want to thank him, as a colleague from Montreal to a colleague from Toronto.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was just saying to my dear colleague from Toronto Centre that this is a very sudden development.

Nonetheless, it is a great pleasure for me to commend and congratulate the hon. member for Toronto Centre for his long and distinguished career in the House of Commons and outside this chamber.

[*English*]

I do want to take a few minutes to recognize and to appreciate the incredible career, really a lifetime career, of the hon. member for Toronto Centre.

It has been noted already by both the member and his leader that he took a long time to get here and was very persistent in trying to get here. I must say I went through a similar experience. I ran once and was defeated. I still cannot find anyone who voted against me, but I am sure he knows the same phenomenon as well.

Nevertheless, I think what is important to note is that all this perseverance to come to the House of Commons and to engage in public service was not something that the hon. member for Toronto Centre really needed in any way, shape or form.

He had, long before coming here, an outstanding private life. He was outstandingly successful as a corporate director, as a lawyer, and as an academic whose expertise was valued both nationally and internationally.

He certainly had no need for the trials and tribulations of elected public office, but nevertheless he took those on, was ultimately successful in his electoral quest, and then went on to achieve great things in a parliamentary career.

Before he even entered cabinet, he had a long parliamentary and interparliamentary career, as noted, as committee chair, a career, frankly, that was very successful.

He then of course went on to hold two of the most important and most highly visible cabinet positions one can hold in the Government of Canada, first, as minister of foreign affairs and then as minister of national defence.

He served with great distinction in both roles. However, I think he served, if I do not mind saying so, with highest distinction in the job he was to attain next and that was to be leader of the opposition.

I should tell members, and I certainly have conveyed to my friend opposite, that leader of the opposition is never an easy job to have. It is certainly the one job in the country where everybody, including it seems at times everyone in one's own party, thinks they can do it better and very often there is a sense that they would like to do the job.

The hon. member for Toronto Centre had more than that sense. In fact, while he was doing the job, several of his colleagues were actually out there competing for it, which I am sure did not make that job any easier.

However, I have to say, as I have said before, I do think, and I think we should all recognize, that he really did a tremendous job as leader of the opposition. He conducted himself with great intelligence, with great passion and with great integrity, and I think we should all appreciate his efforts.

Of course in that role, he and I disagreed about very many things. I recall on one occasion we even disagreed about the various ways in which one should or should not wear silk. So, it is fair to say that our disagreements covered a wide range of issues.

However, in retrospect, I think we agreed on a couple of subjects where I think the country was better for our agreement and where that agreement will prove to be recognized over time.

● (1530)

[*Translation*]

As the Leader of the Opposition already mentioned, the hon. member for Toronto Centre is a great advocate and promoter of French in Canada and of Canada's French heritage.

He joined us and our party on the matter of a very important resolution for the history of this country, the resolution that recognizes the nation of Quebec within a united Canada. I want to thank him for his contribution to that debate.

[*English*]

Also, Mr. Speaker, as the minister of national defence the member for Toronto Centre was involved in another difficult decision and that was to support Canada's involvement in the United Nations action in Afghanistan.

The member made many difficult decisions while he was minister of national defence regarding Canada's involvement in Afghanistan. He has stood by those decisions and stood by that mission, and I know that we on this side and I think our troops deeply appreciate his commitment in that regard.

Routine Proceedings

I assume that a member and a gentleman as active and accomplished as the member for Toronto Centre will now be involved in a life of activity as well as some retirement. I would say whether it is retirement or whether it is the future endeavours of whatever combination, I hope the House will indulge me in wishing Bill, Cathy and all of their family all the best in the future.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am sure that the leader of the Bloc Québécois and the member for La Pointe-de-l'Île are disappointed that they could not be here to pay tribute to the member for Toronto Centre, because they are among his greatest admirers. I know they will join us, in spirit, in acknowledging the work he has done as a parliamentarian and also in acknowledging his ever-respectful attitude. All the Bloc Québécois members have a fondness for him and have greatly enjoyed working with him.

I had the opportunity to work with the member for Toronto Centre on the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade for four years. I can therefore attest to the fact that, as the Leader of the Opposition said, we were able to produce unanimous reports in large part thanks to his humanistic attitude, which would transcend party lines to get to the bottom of problems and find real solutions to the challenges facing the committee. His leadership on the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade made it possible to reach a consensus. Having worked on other committees, I can say that sometimes, the dynamic was rather different and we rarely produced unanimous reports. We owed it all to him, and I would like to congratulate him on that.

I would also like to point out that we have a special connection to the member for Toronto Centre because he was born in Montreal. I think that I am speaking not only on behalf of the Bloc Québécois, but on behalf of the entire Quebec contingent. In fact, a large part of his family has very deep roots in Quebec, and he even has roots in Lanaudière. That explains our close connection to the member for Toronto Centre.

The fact that he was born in Montreal accounts for his desire to learn how to speak excellent French, as someone mentioned. We should all consider him a role model. The member for Toronto Centre is a great francophile, not only in Canada but throughout Francophonie, and he has been recognized as a great defender of the French fact. That is just one more asset that he brought to the House of Commons.

As you know, he studied law both here and in France. He even headed up the Alliance française in Toronto for 10 years. I do not have to repeat that he was a brilliant academic, that he worked for and taught in the faculty of law, and that he was elected in 1993. Earlier, his two defeats were mentioned, but I would rather highlight his four consecutive election victories, which show just how much voters in his riding liked him.

Some hon. members: Five victories.

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Five victories; I forgot one.

As I was saying, we like him too.

As someone else mentioned, he did a very capable job as interim leader of the Liberal Party between the last two Liberal prime

ministers prior to the most recent election. He could easily have been a formidable candidate during the Liberal Party of Canada's last leadership contest.

Of course I will always remember his work in foreign affairs and international trade, as I have already mentioned. I would like to reiterate the fact that he truly had a vision, which is crucial when dealing with such contentious and serious problems and when so much is at stake, which is usually true of foreign affairs.

This vision gave him the right attitude, particularly during the debate on Canada's possible intervention in Iraq. I am sure he must have been torn between the two options for some time. In the end, thanks to his humanistic, multilateral vision, which focused on international cooperation, development and security, he came to the conclusion, like the majority of this House, that our participation in the war in Iraq would not be well received, unlike our mission in Afghanistan, which had a multilateral foundation and was entirely understandable at the time. The situation is not quite so clear now. That said, when he was national defence minister, we knew a little more about where things stood.

I must say, I hope he puts all this experience to good use for all Canadians and all Quebecers. I can assure him that if he decides to set up a little foreign affairs consulting business, the Bloc Québécois will consult him regularly before making any decisions. As we all know, he has extensive expertise in this area.

• (1535)

On behalf of the entire Bloc Québécois caucus, I would like to wish him and his family—his wife, Catherine, and their two children, Katherine and Patrick, along with their three grandchildren—every success in all their future endeavours. I am confident that this is by no means the end. No, this is merely the beginning.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is with great pleasure, but also with some regret, that I rise to share a few words about my friend, our friend, the hon. member for Toronto Centre.

He has worked very hard for his fellow citizens. Many of his constituents have very limited means. His riding was known as Rosedale a few years ago and, as we all know, some of the poorest neighbourhoods in the country are found there.

I was elected at the municipal level in the same area for years, and I can assure this House that the hon. member for Toronto Centre was always there for his fellow citizens and worked with them for social justice and their well-being. He is not someone who shies away from anyone in need.

Government Orders

• (1540)

[English]

I witnessed firsthand what a member of Parliament who is truly committed to all of his constituents can do. It probably would have been very easy for the member for Toronto Centre to have found many reasons not to be a part of a lot of community activities. He was a minister and a brilliant chairman of the foreign affairs and international development committee. He served his country in so many different ways and yet I can attest to how devoted he was to his constituents. We would often be together in some of the poorest neighbourhoods where some of the greatest homelessness is found, where people are really struggling, and the member for Toronto Centre would be there because he is someone who takes and who always has taken his responsibilities very seriously.

He is warmly welcomed in the parts of the community that he represents. He was also one of the first to stand for civil rights and human rights for gays and lesbians at a time when that was not very popular.

I must say that I was always very impressed by his dedication to human rights and his participation in such a celebratory and principled way with people who are often on the margins and can still feel that marginalization today, but they will never feel it when it comes to the member for Toronto Centre. He has been honoured many times, and rightly so.

I was thinking of the things we share in common. We were both born in Montreal and both spent some time in the same academic institution at the University of Toronto. He was far more famous and illustrious than I in my time there, I must say. We also had the opportunity to contest the 1993 election in Toronto Centre. We were both trying to defeat David MacDonald at the time who was the member and a Conservative. I succeeded in converting David MacDonald to a socialist but that was really the only consolation I had.

The member for Toronto Centre taught me the lesson that one needs to lose a couple of times before one earns the right to be in this place. Three of us would often go out for a couple of beers after an all candidates debate, a practice that I would like to propose to the other party leaders, by the way, and we would talk about job sharing and the issues of the day. He did assure me that someday I would probably be elected but not in his riding. He was right once again.

• (1545)

The other thing I want to say is that I have always felt that despite his sort of straight back demeanour and his very dignified presence, the hon. member is very approachable at the human level. We had a number of occasions to talk about issues together one on one. Every time I found a dignity, an openness, a friendship and the kind of conversation that we really wish could happen among all of us much more often.

When he stood in his place to debate, we knew several fundamentals about this man: he felt that he was here to serve the others and his country. We also knew that he loved his country very profoundly every time that he spoke. We finally knew that he respected this place and the opportunity that it provides for all of us to do our best on behalf of our fellow citizens.

I think what we are talking about here is a true parliamentarian, someone who can serve as an example for people coming newly to politics. I hope they will study the record of the member for Toronto Centre.

I hope that he will accept, on behalf of my caucus, the New Democratic Party, and all our members and supporters across the country, our gratitude because we appreciate the service of the member. We also want to thank his family for sharing him with us over these last number of years. We wish him well in the future.

The Speaker: On behalf of all hon. members, I want to express our thanks to the hon. member for Toronto Centre for his service in the House. It has been a pleasure for me as Speaker to work with him as a minister and leader of the opposition.

I appreciated his remarks about respectfulness in question period and in dealings between members. I hope all hon. members will bear those comments in mind overnight so that tomorrow's question period will be the very model of civility which we can all look forward to.

I thank the hon. member for Toronto Centre for his friendship over the years and wish him and his wife Cathy the very best on his retirement.

• (1550)

The Speaker: I wish to inform the House that because of the deferred recorded divisions government orders will be extended by 10 minutes.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order arising out of question period. The Minister of Public Safety during question period invited the official opposition to advise the government on his task force on the RCMP. Will the minister commit here and now to meet with the official opposition to discuss the membership of the task force and how its work can be made fully transparent with proper oversight and public reporting?

The Speaker: I am not sure the hon. member has raised a point of order. He seems to have asked a question. I would stress that question period is over. Maybe tomorrow he would like to ask a supplementary and clarify the matter.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

CRIMINAL CODE

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC) moved that Bill C-21, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Firearms Act (non-registration of firearms that are neither prohibited nor restricted), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to be able to lead off the debate on Bill C-21. I have been waiting 12 years for this day. That is when we started putting an end to the Liberals' infamous \$2 billion boondoggle on the firearms program. This is the day we start to dismantle Bill C-68 and return our gun laws to the way they were in 1995.

Government Orders

There was no evidence that those gun control laws were effective, but at least they were only costing taxpayers \$12.8 million a year, not \$100 million. This is the day we start putting an end to the Liberal gun control laws that do not work, do not save lives, do not reduce violent crime, do not improve public safety and do not keep guns out of the hands of criminals.

Finally, this is the day we start putting in place weapons control laws that have been proven statistically to save lives, to reduce violent crime, to improve public safety and to help to keep deadly weapons out of the hands of criminals.

I want to warn Canadians of the blather they are going to hear from the other parties on this issue, likely today. Their gun control proposals sound too good to be true and they are. They may sound good, but they are not sound policies. Policies that are driven strictly by emotions may actually do more harm than good. They may divert resources away from more useful endeavours. Emotions may encourage us to act to solve a problem, but they can be harmful if they make us act irrationally. Because Bill C-68 was not based on factual evidence, it has done more harm than good.

I intend today to expose that flaw in our response to crime in Canada. Canadians need gun control policies that are effective as well as cost effective, but Liberals have not let logic, facts and truth get in the way of a good sound bite or a scary political advertisement at election time. The truth is they want votes more than they want effective gun laws and this is hurting our nation.

This is not a right versus left issue on the political spectrum. It is a right versus wrong issue to crime control.

Let us start with the colossal overspending by the Liberals on implementing the Firearms Act. On April 24, 1995 then justice minister Allan Rock appeared before the Standing Committee on Justice and promised Parliament and the Canadian taxpayers that implementing the Firearms Act would cost \$2.2 million over five years.

On May 17, 2006 the Auditor General of Canada reported that the Liberals had spent more than a billion tax dollars over 12 years to implement that program, and guess what? It is still not completely implemented.

In a letter to me dated June 15, 2006, the Auditor General confirmed that her audit of the firearms program costs did not include enforcement costs, compliance costs, economic costs, and unreported indirect costs to other departments. She also confirmed that the Liberal government's cost benefit analysis of the firearms program and the Liberals' 115 page economic impact study are still cabinet secrets as they have been since 2003 and 1999 respectively. So we still do not know the real costs.

In his 1993 report, the previous auditor general, Denis Desautels, criticized the government for moving forward with new gun control regulations without "important data, needed to assess the potential benefits and future effectiveness of the regulations", and recommended, "it is essential that the Department of Justice evaluate the effectiveness of the program again". But it never did.

Political posturing overrode common sense. Mr. Desautels' findings 12 years ago seem very similar to Auditor General Sheila Fraser's report in May 2006. Paragraph 4.36 of her report states:

In particular, the Centre has not set any performance targets and has provided few examples of its outcomes. Instead of reporting the key results achieved, the Centre describes its activities and services.

Paragraph 4.38 added:

The Centre does not show how these activities help minimize risks to public safety with evidence-based outcomes such as reduced deaths, injuries, and threats from firearms.

● (1555)

That quotation is the most important part of my speech because it exposes the tactics used by those that defend the gun registry. This appalling lack of evidence of effectiveness was also confirmed by the Liberal government's response to order paper question No. 19 on November 29, 2004. Statistics Canada's statement was in bold text and underlined that the specific impact of the firearms program or the firearms registry cannot be isolated from other factors.

In fact, their own statistical evidence proves that the Liberal gun control policies and programs have been a dismal failure. Last December the Library of Parliament obtained a special set of tables for me from Statistics Canada showing firearms related statistics for the total number of homicides committed in Canada between 1997 and 2005.

Consider these Statistics Canada findings: Of the 5,194 homicides committed between 1997 and 2005, only 118, or 2.27%, were committed with a registered gun. Of the 5,194 homicides committed between 1997 and 2005, only 63, or 1.21%, were committed with a firearm registered to the accused murderer. Of the 5,194 homicides committed between 1997 and 2005, only 111, or 2.14%, were committed by a person who held a valid firearms licence. Of the two million licensed gun owners in Canada, only 111, that is 0.00555%, used their firearm to murder somebody.

This analysis shows what almost everyone in Canada knows, with the exception of the opposition parties in this House, that criminals do not register their guns and cannot be bothered to qualify for a firearms licence. Sadly, these statistics prove the main point I have been making for the last 12 years, that laying a piece of paper beside a gun does not prevent it from being used to murder someone. These statistics represent a failure of gun registration and gun owner licensing as cost effective measures to save lives, improve public safety or keep firearms out of the hands of people who should not have them.

Government Orders

On November 8, 2006 Statistics Canada released its 2005 homicide report. Here are some of the highlights which show that criminals are the real problem, not the type of weapons they use against their victims. There are two things to keep in mind as I read the highlights from the StatsCan report. Number one, the RCMP have been registering handguns since 1934 and fully automatic firearms, sawed off rifles and shotguns have been banned for decades. Number two, in 1995 when the Liberals passed Bill C-68 they banned some 555,000 handguns and required the licensing of all gun owners and the registration of all rifles and shotguns.

Two billion dollars later, this is the result according to Statistics Canada in 2005: We have the highest homicide rate in nearly a decade. The firearm homicide rate is the same as it was 20 years ago. Sixty-six per cent of murders in 2005 were committed without a firearm; 58% of the firearms homicides were committed with handguns; 9% were committed with banned fully automatic firearms, sawed off rifles and shotguns; and only 30% of recovered firearms were registered.

Here are the more relevant homicide statistics that parliamentarians should be focused on: Sixty-four per cent of the accused murderers had a criminal record, 6% for homicide. I have to ask what were these people doing back on the street? Seventy-three per cent of the accused murderers had been drinking or on drugs. Thirteen per cent of the accused murderers were mentally ill; 45% of the murders occurred while the accused were committing another crime; and 22% of murder victims were involved in illegal activities.

• (1600)

Let us turn to an example of the opposition parties using false statistics in an attempt to keep our government from replacing useless gun control laws with truly effective ones. That is why we are here today.

In June 2006 the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security debated a Bloc motion calling for the retention of the long gun registry. A number of opposition MPs repeatedly quoted a statistic to justify their defence of the gun registry. The researchers in the Library of Parliament later proved there was no evidence to support their claims. They claimed "71% of the firearms assaults perpetrated against women involved long guns". That is a false statistic. The Library of Parliament researcher could not find the source for that statistic but she did find two different sets of statistics to contradict it. The researcher reported:

With regard to your request concerning statistics presented during the 8th meeting of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security, specifically the statement that 71% of firearms assaults perpetrated against women involve long guns (rifle and shotgun), compared to 29% of the assaults perpetrated against men, I have not been able to find the source of these statistics.

I do not have time to read the whole Library of Parliament quotation, but it clearly notes that the number was not 71%. It was 17.1%. Those were misleading statistics by the opposition. While we deplore domestic violence regardless of the type of weapons used, there are far more effective measures the federal government could take up to help spouses living in violent households.

While doing research on domestic violence, we keep finding news stories about women's shelters not being able to accommodate abused women showing up at their doorsteps. The Library of Parliament sent me the most recent statistics Canada reports on

shelters for abused women that showed the tragic truth ignored by the Liberals for years: "On the snapshot day, about one-fifth of all shelters referred about 221 women and 112 children elsewhere. Two-thirds of those referrals were made because shelters were full. Eight in ten abused women in shelters were there to escape a current or former spouse common law partner".

While the Liberals were wasting over a billion tax dollars on the gun registry over the last 10 years, hundreds of women and children were being turned away from women's shelters every day. I do not need to remind the House of the massive cuts to social transfer payments to the provinces that were made by the previous Liberal government during the 1990s.

Another analysis of domestic violence just completed by the Library's parliamentary research branch showed spousal homicides committed each year have remained virtually unchanged over the last 10 years. The futility of it all is driven home by the fact that 70% of the women murdered by a family member over the last 10 years were murdered with something other than a firearm. These domestic violence reports expose 10 years of Liberal deception on the firearms file.

Women should be outraged that they were treated so shoddily when one of the solutions to combat family violence was obvious and blatantly ignored for so many years.

If we were telling people the truth, they would be telling us that helping abused women is more important than simply laying a piece of paper beside our guns, but then the opposition parties will claim that the police use the system thousands of times a day. Members have likely heard that claim.

Here is what the Auditor General, Sheila Fraser, said on May 31, 2006, when she appeared before the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security:

I believe that the indicator of the 5,000 hits a day is more of what we call an activity indicator than an indicator of effectiveness. So those law enforcement people who use the registry would have to give an assessment as to whether or not it was useful to them.

There could be 5,000 hits, and they could say, yes, it was very helpful and helped me in this way; or they could say, no, it wasn't helpful because the information wasn't correct. It takes an additional degree of interpretation or information to assess effectiveness.

• (1605)

Members will understand why I say we should have the Auditor General audit firearms law to see if it is cost effective. That is what we should be doing.

Here is what the RCMP commissioner said on June 7, 2006, when he appeared before the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security:

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They're automatic CPIC checks that they automatically go over. I don't have the number of how many are direct checks.

Guess what? The Liberals have known this deceptive statistic for a very long time and yet chose not to be upfront and honest with Parliament or the Canadian people.

On December 3, 2004, the then registrar of firearms emailed the then director of public policy with the Canada Firearms Centre and said, "In sum, CFRO", the gun registry, "is indeed automatically queried in many cases when police officers query CPIC", meaning the police computer system.

This email from the firearms interest police coordinator to the registrar of firearms states:

Note that the CFRO auto query of addresses is based on any valid address query response returned through their Intergraph System query. This means that if a parking ticket had a valid address and was returned...the Intergraph System, it would generate a CFRO address query.

This quote is from a young RCMP officer in my riding who was told by his superiors to stop sending requests to the gun registry before attending domestic disputes because he was "putting his life in danger". The reason, he was told, was that "the usual 'no guns' response to his query 'creates a false sense of security'".

It may surprise many MPs on the other side that the majority of front line police officers do not support the gun registry nor do they use it. Why should they, when it is so full of errors?

In December 2005, I released Liberal government documents showing that the number of unverified firearms in the gun registry had increased from 5.1 million to 5.6 million over the last two and a half years, and there are only seven million firearms in the registry. The more millions wasted, the further they fell behind. So much for the Canadian Police Association's resolutions in 1999 and 2004 demanding that data entered in the gun registry be "verified as accurate".

Other Canadian Police Association demands from 1999 that have not been met are as follows: that the Auditor General of Canada conduct a thorough review of the firearms registration system and release a public report on the findings to the people of Canada; that the CPA receive confirmation that the registration system has the capacity to meet the legislative timeframes established for firearms registration; that the CPA receive confirmation that the cost recovery plan for registration can be achieved; that meaningful consultations with the user group take place to ensure that the concerns of stakeholders are addressed in the review process; and that the CPA receive confirmation that the implementation and operation of the system is not taking officers off the street.

It is unfortunate that we are playing politics with public safety.

Now let us get to the meat of Bill C-21, our government's first step toward implementing our party's firearms and property rights policies passed by our delegates in Montreal in March of 2005.

Our firearms policy states:

A Conservative government will repeal Canada's costly gun registry legislation and work with the provinces and territories on cost-effective gun control programs designed to keep guns out of the hands of criminals while respecting the rights of law-abiding Canadians to own and use firearms responsibly. Measures will include: mandatory minimum sentences for the criminal use of firearms; strict monitoring of high-risk individuals; crackdown on the smuggling; safe storage provisions; firearms

safety training; a certification screening system for all those wishing to acquire firearms legally; and putting more law enforcement officers on our streets.

I support Bill C-21 because it is the first step toward fixing all that is wrong with Canada's gun control laws. Getting this bill through second reading will get it into committee where the truth can finally be uncovered and we can start building evidence based and truly cost effective measures to control the criminal use of all weapons, not just guns.

● (1610)

Legislation is seldom perfect. Many people support the gun registry because they think it is gun control. I challenge everyone to look below the surface on this issue and not form an opinion based on a superficial impression that some may have created. The long gun registry does not enhance public safety and that is why it should be repealed.

I appreciate the opportunity—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): I regret to interrupt the member. Questions and comments. The hon. member for Marc-Aurèle-Fortin.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ): Mr. Speaker, clearly, it was the Liberals who created the firearms registry in its current form. Many mistakes were made in how it was handled. The hon. member who just spoke pointed out the unreliability—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): I am sorry to have to interrupt the hon. member, but the technicians had to turn off his microphone because his headphones were too close to the microphone. The microphone is now on. The hon. member may continue.

Mr. Serge Ménard: Mr. Speaker, evidently the Bloc does not need to defend the gun registry as designed by the Liberals. It may perhaps result in mistakes, but it does exist nevertheless. If we are defending it, it is not because it is the creation of one political party or another, but rather because almost every police force in the country and those who look after victims of crime believe that a gun registry is a preventive measure that gives results.

The previous speaker spoke of the weaknesses of the registry and used that as an argument to abolish it in its entirety. I would like to ask him whether he believes that the amnesty granted over a year ago, allowing those who had not registered their firearms or who had to renew their registration to postpone the registration or renewal for a certain period of time, is a measure that will improve the effectiveness of the gun registry, or whether he believes that it will have the opposite effect and make the registry less reliable.

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[English]

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to lead off on this debate because of all the work I have done on this file in exposing the fraud that was perpetrated on Canadians and the impression that it was somehow gun control when in fact the gun registry was not gun control.

Let me begin with some of the opening comments that my colleague from the Bloc has raised. First, the member said that one of the charges I made was that the firearms registry is not reliable.

Approximately seven million guns out of all the firearms in Canada have been registered in the system. How many firearms are there in this country? A reliable estimate indicates that the minimum number is 16.5 million. If seven million have been registered and at a minimum there are 16.5 million in the country, and probably closer to 20 million, we have barely scratched the surface.

I will let that sink in for members here. If we are trying to put a piece of paper beside every gun in the country, we have barely begun, and this at a cost of approximately \$2 billion. So how can the registry be reliable? The police want a tool that will be effective. It is not effective when only a fraction of the guns have been registered.

I can explain how these numbers were achieved, with import and export numbers, the number of guns manufactured in the country, and a reliable estimate by the justice department before all of this was put in place.

The Auditor General also pointed out, and I think my hon. colleague knows this, that 90% of registrations had errors, so what happens if the police go to a system like this and let it in any way affect what they do? I do not think there is a policeman in this country who will allow this registry to affect what the police do.

When the police go to a home, they do not trust any of the information they pick up on their CPIC system, their computer system, because of what the Auditor General said, which is that 90% of registrations have problems. Police want effective tools that will help them in their fight against crime.

•(1615)

Mr. Jim Abbott (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to acknowledge the tremendous hard work that my colleague from Yorkton—Melville has done on this file. He has been tireless. He indeed has exposed the Liberal boondoggle for what it was.

I have a quick question for him. Recognizing that at this particular point there is about a six month backlog for people being able to actually acquire a licence when they purchase a gun, would he not agree with me that it is something like going to an automobile dealership, paying for a car, getting the insurance for the car and then being told that sometime, somewhere, perhaps in the next six months, we could come back and actually use the car?

I think the member would agree with me that it is exceptionally frustrating. For law-abiding citizens in Canada to have to put up with that kind of frustration builds toward the potential for real anarchy as a result of this ill-conceived and useless registry.

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question. It almost answers itself, but the key point is that this registry and the

licensing affect only law-abiding citizens, people who are trying to comply with the law. My hon. colleague has pointed out, I think adequately, that people are frustrated with the fact that they cannot do what they would like to do and lawfully use their property.

It has no effect on the criminal. In fact, that is the key problem. We are spending so many resources on a paper-pushing exercise and creating a huge bureaucracy when in fact if we were to ask police what they would like to see, they would say they need more police on the streets in the right areas, combating criminals, gangs and drugs. That is what they want.

Coming back to the question that was asked of me previous to this one, the amnesty does not waive the law. The legislation we are dealing with today is what will repeal that law.

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren (Chatham-Kent—Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to verify what the hon. member has told us.

I have two sons who are policemen and a third in the process of becoming one. One of them is on the tactical team. Obviously my question to him was this: what about the charge we keep hearing that the forces are using the registration at 5,000 hits a day? The member may have mentioned it. I want him to expand on that a bit.

My son said they would never at any time rely on that, because, as the member so correctly stated, it would give them a false sense of security. They do not trust it. When I asked him if that is the prevailing attitude among other policemen, he told me that is precisely the case.

My question, then, for the hon. member is this: why do we keep hearing that access to the registry is at 5,000 hits a day? Why do we keep hearing that as the best reason for why we should be maintaining this flawed gun registry?

•(1620)

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz: Mr. Speaker, that question strikes to the very heart of what has been happening with regard to this over the last decade or more.

Politics has overridden factually based evidence. The previous government was successful in creating the impression that this was somehow gun control when in fact it was not. The gun registry was not gun control, yet that government could get votes in the cities from people who took the Liberals at their word. Because of the words they used, people felt that might be the case.

What we need to do is get back to legislation that is based on effective crime control. I think the Auditor General is the key person who could help us in this.

The country of New Zealand, I will point out, tried to go down this road and about a decade ago scrapped its gun registry. It had no effect on crime in that country. New Zealand saw that and did away with it, yet we are still trying to promote something that is not a tool that will affect criminals in any way. As my colleague has pointed out, the police know this very well.

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Hon. Sue Barnes (London West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak today to Bill C-21, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Firearms Act (non-registration of firearms that are neither prohibited nor restricted).

The bill received first reading in the House of Commons on June 19, 2006. Its primary objective is to repeal the requirement to obtain and hold a registration certificate for a non-restricted firearm, commonly called long guns, what we would know as a shotgun or a rifle.

It is only now that we are finally debating the bill at second reading, a full year later. The government is clearly dragging its feet, aware that it does not have the support for the legislation in the House.

Under Bill C-21, the registrar of firearms would no longer issue or keep records of registration certificates for non-restricted firearms. Provisions of the Firearms Act regarding these expiry and revocation of registration certificates are accordingly amended, as are provisions setting out the documentation that is involved when lending, importing or exporting non-restricted firearms.

Although registration certificates would no longer be involved when transferring, selling or giving away a firearm, a person transferring a non-restricted firearm to an individual would be required to seek an authorization from the chief firearms officer who will verify that the recipient is entitled to possess the firearm.

As a registration certificate would no longer be required to possess a non-restricted firearm, certain offences in the Firearms Act are amended or even repealed.

The Criminal Code is also amended so that the failure to hold a registration certificate for a non-restricted firearm does not give rise to any of the offences relating to the unauthorized possession of a firearm and does not allow police to seize a firearm. This is all part of the Conservatives' bill.

Although Bill C-21 would remove the need to hold a registration certificate for non-restricted firearms, it would not change the requirement for all individuals to hold a licence in order to possess a firearm and, therefore, to undergo a background check and pass any required safety course.

Additionally, Bill C-21 would allow for regulations to require firearm businesses to record transactions relating to non-restricted firearms.

Even before Bill C-21 was introduced, commentators expressed divergent views on the anticipated legislation. Many stated that abolition of the long gun registry would be contrary to the government's general anti-crime message and therefore opposed by the police, public health officials and groups against domestic violence.

Conversely, the firearms organizations welcomed the expected removal of criminal sanctions when normally law-abiding citizens inadvertently fail to possess required documentation for their firearms. We have two divides here.

During a news conference announcing Bill C-21, the Minister of Public Safety stated:

We have found out too painfully over the last number of years that the effort of trying to track down every single long gun in Canada has been ineffective, costly and wasteful and has not led to a reduction of crime with guns.

He goes on to say:

Duck hunters, farmers and law-abiding gun owners do not pose a threat to Canadians. Criminals do.

Commentators have pointed out that the gun registry did not prevent recent high profile shooting deaths, notably the four RCMP officers in Alberta in March 2005, a teenage girl in Toronto in December 2005, a police officer in Laval in December 2005 and two RCMP constables in Saskatchewan in July 2006.

At the same time, the proponents of gun control have referred to these tragedies, and they are tragedies, as a reason for strengthening, not weakening, the firearms registry.

Among others, the Coalition for Gun Control, the Attorney General for Ontario and Quebec's Minister of Public Safety are against any dismantling of the firearms registry. Police organizations, both the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police and the Canadian Police Associations, are in favour of maintaining the firearms registry as police do query over 5,000 times a day.

I know the members opposite can quote individual policemen who have other opinions but the two organizations certainly are on side for keeping the registry complete.

With regard to the total cost of the gun registry, often cited, and I heard this many times, at \$2 billion by the Conservative government members, we know that it has been placed at less than \$1 billion over more than 10 years by the Auditor General's report.

• (1625)

Proponents of the firearms registry have blamed cost overruns on the opponents of the registry who have forced the government to deal with non-compliant gun owners, as well as to initiate or respond to expensive court challenges and proceedings. They also say that the computer glitches and administrative problems have now been resolved so that abolishing the registry would make no sense now.

There is no doubt that it was an expensive setup but changing it after the investment is made is not smart policy either.

It has further been argued that removing the requirement to register non-restricted firearms will save only \$3 million a year and that \$22.7 million in revenue a year will be lost by the government if it stops charging for the various fees involved or rebating them.

It has been argued also that because long guns are the ones most frequently found in homes, the long gun registry has successfully reduced domestic violence, suicides and accidents. According to a recent Swiss study, a decrease in gun injuries and gun deaths since 1995 shows that Canada may be saving up to \$1.4 billion a year in violence related costs.

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Gun laws are an important part of public safety in Canada. They are not the only solution but they are a part of the solution. In spite of the common use of the word “registry”, the 1995 legislation set up a comprehensive screening and licensing system for all gun owners, as well as the registration of firearms, which did include recording details of what guns individuals owned.

The bulk of the \$1 billion over 10-plus years was spent on screening and licensing gun owners. Most of the annual costs of gun control in Canada and about \$65 million at last count are spent on screening and licensing gun owners, as well as maintaining a system of continuous eligibility.

The RCMP recently stated that the dismantling of the registration of rifles and shotguns would, at most, save \$3 million a year.

In May 2006, the Conservatives introduced an amnesty to effectively eliminate the need to renew firearm licences and to register rifles and shotguns. A rifle or a shotgun in the wrong hands is just as deadly as a handgun. The Ruger Mini-14 rifle used at the Polytechnique is still sold today as an unrestricted rifle, one that Prime Minister Stephen Harper has referred to in the past as a duck gun.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member is an experienced member of the House and a privy councillor. She knows that she cannot do indirectly what she cannot do directly, and I have told her before.

Hon. Sue Barnes: Mr. Speaker, I am not quite sure what you are talking about but I should not have used the Prime Minister's name.

All gun owners need to be carefully screened on a regular basis and all guns need to be registered. Of course these measures do not eliminate the possibility of tragedies. No one is saying that.

However, we know with certainty that countries without strong gun laws are more likely and frequently to be the site of these terrible events. We can look to the south. Every year more than 10,000 Americans are murdered with guns, compared to 200 in Canada. The rate of murders without guns is comparable but the rate of murder with guns is dramatically higher in the U.S. Our gun laws are an important investment in public safety.

Many experts have maintained that rifles and shotguns in the wrong hands represent a threat to safety. They include many powerful semi-automatics like the guns used at the Polytechnique and the “elephant gun” used to kill Constable Gignac in Laval. They are also frequently among the caches recovered from gangs and organized crime by our police.

All firearms are potentially dangerous and all guns should be strictly controlled. All guns start as legal guns. Six separate public inquests have maintained the importance of renewable licences and the registration of all firearms. The Supreme Court also emphasized the importance of both. It said:

The registration provisions cannot be severed from the rest of the Act. The licensing provisions require everyone who possesses a gun to be licensed; the registration provisions require all guns to be registered. These portions of the Firearms Act are both tightly linked to Parliament's goal of promoting safety by reducing the misuse of any and all firearms. Both portions are integral and necessary to the operation of the scheme.

That is the Supreme Court, reference regarding the Firearms Act in June 2000.

Experts have also maintained that the 1995 Firearms Act has aided police in taking preventative action and reducing firearm death and injury in Canada. Supporters of the gun registry include the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, the Canadian Professional Police Association, the Canadian Public Health Association, the Canadian Paediatric Society, more than 40 women's associations, the Centre for Suicide Prevention and the Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians.

I will give some statistics, even though the other side on this debate does not believe them. On average, more than 5,000 queries are made daily. Since 1998, approximately 19,600 firearms licences have been refused or revoked since the Firearms Act came into force. More than 5,000 affidavits, which is an even higher number now, have been provided by the Canadian Firearms Registry to support the prosecution of firearms related crime and court proceedings across the country. There have been 333 fewer Canadians who die annually of gunshots than in 1995. Homicides with rifles and shotguns are down, suicides with firearms have decreased and domestic violence with firearms has plummeted.

All these trends suggest that stronger controls on rifles and shotguns have had an effect on improving public safety. Physicians, crisis workers and police have also provided anecdotal evidence of specific cases where the registry was useful in removing firearms from potentially deadly situations.

During the long Easter weekend of this year, an “Order Amending the Order Declaring an Amnesty Period” appeared in the *Canada Gazette*, Volume 141, No. 14, on April 7, 2007. This order extends the one year amnesty, which expired on May 17, 2007, for another year for individuals who have failed to renew their licences or register their rifles or shotguns.

Because the government bill to abolish the registry would likely be defeated, the Conservative government is deteriorating the effectiveness of the gun registry by stealth. Police associations and powerful anti-gun groups have lobbied to keep the registry and the Conservatives are abusing the democratic process to save face and appease core voters. They are doing it through the back door because the facts do not support their position. The facts show that the gun registry is actually working and that police officers find it to be a very useful tool.

Shortly after announcing the first amnesty in May 2006, the government tabled this legislation to eliminate the requirement to register rifles and shotguns. This does not suggest that the government is committed to building compliance with the law. Indeed, in the public pronouncement around its plan, both the Minister of Public Safety and the Minister of Justice repeatedly stated that the registration of firearms was costly, wasteful and ineffective. We heard that again today.

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•(1630)

There is little doubt that the legislation was launched in an effort to implement campaign promises and I heard that from a lead speaker of the government who said, “The long gun registry is by far and away the biggest issue in many ridings in western Canada”. That is a quote from the former justice minister Vic Toews.

•(1635)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): I wish that the member would not name members of the House, even in quotes. Please refer to them by their title or by the names of their constituencies.

Hon. Sue Barnes: I will, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for that.

Motivation for the 2006 amnesty appears to have been to satisfy political aims and remove “the teeth out of the registry and free rifle and shotgun owners from complying with the rules over the next year”, rather than building compliance with the law as stated when the order was filed.

The objective of the 2007 amnesty order appears to be political rather than as stated, “to build compliance with the existing law”. But if the objective of the amnesty was to address the confusion of gun owners, why did the government not plan a significant media announcement and public education campaign to accompany it?

This is what a previous government did when we wanted to have people comply. Instead, the announcement was published without publicity and only inadvertently discovered by an enterprising journalist. There is no evidence that the previous amnesty improved compliance with the law. There has been no evaluation of the impact of the last amnesty.

The government did not fulfill its responsibilities to undertake a review with an eye to improving the integrity and security of the data. Police have made clear their opposition to a year long amnesty arguing that it undermines respect for the law and that the amnesty penalizes the law abiding gun owners who regardless of their personal views complied with the legislation in a timely fashion. It also encourages groups and individuals who publicly flout the law. It also undermines the integrity of the data in the firearm registration system, a problem that was highlighted in the 2006 Auditor General's report.

There is the issue of the importance of the integrity of data, particularly the address of firearm owners. In the recent killing of a Laval police officer, Daniel Tessier, during a home raid, the media reported that the owner of the legal handgun had not reported the change of address. The Auditor General noted the need to improve the integrity of the data and recommended in the 2006 audit in the chapter entitled “Data quality needs to be addressed”, under paragraph 4.64:

The Canada Firearms Centre should ensure that its new information system will be able to provide management with the performance information it needs to run the Canadian Firearms Registry.

This could prevent police from removing firearms and charging potentially dangerous people. Last year's amnesty has prevented the prosecution of people with illegal guns. As far as we know there has been no assessment of how often the 2006 amnesty has hampered

police investigations and prosecutions though I am aware of an instance that it has.

The attorney general of Ontario, Michael Bryant, wrote a letter to Minister Day on April 20, 2007, stating that—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Strike three.

Hon. Sue Barnes: I am sorry, Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Public Safety.

The Ontario attorney general stated, “Ontario supports the need for the registration of all firearms, including long guns. There are close to two million long guns registered to licensed owners in Ontario. If the long gun registry is dismantled, as you propose with Bill C-21, these guns will become wholly untracked. We have already identified a number of legal implications surrounding untracked firearms that will certainly lessen our ability to carry out searches for firearms, and to ensure effective enforcement of “no firearms” conditions on bail, or on prohibition orders. In practical terms, this has significant implications for public safety”.

Dr. David McKeown, a medical officer of health in Ontario, has stated, “Gun violence is a serious public health issue and unrestricted rifles and shotguns are most often used in domestic violence, suicide and police killings. Six separate public inquests have maintained the importance of renewable licences and registration of all firearms. Extending the amnesty is not the answer. What is needed is to secure and maintain a strong commitment to the licence renewal process and registration”.

Shortly after becoming the Minister of Public Safety, the minister changed the composition of the advisory committee on firearms. Now the members include people who are on record opposing the existing law, that is, the original 1995 law. They are now going forward and advocating an American-style arming for self-protection. Some have even worked closely with the American National Rifle Association and participated in its infomercials.

Since the firearms advisory committee was first formed by the Conservative justice minister Kim Campbell in 1990, the former Liberal government, as of 1993, made a concerted effort to include crime and injury prevention experts, along with gun enthusiasts, to ensure that there was a balance so we could come up with sound public policy.

For the government, the experts on gun laws are all gun enthusiasts. The committee's pro-gun tilt leads to the perception that the Prime Minister's government is out of step with urban concerns on firearms violence. We hear this repeatedly, especially in Toronto and other places, and Montreal I should add.

While the committee includes some serving and former police officers, their views are at odds with the official positions of the major police organizations in the country. There is no one with expertise in suicide prevention or domestic violence even though these are significant consequences of firearm problems.

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Peter Cuthbert of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police said in an article published in *Le Devoir* last November that it was obvious that the Minister of Public Safety wanted a committee that did not support gun control.

The firearms advisory committee, appointed and operating in virtual secrecy, has a dozen members, including a man who argued that more guns in the hands of students would have helped in the recent Virginia Tech massacre in which 32 people were killed, and another shooting aficionado who described a weapon used in last September's Dawson College killings in Montreal as "fun".

Dr. Mike Ackermann, a member of the committee, stated:

If even 1% of the students and staff at Virginia Tech had been allowed to exercise their right to self-defence, then this tragedy would have been stopped in its very beginning and dozens of lives would have been saved.

The public safety minister's office recruited the panel members but did not, as has been the practice in previous governments, issue any public announcement about the appointments. We only found out about it from a letter on the former speaker's website.

Recently, we have discovered that the cost of the gun registry has not decreased with the Conservative government taking power and despite less information being recorded with the two amnesties.

I know my time is up, but public safety is an investment. Last year we had a motion passed in committee saying that we need to keep this registry alive. We know that all types of gun deaths, homicides, suicides and accidents, have declined since the registry was brought into force. I think that we have to invest in this registry and continue, so that it will be one element of helping public safety in this country, but not the only element.

•(1640)

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Peterborough, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member may have been out before the third strike there, but then again I was paying attention to the speech so it is hard to tell.

The member cited a number of things namely, that police associations and so forth were on board with the registry. I would just like to begin by pointing out that a gentleman I respect a great deal, the commissioner of the OPP, has gone on record saying that forcing law-abiding Canadians to register their rifles does nothing to reduce gun crimes and the money would be better spent on front line police resources.

Loren Schinkel, president of the Winnipeg Police Association, said that the Winnipeg Police Association has never supported the long gun registry. It has made its position very clear. The Manitoba Police Association passed a motion calling on Ottawa to scrap the long gun registry. The Calgary Police Association and the Edmonton Police Association support calls for scrapping the registry. I could go on. I have a whole list here.

Let us take a look at what Canadians have had to say. The *Globe and Mail* on September 15, 2006 asked: Do you believe an effective gun registry program could have helped prevent the shooting at Montreal's Dawson College? The response: 77% said no.

I am sure the member has heard of the London *Free Press*. It asked: "In your opinion, would stronger gun control measures have

prevented this week's shootings in Montreal?" The response: 85% said no.

CFRA in Ottawa did a poll. The three guns used by Kimveer Gill, the Montreal Dawson College shooter, were legally registered. They were in the Liberal gun registry. What does this tell us about the effectiveness of the \$1.5 billion gun registry? The poll results indicated that 84.7% said the gun registry should be scrapped.

I cannot understand those members over there. They stand against what Canadians know. Canadians, including the commissioner of the OPP, Julian Fantino, have said that the gun registry does not work and that it will never work. It does not make any sense. There is no empirical data that demonstrates that the registry works.

Why did the member, as part of the former government, close nine RCMP detachments along the border so that her government could fund the long gun registry when what we really needed was law enforcement officials to make sure the guns did not get into the wrong hands?

•(1645)

Hon. Sue Barnes: Mr. Speaker, there were a lot of non sequiturs in that premise and I do not accept them. I quite honestly do accept that there is a divide on this issue. I think we should respect that there is a divide on it. In a minority situation, this is not a bill that this Parliament should be dealing with.

This is a situation where every gun starts out as a legal gun. Every person starts out as a non-criminal. The bottom line is that we do have evidence showing that there are now more than two million gun owners and 90% of those guns are now licensed. There are over seven million firearms and 90% are registered. That leaves some unlicensed and unregistered weapons, and we know that.

Amnesties by our former government were trying to encourage that. We did amnesties in a way that was respectful of the process. We did not use an amnesty to kill a registry.

We have an act of Parliament. In 1995, this body respectfully put through a piece of legislation and it was put into effect. We have to take out an act of Parliament with an act of Parliament. For a year now we have had this piece of legislation and this is the first time it has been debated in this chamber. That was because commentators in the media were going after the government.

We know that the statistics in all areas are down. The rate of firearm thefts is the lowest in 30 years. Five hundred fewer people are killed per year than in 1991. The firearm homicide rate is down by 29%, even though the homicide rate without guns is down only 23%. The rate of homicides with rifles and shotguns, and the rate of women murdered with guns has plummeted both in 1991 and 1995. We strengthened controls on rifles and shotguns.

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I would like to advise the member that the Quebec provincial government is trying to strengthen its controls. Why are we sitting here doing the opposite?

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, passions flare quite quickly when we get into this issue, but I want to get into something that might be a bit more dispassionate.

One of the major concerns that the people whom I represent in northern British Columbia brought forward to me, when we were debating the gun registry back in 2003, 2004 and 2005, was the issue of cost. There are those who are ideologically opposed to the registry on principle of having to register a firearm of any kind in any place in the country. I do not fundamentally agree with those people. We have been registering firearms in the country, in various ways, for many decades. However, there are those in my constituency, and I would imagine in her constituency as well, who have opposed the cost overruns from the beginning.

I also want to talk about the costing of this registry program since the new government has come in. First, is she aware of what the total cost overruns were for the registry leading up to the break in the last election and the change of governance? Then, what has happened in the last 18 months in terms of the costs of the registry?

I can remember Conservative opponents of mine in my region and former representatives from my region, who were Reform, then Alliance and then Conservative members, often focused and fixated on the costs. That was the major push. They did not often speak of the ideology. However, since taking government, I am curious as to what the current numbers are and if this is a top priority for the current regime, to deal with the registry and the costs.

What has happened to the actual spending on behalf of hard-working Canadian taxpayers in relation to this registry?

Hon. Sue Barnes: Mr. Speaker, just last week one of our journalists, Mr. Clark from *The Globe and Mail*, did some interviews with me and other critics about the costs, and I will quote:

The public accounts for the 2005-06 fiscal year—the last year of the Martin government—show that the Canada Firearms Centre spent \$70.5-million. The Conservative government's spending estimates for this year say that the centre spent \$71.6-million in 2006-07 and plans to spend \$70.4-million in 2007-08, the current fiscal year.

The same estimates indicate that [the Minister of Public Safety]'s amnesty announcement cost the government \$21.5-million in refunds in 2006-07 because the Tories also waived...fees. charged to gun owners.

There is only one gun registry and it is for long guns and smaller weapons. This registry is less effective now as we go through the two years of the amnesty. It is not getting complete information. On top of that, there have been refunds, rebates and waivers of fees. This is unusual. Other people pay for their licences out of their own pockets. However, in this one, we have had a considerable length of time now where the government has been forgoing registration and licensing fees and rebating those who had paid before the amnesties were put in place.

The member's question is very apt. One would think that if savings were the incentive here, the savings of the first \$10 million, when it was moved to the RCMP, occurred under the previous government. Even though \$3 million was said to have been saved, what we have found in going forward is more money is being spent.

• (1650)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member certainly meant the government of the right hon. member for LaSalle—Émard and did not intend to name him.

There is a short question with one minute for both the question and the answer. The hon. member for Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale.

Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member has consistently tried to frame her remarks as trying to clear the air and represent a crystal clear, truthful expression about gun control. I would like to go back to what my colleague said, that we want to get rid of useless gun control and get effective gun control. She compares our system here with the United States. Since 1934, handguns in our country have been restricted, so that is an absolutely false premise. She mentions over 19,000 cancellations and she confuses licensing with permits.

How can she state that murders, suicides and accidents are down from long guns, when the Auditor General specifically has said that there are no specific goals of the registry, no measures of success and no way to check the effectiveness of the registry?

Hon. Sue Barnes: Mr. Speaker, there is nothing I can say to that member or those who do not agree with registration that will change their mind. I will state again that all guns start legal and not everyone who commits an offence with a firearm starts out as a criminal in life. What we have here is an effective message.

There is an honest debate going on here and I will not take the reading into my speech of some of his conclusions.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is strange that we should find ourselves ending the session with an issue that we have talked about here so much for so long, an issue that is very emotional.

There is a definite intensity among those opposed to long gun registration. I am not exactly sure why that is, but I have certainly met my share of people who are fascinated with guns and who think that they are pretty great even though they are not.

Guns are good at just one thing: killing. People use them to kill animals, among other things. Police officers, people who transport large sums of money and people whose lives may be in danger because they protect very valuable goods carry handguns not only to protect themselves, but also to injure or kill others.

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Because this is a very emotional subject, people tend to go to extremes. I would not want to fall into that trap. Personally, I think that gun control is the best way to prevent crime. It is also a way to prevent the most dangerous crimes—those that can result in death or serious injury. I think that we can start with a number of premises with which we all agree. Firearms are dangerous. Only responsible people should be allowed to have them. To the extent possible, nobody wants bad guys to have guns, and nobody wants it to be easy for criminals to get them, but we know that is impossible. There will probably always be some criminals who can find a way around the controls we put in place.

We must not become discouraged because it is impossible to implement controls to ensure that criminals cannot get guns. We can still achieve results. We cannot abolish guns entirely, but we can reduce their numbers. That is why it makes sense to look elsewhere in the world to see if other countries and other legislators have gone through what we are going through.

I think that the majority of civilized countries whose homicide rates are similar to ours also have comparable incarceration rates. But there is one—our neighbour—that has an extremely high incarceration rate. It is six times higher than ours and three, four, five or even ten times higher than the incarceration rates of some Scandinavian countries. Does its high incarceration rate get results when it comes to homicides? Not at all. On the contrary, it has the highest homicide rate in the world. So putting more people in prison and leaving more guns in circulation is not the best way to go. We also tend to register dangerous objects that were not created for killing, but that can be a danger. We register vehicles, large and small. We even register snowmobiles and scooters.

I wondered why we register automobiles. Some think that it is so the government can collect fees. If the government really wanted to make money off drivers, the easiest and cheapest solution would be to increase the tax on gas. It is true that the government may use this as a source of funding. In Quebec, when people register vehicles, the government collects an insurance premium that compensates motor vehicle accident victims. However, I think we started registering vehicles because they can hurt people.

•(1655)

People who had injured someone and who had probably been negligent tended to leave the scene if the car could not be traced. Thus, it became mandatory to display licences on automobiles.

At present, we have a somewhat ridiculous situation where duck hunters object to registering their guns that kill, but they get into a boat that has a registration number. When they hunt in the winter, they travel by registered snowmobile, but they absolutely do not want to register their rifles. What is more dangerous, a snowmobile or a rifle? Do they own the boat or the rifle?

In addition, I sometimes believe that the Conservatives are not as mean as they would have us believe. They recognize that these guns are not used solely for sport, as long guns are. However, handguns—guns that can be used with only one hand—should continue to be registered. And they have been since 1934, which allows us to compare our experience with that of our neighbours to the south.

Everyone knows that weapons circulate very freely in the U.S. Yet, those who commit crimes with weapons are for the most part punished very severely. What is the result? The homicide rate in the United States is three times higher than in Canada.

People will say that it is criminals who kill and so forth. At some point, I would like to have the definition of a criminal. The Conservatives talk about them as though they are people who have chosen to lead a criminal life. But they are not the only ones who kill.

People kill for all sorts of reasons. They kill out of passion, revenge or jealousy. Very often individuals who do not really have a criminal past are found guilty of murder. Some have a criminal past and others do not. Easy access to weapons, the availability of weapons, is an important factor in the increase in the homicide rate. The best evidence is that your chance of being a murder victim is three times higher in the United States. Unfortunately, women are five times more likely to be victims of murder in the United States, probably because of marital strife.

When we look at it, these numbers are rather substantial. Incarceration rates are six times higher in the United States and homicide rates are three times higher. Ask any educated, well-informed American who is not a member of the National Rifle Association why their homicide rate is so much higher than ours and they will tell you that it is due to the fact that firearms are so easy to acquire in that country.

I did not bring the statistics with me today, because I did not have a great deal of warning. However, I have been a part of this debate for quite some time and I often hear things that, in my opinion, prove the opposite of what they claim.

For instance, regarding the very high homicide rates in the United States, the Conservatives pointed out that, in nicer neighbourhoods, in comparable neighbourhoods, such as the Seattle suburbs and the Vancouver suburbs, the homicide rate is more or less the same. I agree and I am not surprised, because people who have similar levels of education are likely to have a similar sense of responsibility. But if we look at the United States as a whole, if comparable neighbourhoods with similar education levels have the same homicide rate, that means that in other areas of the United States, the homicide rate must be extremely high. Firearms are easily accessible in those places, too.

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● (1700)

Based on the U.S. experience, everyone thinks there should be gun control. What barrel length should we start controlling guns and at what length should we stop? People involved in crime want to use guns, but then some of the people who have a fascination with guns—something I have never really understood—are not criminals. Nonetheless, generally speaking, criminals have a fascination with guns for a criminal purpose. This includes all kinds of criminals, crooks for example. Criminals who have a fascination with guns want to perpetrate violence. The easier it is to get guns, the sooner they will start to use them. Those are the general conclusions we draw from the difference between us and the Americans.

I have always wondered why people would buy a rifle and saw off the barrel. The reason is simple: they want to hide it. It is easier to carry a rifle that is inconspicuous when one wants to rob a bank. That is why they saw off the barrel. By doing so, they are cutting off the difference in price between a handgun and a rifle.

Criminals were sawing off shotguns—so much so that a specific offence was created for this—because they were having a hard time getting revolvers. Revolvers and handguns were registered. Accordingly, the sale of these weapons was better controlled. It cost more to get them on the black market. And since hunting rifles were not controlled, a person could buy one, saw off the barrel and have a weapon that could be concealed until it was needed in a bank robbery. I fear we may end up back in that situation.

Then people bring up another statistic, which was actually used this afternoon to prove two opposing notions. Fewer than 2% of firearms related homicides in Canada are committed with registered firearms, which proves that the system does not work. That sounds strange to me, because I would tend to believe that it proves that the system does work. It proves that people who register their weapons are responsible. The primary purpose of the gun control program is to ensure that only responsible people have access to firearms and to encourage them to keep these items safely locked up, as they have been taught to do, and never to give in to the temptation to sell them to someone who does not have the right to buy them.

In the context of the gun control system, registration may not eliminate homicide altogether, but it is a vital tool to lower the homicide rate significantly.

There are cases where registration is essential to facilitating the application of the law, such as when a judge issues an order to surrender firearms. It is important for police officers to know which firearms to seize, which is easier when they are registered. The Montreal police brotherhood, which came to one of our press conferences, told us about a striking case. A woman was afraid of her husband, who had a lot of guns. She knew that he had guns, but she did not know how many. The marriage was going badly, and there was some danger of violence erupting, so they went to a judge. The judge issued an order to seize the firearms. As I recall, there were over 280 of them. The police did not leave until they had found all 280 registered weapons. As you can see, registration was vital in that case.

There are other cases where registration is useful.

● (1705)

These judges' orders are issued in cases where spousal abuse may be a concern and where someone has suicidal tendencies. The judge may issue an order. That is why all suicide prevention organizations are asking that the gun registry be maintained. If an order can be obtained, the authorities know what weapon to look for because the weapon is registered.

Of the 480 or so murders committed last year, two were committed with registered weapons by Kimveer Gill, in the Dawson College tragedy. Some claimed that the firearm registration system did not work because the weapon used was registered. The Dawson College tragedy could perhaps have been prevented. Just after this incident, another tragedy was averted and it received a great deal of publicity. It was obvious from his website that this individual should never have owned weapons. That was not known at first.

Some individuals found a site in Hudson and believing him to be dangerous, reported the author. The police looked into the matter and realized that the individual had registered firearms in his possession. The police went to court, obtained an order and retrieved the weapons. That is why I am proposing a reporting site.

In the case of Kimveer Gill, had this reporting site been operational and if, by chance, someone had seen Gill's site, the police could have determined if he had registered weapons. Thus the police could have retrieved the weapons and a tragedy would have been prevented. The registration of weapons can be useful.

This can produce results. It seems to me that the American experience, when compared to that of Canada and other countries, clearly shows that the fewer weapons are in circulation, the fewer homicides take place. The safest country in the world is Japan, where there is absolute gun control. Only police officers and registered hunters have the right to purchase firearms. The homicide rate is even lower than that of Canada.

This debate shows that there is some emotion attached to firearms, and that disturbs me. The rational attitude is obvious. People do not want the government to register things, but my goodness, so many things are registered. Cars, boats, bicycles, dogs and cats are all registered. What is so wrong about registering something that can kill?

Firearm registration is important because we do not want firearms to easily find their way into the hands of irresponsible people. Currently, when a person sells or gives a registered firearm to someone else, they must go to the registry office. We take care of our firearms and ensure that they are always under control.

I know that some people want to keep the provision that prohibits selling a firearm to someone without a permit. However, this is not verified. It can also happen through carelessness.

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So this leaves the door open to organized crime. If a group member has a permit, he can purchase unregistered firearms and then supply his group. I will remind the House that there are no savings. What was expensive was the computer system.

• (1710)

We are keeping this computer system since the Conservatives want to keep it for handguns. A computer system that would register 30%, 40% or probably even 100% more transactions would be pretty much the same computer system. There are no savings, obviously. There was an amnesty, but no savings. This is why I think we should keep the gun registry.

[*English*]

Mr. Garry Breitreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a lot of statistics were cited and I wish I had time to go over each one.

The member made quite a point about police confiscating or getting a court order to remove 180 firearms from a residence. A key thing that the Liberals do, the Bloc does and some of the NDP members do is confuse registration and licensing. What we need and what the police would like is to have more resources to deal with this, but there is a difference between laying a piece of paper beside every gun in the country, which is gun registration, which is what we are dealing with in this legislation, and the licensing of every firearms owner.

The courts have made over 200,000 prohibition orders in this country but they are never enforced. Why? Because the police do not have the resources at this point to do it.

If the member were in government, which he is not, he would have to make the decision on the best way to spend our money: do we put \$1 billion into a paper pushing exercise that does not affect the criminal, or do we put it into enforcing the laws of this country, such as prohibition orders? Why do we not have more police to check the people who are not supposed to own firearms? That to me seems logical.

I want to quote what a former provincial Liberal candidate had to say. By the way, Brian Ford was the Ottawa Police chief and he was upset. This is from the *Ottawa Sun* of May 17, 2006:

Ottawa's former top cop says he supported the gun registry because he didn't know the Liberals were lying to him. "I was assured by government — it's on budget"—

The budget was \$2 million and it has gone 500 times over budget. He publicly supported the registry as chairman of a Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police committee. He said, "They were lying to me. It bothers me. I was telling people what I believed was the truth".

That is what we need to have come out. We do not need all this rhetoric, theorizing and explanation about how it might work.

I want to refute something else the member said, that gun control is working in some countries. England went to very strict gun controls recently to the point where it banned all handguns. Gun crime has increased. One cannot simply implement these laws and say that passing the law is going to work. We have effective laws in

this country. People are not allowed to carry handguns. Let us start putting police on the street to—

• (1715)

The Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Marc-Aurèle-Fortin.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Ménard: Mr. Speaker, we have to talk about distinct societies because I assure you that in Quebec, when a judge issues an order for someone to turn over their guns, someone makes sure it happens. The police officer in charge of the investigation ensures that the guns are turned over to him and, generally speaking, he checked beforehand in the gun registry whether the person owned rifles or handguns. That is why representatives of the *Fraternité des policiers et policières de Montréal* came to see us. They gave us the example of a case where a woman did not know how many guns her husband owned. The police checked the information in the registry, saw how many guns were registered, went to the individual's home and did not leave until they found all his guns.

I practised criminal law for years and I can assure you that when judges issue a condition on bail for firearms to be turned over, they talk to the police to find out how this order will be applied. Furthermore, the judges give a deadline and ask the police to file a report, at least to the crown prosecutor.

In my opinion—and you will surely agree—this is a very bad reason to amend legislation that can provide good results. It does not provide good results because, in some provinces, police officers do not have the means to see the work through.

Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a few questions that I would like to ask the member with regard to the support of police forces in Canada, and especially in Quebec, for the firearms registration system.

The member for Peterborough stated that he believes many police forces in western Canada do not support the system. I know for a fact that a Montrealer, Tony Cannavino, President of the Canadian Police Association, has indicated that his association supports registration. During his speech, the member forgot to mention Quebec support for firearms registration. Are there particular organizations that support this system or a system to prevent gun crimes in Quebec?

• (1720)

Mr. Serge Ménard: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for the question. He is right, I should have addressed this.

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There is more or less unanimous consent in the sector. Of course, there are some exceptions, and one member mentioned them earlier. But, on the face of it, more than 95% of representatives from police forces are in favour of the registry, including everyone from the chiefs of police to simple constables. Tony Cannavino, president of the Canadian Police Association, wants to see the registry maintained.

Not only is there nearly unanimous consent among police officers, police forces and provincial ministers—which is important because criminal law is enforced at the provincial level—but there is also unanimous consent among people who take care of the victims, people who work on suicide prevention and among other care givers. Psychiatrists also tell us how important it can be.

Generally speaking, those who deal with the problems created by firearms agree almost unanimously that control is a positive thing and that it must be maintained.

[*English*]

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am glad to have the opportunity to participate in this debate because I want to be on the record that I do support gun control in Canada. I see Bill C-21 as an attempt to weaken the gun control regime that we have in Canada.

I have two brief questions for the member for Marc-Aurèle-Fortin. I wonder if he could comment on why it took the Conservatives so long to bring the bill forward for debate in the House. They tabled the bill over a year ago. The member for Yorkton—Melville talked about how he waited for 12 years to debate this issue in the House of Commons. One full year of that was with his own government having legislation tabled before the House.

I am also glad that the member talked about the culture of responsibility that registration provides in Canada.

I also know that Wendy Cukier, president of the Coalition for Gun Control, talked about it in a slightly different way. She said:

Registration is essential to ensure that licensed gun owners are held accountable for their guns.

I think that is another way of looking at the responsibility issue talking about being accountable for specific weapons.

I wonder if the member might comment on those two things.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Ménard: Mr. Speaker, I think that is one of the positive effects of registration. When people register something, they feel responsible for it. They are more likely to follow the instructions they are given during their courses: keep guns locked up and keep ammunition in a separate location. Before letting their children use the gun or enrolling them in a course, registered gun owners will take precautions and so on. They will ensure that the firearm registered in their name is always in a safe place. They will take care of their firearm just as they take care of their car. They will not let other people use it. And when the time comes to get rid of the gun, people will transfer the registration so that they are no longer responsible for the it.

The people here are elected representatives, so they must be accountable. They do not need this kind of system to make them

accountable. However, we have to think of people elsewhere, in general. They will take care of a registered item. They will not abandon it. They will not get rid of it without following the right process.

The government could easily improve the system so that it costs less. It could get gunsmiths involved. There are not very many of them in Canada, perhaps a few hundred at most. They know firearms. They could register their guns so that there would be fewer errors. They could even do it for free. It is not very complicated. They can describe the firearm. A buyer would have to go to the gunsmith, who would register the firearm under the new owner's name. The new owner might even turn out to be a hunting client, so it would be advantageous, and the firearm would be—

[*English*]

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. Resuming debate, the hon. member for Windsor—Tecumseh.

• (1725)

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I must admit that I am getting some encouragement from the Conservative Party member to make a good speech, but I think the member's definition of a good speech on this topic would be substantially different from my definition of a good speech on this topic.

I want to begin by acknowledging the passion that this issue has raised in this country, including yourself, Mr. Speaker, on a number of occasions. To some significant degree, it is unfortunate that this issue is at times so clouded by passion rather than by reason and fact.

To a significant degree, members of the Liberal administration need to take a good deal of responsibility for this because, quite frankly, of their mismanagement of the long gun registry in particular, and the manner in which they dealt with the registration of firearms in this country.

It is important that we look at the history of the registration of guns. If we go back, even at the turn of the century there was some requirement if people were carrying a gun to register it. However, the real registration system began in 1934 for, using various terminology, but what we would now refer to as restricted weapons as opposed to prohibited, those weapons that one could legally own and did not need to register, which, from 1934 on, were generally handguns.

The real controversy arose, and I say that objectively in terms of the history of the registration of guns in this country, after the massacre at the École Polytechnique in Quebec when we moved to require the registration of long guns. That was when the real passion arose in the country. To a significant degree, that anger against the long gun registry was generated by, in some cases, gross mismanagement in the system and the cost that went along with that system.

Private Members' Business

It is quite clear that we need to look at the facts. I do not want to be overly critical of the people who are opposed to the long gun registry because there are some of those within my own caucus. I want to acknowledge, perhaps at this point, that if this bill ever gets to a vote, although I have some doubts about that with the current administration, our party has decided, because of some long-standing opposition from some of our members and their constituents, that in our party this will be a free vote, not a whipped vote.

Those of us who are opposed to this bill and in support of the long gun registry will stand in this House and vote against this bill and vote in favour of retaining the registry. Those within my caucus who are opposed to this registry and in favour of this legislation will stand and vote accordingly. That decision has already been made and taken some time ago.

I am happy to say that a substantial majority of my caucus is opposed to the bill and in favour of maintaining the long gun registry. I want to be very clear about that because of the history that we are prepared to take that position because we do believe the long gun registry does have some validity in reducing injury as a result of the use of long gun weapons in this country and in reducing certain types of crimes.

Having said that, we are very clear that this needs to be managed well, whether it is a Liberal administration or the current Conservative administration. There are some problems with the system and Ms. Fraser, our Auditor General, made that very clear in her report in 2006.

In spite of the fact that the government has moved to transfer the registry to the RCMP, I am very concerned that it has not looked at some of the significant improvements that the registry requires. I say that not just with regard to the long gun registry, but with regard to the handgun registry as well. Some significant improvements are required and are necessary and we are capable of doing them but we are not seeing that from the government. Its approach has been to simply dismantle the long gun registry.

● (1730)

I will be critical again, although I do not want to be overly passionate about this, but I am angry at the government for the position it has taken. This bill was tabled in this House exactly one year ago today, on June 19, 2006. Since that time, the government has had the opportunity to bring the bill forward for debate and for votes. I would estimate roughly 100 days and maybe more than that. It has not done so and I think that is to its discredit for not having moved on this earlier. The debate is going on in the country, the passion is still there and we need to deal with it.

The Deputy Speaker: I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member for Windsor—Tecumseh but 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**PHTHALATE CONTROL ACT**

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-307, An Act to prohibit the use of benzyl butyl phthalate (BBP), dibutyl phthalate (DBP) and di(2-ethylhexyl)phthalate (DEHP) in certain products and to amend the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999, as reported (with amendment) from the committee.

[*English*]

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Deputy Speaker: There are three motions in amendment standing on the notice paper for the report stage of Bill C-307.

Motions Nos. 1 to 3 will be grouped for debate and voted upon according to the voting pattern available at the table.

[*Translation*]

I will now put Motions Nos. 1 to 3 to the House.

[*English*]

I understand that the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley is withdrawing Motion No. 2 so we will not be debating or voting on Motion No. 2.

● (1735)

MOTIONS IN AMENDMENT

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP) moved:

Motion No. 1

That Bill C-307, in Clause 2.1, be amended by replacing, in the French version, line 10 on page 1 with the following:

“phtalate est de moins de 0,1 % de la masse du”

Motion No. 3

That Bill C-307, in Clause 3.3, be amended by replacing, in the English version, line 18 on page 3 with the following:

“Environmental Protection Act, 1999, of benzyl”

The Deputy Speaker: Debate. Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Deputy Speaker: The question is on Motion No. 1. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion No. 1 agreed to)

The Deputy Speaker: The next question is on Motion No. 3. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion No. 3 agreed to)

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP) moved that the bill, as amended, be concurred in.

(Motion agreed to)

Mr. Nathan Cullen moved that the bill be read the third time and passed.

Private Members' Business

He said: Mr. Speaker, I thoroughly enjoyed that. It was as arduous as the process of getting the bill to this point in the legislature. I would check one thing with you. There was some debate as to allotment of time for speaking and then for questions afterwards. Could there be some clarification?

The Deputy Speaker: My understanding is the hon. member has 15 minutes and then a five minute question and comment period, to be followed by speeches after that.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, for members who are following the process of the bill, many, unlike you, will get dismayed by the language and terminology used and contained within it. The chemicals that are addressed within the bill, while complicated in their nature and obvious pronunciation, which again you had no problem with and it was quite remarkable, many parliamentarians will say that this is awfully specific and they may ask why this has been raised at this time.

A number of principles are contained within the bill, which we fought for rigorously and had considered for a long time. This is one of the few and rare exceptions that we will be bringing something as important, as specific, to the protection of Canadians and their health, particularly to the health of our children.

The concept around the family of chemicals known as phthalates has been raised by New Democratic members in this place for 12 years now. Various members from different parts of the country have raised the issues of what is contained in our consumer products in particular, how that will eventually affect the health of Canadians and the way the government is ill-equipped to deal with it on a day to day basis.

Many Canadians, when considering the role of governments or the role of private industry, assume that governments will take on the capacity of protecting the overall health and well-being of Canadians, by not allowing products and chemicals that harm us to enter our bloodstream, our health and our environment. They would never knowingly do this.

The challenge facing government is the enormous number of chemicals that are introduced each and every year by various industries, both domestically and internationally, and how to contain them and have some sort of understanding of what effect those chemicals have on human health.

This particular group of chemicals known as phthalates are used predominantly in the softening of plastics. Various members in the House will know that even the cords we use in our microphones allow this plastic flexibility. They are often used in children's toys, rubber duckies, teething rings, et cetera to soften the plastics. Oftentimes they contain serious quantities of phthalates in them. This would not be a problem, except for the fact that government health agencies around the world have identified certain parts of these chemicals to be developmental and reproductive toxins.

For a number of people watching, they might wonder why these chemicals, which are known to have such harmful effects, have been used for so long. In various lab testings they have been found to cause tumours. They are endocrine disruptors. That means they go to the genetic reproductive level of humans and cause disruptions. In

particular, they get concentrated in small children and affect their developmental growth.

How could we have allowed these chemicals to go through our manufacturing process and be used for so long? Clearly, there must be some reasons. For a number of years, industry has presented various reasons.

Recently the government was engaged in the review of the Canadian Environment Protection Act, known as CEPA for short, which was designed some years ago. It was up for review for a number of years and, finally, after haranguing, we were able to get it through the committee and present a number of important recommendations. I suggest those recommendations dovetail in with the recommendations proposed in Bill C-307.

Government is oftentimes catching up to the developments that go on within the chemical and manufacturing industries. The innovation and consumer demand for new and innovative products is so high that the manufacturers are seeking new ways to present their products.

Unfortunately, when dealing with these three phthalates, BBP, DBP and DEHP, they are often presented in such a way where the proper rigorous testing is never brought. Government does not have the resources at capacity, and we have heard this from testimony in front of us and also when we reviewed CEPA, to do the proper testing.

It seems that in government there is a certain amount of aversion to raising any alarm bell. These very chemicals were reviewed in 1994 and 2004. They were found to be what is called not CEPA toxic. Unfortunately, the nature and design of the tests can often predetermine the results. When the government, particularly in 1994 but also 2004, went through the testing, it eliminated things like consumer products.

● (1740)

I have already listed some of the products that contain these chemicals, but there are others such as cosmetics, nail polish, blush and mascara. All these are also known to contain these chemicals.

When the government went through the review on the exposure of Canadians to chemicals and whether that exposure would be harmful, it excluded all consumer products. It seems a bit dastardly and at the very least shortsighted. One tries to take some measure of faith within the hard-working civil servants, but that oversight needs to be corrected.

The bill seeks to correct that. There would be another review process for these chemicals. We would include consumer products. We would also include up to date information, not information that was known 13 or 15 years ago.

Private Members' Business

The bill seeks to do a number of other important things, but it is important at this time to recognize the validators that have come on board such as the Canadian Cancer Society and a whole swath of environmental and health groups that have seen their way to support the merits of the bill, as well as other jurisdictions, in particular Europe, which has been conducting a process called REACH. It is a new vision of looking at chemicals, trying to instill principles such as substitution. It is also the review of chemicals in such a way that we avoid unnecessary risk and harm. It is the precautionary principle, which is written into Canadian law but is almost never practised.

Let me deal with each of them separately.

The precautionary principle says that even in the absence of 100% certainty, we take a cautious route and try not to expose Canadians to something we suspect might be harmful, but still requires further study. We do this all the time and every day in our lives. We know there is not a 100% certainty of falling off a bicycle and getting a head injury, but we put on a helmet anyway. The precautionary principle says that there is some chance this could happen, and we all recommend that for our children. We say in this cautious way that we will recommend this thing. That principle is built into the bill, and we believe for the first time in Canadian legislation. It says we must take a precautionary approach.

The second principle is one around substitution. Oftentimes when legislators of all levels of government seek to ban a dangerous chemical, unfortunately the industry will come forward and raise the economic spectre. It will say not to do it, that it will be too expensive and it will cost Canadians jobs. We have to weigh out that fear. Is it true or is the industry avoiding change?

What the substitution principle says is that the government, when a known dangerous chemical is being introduced into a product, must first seek and demand of the manufacturer, not of citizens or government, to look for alternatives. Is there an alternative available to soften plastics or to apply cosmetics that will function in the same way the manufacturer seeks, but will not harm Canadians?

That substitution principle is one of the recommendations the environment committee, I believe unanimously, suggested in its review of the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, and it is one of the essential things within this bill.

I want to point out a number of other things that are required under the bill.

It requires that regulations respecting cosmetics that contain DEHP, one of these chemicals, under the Food and Drugs Act. It requires products such as toys that contain DEHP and that may come in contact with the mouth of a child less than three years to be prohibited.

An important side note is a certain amount of leaching goes on in a plastic water bottles over time. One of the quickest ways to have these chemicals enter into the greater environment is to chew it, to masticate it.

The sad irony is we were finding products and toys that were designed to be chewed also containing these harmful chemicals. That is the absolute principle of unintended consequences. I believe no manufacturer in the world would put these chemicals in toys,

knowingly realizing that children would be releasing these chemicals into their mouths. This bill would prevent that.

There is also a whole sector around medical devices. Here is another system of unintended consequences. There are medical devices that are plastic but they are softened. We know through studies that these chemicals will leach out of the plastics and into whatever is being used. We have blood transfusions and transfusions of many kinds and other testing. This is the absolute last moment, with the vulnerable population of children and now the vulnerable population of those seeking medical attention. They are in hospital for an obvious reason and now, lo and behold, while they are there receiving things like transfusions, they may be receiving a known reproductive toxin.

• (1745)

There are a number of things that did not happen in this bill. I suppose in a minority Parliament, as in many places in life, that concessions have to be made. We wanted to go a step further than the bill describes. There should be an outright ban on all these chemicals in cosmetics and toys. We also asked for a phase-in period for medical devices.

There is still reluctance on the government's part. We appreciate that there have been some concessions by the government and those within the bureaucracy, but we still believe, in principle, that there is much further to go. We still believe that when the government goes through its testing and retesting, with the proper parameters, and with a good look at these chemicals, it will realize there are substitutes available. We had witnesses come before us to talk about medical devices. They said that they had held these medical devices in their hands and they did not contain any of these chemicals. They can be made and at a cost benefit.

Hospitals in this country and across the United States have labelled themselves phthalate free. When people enter those hospital, there is no chance of contact because they have self-initiated. When they looked at the studies and did the research, they encouraged the manufacturers. The manufacturers have stepped to the plate because, lo and behold, there is a market. They have made the products that then go to the hospitals where there is no potential for contamination.

We think some Canadian hospitals have moved this way, and there will be growing numbers. We would recommend that the government get ahead of these health and hospital groups and look at making these things come true.

Another essential principle is identifying vulnerable populations in the bill. When we deal with the notion of toxins in our environment, oftentimes in past legislation and with previous governments adults have been the test group. Many would argue that it makes sense.

However, when we look at the conditions and the nature of children, they have a higher absorption rate of many of these toxins because of their body mass to skin ratio. These are used by the medical and health communities to determine someone's vulnerability to a toxin. Children are almost in all cases more vulnerable than an adult.

Private Members' Business

Recently one of the environment groups in Canada did toxicology of our blood. It tested famous Canadians. The former minister of the environment and the leader of the NDP found they were exhibiting levels of mercury, PCBs and other things in their blood, some that have been banned for a number of years. They are bio-accumulative. They come through our bloodstream.

One of the results of this testing showed that even in families that had made a concerted effort to live well had toxic levels as high as other Canadians in some cases. They do not live in a particularly toxic air shed or environment, they try to eat well and do all the things we tell Canadians to do. In fact, their children's toxicity was higher than the adults.

One of the first nations' elders in my community commented to me the other day, while we were talking about another issue, that "we must become good ancestors". I thought this was a powerful way for us to think about it as the leadership in our country. We must conduct ourselves in a way that future generations will look back and thank us for the work that we did and honour our memory, not in a way that we have seen our generation conduct itself by leaving behind problems and not solutions. We are leaving behind a more toxic world, not a cleaner one.

In a small way, but an important way, we believe the bill pushes us in the right direction: substitution, precautionary principle and looking at vulnerable populations. I think Canadians when given the measure will find important, will find meritorious. We look for support for this bill from all sides.

• (1750)

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley for his very good work on this initiative and also on the environment. He has been a very good spokesperson for important issues facing the country. I appreciated his comments around our responsibilities to the future generations, which leads to my question.

In part the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley spoke about the vulnerable population. I have two questions in that perspective. First, was the impact on women and seniors considered when the committee was reviewing this legislation? Second, was there any discussion around mandatory labelling? If there is not a complete ban on this product, I would argue that particularly vulnerable populations need to be aware of the potential side effects of using such a product.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, when we looked at vulnerable populations oftentimes women were brought up as one group, particularly in regard to the transference of these toxins to their newborns. I did not go through the list of what these chemicals actually manifest themselves as in the human system. The reason I resist is only for the sake of civility. This starts in the womb. The way that these chemicals exhibit themselves, particularly in young children, can affect the growth and the actual physical nature of children from that point on.

The notion of looking at groups such as seniors and women in particular goes on an issue by issue basis. Oftentimes when we are talking about air quality, we definitely look at seniors to identify if they are more vulnerable to smog or one pollutant or another. That is one sure category that we look at.

With respect to women, a whole range of studies has been done on breast milk and toxicity. Women in northern populations in Canada were suddenly showing up with levels of mercury in their breast milk that in effect were making their children toxic. The breast milk could become so toxic in nature that health officials were recommending that women did not breastfeed.

If there is any indication for us as leaders in this country that things are not right, it clearly must be these indicators. When health officials are advising women in this country not to breastfeed their children because they themselves are toxic and that in doing so they will be causing harm to their children, that has to be an indication.

Clearly there is the science. There is the testing. There is the proper rigour. There is also the intuitive understanding, because the anecdotal information that we know about and see before us says that we are not doing it right.

I will turn to the member's second question about mandatory labelling. Boy, is there a lot of fear within industry about doing this. It is the same question we had when automakers were asked to put labels on their vehicles as to fuel efficiency. They said they could not do that because it would destroy them and consumers did not want to know that. Lo and behold, they did it, and now consumers use it as one of the choices they make when deciding things.

It is very difficult to say that labelling will answer this problem entirely, because who knows what a phthalate is? When someone is entering hospital or putting their child in hospital, the education level of the average Canadian makes it difficult to ask the hospital to check for phthalates.

We really believe that while labelling can be important, the onus rests within government to protect the overall and general health of Canadians, particularly when we have the information at hand, particularly when we know that substitutes are available, and when the precautionary principle tells us to just not introduce this to people, to not expose people to this.

Labelling can play a role, but we should not be overly reliant on it, because it then means that the education level is high enough that it will mean something.

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it was very interesting to listen to the member's dialogue tonight. I would like to commend him for his concern for children and for people in terms of attitudes and this particular chemical. I am curious about what got the member interested in this. This is a relatively unknown chemical. Our family is very careful about the things that we eat and the chemicals that are added to food. I wonder if he would be so kind as to share that with the House.

Private Members' Business

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, there are different choices that members of Parliament can make when it comes to private members' legislation. Certain bills grab a lot of attention and seek the headlines. Others go to a specific case involving a constituent. With respect to this bill, we wanted to combine the issue of environment and health. We wanted a bill that would eventually have results. We did not want a token bill. We wanted a bill that would make a difference and change the way things are produced. We wanted a bill that would protect the health of Canadians.

We looked at the various predominant chemicals such as mercury and a number of the PCBs, the toxic chemicals of note and repute. We looked at the chemicals that most Canadians could identify as being bad. A lot of work had been done on them, but the fight was very clear on this one. These phthalates, while not well known, are instructive for legislators as an example of how to deal with other toxins, those that are involved in our manufacturing process, those that do not have 100% certainty. The case has not been closed with respect to these chemicals, but it has been very strongly presented that there are problems with phthalates.

This is a good example of how current legislation has been failing us. If the rule and the letter of the law of the Canadian Environmental Protection Act had been applied, the changes in this bill would have been made already. I feel absolutely certain of that. A number of health groups also feel that way.

While the obscurity of the actual chemicals was a threat to getting proper attention from Canadian families, we realized that in changing Canadian practice this was the best way to go.

• (1755)

Mr. Mark Warawa (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to rise today in the House to speak to Bill C-307, the phthalate control act.

The bill seeks to regulate the use of certain phthalates in specific consumer products and cosmetics that Canadians may be exposed to. I am pleased to say that after a lot of hard work by all the members in the environment committee to fix some of the major errors of the bill, we think we have found a way to move forward with the bill. It was good to focus on solutions. Solutions are very important for our environment.

As previously mentioned, phthalates make up a group of chemicals that are used to make certain types of plastic softer and malleable. These plastics may be used in a variety of consumer products, such as shower curtains and blood bags, including small toys or other children's products.

Bill C-307 deals with three of these, which I will refer to by their common substance names: BBP, DBP and DEHP.

The government recognizes that the current state of scientific knowledge and evidence for one of these phthalates, DEHP, warrants more aggressive measures to help reduce Canadians' exposure to it. These additional measures will complement and strengthen the existing voluntary actions taken since 1998.

Briefly, I would like to outline the existing activity related to DEHP in consumer products and cosmetics, the only phthalate so far that has been declared toxic under CEPA 1999.

Toys, equipment and other products for use by a child in learning or play are covered under the Hazardous Products Act. There currently exists guidance to industry on the requirements for plastic used in toys designed for children under the age of three. In 1999, Health Canada requested Canadian industry to discontinue the use of phthalates in the manufacture of soft vinyl teething and baby products that could be mouthed by young children.

Based on Health Canada's retail market reviews and intelligence gathered from various levels of trade, including importers, exporters, distributors and retailers, the evidence shows very little Canadian manufacturing of children's plastic toys, rattles and teething. The vast majority if not all of this activity takes place offshore, predominantly in Asia.

As a continued precautionary measure and to ensure a level playing field for all industry, the government will implement within 12 months of the coming into force of the act a prohibition of DEHP in products intended or likely to be used for sucking, chewing, feeding or mouthing by a child under the age of three. This prohibition will be accomplished by using the authorities of the Hazardous Products Act. The prohibition will allow for continued use of existing compliance and enforcement strategies to monitor the marketplace and will ensure that established mechanisms for communicating consistent messaging and directives are used to inform industry and the general public.

The government's actions also will bring Canada more in line with the European Union's actions for similar types of children's products. Having similar requirements may foster opportunities to share compliance information, leading to opportunities to help limit the numbers of non-compliant products entering our country.

Our government takes pride in the fact that the best suitable risk management options are discussed and selected based on sound science. As hon. members of Parliament, it is our duty to ensure that risk is taken into consideration when weighing control measures for chemical substances used in consumer products.

The mere presence of a chemical substance does not necessarily mean that the public is at risk when using those products. The bill's approach for phthalates achieves this goal by focusing our actions where the greatest risk exists for the consumer products: those intended or likely to be used for sucking, chewing, feeding or mouthing by a child under the age of three.

In addition to actions proposed for the specified consumer products, DEHP in cosmetics will also be addressed by Health Canada through the authorities provided in the Food and Drugs Act under cosmetic regulations.

Private Members' Business

While the phthalate DEHP has not been reported in any cosmetics notified with Health Canada, it is used in other countries as a cosmetic ingredient. By controlling DEHP, it will make it clear to cosmetic manufacturers that they cannot use DEHP in new formulations and it will allow Health Canada to quickly identify and take action on any cosmetic product sold with DEHP in the formulation.

● (1800)

The government would like to note that the estimated risks from other phthalates in cosmetics such as nail polish are negligible, based on several scientific expert panels in Europe and the United States.

New regulations that came into force for the Canadian cosmetic industry in November 2006 require manufacturers to label product ingredients. This means that if a phthalate is used in cosmetic preparation, it would be identified on the product label, allowing customers to make an informed choice about which brand to use.

As a result of this bill, the Government of Canada is committed to reviewing the available science on phthalates. Pending the results of those assessments, the government will have the opportunity to further control specific phthalates in consumer products and cosmetics, based on sound science and potential risk to users.

The government is supportive of Bill C-307 as it shows Parliament's commitment to improving the health and safety of vulnerable populations, our children.

Ms. Penny Priddy (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise to support this bill and congratulate my colleague from Skeena—Bulkley Valley on the really excellent voice he has had for a variety of environmental issues this session.

This is something that we are going to begin to hear more and more about, and that is the relationship between the environment and health. We all sort of know it is there, but we will be able to see more specific linkages to what is in our environment, the health of our bodies and the relationship between them.

We all stand in the House to speak wearing a variety of hats as the people elected in our ridings. I am the health critic for the federal NDP as well as a former nurse who worked in hospitals, and I will speak of medical devices in a moment. I am also a mother and a grandmother.

What do Canadians expect? We expect, as we have heard other people say, that somebody, and I do not think people could identify who but perhaps Health Canada or whoever, has used the highest level of safety consciousness possible before any product is put on the market that someone in their family might use, their child, an adult or anyone else.

When we become parents and sometimes even grandparents, although some of us try, we are not as successful at holding advice back as others, I am sure. My daughter would say I was probably less successful. As parents and grandparents we read books, Internet sites and anything else to find out everything we can possibly know to keep our children safe. We work very hard at that.

We check what is in food and in formula if women are not breastfeeding. We ensure children lie in the correct body position

when they sleep, but we expect if a neighbour or grandma buys a toy that it is safe.

We know that there are phthalates in toys. It is of course much more pleasant for babies and small children if the toy is soft. I have picked up toys and squeezed them and thought that one felt better for my granddaughter than the other and that is the one I would buy. It never occurred to me that I should be looking for other things as well that I would not have known to look for before.

We know that children, some more than others but every child to some degree, puts things in their mouths whether it is due to teething or it is one of the ways of exploration. It is one of the ways children learn. If it exists, their instinct is to put it in their mouths. If someone hands a child a toy, the child puts it in his or her mouth.

At the same time, we know that particularly smaller bodies have very different levels of absorption. Their levels of absorption are higher but among adults as well the levels of absorption will vary. If a child is particularly prone to mouthing a toy and has a high absorption level, that child will therefore be exposed to more phthalates than perhaps other children.

We all imagine this lovely picture of moms who are breastfeeding their children because they have been told that is the best thing to do, that is the way babies maintain their immunity and all kinds of wonderful things for moms who are able to breastfeed. It would not occur to us to think that because of mom's exposure to a particular product, a cosmetic or perfume, depending on how much a woman uses a certain product, it gets absorbed into her body and might be transferred through milk to her infant.

As careful as parents want to be, these are things that we have not known about before and why the European Union has banned this completely in toys, as has Argentina, Fiji, Finland, Japan and Mexico. In the United States there are a number of states that are moving to do exactly the same thing. I am quite sure that here in Canada we could do that. We will not be breaking any new ground to do this and we should be moving as quickly as possible to ban phthalates.

The other people we have to be concerned about are other vulnerable people, like folks who are immunosuppressed because they have had chemotherapy for cancer. Their bodies are particularly vulnerable.

● (1805)

Many phthalates are found in medical devices which I certainly did not know about before I read this. Going into the hospital to have surgery people are already worrying enough, at least if they are like me, they are. So do I think about whether the IV line they are using is safe? Or the catheter that someone is inserting is safe? I would not have time to even begin to read the entire list of medical devices, such as the aprons used during radiation therapy, feeding tubes, IV equipment and catheters. The list is enormous.

Private Members' Business

I have enough things to worry about if I am having surgery other than whether that equipment, which we now know has phthalates in it, is safe, but we also know that there are alternatives. We know if manufacturers are told that it is a banned substance they will very quickly find another substance to use. Indeed, with medical devices a variety of companies have found other substances to use so they can remove phthalates and still have the same effect in the product that they are producing.

This is a superb opportunity to move forward with this. I am disappointed that it is not a complete ban because the precautionary principle says we should probably ban them all. Nevertheless we are still faced with the challenges around leaching, absorption, mouthing, et cetera. We are going to spend 24 months reviewing something that was reviewed in 1994 and 2000 by CEPA and found at that stage to be acceptable.

Our tests are more sophisticated now and I think we will find a very different outcome. However, I would like to believe we could do that in a much faster period of time because I do not like thinking that in the next 24 months people will be going to hospitals or children will be mouthing toys. It is not the toys that will be banned, but with the medical devices people may still be at some risk.

We have had some health crises in this country that we were not able to get ahead of. We could not see them coming and we could not get ahead. Tainted blood is a good example. We do not see health crises coming. We cannot see ahead. This is an opportunity to be ahead of something, not chasing it. No one wants to chase a health crisis.

Given that the European Union and all the countries I mentioned have already taken action on this, the faster we act on this bill, the better off Canadians will be. It does give legislators an opportunity to say that we do believe in the precautionary principle. If there is any risk to Canadians we will do everything we can either to reduce or eliminate the risk until we know that the products on the market are as safe as they can possibly be.

This is not world shaking. Many other countries have done this and we know that manufacturers will be able to change because with any other product that we have said is dangerous and told them they could not put this in it, a week or two later the product is back on the market, the dangerous substance is out, and another one is back in that enables the product to be sold safely. We are more than able to do this.

I would be happier if we could have moved more quickly. I would be happier if this were a ban, although it is a ban on the toys, but I am worried about the 24 months before the act comes into force and the total reassessment of all of the medical devices. We will have a lot of people standing beside us, hurrying us to do it, including consumer groups, health groups, patient groups, parents, all those people I mentioned where products could bring their child or family member into some risk or maybe some significant risk.

Illnesses from cumulative diseases are very hard to assess because it not like one exposure to tainted blood or something. Cumulative is very hard to assess and therefore we should not take any risks around cumulation of a product. We should move very quickly to ban these and to move forward to assess the others as quickly as possible.

Again, I thank my colleague for his very hard work on this and I thank the House for the time to speak.

● (1810)

Mr. Steven Fletcher (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is with pleasure that I speak to Bill C-307, the phthalate control act. The bill seeks to regulate the use of certain phthalates in products that Canadians may be exposed to.

I want to take this opportunity to thank all the members of the Standing Committee on the Environment and Sustainable Development for their hard work in reviewing this bill.

Bill C-307, as amended by the committee, will ensure that the government takes the appropriate evidenced based approach to protect Canadians from exposures to levels of phthalates that can cause them harm.

The amended bill restricts the use of DEHP in children's toys, cosmetics and medical devices using the appropriate existing federal statutes and regulations.

Under the current regulatory regimes and in keeping with the federal constitutional jurisdiction, Health Canada has legislative authorities in place to regulate the safety and effectiveness of medical devices and their manufacturers under the Food and Drugs Act and the medical devices regulations.

One phthalate known as DEHP is used as a softening agent for many medical grade plastic materials made from polyvinylchloride, PVC.

Without a softening agent life saving medical devices such as medical tubing and blood bags would be brittle and crack during use, or could not be sterilized as effectively.

Alternative materials have been developed for use in some medical devices for certain medical applications. In other cases non-DEHP containing devices are not available or do not perform as well as devices made with DEHP.

In these cases an individual risk evaluation must be undertaken to fully understand the implications of alternate treatments or no treatment compared with the use of a medical device containing small quantities of DEHP.

Only a physician in consultation with the patient can make the final decision as to what is an appropriate medical treatment. No medical device or drug is 100% safe and effective. This is an important consideration in any decision when seeking medical treatment.

It follows then that the government's response to the phthalates in medical devices must differ from its approach taken with other consumer products.

Private Members' Business

Concerns have been raised about the safety of DEHP in medical devices since the 1980s. These concerns are based on studies showing that DEHP administered at high doses to rodents caused certain adverse effects, particularly effects on the developing reproductive system in young males.

There is concern that DEHP has the potential to produce similar adverse reproductive effects on humans, although there are no reliable data demonstrating that it does.

Health Canada has extensively studied the safety of DEHP in medical devices. In 2001 Health Canada completed a review of the scientific and medical literature and in the fall of 2001 convened an expert advisory panel to review the report and provide specific advice on managing the risk associated with the use of DEHP in medical devices. The recommendations of the advisory panel were made public in January 2002 and implemented.

In 2003 Health Canada published a draft position paper regarding the use of DEHP in medical devices. Health Canada has committed to finalize this position paper within the next few months.

Bill C-307, as amended in committee, recognizes that it is not in the best interests of Canadians to ban all medical devices containing DEHP in Canada at this time because alternate treatment options may not exist; and secondly, alternate treatment options may present higher risks to the patients.

• (1815)

Bill C-307 will aim to provide Canadians with continued access to needed medical devices, such as blood bags and intravenous tubing, when DEHP-free devices are not available or appropriate.

Under this bill the Government of Canada will work with the health care community, hospital associations, industry and other stakeholders to facilitate the development and promotion of clinical practice guidelines for the use of DEHP-containing medical devices. It will finalize and release a position paper on the use of medical devices containing DEHP and develop a guidance document on labelling requirements for these products.

The government will also give priority to the review of phthalate-free medical devices intended to be used on vulnerable patient groups. These actions will lead to a phase-out of the use of DEHP in medical devices starting with those used on vulnerable populations such as children, pregnant women and newborns.

This approach will aim to provide Canadians with continued access to the best available medical devices and treatment options. Health Canada continues to monitor and review the approaches of other global regulatory agencies with regard to the potential risks associated with DEHP and other phthalates used in medical devices.

Since the 1980s' Canada's risk management approach to this subject has been evidence based, recognizing the balance between potential exposure to DEHP with the need for medically necessary treatments.

I can assure members that Canada's approach to minimize the risk associated with medical devices containing DEHP is one of the most stringent in the world. I would also urge members to support Bill C-307 as amended by the committee and proposed actions by Health

Canada and Environment Canada aimed to ensure the health and well-being of Canadians.

I would like to take a moment to reflect on the hard work of the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, the member for Langley, and his lead at the environment committee. We all know that can be a very challenging position. The member for Langley has demonstrated that the committee process is active and well through the cooperation of the mover of the bill and others to demonstrate that this Parliament is in fact working.

As I mentioned previously, Bill C-307 was amended at committee to make sure that we clearly reflect the realities in the medical community. Medical devices are very important. On one hand we want them to be available; however, as I said, there are always risks with some devices. I think the committee has struck a balance. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment should be congratulated for navigating this bill through the committee.

I think Canadians, in particular vulnerable Canadians such as children, pregnant women and newborns, will be better off for the hard work of the committee, and particularly the member for Langley, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment.

• (1820)

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to speak to Bill C-307, the phthalate control act, introduced by the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley, who takes the environment very seriously.

I have followed the progress of my colleague's work on this bill, in the drafting process and in getting ideas together. This bill should be supported by all parliamentarians and all Canadians because it will reduce the risk of cancer and other diseases in a vulnerable part of our population. There is no appreciable downside to the bill. It is all good. It meets all the tests for developing environmental legislation in this country. As such, I hope that the bill can receive reasonably speedy passage.

As soon as things like this bill are put in place, the cumulative impact of the products on people's lives will be taken away. As soon as we start to reduce that cumulative effect there will be a reduction in the serious and debilitating illnesses and diseases that are a real plague in modern society.

Some of the statistics that come out about the rate of cancer in our society are truly frightening. We need to confront things as soon as possible. We need to take action. We need to take away the risks of living as much as possible. Preventing disease is much more practical and reasonable than trying to deal with it once it has happened.

When we understand that a substance can be harmful to humans, then surely we should follow the precautionary principle and take it out of manufactured products. There are substitutions. There are other products that are just as good. These are the things that drive the bill forward.

Government Orders

I congratulate my hon. colleague for putting forward this bill. It is not something that will catch the headlines, but it will help Canadians in the future. It is something we can all support to make a difference in the lives of Canadians.

If the principles that my colleague has put forward in this private member's bill are carried forward with many other substances, we would be much better off. We all make compromises in what we do in this society. If we understand that products that we are using are harmful to people's health sometimes we make compromises and allow it to continue which is a real detriment to our society.

Before I was elected to Parliament, there was a Conservative member who put forward a private member's bill regarding taking the compound out of cigarettes that allowed them to stay lit when they were not being smoked. I was impressed that a private member's bill could make such a dramatic change to people's health in terms of things that some people were ingesting through their use of tobacco. Cigarettes play a major role in people's lives. We know of people who have died in bed because of smouldering cigarettes.

● (1825)

That private member's bill from the last Parliament will have a major impact on people's health. I see Bill C-307 in the same light. It is something we should all be behind. It is something that means something to Canadians in a very positive and progressive fashion. The bill can set a pattern for how we deal with similar substances in the future.

We all care about children who are at risk. Canadians care about children, how they are treated, how they grow up and how they are socialized. We should be involved with doing what we can to prevent contact with substances that can lead to cancer and debilitating disease.

I trust that Parliament will push this bill forward and that we will see it in place as soon as possible. It will make a difference for Canadians forever more.

I thank my hon. colleague from Skeena—Bulkley Valley who has worked so hard to bring this bill forward and to put it in a form that everyone can support.

Mr. Rob Merrifield (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will start by speaking about the work the committee has done. It is very important to recognize the committee's work. I have the privilege to chair a committee. In a minority government chairing a committee is sometimes quite difficult. My colleague sitting beside me also chairs a committee and he does an extremely good job.

In a committee in a minority Parliament all members have to sit down and work together to try to make things happen. This piece of legislation that came out of the committee is indeed quite a bit different than when it first went to committee. It is important to recognize that the committee members actually looked at it in a non-partisan way and tried to decide what was in the best interests of Canada and the Canadian population. They agreed to have the bill come out of committee in a way that all parties can and will support it.

We need to recognize the good work that the committee has done. We can point to other examples where the committee has not worked

in that way. There are other committees in this House, particularly in the last month or so, that have become quite dysfunctional.

When we come back in the fall and get into the committee work in aggressive ways again it is important that we recognize the importance of the people we are here to serve and they would be the people of Canada. We should work in as much of a non-partisan way as we possibly can on all pieces of legislation and lower the temperature in order to get things done. I want to compliment the committee for a job well done.

When it comes to this piece of legislation, it really is about balancing the environment with risk. Although phthalates are used now in Canada and we recognize them as being safe, it is probably a good thing to be able to take a serious look at whether that continues to be the case. What this piece of legislation really allows for is the government to take a more in-depth study, to examine whether these phthalates are indeed causing perhaps some of the problems, which could be some of the cancers and some of the unknown diseases that occur at the present time in this country.

It is important that we do examine this and take a look at some of the blood studies. When we start looking at some of the blood studies of the population I think we will find some surprises. A perfect example occurred in Swan Hills where there is a toxic chemical plant. When some of the deer population was examined at a spill that occurred it was found that some of the deer in the general population much further from the plant had more toxic chemicals than those that were exposed to the chemicals close to the plant. That adds to the question of what is actually happening in our environment and what we need to look at.

● (1830)

The Deputy Speaker: I am sorry but we will need to leave it there with the hon. member for Yellowhead.

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

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

CRIMINAL CODE

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-21, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Firearms Act (non-registration of firearms that are neither prohibited nor restricted), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Deputy Speaker: I believe the hon. member for Windsor—Tecumseh has 14 minutes left in his speech to Bill C-21.

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we were joking a little as I finished that I was just getting wound up, and I was getting wound up around being critical of the government.

Government Orders

I want to go back to how I started my comments this afternoon, which was about trying to reduce the passion around this issue. Although I am being critical of the government because I think it has gone down the wrong road on this, I want it to be seen as constructive criticism rather than a diatribe against it.

However, I am concerned and I actually was angry at the government because of the process it embarked upon with regard to Bill C-21.

We know that the Conservatives sought legal opinions shortly after they were elected. They were told by legal counsel at that time that they had to bring in a bill. They looked at various ways, through regulation or other methodologies, that would have avoided a vote in this House. Ultimately, they determined that they did not have a choice, that the democratic process had put the long gun registry in place and only the democratic process in the form of a bill and a vote in this House could do away with it.

As I had said earlier, the Conservatives introduced the bill into the House exactly a year ago today and have not done anything since then to bring it forward, which is anti-democratic. I am bothered that they took that approach. However, they compounded their inaction with regard to Bill C-21, in the sense of bringing it forward, having a debate and having a vote twice, by publishing and putting into place amnesties for individuals who had long guns who would no longer be required to register them. If they came up for re-registration, they would not need to do that.

There are a couple of things with that. The amnesty provisions within the Criminal Code, in my opinion, were never designed for that purpose and it is really abusive to use them in that way. Amnesty is to be used in very limited ways, mostly for individual crimes rather than in these circumstances where a whole group of people were exempted from the application of this legislation as it existed and as it continues to exist today.

They granted that amnesty and at the same time made the decision not to collect fees. That has cost the Canadian taxpayers now over \$20 million per year. We are into the second year and we are approaching the \$40 million mark that it has cost the Canadian taxpayers.

The obvious question is why the government would have taken this approach, given the Conservative Party's long antipathy toward the long gun registry. Why would it sit on this? The very simple answer is that it knows it does not have the votes in this House to support this piece of legislation, even at second reading and to send it to committee.

Instead of that, it has engaged in a campaign to avoid its democratic responsibility to bring this matter to this House in a timely fashion and to let this House decide, to let the elected officials in this country decide whether in fact we were going to have a long gun registry. It has avoided doing that and I am highly critical of it for doing that.

Even though we are having this debate tonight until 10 p.m., I do not see it going any further than that. We will not have a vote on it this week and the House is scheduled to end on the 22nd, this Friday. The House will return in the fall and I have no sense that this bill will

be brought back in the fall. To some significant degree, the government is avoiding the issue.

The essential point I want to make is that we need to lower the passion around this issue in this country and this does not do it. In fact, it is just the opposite. It feeds it, both for those of us who are opposed to the gun registry and those of us who support it.

In the remaining time I would like to briefly address the bill. The bill is pretty straightforward. Although it is some 10 or 12 pages long, it is very basic. It would amend the Firearms Act. It is legislation that refers to long guns and in effect it would systematically dismantle the long gun registry in this country if this bill were to go ahead and become law at some point in the future. That is all it would do. I suppose I should not say that because it would do a bit more, but that is essentially what the bill would do, which why those of us who feel the long gun registry performs a function are opposed to it.

● (1835)

In that regard, there is no question that the debate around whether this has reduced violent crime in this country is a debate. There is not sufficient evidence on either side to absolutely control that question. There are strong arguments that I voice on a regular basis that have convinced me that the long gun registry has had a substantial impact in reducing violence in this country.

The evidence, I believe, is incontrovertible that the suicide rate has been reduced substantially since 1996 when the long gun registry began to have an impact. Certainly in the period of time from 2001 to 2003 when it really began to have an impact, the suicide rate went down.

The accidental death rate dropped dramatically, in the 20 percentile range, as a result of the controls that the long gun registry imposes upon the storage, transportation, et cetera, of long guns.

It is interesting as well to look at what happened. It was one of those unintended consequences. I certainly did not hear anyone during those debates on the long gun registry legislation speak to this. One of the unintended consequences of the legislation, because it costs money to register, or at least it did before the Conservative government got hold of it, was that it dissuaded people from keeping their long guns when they had to register them. It also had the effect of dissuading people from buying long guns knowing that they would have the ongoing cost of registration.

In that regard, there was a pretty extensive survey done at one point that showed that in the previous year of the survey being conducted slightly more than half of the people who owned long guns in this country did not use them. We have this image portrayed of us making it difficult for hunters to use their long guns for hunting and other recreational purposes, including target practice. The reality is, from what we have been able to ascertain, that continues to be the case. A large number of long guns, slightly more than 50%, in any given year, are not used at all by the owners of those guns.

To go back to the point of that unintended consequence, when the legislation came into play, people who had to begin to pay fees gave up their long guns rather than pay the fees because they were not using them and had no use for them.

Government Orders

One of the fears, of course, if the long gun registry is done away with and the requirements for storage and the sequence that we follow in terms of enforcing and patrolling that legislation, is that we will see an increase in mishaps, at least in accidental deaths. Suicide is another issue but the fear is that accidental deaths will go up because casual owners, not the hunter who is devoted to a recreational pastime, but the casual owners, who on a whim in many cases buy long guns, will not be careful in how they store the guns and, in effect, protect their families, friends and the environment from the accidental use of the guns. We will see an increase in accidental deaths and for that reason alone it is well worthwhile to keep the registration in place.

One of the other statistics that is very clear, which my colleague from the Bloc mentioned in his address, is that the number of violent crimes within domestic settings between partners, almost all of it males serviced on females, has dropped dramatically as we got rid of that many guns. We got them out of the households where they should not have been. We restricted the use by other people who should not have been owning them.

Some of that will continue. I do not want to mislead the public in that regard. This legislation would continue to require people who own guns to be registered and screened.

● (1840)

What should we be doing to improve the registry of both handguns and long guns? I believe the government has gone wrong by spending so much energy, including the amnesty and including forgiving the fees. Rather than doing that, if it had been spending time and effort and doing analyses of what we should be doing, we probably would have had some significant impact.

I want to talk about the Dawson situation. The long gun that was used, which looked like an assault rifle, at one point could have been banned as an assault rifle because there are provisions within the legislation now that say this type of a gun, if it looks this way, which is the kind of wording and essence of the legislation and the regulations, is banned. That was during the Liberal government administration. There were a number of opportunities but because of the opposition that was coming from those people who opposed the long guns, the Liberals were not prepared to take those administrative decisions to get guns like that out of the hands of people who, as my colleague from the Bloc said, have this fascination with guns.

I do not want to taint all owners of guns that way but it was one of the places where we could have done better as a government. We did not do that because of the opposition to the long gun registry. We should be doing that. There are other assault rifles appearing in this country that should be on our prohibited list and no one should be allowed to own them, rifles similar to the one used in the Dawson killings.

We should be tightening up quite dramatically the screening of everyone, whether they own a handgun or a long gun. There are simply too many other possibilities. I want to point to one of the suggestions that has been made, which has come out of the province of Quebec, around screening people by getting the gun clubs more on side, requiring them to provide information and, in particular, concerns, if they have them, over individuals who have gone through the training process that they needed to go through in order to get

themselves and their weapons registered in this country, requiring them to do more in that regard.

The financial reason that they should be required to do that is because they benefit from the use of guns in this country at the clubs they run, whether they are private or non-profit. They have an additional responsibility and I believe it is one that we should be imposing upon them and should be enforced. That would have some significant difference. Again, in the Dawson situation we should have done additional screening with regard to military records. It is quite clear in that case that it would have brought forward to the registrar that this individual had a problem and that may very well have prevented that.

We can go down the list. There are a number of other areas where we could be doing much better. The concentration that we have done on simply getting rid of the long gun registry is a major error. We should be doing much more work in these other areas of screening and getting other guns out of circulation that really have no purpose in a society such as Canada.

I urge all members of this House in the debate that will be taking place through the rest of this evening to try to limit the passion, look at the facts and to argue from whichever side, because there are facts on both sides of this, but to reduce the passion and hopefully that will spill out into the rest of the country.

● (1845)

Hon. Stockwell Day: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I believe that if you were to check with members you would find unanimous consent for me to be allowed to enter into the speaking order at this time. I had to attend to a security matter previously and I believe you would find that to be true.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Public Safety is seeking the unanimous consent of the House to speak. As the mover of the motion he is deemed to have already spoken but he was not able to speak. Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am thankful for that demonstration of collegiality from the members.

My friend who just completed speaking had talked about a lowering of the emotions and I think that is important. I think the debate tonight has been civil although people feel strongly about it. Previously there have been unfortunate references, which I have not heard tonight, to almost a questioning of whether one really loves one's loved ones if one is supporting getting rid of the long gun registry.

I am glad that has not entered into the debate. Most of us here have children. Some have grandchildren. We all have loved ones. We all want to see crime with firearms reduced. We all believe there is a way to do that. It is not a question of how much we love our loved ones. I am glad that has not entered into the debate.

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As a matter of fact, in two cases I have talked to parents, each of whom lost a son who was tragically slain by a firearm. In each case, those parents said to me, "Don't fix the problem by trying to keep the long gun registry". They said that it is a waste of money and a waste of police time and resources. Both sets of parents had sons who were police officers and who were slain by long guns.

I share that with members and will share just as emphatically that I have talked with parents who have lost loved ones because of a handgun and want to see the long gun registry maintained. I say this to show that even among parents whose children have been slain there is a difference of opinion on this.

I want to emphasize some things that we are not changing as we look at Bill C-21.

We are not changing the requirement to have a licence if a person wants to own or acquire a firearm of any type. A person still must have a licence. That does not change. A person still must have the training that is involved in the handling of a firearm. The storage laws remain in place. We are still maintaining those.

The handgun prohibitions still remain. We do not endorse a ban on handguns because effectively there is one now. A person can own a handgun only under very strict conditions. A person can transport it only under very strict conditions.

I notice with interest some new legislation being proposed by one of the provinces. I am glad to see provinces engage in this discussion. That province is saying that it should be illegal to carry a handgun on a bus or to take it to school, for instance, but it already is illegal to do that.

A point should be noted about virtually any country where we look at a handgun prohibition, where handguns were banned and ordered to be removed from the hands of all citizens, such as Ireland, the United Kingdom and Jamaica. We watched this debate play out in our newspapers about two weeks ago. In all countries, everybody was agreed that over the period of time in the last 10 years or so where these handgun eradications took place, firearm use, death by firearms and the use of firearms in crimes all went up and went up substantially. I agree with my colleague who just shared his comments. It is difficult to try to endorse what we are doing here with actual statistics.

There are some things that we are changing and that we have changed.

Last year, recognizing that thousands of people were out of compliance because of the fees that were involved in being registered themselves, we waived those fees to encourage people to come into compliance so we would know who is out there with a licence to own handguns. Literally thousands of people came back into compliance, back into the system that tells us who has a firearm licence. We changed that and it proved to be a positive thing.

We also are proposing, with an allotment from our budget this year, that \$14.2 million go into screening people who want any type of firearm. It would be screening at a much higher level than before. A person is going to need to have an interview with a firearms officer or his or her designate. Also, the person's two references will have to be interviewed. It is going to be tougher from the screening

point of view to get a firearm licence than it is to get a passport. We are going to be checking into that more thoroughly.

• (1850)

Again, I have heard colleagues on all sides of the House recommend other things that can be done to alert those in the health care professions, and in other ways, to the possibility that they are dealing with a person who possibly should not have any type of firearm. Those are things that we need to continue to look at.

We also have put the funding in place because we believe that we fight crime by having more police officers on our streets and in our communities. We have put in the funding for a thousand more RCMP officers from coast to coast. I am engaged right now in discussions with provincial ministers and territorial ministers for a cost sharing formula to have 2,500 more municipal officers on the street.

We are proceeding with arming our border officers so that no longer when there is a concern about someone who is armed and dangerous coming to the border do they vacate their posts and shut down the border. That is going to assist them and it sends a message to people south of the border who may be carrying firearms that they will be greeted by people who are equipped to handle that eventuality.

We are giving extra funding to the teams that work together across the border on the whole area of smuggling. Police officers and police associations talk about the huge percentage of firearms smuggled into the country. We are being very aggressive on increased resources to deal with that.

We are putting literally millions of dollars into the whole area of gang activity and it is especially directed toward youth who would be prone to being drawn into gang activity. We want to show them that there are other choices. Millions of dollars will be and are in the process of going to local jurisdictions and local organizations that can be effective in reaching out and providing prevention programs.

Everything I have just mentioned in terms of more police, going after smuggling and a more aggressive police presence on the street also has to be accompanied by legislation. As members know, we now have legislation dealing with the mandatory requirement for somebody to spend jail time if they commit a crime with a firearm. We think it is right that a multiple offender with a firearm should go to jail for at least seven years.

I was disappointed that most of the Liberals did not agree with that. They voted against that. I have never fully understood it. The Liberals want a long gun registry for farmers and duck hunters, but they do not want people who have committed more than one offence with a firearm to have to go to jail. I have not fully comprehended that and I will be listening to hear an explanation.

Government Orders

This type of aggressive action of going after the criminals and going after the problems is something that the city of Toronto police have done over the last year following the tragedies in that city. Crime with firearms has been drastically reduced, notwithstanding two very tragic incidents that have happened recently. The Toronto police are putting into practice what we endorse. We think that we will continue to see crime with firearms go down.

Bill C-21 talks about three basic things. It is mentioning and making it a matter of law that to acquire any type of firearm an individual is going to have to be licensed. For any type of firearm, that individual will have to be licensed.

The bill also lays out rules for how businesses are going to have to record and maintain the records of any firearm transactions.

Then, getting to the contentious point, the area of long guns themselves, we are proposing that the long gun registry of non-prohibited weapons be dismissed, be removed.

There are reasons for that. There are millions upon millions of long guns out there, primarily used by duck hunters and other types of hunters and sports shooters. There are literally millions of long guns. Rightly or not, and I will always assume good intentions on the part of members of Parliament, in the last decade the Liberals thought they could embark upon a journey to see every single one of those long guns all across the country registered, the long guns themselves, millions and millions of them.

It proved to be a disaster. I will quote the Auditor General herself. She said that the long gun registry was “significantly over budget” and that her office had evidence that they were looking for an accounting solution. She also said, “The quality of the information is doubtful”, in reference to the long gun registry, “and they don't have the mechanisms to verify it”.

She went on to say, “If a police officer is consulting it, he cannot be certain that the information is complete and exact”. That is quite an indictment, with \$946 million spent up to that point to support a long gun registry that the Auditor General herself said simply did not give accurate data. It may have been well intended, but it was an impossible task.

●(1855)

That leads us to the question that often comes up about something called the CPIC system. It is a police information system. I consistently hear that it is used 5,000 times a day to check for firearm occupation or firearm possession. It is not.

That CPIC system is available to police officers all across the country. If they pull somebody over for speeding or they catch someone for jaywalking, whatever the serious or less serious nature of an event may be, they plug into the system. They have a person's car licence there. They want to see who it is they are dealing with.

Coincidental to that, there are also links, as those who are familiar with websites know, to a number of different sites from the CPIC system. One of those sites is linked to the firearms registry. If they want to hit the link button and go into that particular registry, they can, but this is predominantly used by police officers who want to check that system daily for any person they stop.

There are 5,000 police officers in Toronto alone and 6,500 in British Columbia. In a day, they use the CPIC system thousands of times, but in the vast majority of those times they are not checking whether or not a person has firearms. It is some other related activity on which they are checking.

I wish people would exercise caution when they use that number.

In terms of the facts of the matter related to the firearm registry, in 1998 there were 51 deaths as a result of long guns. In the year 2003, just before the long gun registry was fully implemented, finally, after the Liberals had tried for many years to do so, the number dropped. The number of long gun deaths dropped from 51 to 32 without the long gun registry. Two years after the long gun registry was in place, the numbers went up to 55.

I will not use a specious argument and say that the long gun registry caused more deaths, because I do not think it did, but it certainly did not reduce any. What it did do was take away millions upon millions of dollars of resources and time that police officers could have been more effectively using in all of their efforts to reduce crime with firearms.

There is no evidential coincidence at all that over the period it has been in place the long gun registry has reduced crime with firearms in any way, shape or form. The only thing that reduces it is aggressive activity, with more police officers on the street and some of the other items I mentioned.

We often hear quotes from those who want to substantiate the reason why there should be a long gun registry of sports shooters, duck hunters and farmers. Often we hear that this is one group of elected people who endorsed this particular bill and this path that we are embarking on.

Let me quote some other people whom we never hear quoted. Samara McPhedran is the chairwoman of the International Coalition for Women in Shooting and Hunting and she says, “The ideologically driven registry has not reduced rates of violence crime”. That is a fact. She says that it “has not improved public safety”. That is a fact. She says that it “has not prevented criminals from illegally obtaining firearms”.

She goes on to say:

Massive ongoing expenditure of public funds upon an ineffective system achieves nothing more than the misdirection of resources away from where they are urgently needed—social services, education, health care and policing.

We endorse what she says there 100%.

This is something that is not partisan or politically driven. I remember that the member of Parliament for Yukon, the Liberal member, talked about being very passionately against the long gun registry. He said, “One thing that upset Canadians, even those that support the registry, was the administrative mismanagement”. He said, “That made people think it was a gross waste of money”.

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The Liberal member for Kings—Hants, who was also a federal Liberal leadership candidate, said, “We should be getting rid of the long-gun registry”. He said, “A billion dollars would have been better spent on health care or education or, for instance, in strengthening the RCMP”. That is from a Liberal member who was running for the leadership of the Liberal Party.

The Liberal member for Newmarket—Aurora was previously a Conservative, and I respect that. She ran for the leadership of the Conservative Party and now is a Liberal and I understand she is stepping down. That is certainly her choice and I respect that, but she said something interesting. She said, “As a mother, I am scared by gun violence”.

She said, “I believe we must protect law-abiding citizens from criminals, which is why we should increase the minimum sentence for violent crimes involving guns”. She is one of the few Liberals who think repeat firearm offenders should actually go to jail. She went on to say, “I believe it is not a crime for law-abiding farmers, ranchers and hunters who use firearms as a tool”. She said, “It is wrong the federal government has penalized them”.

● (1900)

Those are good quotes.

The Liberal member for Huron—Bruce is on record as showing once again that the gun registry does not work and makes that point very clearly.

Many in the NDP share the government's view on this. The member for Winnipeg Centre said that he and likely half of the NDP caucus would back a Conservative bill to scrap the registry.

The MP for Skeena—Bulkley Valley has said that he will keep his promise to abolish the gun registry. He is a man of his word and I believe he will. He says that there is no uncertainty about that. Politically, this view is shared by many.

We often hear the term “the police” want the long gun registry maintained. A few senior officers in a few associations, for a variety of reasons not totally understood, have said that they want to see the long gun registry maintained, but people should be honest. When they say that the police want the long gun registry maintained, at the very least they should say a few police officers are on record as wanting the long gun registry maintained.

For instance, the president of the Winnipeg Police Association said, “the Winnipeg Police Association has never supported the long gun registry”.

The Manitoba Police Association passed a motion saying that Ottawa should scrap the long gun registry.

The executive officer of the Saskatchewan Federation of Police Officers, about the long gun registry, said:

We've been against it right from the beginning...That's been our position since 1994 and it hasn't changed—we've been in opposition to our brothers at the Canadian Professional Police Association (on the registry).

The president of the Calgary Police Association is also opposed to the long gun registry, but he is proposing mandatory minimum sentences for gun crimes. That is what we are proposing.

An officer from the Fredericton police said that officers responding to a potentially dangerous situation always assumed there was a firearm involved. He said that they always took the corrective practices approaching a domicile that there could be a firearm involved. He went on to say, “We don't check with the registry during a gun-related incident”. They have been trained to always assume that possibility is there.

It is not just western police, if somebody is reflecting on that. I have talked about some in Fredericton. The deputy chief of the Toronto police said that the money spent on registering shotguns should be used instead on stricter law enforcement and social programs to keep kids out of gangs. He said, “The \$1 billion could be better spent elsewhere. It really has done nothing to solve the crime problem. The gun registry registers legal guns. Gangsters do not register their guns”.

Brian Ford, former Ottawa police chief, supported the registry at one point but makes an interesting statement. He says he supported it because he did not know the Liberals were lying to him. He stated, “I was assured by government—it's on budget”. He said, “They were lying. It bothers me. I was telling people what I believed to be the truth”. That is a dramatic statement from the former police chief in Ottawa.

Former Toronto police Chief Julian Fantino, now head of the Ontario Police, supported scrapping the long gun registry. He recognized that forcing law-abiding Canadians to register their rifles did nothing to reduce gun crimes and the money would be better spent on front line police resources.

Chief Bill Blair has done much to reduce crime with firearms in Toronto. He is not taking the position precisely on the long gun registry, but says this:

—we know the gun problem in Toronto is overwhelmingly a problem of illegal handguns....Gangsters who carry guns in the city of Toronto do not register those guns so any changes in the gun registry are not going to have a significant impact on our efforts to control the operation and use of illegal handguns on our streets.

I have one more quote. I have quoted moms who have lost sons, parliamentarians and police. We should listen to the words of a former gang member. Former Toronto founder of Vice Lords and gang member said, “The gun registry has not had any impact on the availability of guns to gangs. If you want a gun, you can get one in a day, a couple of hours maybe”.

Across the board there is a consensus that we need to do all the things we are going to do to reduce crime with firearms, and I have gone through them. However, we also need to eliminate the long gun registry and let those precious resources get into the hands of our police officers.

● (1905)

Hon. Roy Cullen (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, after listening to the Minister of Public Safety and his selective quotations, I had to rise.

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First, the minister knows that the members on this side in the official opposition support mandatory minimums for gun related crimes because the research shows they work. That is why, before Parliament dissolved in the last session, our Liberal government introduced legislation to increase the mandatory minimums for gun related crimes.

When the minister speaks of the 5,000 hits to the gun registry per day and argues that it is all tied in with CPIC, he knows full well that if law enforcement officers are accessing the CPIC, they have an option of whether to go into the gun registry database. If they go into the gun registry database 5,000 times a day, they should know whether it is useful information or not. If they sit in their cars, investigate crimes and take the time to access the gun registry, the police officers know their business and have taken the time to do that. Although it is tied in with CPIC, the 5,000 hits are on the gun registry per day.

Second, the minister quoted a selection of police officers who do not support the gun registry. How about the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police and the Canadian Professional Police Association? Those are rank and file police officers. They support it.

Hon. Stockwell Day: Mr. Speaker, I was trying to note everything the member was saying.

He quite rightly said that when police officers consult the CPIC system, they are not doing that primarily to consult the gun registry. They are using it for other reasons. All I am saying is that it is really not a totally truthful argument to say that 5,000 times a day police officers consult the CPIC system to get into the gun registry. They do not. The vast majority of the hits on the CPIC system are for other things. It just shows there is a link into the long gun registry.

It may be a minor point, but people strike fear in the hearts of Canadians by saying that 5,000 times a day police officers are looking at the gun registry. They are not. It is possibly a handful of times a day, but not 5,000 times a day, so it is a correction.

To say I selectively quoted police officers, I quoted representatives of vast associations. I would suggest for the member, if he did a poll of the associations that he quoted, he would find that the head of those associations had a certain point of view and the rank and file might see that drastically differently.

All I am saying is there is a vast difference of opinion among police officers on this point and they should not quote one or two officers as that being the monolithic position of all police officers. Most rank and file police officers do not support the hundreds of millions of dollars going into the long gun registry.

• (1910)

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first, I thank the minister for tabling Bill C-21 in this House and keeping another Conservative platform commitment to eliminate the long gun registry.

I also thank the minister for implementing the amnesties. I know my constituents are very appreciative of that. I know a lot of them received some of the money they had used on their application forms back, and I have received some positive feedback on that.

I also thank the minister for the tremendous work he has done to ensure there are enough RCMP officers on the streets. I have met with my constituents in Breton and Hobbema and there is a lack of RCMP and resources on the ground to do the police work that needs to be done.

However, the question I have for the minister is on something he brought up during his speech. I would like to bring some clarification to the House.

In a former life I was a database administrator. I am fairly conversant in how databases work and how queries work between databases. One of the things I used to do, when I was a faculty member teaching databases, was talk about the importance of processes in place to ensure the information that went into a system was good. We used to call it garbage in equals garbage out.

Could the minister clarify and give us more information about whether the information in the database is good, whether the police officers can use, through CPIC, the licence database, as there is obviously a repository of information there, and whether that information is useful to police officers in lieu of the fact that the registry information is obviously flawed?

Hon. Stockwell Day: Mr. Speaker, the fact is it was an impossible task to register the millions upon millions of long guns in the hands of farmers, hunters and sport shooters. Guns have been passed on from generation to generation. Some do not even have the serial numbers on them.

Because the member has asked, it is only fair that I use the quote from the Auditor General when she looked at that. She said, "The quality of the information is doubtful". This is not very reassuring to a police officer pulling up to a home and thinking that he or she is going to be able to get exact, precise information about a certain type of long gun or not. However, what a police officer can know is that an individual has a licence to possess firearms. We can have this information without spending \$1 billion trying to register every type of firearm. That is the disconcerting part.

I have quoted a police officer who says that the officers cannot trust the data. What they trust is their training and they approach every situation as if there is a firearm present.

Mrs. Susan Kadis (Thornhill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, why is the minister continually misleading Canadians, telling them that licensing is adequate when that will not register each gun? Police will not have that prior information, when approaching a potential crime scene, to know whether there are five, ten, twenty or forty long guns. Why is the minister continuing to put forth the notion to Canadians, which I believe is completely erroneous and incorrect, that they will be just as safe without registering every long gun?

Government Orders

•(1915)

Hon. Stockwell Day: Mr. Speaker, in the debate, even from the previous member who asked me a question related to quotations from various officers, I at no time suggested that he or anyone else was deliberately misleading people in this debate. He shared some quotes. I shared some others. Injecting this fact that anybody would deliberately try to mislead people when it comes to the use of firearms is detrimental to the debate.

I quoted the numbers, and I will quote them again. In 1998, at the time when this unfortunate journey began of trying the impossible task of registering millions upon millions of long guns, there were 51 deaths as a result of long guns. The year the long gun registry was to be put in place officially, that had dropped to 32, without the long gun registry. Then two years after the long gun registry was officially in place, from 2003 to 2005, deaths actually went up.

It would be specious of my to say the long gun registry caused those deaths. I do not think it did, but it certainly did not reduce crime. The way to reduce crime is taking valuable and precious resources, getting more money on the streets, getting more police officers on the streets going after gun smuggling and keeping youth out of gang activity. When that is put into place, we know one thing, that approach works. The Liberal attempt to register every long gun did not work.

Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. minister for bringing forth Bill C-21. In my last householder I did a survey on this to reassure myself that thoughts had not changed in the riding. It came back and overwhelmingly 95% still felt that the long gun registry had to be, if not revamped, scrapped altogether.

The Liberals reacted to a very terrible incident in bringing in the long gun registry. Some people said that they lied about the cost of it. Grossly underestimated is certainly a fact, so I will give them the benefit of the doubt on that. However, the fact that really bothers me was when a member across the way from the GTA said a few minutes ago that the Liberals supported toughening up the sentencing for gun crimes, but they voted very recently against that. It is pretty hard to say that is literally not telling the truth. What are the reasons for that? Could the minister comment on that?

Hon. Stockwell Day: Mr. Speaker, I cannot comment on intent or why people see the truth in different ways, if I can be as diplomatic as possible.

The fact of the matter is our justice minister tabled a bill which would require that somebody who has committed multiple offences with firearms should go to jail and there should be a mandatory jail term. The simple fact of the matter is, and the record can be checked, the majority of Liberals voted against that.

We think someone who has committed multiple offences with firearms should be going to jail. The Liberals do not. That is just a matter of fact.

Hon. Roy Cullen (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think the introduction of this bill is a sad day for Canada.

We know why the Conservative government is introducing the bill. The Conservatives know it has no chance of being passed, but

they are trying to deliver on a promise that they made, which is fair enough.

However, they know that the gun registry is supported by Canadians, maybe not in their political constituencies generally but by Canadians generally, who overwhelmingly support not only the handgun registry but the long gun registry, and I certainly do as well.

I listened with interest to the minister's comments. He quoted a member of a gang who said that the gun registry has not worked at all with respect to the acquisition of handguns. That might be true; I am not sure. However, by his own logic, then, he would be banning or dismembering the handgun registry, which does not make any sense at all.

We also know that the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, not a handful of police chiefs, voted on this particular matter and it supports the handgun registry and the long gun registry. The Canadian Professional Police Association, the association that represents the rank and file police officers across this country, voted and supports the gun registry.

So, for the minister to argue that there are one or two police officers across Canada who support this is nonsensical and absurd.

We have heard the figure of \$1 billion to build the gun registry. It did cost a lot of money to build the gun registry. In fact, it cost too much to build the gun registry. That was as a result of a number of problems, organizational problems, policy influx problems, a whole host of systems development problems that emerged, which our Liberal government restructured and fixed, but at that point in time, the costs had been incurred.

However, I would remind members in this House, for those who have worked in the private sector, systems development budget overruns are not unique to the Government of Canada, believe me. In my experience in the private sector, I have seen many large systems development projects run way over budget. Does that justify it? Of course not.

However, there is another reality. There is a concept in economics and business called "sunk cost". Sunk cost means if it cost that much, it may have cost more than it should have, but the money has been spent.

So now we are faced with a house, let us say, that costs more than it should have. Does that mean we burn it down? The question really at that point in time is: What is that house providing in terms of benefits and what is it costing?

The reality is that operating the gun registry today is costing in the vicinity of \$15 million a year, which is a very manageable cost for the benefit that it delivers.

I come back to the issue that if 5,000 police officers and law enforcement officers access the gun registry daily, which is the case, they might do it through the window of CPIC but these are the actual hits on the gun registry itself.

Government Orders

I do not know how the members opposite, who have a respect for law enforcement officers, I think they do because they seem to present themselves that way, would ignore the support of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police and the Canadian Professional Police Association, and ignore the fact that 5,000 times a day law enforcement officers across this country access the gun registry, and that is a fact.

The other fact that I think the minister conveniently ignores, or in fact I think he misstated, perhaps he had not had the right information when he made his remarks, is that all forms of gun violence are down in Canada. While other types of murders have increased, murders with guns have declined, and I think that is partly the result of the gun registry. The mistake that is often made is to say that the gun registry is a panacea for crime, to deal with criminality.

• (1920)

Of course one cannot look at it that way. One has to look at the gun registry as a tool that is used by law enforcement officers. I am told it is very useful to them. I am told this on very good authority that it is very useful, especially for domestic violence calls when they want to know how many guns are registered in a home.

We all realize that police officers are not naïve people and if there are not guns registered they do not automatically assume that there may not be guns there. Unfortunately, there are some Canadians who have not registered their guns.

On that point it is only about 10%. We believe that 90% of Canadians have registered their guns, in contrast to the statistics that were quoted earlier. The police do know if the guns are registered and when they are going to a home where there is domestic violence they have to be very mindful of that. It is a useful tool for the police.

In fact, most countries in the world licence guns and register guns. Of course the government would be totally irresponsible if it eliminated gun licensing because that is something that is very valuable and results in guns being denied to many people who should not have guns.

Since the gun registry was put in place there have been approximately 16,000 firearms licences that have been refused or revoked.

Something else that the members opposite do not highlight or bring forward in a debate is that the Canadian firearms registry provides many affidavits that are used in the prosecution of firearms related crime. In fact, more than 5,000 of these affidavits have been used. This is a tool that is used by Crown prosecutors to convict people who are charged with gun related crimes.

For the member to say that people on this side do not support enforcement and conviction of criminals with firearms, this tells it right there. These affidavits are useful in convicting and putting people in jail.

The minister talked about how long guns are used. He used the expression that they were used by squirrel hunters and duck hunters. It sounds interesting, but the reality is that long guns are used in equal amounts in contrast to handguns for violent crimes.

In fact, if we look at the police officer deaths from firearms, I have a list and the number of police officer deaths from long guns is about the equivalent to the police officer deaths with handguns from 1996 to 2006. Long guns are used to commit murder and also by people to commit suicide.

The other aspect is to try to think of the long gun registry and the handgun registry as separate and distinct. I would like to read into the record from the Supreme Court of Canada. It said:

The registration provisions cannot be severed from the rest of the Act. The licensing provisions require everyone who possesses a gun to be licensed; the registration provisions require all guns to be registered. These portions of the Firearms Act are both tightly linked to Parliament's goal of promoting safety by reducing the misuse of any and all firearms. Both portions are integral and necessary to the operation of the scheme.

That has to do with the linkage especially between licensing and registration, the point that my colleague made earlier, that the two go hand in hand. There has to be both registration and licensing to make the system work and for it to be an effective tool for law enforcement.

We also know that if we look at the statistics and this was in 1995 I believe, the trend is very much the same. If we look at the percentage of firearms that are recovered at crime scenes, something in the vicinity of 47% are rifles and shotguns. Handguns comprise about 22%. So, to ignore long guns, we do at our peril.

• (1925)

These are rifles and shotguns. If these guns are not registered I shudder to think how the criminal world will adapt to that new reality and start sawing off more shotguns and using rifles indiscriminately to commit more crimes.

The part that I find particularly amazing is the fact that we have no difficulty licensing a car. In some areas we have no difficulty licensing pets. We do not have any problem with that but when it comes to registering a firearm, a lethal weapon, then some people get very upset and I am not quite sure why.

Gun ownership is a huge responsibility. It is a lethal weapon. We as Canadians have the right to know who owns the guns, who is licensed to own a gun, and are they responsible gun users.

There are crimes in the area that I represent, Etobicoke North. There is a sad history of gun related crime, drugs and gangs. Therefore, the argument often comes up that the guns that are used in those crimes, are all those guns registered? That is a fallacious argument. It does not have any merit whatsoever. It is like the equivalent of arguing that because we have police there should be no crime.

Of course we cannot eradicate criminality. We cannot eradicate gun related crime, but to deny police authorities a useful tool that they themselves are saying is a useful tool, and the capital costs have been managed away, at \$15 million a year, if it saves one life it is worth keeping in place.

As I said earlier, the notion that the guns are not licensed or registered flies in the face of the data that everyone knows: some 90% of the owners are licensed and 90% of guns are registered.

Government Orders

I think we have to look at the gun registry as part of an overall scheme of dealing with criminality. In my riding of Etobicoke North we have taken advantage of the national crime prevention program to launch a number of crime prevention initiatives in Etobicoke North.

This program was introduced by our Liberal government. I am told that the program, like so many other programs that the Liberal government brought in, is being re-examined, repackaged, relabelled and rebranded. In fact, I am told the crime prevention program might be focused more on gun and gang related crime which frankly in my riding of Etobicoke North would not be a bad thing.

However, before we start changing the national crime prevention program, we should look at it very carefully because it has been quite useful in my riding, getting young people into activities other than drugs, gangs and violence. Has it eliminated drugs, gangs and violence in Etobicoke North? No, it has not, but to give up on effective tools like that, to give up on the gun registry, is a bogus argument and certainly something that I will not support. We know that most members of the House will not support the bill. It is sort of a masquerade going on in the House as the Conservative Party knows.

The idea is that we have to have a holistic approach. We have to look at crime prevention. We have to look at enforcement. We need more visible policing. In fact, I am very pleased that in Etobicoke North the police have taken action. They have used some of the tools that our Liberal government brought in, the anti-gang legislation, to arrest a whole range of people who are involved in drugs, gangs and violence.

It was our party, when we were in government, that introduced increases to mandatory minimums for gun related crimes. Notwithstanding what the minister said, and I know that he has tabled new legislation. This party will generally support any legislation that is reasonable. However, the reality is that young people do come out of prison, they have to be integrated back into society, and the idea that we can just lock them up and throw away the key just does not work.

● (1930)

We on this side support mandatory minimums and support increases in mandatory minimums for gun related crimes. In fact, that was the legislation that we tabled before the last election.

It was our party as well in the 2006 election that argued for a complete ban on handguns. The former prime minister, the member for LaSalle—Émard, came to my riding of Etobicoke North and we announced a complete ban on handguns which I think would have been useful.

Would it have solved the problem of gun related crime? How could anyone be so naïve, yet that is the argument we hear. It is the same argument, as I said, that there is no point in hiring police officers because there is still going to be crime. It is a totally bogus argument. I think that banning handguns would have been useful.

The minister said earlier that there is an effective ban on handguns today. Well, that is not the case because we know that many of the handguns that are used in crime in Toronto have been traced back to collectors.

An hon. member: That is false.

An hon. member: What a bunch of hooley.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Order. If hon. members would like to ask the member for Etobicoke North a question or ask for clarification, they can do so when he has finished his speech, but for now we will let him continue with his remarks.

● (1935)

Hon. Roy Cullen: Mr. Speaker, I am surprised that the members opposite do not know this, but Toronto Chief of Police Bill Blair pointed this out very directly a couple of years ago when the policy came across handguns that had been stolen from collectors. In fact, they would go into their homes, they would find out where the guns are collected. The gun collectors, I am sure, are properly motivated. They want to own and collect guns. They probably secure them very well. They are all registered; they are all licensed, but these people find out where the handguns are and they go in with trucks and dynamite and they rob them. These handguns are used in murders in the city of Toronto.

By banning handguns completely, unfortunately we would affect legitimate collectors, but I think it is needed because these handguns are getting into the hands of criminals through robberies.

The other part of it is that we all know that 50% of the handguns that are used in crimes in Toronto come from the United States. That is why our government set up quite an elaborate system with the integrated border enforcement teams that involve law enforcement officers in Canada and the United States. They work on cross-border issues. They try to identify firearms and drugs that might be coming in Canada at an early stage. They use intelligence based policing. Those initiatives are paying off.

To actually go ahead like the Conservative government is doing to arm the border guards at a cost of \$1 billion is such a draconian waste of money. It does not even come close and pales in significance to the gun registry in the cost and misuse of taxpayers' money. We know from evidence that we heard that arming the guards at the border will not act as a deterrent. We heard this from the RCMP themselves.

If there is someone sitting in Chicago thinking of running guns or drugs up to Canada, do members think that person is actually going to sit in a little room and worry about the border guards being armed in Canada, that the person had better be careful? Come on. Let us be realistic. Of course it will not be a deterrent.

In addition, the president of the Canada Border Services Agency told us at committee, quite rightly, that the protocol will be for the border officers not to use their firearms. That is a very appropriate protocol because we do not want border guards shooting up people at our borders where there are people waiting in line and a lot of innocent people standing around.

This is a total waste of money. I know it is the American way of doing things and that is what has intrigued the government opposite to move in this direction, but it is a total waste of taxpayers' money. That money could be much better used to fight crime, to hire police officers, to build up our integrated border enforcement teams and to put more money into crime prevention programs. That is what the money should be used for.

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Certainly I will not be supporting this bill. No one in the House, apart from the Conservatives, will be supporting this bill and for very good reason. The gun registry is a useful tool for police. They have told Canadians that time and again. Canadians support the gun registry. They support the handgun registry and they support the long gun registry. I will be voting against this bill.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is amazing that the member for Etobicoke North was able to stand through that entire spin. He must have been dizzy from spinning his message the way he did. It is unbelievable that he could stand in this House and make some of the accusations that he made.

There is no question that we are all concerned about the security of our citizens and that we want to have safe and wholesome communities, but the long gun registry has unfairly penalized rural Canadians. People from urban centres do not understand rural lifestyle. They do not understand that farmers and hunters use their firearms as tools. The Métis community in my riding is seriously disadvantaged in hunting for food because of the long gun registry.

I am a farmer and I can tell the House that it is important to have a firearm handy, properly stored of course and kept safely away from children. A firearm is needed in case of predators and in case an animal needs to be disposed of humanely. It is really unfortunate that people in urban centres do not understand that issue.

The member was throwing all sorts of numbers and figures around, but can he actually show me one incident where the firearms registry has actually prevented a crime? He talked about the gun registry. Handguns are a problem in Toronto. We understand that. We have had mandatory registration of handguns going back over 70 years. Why are handgun crimes still being committed in our urban centres?

• (1940)

Hon. Roy Cullen: Mr. Speaker, the member for Selkirk—Interlake misses the point completely.

The reality is that we would be naïve in the extreme to believe that because of a gun registry we would eliminate gun crime in Canada. That is what the member is proposing. That is absurd.

The reality is that police officers across Canada are telling us that it is an important tool. Who is the member for Selkirk—Interlake to say that he knows their work better than the police do? If they are accessing the gun registry 5,000 times a day, surely it is of some value to them.

Mr. Rob Anders: Mr. Accountant.

Hon. Roy Cullen: Is the member saying that police officers sit around at Tim Hortons and key in to the gun registry just for fun?

Mrs. Betty Hinton: I don't go to Tim Hortons either.

Mr. James Bezan: He is terrible.

Hon. Roy Cullen: Is that what the member is saying? Police officers access the gun registry 5,000 times a day—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Order. There seems to be several members asking questions all at the same time, but we will do this one at a time and hopefully everybody will get a chance to ask their question.

The hon. member for Brant.

Mr. Lloyd St. Amand (Brant, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite in his question asked about understanding and his perception was that my colleague the member for Etobicoke North lacked understanding on the issue. In my view the member for Etobicoke North certainly understands the issue.

What I do not understand is the logic, if it exists, or the rationale in the minds of gun owners regarding registering their guns. As I understand it, they have no difficulty becoming licensed operators of vehicles. They have no difficulty with the principle of registering however many vehicles they may own. These same individuals have no difficulty becoming licensed gun owners. But the logic ends there. They have difficulty seeing the wisdom of having each gun registered. I am wondering if there is in fact any logic or rationale in their viewpoint?

Hon. Roy Cullen: Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Brant has raised a very good point.

We know the politics of this issue. We know that when Conservative members go to town hall meetings in rural Alberta people do not cheer for the retention of the gun registry. Those members have become mesmerized by their own spin. They actually believe that the gun registry is not needed. They actually believe it now because they have been to so many town hall meetings where the people have said that they do not want the gun registry and the Conservatives have developed this veneer of getting rid of it. They know the facts are completely different.

I had the great pleasure, distinction and honour to serve as the parliamentary secretary to the minister of public safety in the last Parliament. I happen to be apprised of the facts, and the facts are as I have recited them. I know when the members opposite go to their town hall meetings they do not hear these facts. They should get real about this issue.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am certainly glad to get a chance to ask a question, but I think I will have a chance to speak later on, so I do not want to take away all my thunder.

It was an interesting comment that the hon. member made about the 16,000 licences that were not issued. Is the hon. member confused between certificates for the possession of specific firearms and the licences that will remain as part of the system? Which one of those was he referring to when he said "16,000 licences"? The ability for police to turn down licences will remain after the bill passes.

Hon. Roy Cullen: Mr. Speaker, I will apologize for the member in his place, because he obviously was not listening to what I was saying. I was trying to make the point by congratulating the government for at the very least keeping the licensing system in place. It was the licensing system that has revoked or not issued 16,000-odd licences to people who should not have firearms. I was trying to be nice to the Conservatives opposite.

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The next time the member should listen more attentively to what is being said on this side of the House. If the licensing system was disbanded, it would be an absolute, complete and utter tragedy in Canada.

• (1945)

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to make a quick comment. The Liberals say they are the friends of the police and they identify with the police, but remember that it was the Liberal Party that said to add one person to a group of eight people on a judicial council to review appointments of judges would undermine our judicial system, as if one police officer added to seven other people in a group would be a terrible thing that would undermine our system.

More important, the Auditor General said in her last report, and the public accounts committee studied this matter, that misappropriation of money by the Liberal government in the last Parliament is insulting to this institution. They broke the Constitution of Canada, and those are the Auditor General's words, the Public Administration Act and they broke the Treasury Board rules to funnel tens of millions of dollars in many years consecutively on this matter.

The member prides himself in being involved in the private sector, knowing numbers and finances. After the fact, after the money was spent, after all these deals were done without any authorization, the Liberal government handled this matter by inserting something in the public accounts estimates, which was described as a miscellaneous unrecorded liability. A miscellaneous unrecorded liability. It was stuck in some miscellaneous parts of the estimates which nobody could pick up. I have not found a single accountant in this country who knows what a miscellaneous unrecorded liability is, other than calling it creative accounting, deceptive accounting.

Could the member please explain to the House what these three simple words mean?

Hon. Roy Cullen: Mr. Speaker, if in doubt, when the Conservatives cannot defend their own policies, they come back to the sponsorship scandal. We have heard that, and we are tired of this government—

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick: This is the gun registry.

Mr. James Bezan: It is the gun registry.

An hon. member: He is talking about the gun registry, Roy.

An hon. member: Roy, there was more than one scandal. Get your scandals straight.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Order. I am having a great deal of difficulty hearing the hon. member. I would appreciate it if he could finish in the short time that he has left without so much noise.

An hon. member: There were so many scandals they are blurring.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Order. Let us let the hon. member for Etobicoke North finish. Do you have anything else to say on this particular question? The hon. member for Etobicoke North.

Hon. Roy Cullen: Mr. Speaker, I have not even begun. However, regarding the accounting treatment, I think the member will have to go back and read the public accounts more carefully, because he certainly will not be getting any answers from me on that.

I must say though with regard to putting a police officer on a judicial council to help in the choosing of judges, frankly I was not quite as upset about that. That is why I support mandatory minimums for gun related crime and our party supports mandatory minimums for gun related crime, because that has been shown to work. Having the police as part of the selection process, I do not have huge difficulties with that myself.

I saw a case the other day. There were two young people racing down Mount Pleasant Avenue in Toronto. They killed a taxi driver. They were going about 140 miles an hour. Those two young people were put on house arrest. I think that is tragic. I think judges should use their discretion better than they do.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time tonight with the member for Northumberland—Quinte West.

It is an opportunity for me to discuss Bill C-21. This legislation addresses firearms control, an area of great concern to all Canadians. Everyone who watches the news knows how prevalent gun violence has become in some communities and this is extremely troubling.

Gang members carrying illegal handguns and brazenly settling scores in public areas have brought fear to cities across the country. In some neighbourhoods, people witness gun violence regularly but are intimidated into silence by criminals. This kind of criminal activity must be stopped. Canada has always had the reputation of being a peaceful country. We must do something now to help ensure this remains the case, and that means cracking down on violent crime.

The government made a commitment to protect Canadians and that is what we intend to do. Bill C-21 is part of the government's larger plan to strengthen the safety and security of Canadians. The government has taken steps over the last year to keep Canadians safe and to do so in a way that simplifies compliance for law-abiding citizens.

The first responsibility of any government should always be to protect its citizens from harm but governments should also be careful to do this in a way that law-abiding citizens can comply with easily. This government is working diligently to ensure that this balance is respected.

We have introduced Bill C-21 to reinstate a balance between protecting Canadians and easing requirements for responsible firearms owners. I would like to highlight some of the public safety measures our government has taken in the past year. The government has an overall plan for safer communities and Bill C-21 fits within our vision of a safe and prosperous Canada.

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First, the government felt that policing and law enforcement needed to be bolstered in Canada. In budget 2006, we invested a significant amount of money to give the RCMP additional resources to focus on law enforcement priorities. These included the expansion of the RCMP's National Training Academy, known as Depot; increasing the DNA samples on file to include a greater range of offenders; support for a special contingent of first nations RCMP; and an additional 1,000 RCMP resources to focus on drugs, corruption and border security.

Now in Budget 2007, we have continued this support for our national police services to protect children from sexual exploitation and trafficking and supporting the Canadian Police Research Centre's work in science and technology in policing and public safety.

Furthermore, we are taking action to crack down on white collar crime by appointing a senior expert adviser to the RCMP to help develop and guide the implementation of a plan to improve the effectiveness of the integrated market enforcement teams. We are also investing \$80 million over two years to make the Canadian Security Intelligence Service's operations more effective.

On another front, the government took steps to strengthen our borders in a way that keeps legitimate goods and people moving across the border and threats out of our country. We put in place a plan to start arming border guards. Through our plan, approximately 4,800 officers will be trained and armed. This includes 400 officers who will be hired so that no officer will be required to work alone. Some of these officers will be deployed as early as this summer and we expect that by March 2008, between 200 and 250 armed officers will be working at the border.

There is another issue that affects our communities directly and that is youth crime. Many communities in Canada have youth crime problems. It can sometimes mean vandalism, drug abuse or even gang involvement.

Our work is based on the principle that the surest way to reduce crime is to focus on the factors that put individuals at risk, factors like family violence, school problems and drug abuse. We aim to reduce crime by tackling crime before it happens. That is why my hon. colleague, the Minister of Public Safety, announced in January \$16.1 million in funding for youth at risk. These projects are funded through the National Crime Prevention Centre and they help youth make good choices and stay or get back on the right track.

Firearms control should focus on criminals, not on law-abiding and responsible firearms owners.

I hope that the hon. members of this House can now better understand the broader public safety context within which our gun control measures operate. Gun control is but one of many ways we are working to protect Canadians.

The object of today's debate, Bill C-21, deals with an aspect of the firearms control program that has been at the centre of discussion ever since the introduction of the Firearms Act in 1995: the registration of non-restricted firearms. These are ordinary rifles and shotguns most often used for hunting.

● (1950)

Why do we wish to abolish the requirement to register these firearms? The answer is twofold. The first reason is that we are not convinced that the registration of non-restricted firearms prevents gun crime. The second reason comes back to what I said earlier. Governments have a responsibility to direct limited resources where they will have the most effect. With respect to gun control, we believe this means investing in measures that focus on criminals rather than on law-abiding citizens.

The most recent example of this was the successful raid carried out in Toronto last week that resulted in over 60 arrests and the seizure of 30 illegal guns, dealing a significant blow to a notorious street gang that terrorized the neighbourhood. Protecting the most vulnerable is where our limited resources should be directed to, not inundating law-abiding citizens with cumbersome rules and regulations.

Therefore, the government has decided to remove the registration requirement for legitimate and responsible non-restricted firearms owners and focus on gun crime.

Indeed, to achieve this very goal, my colleague, the hon. Minister of Justice, tabled a bill on May 4, 2006 to strengthen the mandatory minimum sentences for violent gun crimes. The government has introduced a number of legislative initiatives that target gun crimes and we encourage opposition MPs to support these initiatives.

Bill C-10 passed third reading in the House on May 29 and is awaiting second reading in the other place. Bill C-10 proposes escalating minimum penalties for specific offences involving the actual use of firearms. These offences include attempted murder, sexual assault and kidnapping, among others. Minimum penalties are also proposed for certain serious non-offence uses, such as firearm trafficking and smuggling. The higher minimum penalties rest on specific aggravating factors such as repeat firearms offences, use of restricted or prohibited firearms or the commission of firearm offences in connection with a criminal organization which includes a gang.

Bill C-35 is another important piece of legislation on our agenda to tackle gun crimes. It deals with the burden of proof during bail hearings for firearm related offences.

These reforms will lower the risk that people charged with serious offences may reoffend while out on bail. It will also reduce the risk that they may take flight to avoid facing trial for the charges. This bill was also recently passed by the House of Commons and is awaiting second reading in the Senate.

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These new measures send a clear message that the Government of Canada will not tolerate gun crime on our streets and in our communities. However, as the members of the House no doubt know, firearms control includes much more than handing tough sentences to those who commit crime. Firearms control includes measures that aim to prevent firearms from falling into the hands of ineligible individuals.

The registration of non-restricted firearms has not proven itself to be effective in accomplishing this goal. In fact, in our view the most effective system currently in place that accomplishing that goal is licensing. We have the support of many groups that agree that licensing is the critical information necessary.

As deputy commissioner of the RCMP, Peter Martin, stated to the public safety committee:

If we go to a residence on a call, we're not interested in articles in the house as much as the person in the house and what they have available to them.

The critical piece of information right now is who is licensed and who has the potential to have in his or her possession a firearm, regardless of whether it's a long gun or a restricted or prohibited weapon.

Through the steps that an individual must take to obtain a licence, authorities can determine if the individual in question poses a security risk. The steps include passing the exams for the Canadian firearm safety course, passing the background checks that are performed using police files and answering personal history questions to identify the possible safety concerns such as serious problems with substance abuse. The answers to these questions must be corroborated by two references who have personally known the individual for at least three years.

Screening individuals before they are issued a licence is paramount to an effective firearms control system. Even once a licence is issued to an individual, a continuous check is performed through an automated link between the Canadian firearms information system and the Canadian police information system or CPIC. If any new information is entered on the CPIC system by police, such as a report on threats made to another person, the firearms information system automatically checks to see if the person in question is a firearms licence holder. If so, steps can be taken to suspend or revoke the licence and law enforcement authorities are notified so they can take appropriate action to remove the firearms.

• (1955)

Bill C-21, is an important piece of legislation that would re-establish the proper balance in the area of firearms control. It would ease the requirements for firearm owners while ensuring that records of firearm purchases continue to be kept. Our government believes that resources should be invested to keep Canadians safe. However, we believe in investing those resources in effective initiatives and programs. That is why we have focused on areas such as law enforcement, border security, youth crime and, of course, gun control. In all cases we are taking a results based approach.

I therefore encourage all members of the House to support Bill C-21.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think it is fair to say that Bill C-21 would have the effect of basically scrapping the gun registry in that it would eliminate the requirement for registering non-restricted firearms, which are rifles and shotguns,

about 5 million to 6 million firearms, which effectively guts the purpose of the registry totally.

If there were clear evidence that the lives of 100 police officers were saved as a consequence of having that registry would this bill be before us today? I believe the answer is that it would not. Members would not support this bill because of the importance of the registry.

Given that police officers have indicated that they use the registry some 5,000 times a day, which is the reported amount, I would then ask the member if the lives of 100 police officers would stop this bill. What is the member's number? How many police officers is he prepared to live with in terms of deaths?

• (2000)

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Mr. Speaker, first, the hon. member starts with the wrong premise. We are not scrapping the registration of firearms. What we are scrapping, and it is not a total scrapping, but it is the elimination of the registry of long guns.

We have been registering firearms in this country since 1934. We are talking about handguns. Handguns are our primary concern.

The member's whole premise on this thing is about something that is out there that I do not know has any basis in fact. Simply put, this would actually strengthen gun control, while at the same time eliminating the need for the registry for non-restricted firearms.

Mr. Rob Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety.

I sit on the justice committee but I also represent my constituents as an MP in my riding. I have had concerns from my constituents from day one on this issue that it unfairly targets law-abiding citizens and that it creates an unbelievable burden on seniors. I am speaking specifically about many of the seniors in my riding.

I have real life examples of women in my riding, widows over 80 years old, who are concerned and lose sleep at night because of the requirement that their long gun be registered, the old shotgun that used to belong to their husband and is now theirs. Are these the people we should be targeting?

On the one hand, we have the program that the Liberals invented, a scheme that was supposed to cost \$2 million and ended up costing over \$1 billion, targeting 80-year-old women.

On the other hand, I sit on the justice committee and the Liberal members have opposed our government's legislation that would actually crack down on criminals. I thought that was the idea, not to go after law-abiding people but to go after criminals.

Does the member have any comment as to why Liberal members on the justice committee would oppose our Bill C-10 that targets criminals and yet they continue to go after grandmothers?

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Mr. Speaker, I suppose the easiest answer is no, I would not understand why they would want to target senior citizens who have had guns in their homes for years and years and not strengthen the Criminal Code with respect to penalties for those who commit crime.

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Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a lot of research out there has shown that when it comes to gun related violence, of the OECD member countries, of which Canada is a member, no country has a higher incidence than the U.S.

I know there are many things we can learn from our American friends to the south but certainly the issue of the gun culture that they have there is not one we would like to emulate in this country.

Study after study will show that in countries where there is tough gun registration and gun laws there is—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Order. I have to cut-off the hon. member there to allow the hon. parliamentary secretary a chance to respond.

● (2005)

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Mr. Speaker, I have sat through this debate and I guess it is fair to say that members opposite have not had direct involvement in the field.

I was involved in policing for 30 years. I have a son, a son-in-law and a nephew in policing. If I thought that the gun registry would save one life of a police officer, one of my family members, I would be the first to support it.

There is not a police officer who would trust the information in there when he or she makes a decision to approach a house. It is an ineffective system.

Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am grateful for this opportunity to show my support for Bill C-21 concerning the repeal of the requirement to register non-restricted firearms. The Government of Canada strongly believes that it is vital to protect the safety and security of Canadians. In fact, it is our top priority.

I am often saddened and even shocked by what is happening in some of our communities. Blatant acts of violence committed by gun-toting criminals all too often make the headlines. There are too many perpetrators and there are too many victims. We hear of gang members gunning down their rivals on sidewalks or in parking lots, or even in local parks where children play. We see the reports of them waving handguns openly in neighbourhoods, frightening residents into complete silence about what is going on in their area.

These acts are committed by criminals, people who show no regard for our laws. Therefore, the government believes it is time to put in place effective gun control measures that work, while streamlining requirements for law abiding citizens. This will help to ensure the focus stays where it belongs, on those who would harm our families and our communities.

The government introduced Bill C-21 to eliminate the requirement to register non-restricted firearms, generally ordinary rifles and shotguns, by legitimate firearm owners, while maintaining important safeguards to help protect Canadians. It is important to focus on measures that keep guns out of the wrong hands and that the public safety is protected.

Let me first clarify an important issue, the difference between licensing and registration. Licensing focuses on the individual. It is a way of identifying who can own a firearm. Individuals who want

licences must meet various criteria that help to ensure they do not pose a risk to public safety.

However, registration focuses on the firearm. It involves providing a complete description of a firearm to firearms program employees, who then add the information to a database. Authorities can then know which licenced owner owns the firearm.

If passed, Bill C-21 would repeal the requirement to register non-restricted firearms, that is to say, ordinary rifles and shotguns such as those used for hunting. There are two reasons behind this decision.

The first is, as I have previously mentioned, to ease some requirements for law abiding owners of non-restricted firearms who have been demanding that this requirement be eliminated for many years.

The second reason is of even greater importance. The government believes that registration does not prevent gun crime. We believe that we must invest resources where they can be most effective. Under the current firearms program, an individual must hold a licence to possess or obtain a firearm, or to obtain ammunition. This will continue.

Bill C-21 requires that everyone who purchases a non-restricted firearm will have to have his or her licence verified. This can be done through a simple phone call to the firearms centre.

The government is committed to strong, reinforced licensing. Budget 2007 invested \$14.2 million over two years to enhance the screening of 20,000 new applicants for restricted licences every year. This is a real investment in public safety and it was an area totally neglected by the previous government which did not provide resources to fulfill this important task effectively.

As it now stands, to obtain a new licence for any class of firearm, including a non-restricted firearm, a person must pass the required Canadian firearms safety course exams. The course was developed in partnership with the provinces and territories, national organizations with an ongoing interest in firearms safety, and many firearm and hunter education course instructors from across Canada.

I have heard completely inaccurate comments from the Liberal benches that we are doing away with gun control. This is completely false and ridiculous. What we are determined to do is to make gun control focused and more effective. Indeed, firearms safety training is something that firearm owners and users support, and this government believes in.

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• (2010)

We recognize that firearms safety starts with well trained, law abiding firearms owners. That is why we are maintaining the requirement for safety training as part of the firearms program. In this way we will help protect Canadians from possible tragic accidents. Teaching firearms owners how to store their firearms safely and securely helps prevent children from accessing those firearms and can reduce the chance that firearms could be stolen.

During the election campaign we made a commitment to keep Canadians safe. When it comes to firearms safety, an ounce of prevention is certainly worth a pound of cure.

There is another requirement individuals must meet before they can be issued a firearms licence. They must pass a background check. Background checks are performed by chief firearms officers or their representatives who employ law enforcement systems and resources to ensure the individual in question has not committed a serious criminal offence in the recent past, is not under a court sanctioned prohibition order for firearms, and does not pose a threat to public safety.

As I mentioned earlier, in budget 2007 we committed \$14.2 million over two years to enhance the screening of new firearms licence applicants. For the first time, this investment means that each year 20,000 new restricted licence applicants and their two references will be interviewed by a firearms officer before determining whether that applicant should be issued his or her first restricted firearms licence.

These resources were not provided by the previous government. Instead, it funded a long gun registry that we know does not work, but our government is determined to invest in what really benefits public safety.

While a background check is run before every applicant is issued a licence, another type of verification is also carried out by authorities. The Canadian Firearms Information System, which houses all information on firearms licence holders and registered firearms, is connected to the Canadian Police Information Centre known as CPIC.

This means that every time information on a person of interest is uploaded in CPIC, for example, information on someone who has threatened to harm his or her neighbours or colleagues, the Canadian Firearms Information System runs an automatic check to see if that person is a licence holder.

If the person is a licence holder, the chief firearms officer of the province is warned and action can be taken to follow up on the case. If an investigation shows that the person is a threat to public safety and should not be allowed to own firearms, the individual's licence can be revoked. The police are then made aware of the situation and can take the appropriate action.

This process is called the continuous eligibility check. It is done automatically and allows for the proper identification of licence holders who should no longer be in possession of firearms.

Background checks and continuous eligibility checks are critical in helping to ensure that firearms are only held by responsible law abiding citizens. However, ordinary citizens also have a responsi-

bility to the firearms program when it comes to protecting public safety.

The firearms program has a 1-800 public safety line that individuals can call if they believe someone could pose a threat or should not be allowed to have firearms. That number is indicated on the form the applicant must fill out for a licence and that the applicant's spouse signs. This means that the spouse as well as the references have access to this number, so they can call and inform the chief firearms officer of their concerns, even if they feel pressured to sign the form.

Through the steps that come before the licence is issued and the ongoing checks while a person holds a licence, authorities know who is entitled to own a firearm. This is the type of tool the Government of Canada believes is effective in protecting the public.

It is clearly evident that licensing is the most important dimension of a firearms control system. This is because licensing screens the individuals themselves regardless of the types of firearms they intend to acquire.

That said, as I mentioned before, we are maintaining the registration of restricted and prohibited firearms. These firearms include handguns, some semi-automatic long guns used for target shooting, and gun collecting and other automatic weapons.

Individuals can only possess restricted firearms and prohibited handguns for legitimate purposes such as target shooting or collecting. Target shooting has a long history in Canada and covers all types of firearms disciplines right up to competition at the Olympic level.

• (2015)

As hon. members can see, our work on gun control is part of a larger effort to strengthen the overall safety of Canadians. We believe in focusing our efforts on those who would harm our families and our communities, not on law abiding—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Questions or comments? The hon. member for Miramichi.

Hon. Charles Hubbard (Miramichi, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to the hon. member and probably have two questions for him.

First, in terms of our police in this country, is there any advantage to them to know, when they go to a home to arrest somebody or to deal with a domestic dispute, whether or not there are firearms at that location?

Second, I wonder if the hon. member could explain to the House what in fact this bill would do. We know that there are licences, in fact two types of licences: to acquire a firearm; and also to own one, to possess one. With that, is it the intention of the government to do away with the licensing of the owner, of the person who plans to acquire it?

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Because in my experience, the major complaint in this country has been the need for a renewable licence. The average farmer or sportsman who has a rifle, or a long gun, probably only has to register that once in his lifetime and it is not an onerous problem to license a gun. However, to maintain a licence to own a gun over a period of time, there has been a fee involved. Does the hon. member and his government intend to do away with that five-year fee?

Mr. Rick Norlock: Mr. Speaker, the member first started out with: Is it not a good idea that police officers know if there are firearms at a residence and if a person has a licence to possess a firearm? It is yes to both those questions.

However, the important issue here is how the police officer is trained. A police officer is trained to approach every residence, when he or she receives a call, as if there were a firearm on the premise. It would be foolhardy, quite frankly, for the police officer to make any assumption otherwise.

I think it is very important that individuals be licensed to make sure that they know how to handle firearms and that they are the right kind of person; in other words, there is no criminality or mental condition that might preclude them from owning a firearm.

If the police officer approaching the residence has the name of a person and runs it, as I mentioned, in the CPIC system and it comes back that the individual is licensed to possess a firearm, it is reasonable to assume that there are firearms on the premises. Whether there is one or fifty is—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Questions or comments? The hon. member for Tobique—Mactaquac.

Mr. Mike Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am glad my colleague was able to articulate, much better than I have heard from the other side, the difference between licensing and registration. It just seems that the definition is a challenge for the other side of the House.

I recently conducted a survey in my riding. Of the 1,500 people who responded in my rural riding in New Brunswick, over 95% of the people did not see the value in the gun registry and want it gone. Further, police on the street have also indicated that this registration system really does nothing for them and it is not of any great value.

From a policing standpoint, I wonder if the hon. member has spoken with police officers in his riding and asked them whether this system provides value to them in their work.

Mr. Rick Norlock: Mr. Speaker, like the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, I, too, am a former police officer and I, too, have a son who is currently a police officer.

If I thought for one minute that this registry, the long gun registry, the type of guns that families like mine for generations have enjoyed while they exercised, as far as I am concerned, their right in this country and their privilege to hunt and fish, would save a life, then I would be 110% for it.

My colleagues with whom I worked with previous to my retirement were police officers. I can say that they would have much preferred that \$1 billion went toward better equipment and more officers than a registry that ran amok. Quite frankly, as I said, I

would be 110% for this if I thought a long gun registry would save a life. It will not.

● (2020)

Mrs. Susan Kadis (Thornhill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wish to speak today to Bill C-21. I am speaking steadfastly against Bill C-21, and further, against it moving forward to committee. This bill should not even be seeing the light of day.

Bill C-21, whose intention is to repeal the requirement to obtain and hold the registration certificate for a non-registered firearm, specifically rifles and shotguns, is a dangerous weapon in and of itself, created by the minority Conservative government. If it is passed, millions of people in possession of long guns will no longer be required to register their firearms.

This act means gutting the gun registry and seriously weakening gun control in our country. It means that the registrar of firearms will no longer issue or keep records of registration certificates for non-restricted firearms.

The Conservative minority government is seriously flawed and its wrong-headed objective to remove the long gun portion of the gun registry is patently wrong. Not only is this attempt by the government against the wishes of the majority of Canadians, as reflected in the Ipsos Reid poll with 67% of Canadians who said so, against the wishes of the majority of parliamentarians, against the wishes of the victims of the tragic recent Dawson College shootings and their families, as well as victims of other such tragedies and their families, it completely flies in the face of the vocally stated wishes of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, the president of the Ontario police chiefs, York Regional Police Chief Armand La Barge, the Centre for Suicide Prevention, and more than 40 national women's associations. All oppose strongly this attempt to cripple the gun registry and to weaken gun control in Canada, in turn diminishing the capacity of police to keep Canadians safe, to err on the side of caution, all for the sake of a flawed and ill-conceived election promise, even though it is clear that by including the long gun portion the gun registry works.

It is an important preventative tool. We cannot only look at the measures after a crime is committed. It is essential that we always strengthen prevention, not lessen it. This is inconceivable when we consider that on average more than 5,000-plus queries are made daily by police. Approximately 15,965 firearm licences have been refused or revoked since the firearms act came into effect, and this was born of the tragedy of École Polytechnique in Montreal. Also, more than 500 affidavits have been provided by the Canadian firearms registry to support the prosecution of firearms-related crime in court proceedings across the country.

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As is abundantly clear, the gun registry in its entirety continues to provide a vitally necessary tool used by both police and the courts, helping to safeguard and strengthen the safety of Canadians. The safety of Canadians is paramount. This is not something to be taken lightly or trifled with and that is precisely what the Conservative government did when it implemented an amnesty last year and recently extended it for one more year, which has already resulted in an increasingly outdated registry.

This action by the government is of particular concern and is another blatant example of its pattern of governing by stealth, totally disregarding Parliament, its duly elected representatives, and in effect, then, disregarding, disrespecting and bypassing the very Canadians that we as MPs are elected to represent. The removal of the important long gun portion of the registry will have significant far-reaching implications that will reverberate, adversely impact Canadians and compromise the safety of Canadians.

Also, a number of legal implications surrounding the untracked firearms will definitely lessen our ability to carry out searches for firearms and ensure effective enforcement of no firearms conditions on bail or prohibition orders. The fact is that all types of gun deaths, homicides, suicides and accidents, have declined since the registry was brought into force. This includes deaths involving handguns and long guns.

The Minister of Public Safety and National Security has repeatedly defended this decision by stating that Canadians will not be any less safe with these actions because owners will continue to be licensed even while long guns would no longer have to be registered. This is completely misleading, erroneous and disturbing. The fact is that we need both: licensing the individual and the registration of every firearm, including long guns. Without the critical requirement of registering each long gun, police will not know how many long guns people possess when approaching a potentially dangerous offender or crime scene. There could be 5, 10, 20 or more.

This diminishes the capacity of our law enforcement personnel and puts our officers and others at higher risk because, in the words of the president of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, Winnipeg Police Chief Jack Ewatski, who also opposes removal of the gun registry and the long gun portion, "information is the life blood of policing". He says, "The more information we can give our front-line officers, the better position they are in to perform their duties".

The Conservative minority government is demonstrating a smoke and mirrors approach on this issue at the expense of the safety of Canadians. It is time for the Conservatives to come clean, be honest with Canadians and tell them that licensing and registering are not one and the same, as both are equally essential to Canadians' safety. One cannot take the place of the other. This fact cannot be overstated.

Clearly, the Conservative government knows it is on very shaky ground and is not secure in this action. This is further reflected in its new firearms advisory committee, which the Conservatives have kept secret. As my hon. colleague from York West said, "They have turned the committee into a gun-loving secret society". That is, until the muzzle slipped, she said, and the member for Yorkton—Melville

boasted that the Conservative faction was stacked with pro-gun activists opposed to gun control.

• (2025)

Unusually, there was no routine announcement and there were no biographies released. This was kept under wraps and under the radar of accountability. As the member for York West continued, she said, "Why did the government change it from the firearms advisory committee to the firearms advocacy committee?"

As the member for London West continued, she said, "If the government really supports the police, why was the Canadian Police Association left off this list?" Why was there no representation, she wondered, asking, "Could it be because it dared to support the gun registry?" She asked, "Why does the advisory committee only hear the voices of the pro-gun lobby?" She asked where the balance is that we had before when we were in government.

The Conservative government has repeatedly put forward money as the primary rationale for these dramatic changes to the gun registry, as the rationale for taking out the long gun portion and weakening gun control. The fact is that since the government's amnesty was implemented, there have been virtually no savings. Total spending remains stable, this after the government crippled the gun registry and after the two year amnesty for long gun owners who are exempted from the existing law.

As the former vice-chair of public safety and national security committee, I participated in the committee meetings on both the departmental estimates and the Auditor General's report. The Minister of Public Safety meanwhile implied that by cutting the long gun registry the government would be saving \$10 million this year, when in fact his own deputy minister expressly testified that the \$10 million in savings would happen no matter what, because they were administrative savings due to management. It had nothing to do with reducing the registration of long guns. This was erroneous again. This completely debunks the government's supposed rationale.

In addition, I state strongly on behalf of Thornhill residents and all Canadians that we must invest in the safety of Canadians. It is non-negotiable.

While on that committee, I vigorously supported a motion to keep the gun registry intact in its entirety, including the long gun portion. This motion was unanimously passed by all three opposition parties yet was ignored by the Conservative government. The government continually states that it supports the average Canadian, yet when it comes to gun control, and in fact all issues, it is completely out of touch with what Canadians want and displays a total disregard toward the wishes of the majority of Canadians, the wishes of the average Canadian.

To the contrary, the government turned its back on Canadians and used a backdoor, non-transparent method of weakening gun control, getting around what it clearly saw as a little nuisance: Parliament and therefore Canadians themselves.

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The Conservative minority government's dogged determination to fulfill its ill-conceived election promise despite indisputable facts and the absolute responsibility of government to do everything in its power to ensure the safety of its citizens is indefensible. Anything less than a fully intact gun registry is unconscionable.

Tonight we heard the Minister of Public Safety say that the government's intention with Bill C-21 is to dismiss the long gun portion of the gun registry. The truth is out. The Conservative government, through this bill, is dismissing the safety of Canadians. This is shameful.

We also heard the minister tonight call the registration of guns in Canada an unfortunate journey. This belittles and makes light of Canadians' safety and it is also a major slap in the face to those who have been victims of firearms.

From day one the government has made it abundantly clear that it is ideologically committed to weakening gun control in our country. In fact, incredibly, tonight we heard from one of the hon. members who spoke that it probably would be good to abolish the entire gun registry.

How can Canadians have any confidence in the Conservative government when it is clearly putting a misguided, deeply flawed election promise before the safety and well-being of Canadians? The government, through this bill, will fail to uphold the most important responsibility of any government: the safety of its citizens. I take this very seriously, as do Canadians.

I do not support Bill C-21 and I definitely do not support sending it back to committee. This bill should not even be on the table. To pass it would go against the very sensibility of the majority of Canadians, against what they know is right and what they know is in keeping with the needs in Canada today. What I do support is protecting Canadians and strengthening, not weakening, gun control in our country.

• (2030)

Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a law is a good law only if it accomplishes what it sets out to do. If the gun registry would save lives, I do not think there is a police officer or a member of Parliament who would not say fine, let us do it, but quite frankly, it is the criminal misuse of illegal weapons that is the problem. These weapons are not, have not been and will not be registered, and they are the problem.

Why does the member opposite not recognize that? Why have she and her colleagues voted against every measure that has been taken in this House to protect the safety of citizens in regard to the use of illegal firearms?

Mrs. Susan Kadis: Mr. Speaker, it was the Liberal government that brought in mandatory minimums for firearms. If the Conservative government took this seriously, it would dismantle the bill, but not the registry. It would take more seriously the words of the vast majority of police officers, not the minority, those words that the member says he takes seriously on so many other issues, but for some reason, selectively, not on the gun registry.

Conservative members have no credibility. On the one hand they say they want to strengthen the safety of Canadians, but on the other

hand they want to dismantle the long gun portion of the gun registry. They cannot say one thing and do the other. It is inconsistent.

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague for her excellent comments today. Obviously she is very concerned about the safety of Canadians. That is really what should be at the heart of this debate.

The government has the intention of abandoning the gun registry in Canada and that is quite sad. I think it will be a disaster for safety and of course for issues of gun violence in our country.

Every indicator throughout the world, certainly in the OECD countries, has shown that the country that is the most violent of all is the United States, which has the weakest gun laws of any OECD member country.

A lot of members over there clap when people say to get rid of the gun registry. Quite frankly, I do not understand their love of guns. The passion they have for this gun culture is quite foreign to me. Maybe I need to understand where they are coming from. Maybe that is the case. We need a dialogue.

However, that is a party that has zero members elected in the three largest cities in this country. It is the first time in the history of Canada that we have a government without a single elected member from Toronto, Montreal or Vancouver. It does nothing to reach out to those cities that have serious problems with guns in the streets.

It is baffling and quite mind-boggling as to why the government would not want to reach out to the cities and toughen the laws, not weaken the laws.

Mrs. Susan Kadis: Yes, Mr. Speaker, that is exactly why I have been particularly disappointed and disturbed by the actions of the government. When one of its members had a petition which stated that 95% of his constituents did not support the gun registry staying intact, that clearly was not reflective of the vast majority of Canadians. It was a minority point of view. It clearly did not take into consideration the very serious situation that we have in our urban centres.

This is something that I will continue to speak out about. The fact of the matter is that there is no defence. There is no justification for changing and dismantling this portion of the gun registry. It is wrong in every sense. I am sure that we will defeat this. I am totally confident that we will defeat this, because it must be one of the worst pieces of legislation I have seen in the three years that I have been here.

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the mother of an RCMP officer who is on the street tonight in his detachment, I can tell you that it would be a travesty for those police officers—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Kildonan—St. Paul would know to use the third person and not the second person when addressing—

An hon. member: She is telling you.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Thank you.

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Mrs. Joy Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a member of Parliament and the mother of an RCMP officer who is on the streets tonight in his detachment, I talked to my son yesterday about this very thing. He and police officers on the street have told me that the gun registry needs to be shut down and that in regard to the cost overrun, the tally of over \$1 billion, by the former government, those resources should be used for putting police resources on the street.

The long gun registry is only for the long guns that farmers, fishermen and everybody else use. As outlined in a study in 2005, out of 569 murders, two long guns were used. All the rest used were handguns. Handguns are already registered. Handguns are already licensed.

I think the member opposite and the Liberal members have lost a lot of credibility with police forces across Canada. Will she support this bill or not?

• (2035)

Mrs. Susan Kadis: Mr. Speaker, in response to the hon. member, so are two killings okay? Is that okay? Does that justify killing the long gun portion of the registry? The government is satisfied with two killings? I am not getting the logic there whatsoever.

Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for the hon. member for Thornhill, it was I who stood up a while ago and talked about the survey recently did in my riding. Yes, it was 95%. Maybe that is hard for the member for Thornhill to believe. People in the urban parts of the country, unfortunately, and it is not that they are not smart enough, have different issues than they have in rural Canada.

In my riding in this is a big problem. We have crime, but we do not have it to the same degree. We should not talk of duck hunters, farmers and whomever because there is a crime problem somewhere in the country.

The bottom line is there is a misunderstanding. There is life north, west and east of Highway 7. I know it is a common problem for that part of the world to recognize the rest of Canada. There are issues there. This is about trying to identify and prevent crimes, not just a knee-jerk reaction to a problem.

On that side of the House members say on the one hand that they want tougher crime bills, but their voting record tells the exact opposite. Why?

Mrs. Susan Kadis: Mr. Speaker, first, I hope all hon. members here are taking into consideration the greater good of all Canadians, not only in their riding. That needs to be said. We should not make it easier for people. We are asking for long guns to be registered. Is that too much to ask?

As far as the crime bills, we have supported some, those that made sense and could be effective and have proven effective. The government did not accept our amendments, which would have made them truly effective. Instead we have a government going for show, no go.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the research notes provided, and I do not have anything to table, say that the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police and the Canadian Professional Police Association both support the registry. Yet the member for Northumberland—Quinte West has said that in the

training of police officers, they have to assume there is a gun. They always do that.

Maybe the member does not have an answer, I know I do not have an one, but if that is the case, why do these two associations support the registry and 5,000 references to the registry are made each and every day? There must be a reason.

Mrs. Susan Kadis: Mr. Speaker, because the government does not put as much emphasis on prevention as it should. It makes it more difficult, not easier. The reality is it should not give people the impression that licensing and registration are the same thing. We need both.

• (2040)

Hon. Jay Hill (Secretary of State and Chief Government Whip, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to rise. I would like to state at the outset that I will be splitting my time with my colleague, the member for Blackstrap.

I will begin by describing a little about the riding I am privileged to represent in the House of Commons. The riding of Prince George—Peace River is over a quarter of a million square kilometres up in northeastern British Columbia. It is almost perfectly dissected by the Rocky Mountains. It is a huge rural riding. Without a doubt, one of the most controversial and emotional issues that my constituents deal with and feel about is the long run registry and their opposition to it. It is almost uniform throughout my riding. I am very pleased to have this opportunity to rise tonight and raise their concerns.

As someone who was a member of the House of Commons, when the original legislation to establish the firearms registry was being debated in 1995, I cannot adequately convey my relief that we have now been provided with an opportunity through Bill C-21 to right that wrong.

We knew back then that the move to register each and every long gun in Canada was the wrong move. Many of us spoke out about that increasingly and persistently throughout that debate and in the years since. We knew then it was a waste of tax dollars that would do nothing to keep Canadians safe. Of course, history has proven us correct. The statistics have proven us correct.

Unfortunately, even MPs, like myself, who opposed the long gun registry could have predicted that the cost of this failed Liberal experiment would spiral from their projected estimate of \$2 million to somewhere in the order of \$2 billion today.

This evening I will use my limited time to reassure those Canadians who may have been misled by distorted facts and misinformation by the official opposition and others, as they attempt to defend their fiasco known as the long gun registry. In other words, I want to dismiss the most obvious myths about the long gun registry that members from the other side of the House are attempting to portray as fact. Indeed, we have heard a number of them repeated here again tonight.

The myth is the Conservative legislation to scrap the long gun registry will make it easier for Canadians to obtain firearms.

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The fact is the registration of each and every shotgun and rifle in Canada is separate from firearms licensing. Nothing will change in regard to licensing. Canadians will still require a thorough background check and safety check. Violent behaviour and certain criminal convictions will continue to be checked as well. Applicants for a licence will also be subject to specific safety standards and training. Stringent storage requirements will also be maintained.

The former Liberal government was fond of quoting the fact that tens of thousands of firearms licences were refused or revoked under firearms legislation. Again, this is a licensing issue and is not a registry issue.

The myth is the proof that the long gun registry is an essential tool relied upon by law enforcement agencies is the fact that the Canadian Firearms Registry On-line, or the CFRO, gets 6,500 hits per day from police officers. We hear various numbers. Some people say 5,000 or 5,600. I will quote 6,500.

The fact is that figure certainly sounds impressive until we realize that whenever a police officer enters a person's name for any reason, even an address check, an inquiry or hit is generated with the CFRO. Regardless of any changes to the registration of long guns through Bill C-21, police will still know whether a person is authorized to own a legal firearm.

The myth is the \$2 billion spent on the problem ridden long gun registry are well worth it because the registry helps to reduce gun deaths in Canada.

The fact is according to Statistics Canada 2004 homicide report, firearms homicides actually went up 13% over a two year period. In fact, statistics continue to demonstrate that the long gun registry has done absolutely nothing to reduce firearms homicides. That is because most gun crimes are not committed with registered firearms. I know it has been repeated many times before in the House, but criminals do not register their firearms. That is why our Conservative government has taken concrete steps to target criminals on our streets.

• (2045)

As we also heard tonight, Bill C-10, which I am pleased was passed by the House late last month, targets organized crime and gangs by imposing tougher mandatory penalties on those who use firearms to commit crimes. We recognize that we have to target the people who are using firearms to commit crimes, not the firearms themselves. Two billion dollars are better spent cracking down on the people who commit gun crimes than on reams of paper and bug ridden computer systems to chase down millions of rifles and shotguns legally owned.

The myth is Bill C-21 will remove the need to register handguns.

The fact is the handgun registry has been in effect in Canada since 1934. Bill C-21 does not change that. Whereas shotguns and rifles are an essential tool in many parts of Canada, and I already mentioned my particular riding, handguns are primarily for the use of sportsmen and collectors. Handguns are also easier to conceal and are best registered to better avoid their misuse.

Two-thirds or 65% of firearms homicides in 2004 were committed with handguns. That is because they are the weapon of choice for

organized crime and gangs. Again, Bill C-10 targets the real root of gun crime and firearms homicides by going after the real criminals.

The myth is a complete ban on handguns is a worthy consideration to enhance the safety of Canadians.

The fact is although our Conservative government believes handguns should continue to be subject to registration, we do not believe they should be banned. As I said earlier, it is a perfectly legitimate use for sportsmen and collectors to possess handguns. A handgun ban will do nothing but unnecessarily impact upon those individuals.

I contend that gangs and other criminals could care less whether there are registration requirements or an outright ban on handguns. If they want a gun, it has been well proven, not only in our society but in other western societies, that criminals will get their hands on a gun if their intent is to use it for a criminal purpose.

The final myth about firearms registration, which I will address tonight, concerns the Conservative government's fundamental position on this matter. I want to reassure my constituents and all Canadians that this Conservative government, as demonstrated by Bill C-21, remains as committed as we ever were before to putting an end to this long gun registry that imposes a great burden upon law-abiding Canadians, consumes substantial federal resources, yet brings no measurable benefit to public safety.

In short, we are as committed today as we were for the last 12 years, which seems like a lifetime, not only to myself but to those of us who have been waging this fight against this senseless registry. We will scrap the long gun registry and redirect those previous resources to measures that will actually make our streets and communities safer for all Canadians.

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the chief government whip gave an excellent speech tonight. He talked about the myths and the facts. I want to tell a quick story.

This past weekend I had the opportunity to ask my daughter, who was celebrating her 15th birthday, what she wanted to do. She asked if we could go to the local rodeo. It makes a father awful proud when his child asks to go to a cultural event such as that.

That evening there was a 50/50 draw and a young man from Killam won it. He said to me, "I'll give you all of this money if you'll put it toward the fight against the firearms registry". That shows the level and degree of passion for getting rid of this long gun registry. I told him that I could not take his money, but assured him that the government was taking some very specific measures to get rid of the long gun registry.

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Some of the things we have talked about are investing in front line police officers, the \$1 billion registry, mandatory minimum sentences and real measures that would help get the criminals off the street and fight crime.

Could the member, who has served the country and his riding so well over 13 or 14 years, elaborate on a few of the crime fighting measures we are putting in place, and how a long gun registry is simply not sufficient in the fight against crime and is a waste of Canadian taxpayer dollars?

• (2050)

Hon. Jay Hill: Mr. Speaker, I think my hon. colleague, as I do, echoes the concerns and sentiments of the vast majority of our constituents in rural western Canada and obviously others who have spoken tonight demonstrate that this is not unique to western Canada. It is all across the land that law-abiding firearm owners are incensed about this and they continue to be because they believe it is a direct attack upon them. They want to be law-abiding and obviously they will try their best to obey whatever laws there are in the land.

I would contend that this new Conservative government has brought forward over a dozen pieces of substantive legislation now. We recognize that we are a minority government but with the help of some of the other parties we have been successful in moving some of that legislation through.

Bill C-9 is just one example of something that I fought for unsuccessfully for 10 years against Liberal governments of the past. It would impose certain restrictions on the use of conditional sentencing, which is known as house arrest. We finally put that through so that we could hold criminals accountable for their actions. We are about holding criminals responsible for their actions.

Bill C-21 would help us to take the onus away from law-abiding firearms owners and instead impose stronger restrictions and laws on those who criminally misuse firearms.

Hon. Charles Hubbard (Miramichi, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in order to own a firearm in this country, the owner must have a licence and that licence must be renewed every five years, which is the major complaint with the system.

Could the government whip please indicate to the House tonight whether his party also intends to do away with the need for a farmer back in Prince George who has an old shotgun to pay a licence fee every five years in order to maintain the firearm that Bill C-21 talks about?

Hon. Jay Hill: Mr. Speaker, as I already indicated when I went through the facts and the myths that are being perpetrated by the official opposition and others on this very subject, Bill C-21 is not about the licensing of individuals. This is about the long gun registry, nothing more, nothing less. Our position is to scrap that and no longer have a requirement where law-abiding, legal firearm owners would need to register their rifle or shotgun.

It is not about the licensing. I have said that we are open to discussion on the licensing provisions. There will still be licensing requirements and they will still need to strenuously go through a system to check their background, et cetera.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I may be from the west but I am not an Annie Oakley and I have never handled a gun. I do not know if I could shoot, aim or load one but I do know that responsible gun owners in my riding and across the country continue to say that the Liberal gun legislation did not focus resources where they were needed. They believe that the current long gun registration is inefficient, unnecessary, wasteful, intrusive, ill-conceived and badly executed.

I am rising in support of Bill C-21, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Firearms Act for the purpose of non-registry of firearms that are neither prohibited nor restricted. For the past seven years, as a member of Parliament, I have been told repeatedly by constituents that the registry needs to be replaced. I have been reminded that we promised to do that and I have been encouraged to carry through on that pledge.

I am happy to say that today we are doing that. Needless to say, I am anxious to speak to this bill and express my certainty that it has a speedy passage because it is both necessary and just. However, I thought perhaps a constituent should be allowed to speak first, and since he relies on my presence in this House to make his opinions known, I would like to quote from a letter that he has sent me.

On May 10, 2006, Mervin Hollingsworth wrote:

I want to ensure that our new government follows through with their commitment to repeal the ENTIRE Firearms Act and their pledge to replace that unjust legislation with efficient, effective, rational laws that recognizes the right of responsible citizens to own firearms.

That is why we are here today and that is why I am standing with my colleagues to support Bill C-21.

Although this government has applied the principle of amnesty for long gun owners, vis-à-vis the registry, clearly that is not enough and not what Canadians from coast to coast and a vast majority of my constituents in Blackstrap are demanding from us.

As another constituent, Doreen Ross, put it, she was distressed “over the uselessness of the gun registry in keeping weapons out of the hands of those that choose to conduct themselves in ways that are deadly and illegal”.

Lest there be any in this House or among those listening to my words today who would question whether Mrs. Ross has sufficient knowledge of guns or an adequate knowledge of gun violence, I can only say that she knows the problem well and better than most of us. One of her family members was killed by a man wielding an unregistered gun.

From this tragedy that the gun registry did not prevent, I would turn to a typical story of frustration that the registry has created. Steve Beck from Watrous, Saskatchewan, cannot even shoot a gopher because he has yet to receive confirmation of his registration. He recently called my constituency office to tell us about it.

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Ordinary Canadians know that this registry has not kept guns out of the hands of criminals. They know that it has not saved lives. They know that it is not an effective tool in fighting crime, in reducing violence or in making our streets and communities safer.

They do know that it has cost over \$1 billion. They do know that it has intimidated, harassed and criminalized law-abiding gun owners and duck hunters. They do know that it is yet another example of how the previous Liberal government created ineffective programs that never dealt with the problems that they were intended to target.

I have been hearing this message from my constituents since I was first elected in the House of Commons and I am happy to be able to deliver on our promise to repeal this registry as Bill C-21 begins its legislative journey to hopefully passage.

Let me be clear that this government is very concerned about gun-related crime. Unlike the Liberals, the Bloc and the NDP, this government is committed to effective gun control and tackling the criminal misuse of firearms. We believe in targeting criminals, not farmers and not duck hunters.

The Liberals continuously neglected our licensing system, which is why we allocated \$14 million over two years in budget 2007 to improve front end screening of first time firearms licence applicants. This will help prevent firearms from falling into the wrong hands.

The Liberal Party wasted \$1 billion on a failed long gun registry, which was acknowledged by the Auditor General, and our government is investing \$161 million over two years to add 1,000 more RCMP personnel to focus on law enforcement priorities such as gun smuggling.

• (2055)

We have brought forward 11 new legislative proposals that would help crack down on crime.

The government passed legislation to restrict conditional sentences for violent criminals.

Although Bill C-9 was weakened by opposition parties during justice committee hearings, those convicted of most violent crimes will no longer walk the streets and enjoy the freedom of serving sentences at home.

Bill C-19 bans street racing.

The government raised the age of consent from 14 to 16 years of age to protect children from sexual predators. That was something we tried to do in opposition on at least six occasions, through private members' bills and opposition day motions, but the previous Liberal government kept saying no.

We are trying to impose mandatory prison sentences for gun crimes but the opposition does not like that either.

The government just does not talk about fighting crime. We do not create another committee or another registry to create the appearance of fighting crime. We go to the heart of the criminal justice matter and insist that violent criminals serve their time. We do not blame the victims. We punish the criminals. We do not arrest duck hunters. We

try to stop violent offenders. We do this because Canadians told us that they were tired of the Liberal delay, confusion and diversion.

Canadians expected action and the Liberal gun registry was not the kind of action they wanted. Canadians already knew that nobody could find ways to waste a billion dollars like the previous Liberal government. They did not need to be shown again by the example of the gun registry, which has been a disaster for Canadians.

Attempting to count and track every long gun in Canada has been ineffective and expensive. It has misdirected police resources from what is most important, which is going after criminals who use firearms in crime.

Bill C-21 would refocus our gun control efforts on what works in combating the criminal use of firearms by repealing the requirement to register non-restricted long guns and by requiring firearms retailers to record all sales transaction of non-restricted firearms.

Individuals would still be required to have a valid firearms licence and to go through police background checks and safety training in order to purchase or possess firearms and to purchase ammunition. Individuals would also continue to be required to register prohibited and restricted firearms, such as handguns.

Through a quick background check, our police officers would be able to determine who is in legal possession of firearms and who is not.

In 1995, the Liberal government told Parliament that the long gun registry would involve a net cost of \$2 million. That was in the Auditor General's report 2002, chapter 10.

In May 2000, the Liberals admitted that the costs had actually ballooned to at least \$327 million. That was in the Auditor General's report 2002, chapter 10.

By March 2005, the net cost of the firearms program was over \$946 million. Today it exceeds \$1 billion. That was in the Auditor General's report 2006, chapter 4.

The \$1 billion figure does not even include the costs incurred by law enforcement agencies enforcing the legislation and compliance costs to law-abiding firearms owners and businesses, which likely runs in the hundreds of thousands of dollars. That was in the Auditor General's report 2002, chapter 10.

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The Auditor General said that the Liberals misinformed Parliament about many of these costs. That was in the Auditor General's report 2006, chapter 4. However, misinformation has ruled the day.

I will be happy to end my speech by quoting Edward Hudson of Saskatoon. He stated:

Canada's current Firearms Act is not achieving the stated goal of improving public safety.

Historical government data indicate that compliance with both licensing and registration has been grossly overstated by the previous administration.

I do not think the voice of the people can be more emphatic and yet restrained at the same time.

Firearms legislation needs to be refocused toward the criminal use of firearms and away from the regulation of law-abiding citizens and their activities. For these reasons, the current Firearms Act must be repealed and replaced.

• (2100)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to very quickly reflect the views of my Yukon constituents who often have strong views. I have not heard much from them this year, but when it first came out they had very passionate views on this. There were a few in favour but many opposed and voiced it strongly.

I know Doug Craig gave eloquent dissertations on what the money could be more productively used for. Bill from Hot Springs Road was concerned about the imposition on his rights. Mr. Rogan, a gunsmith, has fought for years against the registry.

This is why I have spoken against the registry many times in meetings here in Ottawa. In Parliament I have voted against it unless it was on a confidence motion.

Also the first nations, many Yukon trappers, farmers, hunters and cabin dwellers consider it a part of their way of life. That is why I have consistently reflected these views in Parliament.

Does the member believe that the views of rural and first nations people are different from urban dwellers on this issue?

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: Mr. Speaker, I think the member is incorrect. I think it is an impression that has been created by members who do not seem to want to believe that the Liberals' gun registry was a complete fiasco. Bill C-21 has been misrepresented by remarks and comments members made earlier tonight.

I do not think the member comprehends what the bill will do or how important it is for gun owners and responsible firearms owners.

• (2105)

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I remember in 1997 the Reform Party came in with a motion to repeal Bill C-68. I remember I voted to repeal Bill C-68 which is how I would vote again.

Why did the government wait until the end of June when the House is about to adjourn for the summer to bring the bill forward if it is that important? Why did the government not bring it forward last year to tell the people of the west that it supports them?

I remember that that same party, which was the Reform Party, the Alliance Party and now is the Conservative Party—not the progressive part as they took that away—but at that time they were

bringing people to the Hill to lobby and to go after the Liberal government about the gun registry. The Conservatives have been in government now for a year and a half and the government brings in the bill when the House will be closing.

I would like to hear from the government, why if it is so important for the Conservatives they waited until now to bring the bill forward.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: Mr. Speaker, I assume the member will support us and try to encourage other members to support the bill. It sounds like he is really for this bill.

Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC): Mr. Speaker, earlier this evening I heard the hon. member for Thornhill state that it was just a billion dollars or so and if that saved the life of one or two of our officers, the whole thing would be worth it.

As a former officer who has looked down the barrel of a gun I can assure members that that is an insult to the commitment, the integrity and the passion that these officers, men and women in uniform commit to this country.

This money, this billion dollars or so, would that not be better spent potentially to help in many ways, whether it is prevention, enforcement, deterrence and yet why has the Liberal opposition opposed every measure that we have taken in that vein?

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: Mr. Speaker, I think the answer is in what our public safety minister has done. He is putting more RCMP officers on the streets. Just imagine how much more we could do and how many deaths could have been prevented if we had invested in police officers or RCMP. The public safety minister has committed this to Canadians for their safety.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Trinity—Spadina.

I am very pleased to have an opportunity to speak to Bill C-21. I would like to thank the government for finally bringing the bill forward, for finally finding the courage of its conviction at this very late date. If we approached all the bills with the same degree of courage the government has shown with this one, we would be way behind in our legislative agenda.

Coming from the Northwest Territories and being our party's critic for rural and remote communities, I have run in three elections supporting the concept of taking away the registry on long guns and shotguns. Throughout those three elections people across the north consistently said to me that it is not required, it is not necessary and it is not really working for them.

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I want to take a step back from that and look at what is working in gun control in Canada now. What is clearly working right now is the registry that is in place for licensing. Quite clearly, we have a better system of licensing now. I guess we can thank the Liberal Party for delivering that in the legislation in 1995. We have a better computerized system. It delivers for licensing. We are more organized and efficient at processing licences. I have heard the number of rejected licences, some 16,000, for people who were not considered appropriate to have firearms. That is a good and meaningful figure. It is a figure that makes Canadians safer on the ground. We can thank the Liberal Party for that.

However, when it comes to suggesting that one party or the other in Parliament has the vision to put everything together, that has the ability to transcend the ideology and politics of the day, whether it is in 1995 or 2007, and come up with a plan that is going to match what is required for Canada, that is a very egotistical approach.

We suffered under that with the majority Liberal government. It did not understand the nature of gun control. The Liberals had a law that tried to do too much. The things that it did not do well are the certificates for individual firearms, for long rifles and shotguns. Those are the things that were not done well. Those are the things that this bill will take out of the system. This is not the end of gun control in Canada. It is an adjustment to the gun control legislation that we have in the country. Quite clearly, that is what we are doing here and that is why we should all look at it in that fashion.

This is not about one party being against the other. This is about looking at what is good for Canadians. As a New Democrat in an open party, I feel very good about standing here today and supporting the adjustment that is being proposed by the government. Why? Because in my territory, before the gun registry, the value of subsistence hunting was some \$60 million for 45,000 inhabitants. That same message is repeated right across northern Canada and northern parts of the provinces. For people who use rifles and shotguns for their way of life, the gun registry did not work.

It was said at the time in 1995 in Parliament that it would not work. It was not adjusted to make it work. The importance of that to many people across the country was not recognized. We had a situation where a majority government, not a minority government as we have today, made a decision in its magnificence to create a gun control law that went too far.

● (2110)

We are taking it back now perhaps with this bill. This is a minority government and we may find that this bill will not meet the test of all members in this House. It meets the test of this member standing here right now. I support it because I see it as a necessary adjustment to gun control.

The bill does not pass up the good work that is in gun control now. If the government decides to put more effort into licensing by ensuring that the people who own firearms are capable, competent and not criminal in nature, then the gun registry is an excellent investment of public funds. It is an investment that will be returned to everybody in the country.

Storage is extremely important. Safety is extremely important. Training is extremely important. These characteristics that we have

built into gun control now should be enhanced and regulated to a greater degree. Quite often if guns are not stored properly, they become available to people who may use them wrongly. I have seen too many tragedies involving young people or people who are not in their right mind who are impaired in one way or another, taking somebody else's rifles or guns that are not stored properly and either doing themselves in or doing in others. We can control that through legislation. We can make a difference to all legal gun owners and the safety of this country.

There is a huge requirement for the control of handguns in our cities. There is a huge requirement for the control of restricted weapons that are easily concealed and are the basis of the criminal industry in this country. A ban on handguns in the future may be part of the legislative agenda of this House, perhaps not with the present government, but perhaps with the next. There would be an onward evolution of gun control in this country. I hope when we debate it that we make sensible choices about how to put that in place.

There is one other aspect of the use of guns in this country that I want to speak to and that is what guns are being used for. Guns are being used to feed the appetite of Canadians for drugs and illicit goods. The majority of illegal guns are causing death and havoc in our cities.

We say that we have to stop criminals by catching them and putting them in jail. We need to recognize the necessity of adjusting our legislation to truly change the criminal state. We need to take some of the oxygen out of the criminal system, what makes it worthwhile for someone to have a handgun in his or her possession, the tens of billions of dollars of illicit drugs that are being sold in this country.

How do we stop the appetite of Canadians for illegal drugs and illicit goods? Are we doing a successful job at that through enforcement, through all the tricks of the trade that we have developed in our war on drugs? I do not think so. I think it has been an abject failure. If this legislature does not come to grips with that, we will never truly understand how to deal with crime in this country.

On the one hand I support this legislation. It is a great adjustment to the gun control legislation in Canada. On the other hand, we have so much work to do to reduce crime in this country.

● (2115)

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Western Arctic for his support of this bill. He is a member from rural Canada and understands the importance of legitimately owned firearms in our areas.

He mentioned and I agree with him totally that Bill C-21 does not change the screening process of ownership of a firearm. A person still has to become licensed to own and purchase firearms. There are still the areas of safe storage which are so important to us.

The member mentioned the problem in urban centres. What we are seeing across Canada are illegal guns and how they are tied to the drug trade. I know in Manitoba we see a lot of people growing marijuana and then trading that for illegal guns in the United States and bringing those back so that they can carry out their crimes.

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I want to get back to this issue of legitimate ownership. I know that one of the things we both talked about was the need for subsistence living. We have a lot of Métis and aboriginal hunters in our ridings that use their firearms as part of their daily living. I know in my riding a lot of people hunt for geese, ducks and deer in the fall, and they stock up their freezers and they are good for the year. The member mentioned that and that is important to me as well.

Also, what has been affected in my riding is the outfitting business. It has become difficult for people to transport their firearms across the line. We do not have those international visitors coming in any more and supporting these people. That has hurt our local economy.

Would the member expand upon that and explain if that is one of the same concerns that they have in the western Arctic as we have in Selkirk—Interlake? Again, I want to thank the member for his support of this bill.

• (2120)

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. Speaker, certainly, the basis of my support in three elections was the failure of the previous Liberal government to understand the impact of the gun registry on hunters, trappers, subsistence users of wildlife across the country, whether they be aboriginal or non-aboriginal.

We could say why not just register them. It does not work like that. When people are part of that subsistence economy, they may borrow guns and use guns. It is a tradition and a lifestyle that has been upset and changed without careful attention to what it meant. I think that is the key and that is where the strong reaction comes from.

In the words of Charlie Snowshoe, an elder from Fort MacPherson who has run the game council there for many years, he is totally opposed to this. He said that it has taken the young people out of hunting. It is taking the tradition out of hunting and trapping. It is changing it and turning people away from a pastime which has been so valuable to them.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like the member to elaborate on how northerners feel differently.

I spoke strongly against the registry and explained how passionately many of my constituents feel about it, the northern trappers, hunters, fishermen and outfitters. They feel that it is a way of life. They do not consider a gun a weapon. They consider it a tool in their way of life.

They have learned from childhood that guns are there as part of their life. They use them safely and they see this as an unnecessary imposition and that this money could be spent to save some lives in the cities. From their perspective the money could be invested in health care or some other system that would have more effect on saving lives.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. Speaker, the member is quite right. Everybody wants to stop accidents with guns, the kinds of things that happen without trained people, without safety as a paramount issue in the use of firearms.

I think that fits with the hunting and trapping tradition as well, where individuals go out in the bush by themselves with a gun and

they have to survive. If by chance the gun does not work or the people run out of ammunition and they have to borrow some from someone else, that should not be a crime. There is that tradition. Interestingly enough, we have focused on gun control, but we—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Order. It is with regret I interrupt the hon. member for Western Arctic. I have been trying to give him signals. Resuming debate, the hon. member for Trinity—Spadina.

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, “first mourn, then work for change”. That was the rallying cry 18 years ago and every year on December 6 tens of thousands of women and men all across this country say, “Yes, we will mourn, but we will work for change”.

In the Montreal massacre 18 years ago, an assault rifle was used. Every year, when we have the candlelight vigil, we make a commitment to ban violence and to reduce the gun culture.

An assault rifle is a long gun. It is a gun that is used to kill animals sometimes in rural Canada, but in a lot of other places, especially urban centres, assault rifles and long guns are used to kill people and a lot of those people are women.

I do not know if some members of Parliament were here 18 years ago, but for every year since, on December 6, we wear white ribbons. The white ribbons are from the families in Montreal who say they want to work for change. It is also a symbol, saying that we want to stop men's violence against women. I hope members of Parliament remember that moment.

We know that 88% of women killed with guns are killed with shotguns or rifles. We know that 50% of family homicides end in the suicide of the murderer, indicating that key to protecting women and children is licensing and screening, including the renewal.

Of the gun deaths in Canada, 80% are suicides, most by using rifles or shotguns that were readily available. Access to guns is the fifth highest risk factor in spousal homicide.

We have heard from different inquests in domestic violence that a lot of the women are killed because of the gun culture and because of passion, but also because of access to guns.

Perhaps, if more women were elected to the House of Commons, this debate would be somewhat different.

The long gun registry has been working. The gun registry is very mismanaged, but it is working. It is being used. Over two million gun owners are licensed and six million guns have been licensed. We now have police using this registration database 1,500 times per day and are reporting successful use of this tool in fighting an illegal gun trade.

It works. Why? We have seen statistics that say there were 525 fewer gun deaths, which include suicides, homicides and accidents in 2002 compared to 1989, the year I was just talking about. It is a 60% reduction. We are talking about 525 lives. We are talking about 40 fewer women per year being shot, compared to 15 years ago. Every year, 40 fewer women being shot. I want people to remember those lives.

Government Orders

There were 100 fewer murders every year with rifles and shotguns. Think of that number as we are debating this bill today. Think about those women. Think about those murders. In Quebec alone, there were 30 fewer gun related suicides each year among young people in 2000-01, a 50% drop from the average of 56 firearm suicides in this group in the nineties. Obviously, the gun registry is working. Yes, it is mismanaged, but does that mean we need to scrap it? No.

● (2125)

We need a better and improved system. We need better screening, tightening the screening, getting and requiring the gun clubs to provide information on individuals who are having problems, who may be slightly bordering on very dangerous behaviour. There should be at least two references and spousal notification when a spouse is getting a gun.

We definitely should be banning semi-automatic rifles. Because of the registry some who did not need their long guns gave them up because they had no use for them, which means that we are getting the guns out of places where people do not use them, so that there is less chance of accidents, less chance of guns being stolen.

The gun registry is like building a house. We have a foundation; the walls are in and the roof is in. Yes, there are some problems with it. Maybe it has a lousy coat of paint or ugly drapes, but we do not destroy the entire house. We have already spent a lot of money. For us to scrap it now would mean a gigantic waste of taxpayers' money that was already spent.

Sheila Fraser, the Auditor General, said in 2006 that there were problems in this registry. This bill was tabled on June 19, 2006, but nothing happened for an entire year. Why not talk to Canadians? That did not happen. It did not go to committee. If it is so important, why did it not go to committee? Why was there no debate?

Instead, the Conservative government decided to have an amnesty and said it would not charge any more. Each year that has happened \$20 million is not being collected. The total for almost two years now is \$40 million.

I heard tonight that perhaps we should take that money and invest it in young people, invest it in anti-crime initiatives. The Conservatives, during the election, said that they would provide \$50 million in crime prevention programs. That did not happen, did it?

Even today in the House of Commons during question period we heard only \$10 million being announced and we do not even know where we can find this \$10 million because if we check the website for the National Crime Prevention Centre there are no clear guidelines. How do communities apply? I do not know.

The old program was mismanaged in terms of the anti-crime prevention programs, but we need to improve on that. Improve the gun registry, strengthen it, and manage it well. What we should not do is scrap it and have this bill passed because it would be very unfortunate. We know what the results would be: homicides, suicides, and accident rates would go up. Lives would be destroyed and most of those lives would belong to women.

● (2130)

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Peterborough, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened intently to what the hon. member had to say. She mentioned that the gun registry was like building a house. I suppose, but that house was about a thousand times over budget. The gun registry that was supposed to cost \$2 million cost \$2 billion. It is like starting out to build a house for \$150,000 and accidentally going over budget and costing \$150 million. Now we are thinking it might be a nice house except that it leaks and probably was built on a lousy foundation, so it is probably going to fall down, but let us keep spending money on it anyway because it might be a nice house some day.

That is garbage. The long gun registry does not work. The hon. member mentioned homicides, domestic assaults and so forth would go up. First of all, she cannot present any evidence in that regard. Second and more importantly, homicides happen by various means.

Would she propose that we start a parallel registry where perhaps we could ask chefs to register all their kitchen knives because as we know, stabbings kill people. So if we registered every knife and we knew where every knife was, we could probably put an end to stabbings because it is the same philosophy.

If we register every weapon imaginable, surely nobody could commit a crime. This whole philosophy is so flawed. Would she like to recommend to the House that we start a parallel registry to register kitchen knives?

Ms. Olivia Chow: Mr. Speaker, two weeks ago I met with a mother whose son was shot and killed, not by a rifle but by a gun. If one were to talk with her about guns, she would say that guns, whether they be long guns or short guns, are bad.

In the old days, maybe in the 1950s, when kids got into fights they may have pulled knives on each other or fought with their hands but not many of them had guns. Today, even though the youth crime rate has gone down, we are seeing that the rate of kids using guns to shoot each other has gone up. We cannot compare knives to guns.

I will go back to the example I was using. If someone were to spend \$150 million building a house, I cannot imagine that person would bulldoze it to the ground just because the roof was leaking. The person would spend a bit of money to repair the leaky roof. The member would not get a bulldozer and scrap the entire house. I cannot imagine anyone would do that to a house that is worth a bit of money.

● (2135)

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for referencing the massacre that happened 18 years ago in Montreal, a very sad and tragic event. Violence against women is an almost daily event in our country. All of us as parliamentarians should speak up and voice our concerns about these horrendous and terrible crimes that are committed against women every day in our country and throughout the world.

Government Orders

I am obviously very concerned, coming from an urban city like Toronto, as she is, about violence and guns on our streets. I am certainly concerned about the constant use of guns.

I do not understand why there is this gun loving culture that exists with some members of the government. What is the importance of a gun? A gun cannot be compared to any other weapon. A gun has only one purpose and that is to kill. If the Conservatives can give me another rational reason or purpose for a gun—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): It is with regret that I interrupt the hon. member. The hon. member for Trinity—Spadina has 30 seconds to respond.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Mr. Speaker, I wish that the gun clubs, some of which are for profit, would have detailed screening and that the guns would be stored in the gun clubs rather than allowing people to take their guns home because many guns are stolen from residences, which is most unfortunate because many of the guns being used on the street are in fact stolen.

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to stand this evening and participate in the debate on Bill C-21, an act to amend the Criminal Code and the Firearms Act.

Where I come from, predominantly a rural riding in Alberta, this bill is one of the most important changes that my constituents, over the seven years that I have been a member of Parliament, have asked for. They want to see the gun registry changed and the long gun registry dropped.

This bill is the start of a process that would reverse the burden that has been placed on rural Canadians by Liberal governments for far too long, approximately 10 years. Farmers and ranchers, those of us who live in remote and rural communities, have been taxed and red-taped by the Liberal government's failed gun registry for a decade now and they are saying that enough is enough and that it is time to make changes.

We have lived with this type of registry for a long time but we have lived with firearms, and long guns specifically, for generations in rural Canada. We have lived with them safely as responsible and law-abiding owners and users. However, when urban Canada, and our largest cities in particular, began to suffer from gun violence on an increasing basis, the Chrétien government launched a long gun registry. However, it did not address the problems in these urban centres and caused considerable hardship to rural Canada.

The Conservative Party campaigned on a promise to address what some estimate to be now a \$2 billion waste of taxpayer dollars and to remove the yolk that the Liberals placed on rural residents when it comes to firearms ownership.

Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound.

Unlike the current Liberal leadership, Canada's new government is committed to effective gun control in tackling the criminal misuse of firearms. We understand that serious gun crime problems are very evident in our urban areas. They continue to rise and this government will do something about it.

The truth is that the vast majority of these firearm homicides are committed with illegal, unregistered firearms. That is why we

believe in targeting the criminals themselves, the criminals who use and traffic in illegal firearms, not the duck hunters, not the farmers and not the ranchers who have nothing to do with the criminal element or criminal activity.

The Liberals continuously neglected our licensing system. We allocated \$14 million over two years in budget 2007 to improve front end screening of first time firearm licence applicants.

I have listened to people tonight from the other side say that we were getting rid of every type of regulation. That is not right. We want to ensure that those who apply for a firearms licence will be trained and screened so they will be responsible firearm owners. Those are very important measures that will help prevent firearms from falling into the wrong hands. It was the aspect of a licensing and screening system that was totally neglected by the previous government.

Instead, over more than a decade the Liberal Party wasted hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars on a long gun registry that could have been used for fighting crime and the sources of criminal behaviour.

The other failure of the Liberals' long gun registry is well-documented by the Auditor General. Data was too often inaccurate and costs skyrocketed while Parliament was, in my opinion, intentionally misinformed about the progress that was being made.

As a government, I am proud to say that my party has changed the focus from paperwork and charging fees to farmers and duck hunters to focusing on dealing with crime on the front lines.

● (2140)

We have invested \$161 million over two years to add 1,000 more RCMP personnel to focus on law enforcement priorities, such as gun smuggling, a very real problem in this country that needs to be addressed.

Since taking office, we have brought forward 11 new legislative proposals that will help crack down on crime, proposals such as restricting conditional sentences such as house arrest for serious crimes, imposing mandatory prison sentences for gun crimes, and keeping in prison the most violent, most dangerous repeat offenders in the country.

Canadians are watching as the opposition parties in this minority Parliament are being soft on crime and blocking our tough on crime bills from moving forward.

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Canadians expect action, not further delays, yet that is what the opposition is doing with its majority of votes at the justice committee. They opposition members are slowing down and watering down and doing everything they can to postpone the proposals to strengthen our criminal justice system. Yet again, getting tough on crime was one of our major planks in the previous election and the Canadian electorate supported our proposals.

The Liberals' attempt to count and track every long gun in Canada has been ineffective and costly. It has misdirected police resources from what is most important: going after criminals who use firearms in crime.

Bill C-21 will take the focus back to where it should be. It will refocus our gun control efforts on what works in combating the criminal use of firearms by repealing the requirement to register non-restricted long guns and requiring firearm retailers to record all sales transactions of non-restricted firearms.

Under our Bill C-21, in order for a Canadian to purchase or possess a firearm and to purchase ammunition, a person will still be required to have a valid firearms licence. In fact, when a person purchases a non-restricted firearm, the validity of his or her licence will have to be verified. This can be done relatively simply and not at a huge cost, but we want to make certain that the right and responsible type of firearm owners are the ones doing the purchasing.

Applicants will continue to go through police background checks and safety training. Canadians also will continue to be required to register prohibited and restricted firearms, such as handguns, as has been the case since 1934.

Our intention is not to change the handgun registry. It is not to take that away. We recognize that it is the gun of choice for the criminal element. It is not our intention to touch that.

Again, we are talking about the long gun registry. Through a quick background check, our police officers will be able to determine who is in legal possession of firearms and who is not.

In 1995, the Liberal government told Parliament that the long gun registry would involve a net cost of just \$2 million. That is a fact. Anyone can check. That is what was in the Auditor General's report in 2002 in chapter 10.

In May 2000, the Liberals admitted that the cost had actually ballooned to at least \$327 million. Again, that is a fact. Members can check the Auditor General's report of 2002 in chapter 10.

By March 2005, the net cost of the firearms program was over \$946 million. Today those costs exceed well over \$1 billion, according to the Auditor General's report of 2006 in chapter 4.

This \$1 billion figure does not even include the costs incurred by law enforcement agencies in enforcing the legislation or the compliance costs for law-abiding firearms owners and businesses, which are astronomical and likely run in the hundreds of thousands of dollars.

What is worst of all is that by 2006 the Auditor General said that the Liberals had misinformed Parliament about the many costs of their failed long gun registry.

In the many towns and villages in my riding, the waste of these taxpayer dollars by the Liberals in a phony attempt to fight gun violence is overshadowed only by the tremendous and terrible burden placed on rural Canadians and, I dare say, also on western Canadians. The Liberal gun registry targeted every rural Canadian and certainly out west it would seem to me that we felt it the most.

The Liberals deny and then after electoral defeat they wonder why they are having problems in western Canada. Their long gun registry is a prime example.

I will not mention the fact that the Liberals ignored and dragged their feet on the agriculture file, that they denied rural Canada a real and useful child care policy, that they refused to appoint our elected senators, that they racked up surpluses while forecasting deficits, and many other things.

• (2145)

Bill C-21 would put an end to the waste of taxpayer dollars being spent on a failed Liberal long gun registry. That is why I am proud to stand in this place and support Bill C-21 and say goodbye to the long gun registry.

Hon. Charles Hubbard (Miramichi, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have heard both sides of the issue this evening. I know the hon. member has certainly brought forward his own point of view and the point of view of his government. However, we know guns are not only associated with criminal activity causing deaths. We also have suicides and accidents.

Could the hon. member give us some statistics on the last 15 years of the changes, in terms of the number of deaths from firearms, from those three causes? Has there been a major reduction or not? Could he confirm that to the House?

Mr. Kevin Sorenson: Mr. Speaker, in my opinion I do not believe the registry has in one way helped solve crime. I do not think it has lowered the suicide rate. I think those who have chosen to end their lives will find a method to do it.

We have a long gun registry that costs \$2 billion. I heard Liberals tonight say that if it only saves one life, that if it only saves a couple of lives. If we could take the billions of dollars for a failed gun registry and put it into places where we could see front line officers out on the street, if we could take that billions of dollars and make certain that there is more effective education to help fight crime, I think we would see crime lowered even more.

However, to take this idea that property of an individual is wrong, and not the person behind that property, the Liberals are going down the wrong road. They have already argued and talked about different violent, terrible events that have happened.

All I can say is we have had the long gun registry in place and it has not solved those crimes.

Government Orders

Ms. Catherine Bell (Vancouver Island North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I heard a lot of the comments from my hon. colleagues tonight. I listened to my colleague for Trinity—Spadina talk about December 6 and how we got into this gun registry program in the first place. Every year on December 6, I too go out and honour the women who were murdered at École Polytechnique, and I remember them.

I also live in a rural riding. In my riding of Vancouver Island North, there are a lot of small communities and hunting, fishing and farming is a way of life. I come from a family where we had guns in our house. I have hunted myself. I have owned a gun, but not any more. I absolutely understand the changes in the bill and I will vote for them.

The hunters and people in my riding are concerned about the over expenditures in the gun registry over the many years, the millions of dollars that were wasted. They have asked me why the government has taken so long to bring it about. Why has it taken a year and a half to bring this out on the eve of the end of this session?

• (2150)

Mr. Kevin Sorenson: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from the NDP for her support on Bill C-21., and we appreciate that.

She made reference to the tragedy of December 6, and we all recognize that as a tragedy. There is nothing we can say here tonight that would in any way bring out the degree of sympathy we feel, and that we feel all the time, when such tragedies take place.

However, I will mention this. Retired Montreal detective sergeant Roger Granger was there. He was one of the individuals who investigated the Lepine shooting in 1989. He was a police officer. I have never met the individual, but I am certain he has probably been to many tragedies and seen many things. One thing he said in regard to that was that federal gun registry created by the Liberals under former Prime Minister Jean Chrétien was totally ineffective.

When I go around my constituency and when I stop in and speak to the detachments, to the RCMP and municipal police, they make it very clear that they do not support the gun registry.

Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House and speak to something that I and a large majority of my constituents are very passionate about, and that is Bill C-21, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Firearms Act, also known as the long gun registry.

It has been well stated tonight that the country has had the toughest handgun laws in the world since the 1930s, yet that has not prevented gun crime from happening. It is unfortunate, but it is a fact.

In 1989 we had the troubling and tragic Montreal massacre at École Polytechnique Institute. This is remembered to this day. In 1995, as a result of that terrible incident, the Liberal government of the day, with a knee-jerk reaction and without thinking, introduced Bill C-68. It was a Firearms Act that was called the strictest gun control legislation in the world.

When it was first established, the Department of Justice estimated the cost of the Canadian firearms program, also the gun registry, to be \$2 million. In the end, the Auditor General reported the cost as

way over a billion dollars and approaching \$2 billion and still climbing. It has turned out to be the biggest single deception of the Canadian people ever, another Liberal boondoggle, nothing more than a black hole for taxpayer dollars. Their money went nowhere and was used to accomplish nothing, our money.

The goal of the bill was to license all firearms, including shotguns and rifles. Furthermore, it was supported by the anti-gun, anti-hunting crowd that put their support behind it, knowing full well that it would do nothing to reduce crime, but would move them one step closer to their ultimate goal and their naive dream of the total ban of guns from the average citizen. This would suit the criminal element in society just fine.

We all know that we cannot eliminate guns totally and that the criminals will always have their way. A good example was during the temperance movement years ago. Liquor was still smuggled in. The criminal element will always find a way.

Do we throw up our hands and penalize the rest of society instead of targeting the real problem? No. That is the Liberal way. They did it. It was “let us go after the farmer, the duck hunter, the target shooter”.

Bill C-68 will not and has not prevented gun crime from taking place. Now, unfortunately, last fall there was another tragic example of that in our country. The shooting at Dawson College was carried out by a man using a registered gun. This registry was supposed to stop this kind of thing, but the reality again was it did not.

These events, in addition to the numerous shootings that have taken place in other Canadian cities, have all occurred with that legislation in place. The gun registry has not saved any lives. Many speakers, including the hon. member beside me, have spoken to that point. Any member in the House or any police officer would support that kind of an objective, but unfortunately Bill C-68 did not do this.

History speaks for itself. If we continue along this same path, the future will repeat itself. We need to make changes, and Bill C-21 is about that.

Something that needs to be pointed out is the lack of on the ground police support for the gun registry. While some police leaders have supported it, it is very hard to find an actual police officer out there on the ground who will say the registry is needed. That is a fact.

The opposition and the anti-gun, anti-hunting lobby continually mislead the public and the media by telling them the police use the registry 5,000 times a day to check out criminals. This is a total misrepresentation.

Government Orders

The gun registry is automatically linked so when an officer investigates someone on a regular traffic infraction, he or she is also checking that person out on the gun registry. However, the officer does not even know that he or she is running that person's name in the gun registry. The officer does not see any information from it and does not keep or use that information. Total blamey, a whitewash, just another "federal" scam.

Unlike the previous government, the Conservative government is not interested in licensing guns. It is committed to licensing people. People with long guns do not rob Mac's Milk stores. People with long guns do not hold up gas stations. People do not use legal long guns in drive-by shootings.

• (2155)

We believe in targeting criminals, not duck hunters and farmers. That is why in budget 2007 we allocated \$14 million over two years to improve front end screening of first time firearms licence applicants. This will help prevent firearms from falling into the wrong hands.

Individuals will still be required to have a valid firearms licence. We are not opposed to that. They will still go through a police background check. For 25 years I went through a police check to purchase a gun. I do not have a problem with that and neither does the long gun owning crowd.

Safety training is still going to be part of it. We have no problem with that. In order to purchase or possess firearms and ammunition, individuals will still also continue to be required to register prohibited and restricted firearms such as handguns.

Through a quick background check, our police officers will be able to determine who is in legal possession of firearms and who is not. The government invested \$161 million over two years to add 1,000 more RCMP personnel to focus on law enforcement priorities, such as gun smuggling, restricting conditional sentences such as house arrest for serious crimes, especially gun crimes, imposing mandatory prison sentences for gun crimes and keeping the most violent and dangerous repeat offenders in the country in prison.

I have to point out that the opposition party across the way and many other members in the House en masse voted against our tough on crime bills. It is unbelievable. Yet they still stand and say that they want to get tough on crime.

Bill C-21 will refocus our gun control efforts on what works in combatting the criminal use of firearms by repealing the requirement to register non-restricted long guns and requiring firearms retailers to record all sales transactions of non-restricted firearms.

At the outset, I said this was a passionate issue for my constituents. In my last householder I conducted a survey in my riding just to be sure the mood had not changed. On the topic of the gun registry, more than 95% said yes to scrapping or revamping the long gun registry.

The government has introduced an amendment to the Firearms Act that will eliminate the expensive and ineffective long gun registry. It has not saved lives. It has cost us billions and is still climbing. The bleeding must stop.

It is fair to say that all in the House truly want to reduce gun crimes, but I implore everyone on all sides of this issue to think with their heads. Let us tackle gun smugglers, gangs and all criminals and give our police officers and border guards the tools and support they need, and we will make headway.

In that battle, unfortunately, we will never eliminate all the Marc Lepines of the world or get them off the street before it is too late. Unfortunate as it is, it is simply a reality.

I urge everyone here to support Bill C-21.

• (2200)

Mr. Lui Temelkovski (Oak Ridges—Markham, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I heard the hon. member for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound talk about a number of issues in this bill.

First, what is somewhat of a surprise is the Conservatives cannot see that their image of being tough on crime in this bill will be very soft on crime. Second, maybe the member can respond to this. If he removes the m's for millions and the b's for billions, would he still have the registry or not?

Mr. Larry Miller: Mr. Speaker, only the hon. member across the way and the rest of his crowd, cronies, as somebody said, who supported this gun law can answer the question about the billions. They should be ashamed of that. They deceived the Canadian public by saying it would cost \$2 million, which was underestimated by \$998 million and climbing. It blows me away that members can stand in the House—

Mr. Paul Szabo: Code blue.

Mr. Larry Miller: Could we have a little order, Mr. Speaker?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): It is with pleasure that I ask all members to be attentive to the wisdom of their colleagues.

Just to let members know, I will, as best as I can, allow everyone who wants to speak a chance to ask a question, but we have to compress it.

Mr. Larry Miller: It blows me away, Mr. Speaker, how some members can stand in their place and pretend, as they have, that they are tough on crime. Not very long ago they all stood over there and voted against some tough on crime issues. Yet they stand there and pretend. It would almost be laughable, if it were not such a serious issue.

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a great pleasure to speak this late in the evening on this very important and critical issue.

Many times I get concerned by the rhetoric, especially on the slogans that are used: tough on crime; soft on crime. They are just slogans and add nothing to the real debate on crime and how to best manage this issue in our society.

Statistics show that tough gun laws and registration do in fact deal with reducing crime—

Government Orders

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Earlier, when I had recognized the hon. member for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, I asked the other members to be attentive. It seems that members on my right approved of this admonition. It is also good now that I recognize the hon. member for Davenport.

Mr. Mario Silva: Mr. Speaker, the question I was trying to pose to the hon. member as he spoke in the House was that these are just slogans. We are not adding to the debate.

Really, every statistic out there has shown that this particular registry does in fact save lives. Will the member not agree with those statistics?

• (2205)

Mr. Larry Miller: Mr. Speaker, I know the hon. member very well. I had the pleasure of travelling with him on government business. He is a very smart individual.

I know it is not deliberate, but sometimes people in different parts of the country do not realize that things are different in other parts of the country. I need to point out, as I have with a number of members from his part of the world tonight, that there is life north of Highway 7.

For example, up our way we do not need sidewalks along our country roads, but they do in the city, so there are sidewalks in the cities. Up our way we do not have a very big crime problem, so we have a few officers to do the job. In the city there is a large crime problem, so they need to deal with it, but that does not mean they have to make the rest of the country suffer because of a problem in one area.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Resuming debate. The hon. member for Kildonan—St. Paul has the floor for 20 minutes. However, only three of those minutes will be tonight.

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am glad to rise today, albeit for three minutes, and speak to this very important legislation.

The bill is about accountability. We have a duty as elected representatives of the people of Canada to be accountable for the safety of our loved ones. We have a duty to be accountable with the taxes we receive. We have a duty to be accountable with the freedoms we have. We also have a duty to be effective. We need to ensure the bills we pass, the laws we implement and the programs we establish are effective.

This leaves us with a role that we must play wisely and carefully, so I would request that when examining and debating Bill C-21, we do so while remembering the importance and duty we have to be accountable and effective for all of Canada.

Gun crime is a serious issue in Canada; there is no doubt about that. There have been a number of recent incidents in my city of Winnipeg.

On Friday, May 25 of this year a 22-year-old man was shot early in the morning in Winnipeg's Spence Street neighbourhood. The man was out walking around 1:30 a.m. when he was approached by a pair of teenage boys. They reportedly made comments related to gang involvement before shooting the man in the upper body, police said.

Just this past weekend a 20-year-old man was gunned down on an inner city street. He died after being taken to hospital in critical condition.

Just an hour before in a separate incident, a 15-year-old girl and a 37-year-old man were shot and taken to hospital. The residents in the area where the shootings occurred were frightened and would only suggest the shootings might be gang related and they were fearful of repercussions.

The residents in my city of Winnipeg should not be afraid. They should not have to live in fear. We need to protect these citizens in an accountable and effective manner. That is why our government is taking steps to strengthen gun control by making it effective. We want to tackle the criminal misuse of guns, not hunters and farmers.

Bill C-21 will address the concerns of legitimate hunters and farmers as well as the legitimate concerns of the public for their safety and the rising gun crimes.

Bill C-21 will refocus our gun control efforts on what works in combating the criminal use of firearms by repealing the requirement to register non-restricted long guns and requiring firearms retailers to record all sales transactions of non-restricted firearms.

It is clear that requiring legitimate long gun users to register their guns is not a way to prevent gun crimes. Hunters and farmers are not criminals and should not be treated that way.

Long guns are not commonly used in gun crimes. In fact, there are over seven million registered long guns in Canada. However, as I said earlier tonight, of the 569 murders recorded in Canada in 2003, only two were committed with long guns known to be registered. That is only .3% of all the murders in 2003.

I would like to point out that it is not only the government side of the House that feels the long gun registry is ineffective. There are many members in the official opposition who feel the same and want to ensure that legitimate gun users are not penalized. I feel it is important to recognize their wisdom on this issue. The deputy leader of the Liberal opposition—

• (2210)

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): It being 10:10 p.m., the House now stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2:00 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 10:10 p.m.)

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