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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Wednesday, March 25, 2009

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, March 25, 2009

The House met at 2 p.m.

Prayers

• (1405)

[*English*]

The Speaker: It being Wednesday, we will now have the singing of the national anthem led by the hon. member for Lambton—Kent—Middlesex.

[*Members sang the national anthem*]

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

KIDNEY HEALTH MONTH

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to inform the House and all Canadians that March is Kidney Health Month.

Kidney disease can strike anyone at any age. It is estimated that two million Canadians have or are at risk of developing chronic kidney disease.

Our government is taking action on two leading causes of kidney disease, which are diabetes and high blood pressure, by investing \$18 million per year in the Canadian diabetes strategy and supporting organizations such as Blood Pressure Canada in providing reliable information to health care providers and the public on the importance of controlling high blood pressure.

Since 2000 the Government of Canada, through the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, has invested over \$88 million in kidney disease research.

I would like to commend the countless volunteers and organizations such as the Kidney Foundation of Canada for the much needed support and services that they provide.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last Thursday, changes were revealed in the *Canada Gazette* that will undermine environmental protection in this country.

Environmental assessments are a critical tool to ensure that environmental damage is anticipated and prevented or mitigated when development is being planned. Shockingly, effective immediately and for the next two years, many infrastructure projects within the building Canada fund will be exempt from environmental assessments that large construction projects must currently undergo.

This is an unacceptable, even shameful, abrogation of the public trust by the environment minister. The environment minister first signalled his disregard for this important environmental protection mechanism by sneaking an amendment into the Navigable Waters Protection Act. He should stop taking us backward to a previous century and recognize the environment as the precious asset it is.

The Speaker: I would remind the hon. member of my ruling recently on personal comments in the Standing Order 31 statements, in the hope she will watch herself in future and not use these statements as attacks on individual members.

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

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[*Translation*]

GOSPEL CELEBRATION CHOIR

Mr. Claude Guimond (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Gospel Celebration Choir from Quebec City, under the direction of Marie-Josée Pelletier, a native of Dégelis in the Temiscouata RCM, came first in the Pathmark gospel choir competition in New York City on February 28. They were the only group from Quebec to compete against a number of American choirs. According to Ms. Pelletier, they went to New York just for the experience, but they came away with first prize.

This is one more example of the talent and determination of Quebecers on the international stage. The Bloc Québécois will always encourage Quebec artists to perform abroad, and will take every opportunity to draw attention to their successes. My congratulations to Sylvie Pelletier and the Gospel Celebration Choir on this achievement.

Statements by Members

[English]

2010 VANCOUVER-WHISTLER OLYMPIC GAMES

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the 2010 Vancouver-Whistler Olympic Games present an opportunity for us to showcase Canada to the world. We must not squander this by allowing a shocking case of gender discrimination to occur at taxpayer funded facilities.

Ski jumping is the only winter Olympic event that does not include a competition for women, but it is not too late to change this. Even though Canada has a Charter of Rights and Freedoms that prohibits gender discrimination, the female ski jumpers have been forced to turn to the courts for a chance to compete.

I urge my hon. colleagues to stand up for Canadian laws and Canadian values and to support my motion to include a ski jumping event for women in the games.

As a member of Parliament from British Columbia, I am embarrassed that such a public display of discrimination against women may take place in Vancouver next year. Let us not go down in infamy as the host of the last Olympic games in history to discriminate against women.

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CP RAIL OVERPASS CLEANUP

Mr. Randy Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on Saturday, March 21, a group of Pitt Meadows residents joined me and my office staff to clean up an area around a pedestrian overpass in Pitt Meadows.

Derelict shopping carts, rusty bike frames and other unsightly debris had littered the area underneath the overpass for more than two years. Rick Poznikoff and Mike LoVecchio led a CP Rail team that trained us in safety procedures and stopped the trains so that we were able to pull out more than 400 kilograms of garbage and recyclables.

Our efforts this past Saturday have encouraged the city of Pitt Meadows to consider making some permanent changes to the overpass that would prevent individuals from dropping trash into the area again.

I would like this House to join me in thanking volunteers Darlene and Jeff Mercer, Deb and Len Walters, Ken Harper and Bernie McCarthy, and the CP Rail crew, all of whom generously gave up a Saturday morning to make the city of Pitt Meadows a great place in which to live.

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● (1410)

NATIONAL ANTI-DRUG STRATEGY

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government's drug policy is exacerbating crime, violence, the illegal drug trade and substance abuse.

The World Health Organization supports harm reduction strategies. The U.S. has even appointed a prevention focused national drug policy chair, but our government is refusing to listen to the facts and is actively blocking life-saving harm reduction strategies, like

Vancouver's Insite program and the NAOMI program. The government is even trying to block these programs through the courts.

If we are to be serious about addressing gang violence, the illegal drug trade and even reducing the harm for our troops in Afghanistan, the government must see substance abuse as a medical problem, not a judicial problem. It should cut the link between users and organized crime through supporting NAOMI, Insite and other harm reduction programs that have been proven to work and save lives.

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[Translation]

WOMEN'S ACTION NETWORK

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Saint Boniface, CPC): Mr. Speaker, since March 8 was International Women's Day, and March 20 the International Day of La Francophonie, I am extremely proud to rise today to point out that it is 21 years since Réseau action femmes gave out its first Réseau awards. This political action network works to improve the situation of francophone women in Manitoba.

The network has been honouring women of action since 1988 with this prestigious award in recognition of their remarkable contributions to community development.

Prize winners this year were: Doris Lemoine of Saint-Boniface, for her work on behalf of heritage; business woman Rachelle Edmunds of Saint-Pierre-Jolys; Thérèse Dorge of Sainte-Agathe, president of the Franco-Manitoban seniors association, and Patricia Vermette, a woman of great generosity who is supported by the entire community of Morris and Île-des-Chênes.

Congratulations to all the recipients. Keep up the excellent efforts to promote francophone culture.

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LA STATION CHEESE FACTORY

Ms. France Bonsant (Compton—Stanstead, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I never tire of talking about products from my region, and for good reason: they are top-notch and made by our very own people.

I encourage you to try some great-tasting cheeses from La Station in Compton, which is in my riding. Every one of this family-owned company's cheeses has been nominated for the 2009 Canadian Cheese Grand Prix.

Comtomme, Comtomme Signature, Raclette and Alfred Le Fermier were selected from among 172 cheeses sampled by the jury as part of this annual competition organized by the Dairy Farmers of Canada.

La Station could not have asked for a better showcase for its organic raw-milk cheeses. I would like to wish the company the best of luck because it deserves to win multiple awards during the Gala of Champions on April 23.

Statements by Members

[English]

JUSTICE

Mr. Andrew Saxton (North Vancouver, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to be a member of the only party that is committed to fighting crime 365 days a year, the Conservative Party of Canada.

The Minister of Justice has recently introduced new measures that directly target organized crime in this country.

This government is addressing the serious issues of gang murders, drive-by shootings and offences committed against police and peace officers, and ensuring mandatory jail terms for serious drug dealers, importers and those who get involved with grow operations.

These measures can now be added to the lengthy list of crime and order items we have delivered on, including: limiting conditional sentences, making street racing an offence, ensuring serious gun crimes are met with mandatory jail time, raising the age of protection, toughening impaired driving laws, and making it tougher to get bail for firearm offences.

Canadians know they can count on this Conservative government to tackle violent crime in this country. We have done a lot, and we will continue to do more.

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GREEK INDEPENDENCE DAY

Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on March 25 of each year, Hellenes world wide celebrate Greek Independence Day. On that day in 1821, a people rose up after 400 years of oppression by the Ottomans and said, "Freedom or death".

The revolution of 1821, led by heroes such as Kolokotronis, Lord Byron of England and others, was an uprising not only to restore democracy to the nation that founded democracy, but also to free a nation, to cut the bonds of slavery and free its people, to free a spirit called Hellenism.

Today Greece is a modern 21st century country, a member of the European Community, NATO and the UN. It is a nation with a highly educated workforce, a nation prominently engaged in the arts, science and technology, business and commerce, a nation advocating peace and goodwill with its neighbours and the world.

Today, Greek Canadians are celebrating by saying, "*Zeto E Ellas! Zeto O Canadas! Zeto E Ekosti Penti Martiou!*"

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● (1415)

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government's efforts in the area of employment insurance and support for workers are being recognized in Quebec.

Last Monday, the Action-Chômage group from the North Shore region applauded the positive, effective steps taken by the federal government to help the workers, families and regions of Quebec. I

would like to quote the president of the Haute-Côte-Nord branch of Action-Chômage, Line Sirois:

Yes, we are pleased that Ottawa decided to help our workers, because these people should stay in our region when the industry recovers. We applaud this measure.

Indeed, improvements to the work sharing program and the five week extension of EI benefits are significant achievements of our Conservative government.

Shame on the Bloc Québécois and the NDP for turning their backs on workers by refusing to vote in favour of these important measures needed to maintain the labour force and the vitality of the regions of Quebec.

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[English]

BROADCASTING

Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very concerned about the layoffs and closures of A-Channel stations in Ontario.

In my riding of London—Fanshawe, the local A-Channel station has had its morning show cut and many staff persons laid off. The station's staff fear the worst, that they may lose the station entirely. Sadly, without federal government help, the CBC is also threatened.

It is not just happening in London. Local media is being threatened across the country as media corporations become larger and more centralized. Local stations and publications that would be viable on their own are now at risk of closure because of debt-ridden conglomerates.

We need local media to develop healthy communities and ensure local voices are heard. It is the job of the federal government to keep local and regional coverage on the air. The government must adopt the recommendations from the CRTC's study on media concentration rules and require broadcasters to maintain a local presence.

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JUSTICE

Mr. Rick Dykstra (St. Catharines, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government is tough on crime.

The Conservative Party campaigned on a promise to implement an aggressive and necessary crime agenda, and so far it has delivered. It also campaigned on a promise to restrict courts from giving extra time for time served prior to sentencing.

Oral Questions

Reduced prison terms that are not proportionate to the severity of the crimes undermine Canadians' confidence in the justice system. That confidence is further destroyed when accused persons deliberately attempt to delay their trial so they can rack up extra credit through prolonging their stay in pre-trial detention.

Capping the limit on credit for time served will restore Canadians' confidence in the justice system. It will ensure that dangerous and repeat offenders serve the time when they do the crime.

Given the overwhelming support we are getting on this initiative, especially from the provinces and territories, I encourage the opposition, especially the born-again Liberal crime fighters, to support the bill. Let us get it through the House.

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[Translation]

NATIONAL FILM BOARD OF CANADA

Mr. Roger Pomerleau (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on Monday, March 9, about 30 National Film Board Employees demonstrated in Montreal against the indifference of the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, who refuses to meet with them. The continuing cuts to the budget of this icon of Quebec and Canadian film began in the mid 1990s; they are a worrisome and serious threat to the proper operation of the organization.

To ensure the NFB's survival, the Bloc Québécois is calling for the creation of a \$10 million documentary feature film fund administered by the NFB. This financial assistance would support this organization's efforts to promote our culture. In addition, the Bloc Québécois is asking that amounts allocated to the NFB be restored to 1994-95 levels.

As the Conservative member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles so aptly stated, the Bloc Québécois defends culture. That is why we will do everything possible to act in the best interests of the NFB and Quebec culture.

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[English]

POVERTY

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we read in today's news that Conservatives have finally come up with a plan to address poverty.

The Conservative senators have a truly novel plan. They suggest that we simply shoot all the Canadian geese that are becoming a nuisance at their summer homes and feed them to the poor.

Given that this is a Conservative plan, I am surprised they have not suggested to raffle off handguns, let them shoot, and then let the poor people have the geese.

We all know that Tory times are tough times, but where will it stop: squirrel burgers, pigeon McNuggets, gopher burritos, maybe beaver tails made from real beaver tails?

It may surprise Conservatives to learn that the Canada goose is recognized internationally as a national symbol of our country; it is not an anti-poverty plan. It is high time the Conservatives came up

with a real plan to address poverty and unemployment during this recession.

Stop the silly goose games. The Conservatives have to get their ducks in a row and stop goosing Canada's poor.

* * *

● (1420)

[Translation]

MARIE-PHILIP POULIN

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Beauce, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to say that the people of Beauce who are with me today in Ottawa join me in applauding the outstanding performance of an athlete from Beauceville.

Marie-Philip Poulin, who turns 18 next week, has just been named to Canada's national women's hockey team and will take part in the world championship in Finland next month.

I admire Marie-Philip's discipline and determination. She already has an enviable string of achievements to her credit.

Good luck, Marie-Philip, and congratulations. All of Beauce is with her.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

CANADIAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today, CBC and Radio-Canada announced 800 layoffs, nearly half of them from the French-language network.

Does the Prime Minister grasp how important this national institution is to all Canadians, particularly francophones living outside of Quebec? Will the Prime Minister commit to limiting the damage to this national institution?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we certainly do recognize how important the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation is. That is why, this year, we have given it more money than ever before: \$1.1 billion. The CBC and Radio-Canada are not alone; private broadcasters are struggling too. It is always a terrible thing when someone loses a job.

[English]

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada needs a public broadcaster. Even the private broadcasters understand the importance of a public broadcaster. What is the government prepared to do now to ensure that this national institution survives this recession?

The question then is this. Is the government prepared to extend refundable bridge loans to the CBC to keep it alive until advertising revenues return?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as you will know, the House has just passed the budget. That budget provides the CBC with record financing, financing in the order of \$1.1 billion.

Oral Questions

Obviously, broadcasters, both public and private, are having difficulties. It is a terrible thing when someone loses a job. We will be monitoring the decisions of the board very carefully to make sure that it respects CBC's mandate and treats its employees fairly.

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[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, when I asked the Prime Minister to relax employment insurance eligibility criteria, he said that the problem would work itself out. He said that, as regional unemployment rates rise, more unemployed workers will be eligible.

Am I to understand that the government's solution to the problems with employment insurance is to wait until unemployment gets even worse?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government's economic action plan includes measures to help unemployed workers and improve the employment insurance system. These are significant measures that have been approved by this government and the House.

• (1425)

[English]

The only thing I would say to the Leader of the Opposition is that if he now has changes he would have liked to have seen in the budget, he should have presented some of those proposals to the government before the budget. I would advise him in future to give us his ideas, to work with us on financial matters, before he passes them.

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada is shedding jobs and fast, faster in fact than the U.S. We have a government in disarray, scrambling to make up for its inaction. We saw that clearly in its delayed response to dealing with delays.

The big question is access to EI. The minister denies the problem exists. That would be funny if it were not so sad. She uses misleading statistics to defend a system that excludes hundreds of thousands of people from qualifying, even though they have paid into EI for years.

These are real Canadian families who are scared to death, wondering how they are going to feed their children. What does she have to say to them?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government has been very clear in our economic action plan. Times are difficult worldwide. Unfortunately, we are seeing layoffs here of numbers higher than we have seen in many years. That is why we took the step we did in our economic action plan, to extend an extra five weeks of benefits from the pilot project right across the country to speed up the process.

Yesterday we announced \$60 million in additional resources to help Canadians, who have been unfortunate enough to lose their jobs, get the benefits they deserve and need in a timely manner.

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that does not do anything for those who do not qualify.

Everybody else seems to know there is a problem here. It is not just opposition parties, it is social policy groups, anti-poverty organizations, labour. Even the C.D. Howe Institute said it was surprised that the government did not do more in the budget to address EI access. Who is left? Apparently, just the Conservative government.

Why will the minister not stop denying the problem, stop the excuses, throw away her misleading statistics, and think of Canadian families who are sitting at kitchen tables abandoned by the government, out of options, and wondering why the EI they paid into for years is not there when they need it now?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, over 80% of Canadians who pay into the EI system are able to collect benefits and they are getting them on time.

We have also extended training, training opportunities for those who are on EI, even for those who are not eligible.

We are protecting jobs so that people do not have to be laid off full time by expanding and lengthening our work sharing program. That is preserving jobs and we are creating them with \$12 billion in infrastructure stimulus. That is good for creating and protecting jobs and for looking after those who are unfortunate enough to lose them, and the opposition supported that.

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[Translation]

GUN REGISTRY

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, in the Minister of Public Safety's response here in the House, he confirmed the ideological intent of his government as far as crime is concerned, that is to increase prison sentences while at the same time loosening the rules for gun control.

Is the Prime Minister aware of the disastrous outcome in the United States of the application of a policy identical to the one he is preaching blindly?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, this government supports stringent firearm controls, including permits for all gun owners and registration of restricted weapons. However, a massive registry of all long guns would do nothing but penalize hunters, farmers and aboriginal people. It does nothing to help control crime. This is why we are proposing anti-crime measures.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the rate of imprisonment in the United States is five times that of Canada. At the same time, their homicide rate is triple the Canadian rate.

Oral Questions

Does the Prime Minister not get it: the formula “the more people there are in jail, the more weapons there are in circulation” can have but one result: a catastrophic increase in the number of homicides?

• (1430)

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again this morning, the Minister of Justice announced that a bill will be introduced here in the House to attack the pre-sentencing credit arrangement. We know that the courts are bogged down and that we are fighting crime. We need to look at the whole picture. As for gun control, we are dealing with it, and are aiming at tougher measures as far as gun-related offences and permit issuing are concerned.

It is easy to quote all kinds of facts and figures and to criticize rather than take action, which is the Bloc Québécois approach, but as for us, we are implementing our program against crime and it will be effective.

Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the crime rate in Quebec is one of the lowest in Canada, and the homicide rate five times less than the U.S. rate. The battle against crime is waged far better by a whole set of measures, such as well-targeted police actions and prevention programs, than by tougher sentences. Minimum sentences mean nothing to criminals.

Quebec believes that gun control is an essential element in an integrated and effective battle against crime. Why deprive it of this when it is getting better results than others are?

[English]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we believe strongly in an integrated fight against crime. The hon. member is right to the extent that more police on the streets help. That is why we provided \$400 million for the provinces to fund new police officers. That money is in their hands to do that.

We made a commitment to deliver a thousand new RCMP officers and we have already delivered over 1,500. That is helping.

Handguns are a big part of the drug trade. That is why we are cracking down with new legislation to combat the drug trade and organized crime.

I hope the hon. member will help make that part of the comprehensive combat against crime in Canada.

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Quebec has created joint forces like the Wolverine squad and has achieved spectacular results in the fight against criminal organizations such as the Hell's Angels.

Quebec believes in the motto “not tough on crime, but smart on crime”. Moreover, the youth crime rate is 50% higher in Canada than it is in Quebec.

Why would Canada not emulate the successes in Quebec rather than the failures in the United States?

[English]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois is absolutely wrong. We have advocated a comprehensive approach.

This is why we have put more money into the national anti-drug strategy for prevention advertising. We understand that it needs a complete approach to this.

We have legislation before this Parliament that deals with problems that the member will find in his own province, in Montreal and in other communities. These are problems with drugs and gangs. Finally, for once the Bloc Québécois should get onside and support these measures.

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EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, under this Conservative government, more than half the people who pay into EI do not actually get it. For all their working lives, Canadians have been told that EI would be there for them if and when they needed it. However, because of changes brought in by the Liberals, tens of thousands of Canadians who have been thrown out of work are no longer eligible.

When will the Prime Minister take steps to implement the concrete measures adopted by this House on March 10 that will provide EI benefits to those who need it?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to correct the hon. member. The facts are that over 80% of Canadians who pay into employment insurance can collect the benefits. It is getting easier for people to collect benefits, which is the good news. The bad news is that it is because the economy is worsening.

Our system automatically adjusts every month on a regional basis as the local conditions change. When the local conditions get worse, EI gets easier to get and for a longer period of time and with extended benefits to help those most in need when they need it most. I wish the hon. member had supported our efforts to do that.

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the minister knows full well that the number one issue when it comes to EI is eligibility. A five week extension does not help the 57% who do not qualify to begin with.

This House has spoken loudly and clearly that EI eligibility must be reformed but the Prime Minister has refused to listen. That is the same person who said that a prime minister “has a moral responsibility to respect the will of the House”.

I would like to ask the Prime Minister what happened to those morals. Why is he ignoring the will of the House and denying the unemployed the EI benefits they so desperately need?

Oral Questions

•(1435)

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, why will the hon. member not tell Canadians the real facts, which are that over 80% of people who contribute to EI can collect the benefits? Would she also explain to Canadians why she and her party voted against an additional five weeks of benefits for those who need it most when they need it most? Why is her party opposed to providing training, not just for those who are on EI but for those who do not even qualify for EI so that those people can get the benefit of long term training to get long term jobs to take care of their family? Why would she not support those moves to help Canadians?

[Translation]

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, people are worried. The current crisis is hurting them. They expect their government to be there for them. When he was the Leader of the Opposition, the current Prime Minister said it was immoral not to respect the will of Parliament.

Now that he is Prime Minister, why does he no longer have a problem with something he considered immoral when he was Leader of the Opposition? Under what moral standard is the Prime Minister refusing to improve coverage and accessibility to employment insurance, measures that were officially passed here in this House?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the hon. member why he refuses to respect the will of Canadians. The people of Canada asked us for additional weeks at the end of the EI benefits period. That is what they asked us for.

They also asked us for support for training, preparation and instruction in order to return to the work force with the necessary skills. That is what we are delivering.

They voted against all of our efforts.

* * *

[English]

FORESTRY INDUSTRY

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, family run small businesses form the foundation of our economy but too often they are forgotten when discussing the economic crisis. In the forestry sector over 400,000 family forest owners are struggling with a decrease in demand and have received little to no support from the government.

Why have the Conservatives not come up with a coherent and targeted plan to assist small woodlot owners and help save their businesses before it is too late? They have had three years.

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity to meet with representatives of private woodlot owners here in the House yesterday and discuss their concerns. I can tell the House and the hon. member is that one thing is very clear. They do believe in the forest industry and they are grateful for the help and support that this government has been providing since 2007.

I am very pleased that they are appreciative of the fact that we are looking at innovation and marketing as a way to promote this industry and ensure that it is world-class when it is ready to go.

[Translation]

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in Quebec and the Atlantic provinces, forestry sector workers are anxiously waiting for this evening's decision on the Abitibi-Bowater restructuring. Analysts predict that it will be difficult to reach an agreement on its debt and that its employees will suffer the consequences. One worker at the Laurentide plant in Shawinigan stated that it is as though they have an axe over their heads.

Will the Conservatives help these workers before the axe falls?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are all concerned about the needs of workers and the Abitibi-Bowater situation. We encourage the company to explore options available, including those provided by Export Development Canada.

* * *

[English]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mrs. Bonnie Crombie (Mississauga—Streetsville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the numbers are staggering of foreclosures, bankruptcies, job losses and severances. Every day we are seeing the painful human face of this recession. In my riding, Ted, a father of four with a wife on disability, is worried that he will lose his home because he cannot get EI. He is 11 hours short of what the government demands.

Why are the Conservatives abandoning thousands of Ontarians like Ted, who worked hard, paid EI premiums, played by the rules and are now left to fend for themselves?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is no question that our heart goes out to the Teds of the world right across the country. We took the actions we did in our economic action plan to help people like that. Even when people are not eligible for EI, there are programs to help them get the skills they will need for the jobs of the future and other programs to preserve jobs so that people do not get into that position.

We have expanded the work-sharing and have made it easier to get. We expanded the 38 weeks to 52 weeks to help companies get their employees through the tough times until they can bring them back full time, keep them on payroll and keep their skills going.

Oral Questions

● (1440)

Mrs. Bonnie Crombie (Mississauga—Streetsville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is no time for empty, cold-hearted Conservative rhetoric. EI claims are skyrocketing in Ontario. Bankruptcies are up 21%, with Ontario facing the biggest impact. In Mississauga, auto workers with 20 to 30 years' seniority have simply been dropped by their companies.

The Conservatives told investors not to invest in Ontario and now they have abandoned Ontario themselves. Why are the Conservatives leaving the provinces to fend for themselves?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us be honest here. The Liberals brought in the new system for EI. It was a Liberal program that set up the criteria for eligibility. We are continuing with that program but we are adding to it. We are adding to it so that we can help workers, especially long tenured workers, those who have been in a job, such as the auto sector, for many years and have lost their job but are too young to retire. We are providing them with up to two years of EI support while they invest in new training to keep the jobs of the future so they can transition and look after their families in the long term, even under the rules the Liberals created.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development says that 80% of unemployed workers receive benefits, but that is not true. The following figures are from the department's own website. In 2006, only 46% of all unemployed people received benefits, and only 68% of all those who paid into the plan received employment insurance. The 80% of claimants the minister is referring to are the only unemployed people who meet the very strict criteria set by the Liberals.

How can the minister continue to deny these figures?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the latest figures clearly show that more than 80% of people who have paid for employment insurance receive benefits.

[*English*]

We are working to help Canadians who are unfortunate enough to lose their jobs. We are providing the benefits to them. The system automatically adjusts to make it easier for them to get the benefits to which they are entitled. We are ensuring that they are getting those benefits as quickly as possible.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the minister should read her own website.

In November, December and January, 234,000 people lost their jobs, but only 74,200 people applied for benefits. What these figures show is that 68% of unemployed workers will not receive benefits.

Given these figures, how can the minister claim that the current system is an adequate way to address the crisis?

[*English*]

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, unfortunately these are very

difficult times for a great many people across the country. We are working with companies to avoid layoffs. That is why we have expanded the working-sharing program to preserve jobs. As some people have told me, they would rather take one day of EI benefits so they can keep working with their company than to be laid off permanently. We are working with employers and employees to ensure those options are there for people.

Let us not forget that we are also creating new jobs through our \$12 billion in infrastructure. We are creating jobs so people do not need to apply for EI.

* * *

[*Translation*]

CANADIAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today the government's failure to come to the assistance of the CBC has led to the elimination of 800 full-time jobs. By refusing to provide the corporation with financial flexibility, the minister has contributed to this disastrous situation.

In these hard times, will the minister not agree that his role consists in providing public institutions with the resources needed to retain jobs rather than helping, through his insensitivity, to abolish them?

● (1445)

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the Prime Minister has said, announcements like this are never easy on workers or their families. Let us be clear, however, very clear: year after year our government has increased the CBC budget, that is from early 2006 to the present. We have raised the CBC budget.

The Bloc Québécois is talking about the 2009-10 budget, our budget for this year. We again increased the CBC budget. The Bloc Québécois voted against it. We made campaign promises and we kept those promises. We are delivering the goods to the CBC.

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the minister's attitude is paradoxical to say the least. While he is saying he is ready to help out private broadcasters and media, he is abandoning the CBC to its fate.

How can the minister justify his inflexibility toward the public sector and his openness to the private sector? Are we to see this unrelenting attack on the CBC as more fallout from his reform ideology?

Oral Questions

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the facts speak for themselves. We have increased the CBC budget year after year, and year after year the Bloc Québécois have been the ones voting against it.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have another question for the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

In answer to a question yesterday, the minister said that he is waiting for President Obama's policy on Afghanistan. That means that Ottawa's policy, Canada's policy, is to be determined by Washington. Does the minister realize that?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is a strange way for the member and everyone in his party to see things. They supported a resolution in this House outlining six priorities for the government's action in Afghanistan.

We are delivering the goods. We are implementing those priorities.

I can assure the member that, if there are any changes to the policy, he and all members of Parliament will be informed, but in the meantime, we will carry on with our work.

[*English*]

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister gave the very clear impression yesterday that before the Government of Canada would have a policy, it was waiting for direction from Washington. The minister has lost his battle to have a special envoy. When he was in Europe, he said that he thought a special envoy was a good idea. The minister of state said that he thought it was a bad idea. Apparently the Prime Minister agreed with the minister of state and not with his Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Who is going to be our special envoy? Richard Holbrooke.

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if I recall correctly, my colleague's question yesterday dealt with the meeting on March 31 in The Hague. I told him at the moment that the information we had was the Americans would release their position. I understand President Obama will release that position.

However, a year ago in the House, we determined what our policy was, and that is exactly what we are doing. We are building schools. We are building the Dahla Dam. We are helping that country build a secure environment so it can proceed with the elections. Why do—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Kings—Hants.

* * *

[*Translation*]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister was unable to answer my question yesterday concerning the conference sponsored by his department, at which Canadian entrepreneurs were told that if they want venture capital, they should move to the United States.

Can the minister tell us why the government wants to send our innovators to the United States?

[*English*]

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, one of the many things we are doing to enhance our global commerce strategy is having our trade commissioners, of which there are about 960 around the world, offer sessions and seminars, pulling people together and networking.

The hon. member took a comment from a blogster who had heard from someone who was at one of the sessions that someone there was quite properly encouraging investment, saying “here is a way you might want to consider investing”. One person was offering one option. That camouflaged as research is no way to help people who are looking for work. The member should clean up—

● (1450)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Kings—Hants.

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the only person ignoring the facts is the minister. Yesterday he thought that this was an EDC file. It is not unless EDC stands for endorsing Delaware corporations.

The fact is last week his department held these sessions, where Canadian IT entrepreneurs were told that if they wanted venture capital, they should incorporate in Delaware and move to the United States.

Why is the Conservative government giving up on Canada's venture capital industry and why is it sending Canada's best and brightest to the United States instead of supporting venture capital here in Canada?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, at some time he should admit the fact that he took the information from one blogster who was commenting on one person who was offering investment opportunity. Through the work of EDC, serving over 8,600 customers alone, \$85 billion of financial activity was facilitated. This year alone there has been \$9.6 billion of financial activity with more than 200 new customers.

Today 575,000 people are working because of the efforts of EDC, and that will continue.

* * *

JUSTICE

Ms. Dona Cadman (Surrey North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative Party of Canada campaigned on a promise to restrict courts from giving extra credit for pretrial custody. Our government believes that the credit for time served before the trial should be restricted.

At a federal, provincial and territorial meeting of justice ministers, the minister committed to working on this issue. If news reports are right, it looks like the minister will deliver on this promise.

Could the Minister of Justice confirm his intention to limit credit for time served?

Oral Questions

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can confirm that I have instructed officials to draft legislation that, when introduced into the House and if passed, will finally get rid of the double and triple credit system that is applied in our country when convicts are convicted. It is finally time to get rid of that.

This is one of the things on which this party has run. It is an important plank and I encourage members of the opposition, especially those born-again Liberal crime fighters, to get behind this important legislation and stand up for the issues that affect ordinary Canadians.

* * *

[Translation]

CANADIAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, massive cuts to CBC funding are the result of this government's conservative ideology. The minister refused to work with the CBC. As a result, 800 jobs were lost and local, regional and national services will be scaled back. This is the Reform Party's revenge.

Why is the minister attacking the rural and francophone communities that need local service from the CBC?

[English]

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is completely false. We have increased funding for CBC. We made a very specific campaign promise to either maintain or increase funding for the CBC, and that is exactly what we have done.

Whether we are talking about the CBC, agriculture, justice, defence or the economy, our Conservative government was elected in 2006 because the Liberals failed. We were re-elected in 2008 because we have delivered for Canadians.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, he is sitting on \$60 million of appropriations, while it is starting to shut out the lights in the regional bureaus. Those are the facts, but this is typical of the kind of games he has played around CBC. He has misrepresented its request for bridge financing. He has played games with its request for a reasonable plan to get through this. The results are now massive job losses across our regions.

Why will he not just be honest and say he is using the pretext of the economic downturn to attack the public broadcaster because his government and his base have been fundamentally and ideologically opposed to public broadcasting from the beginning?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, that is ridiculous. We have increased funding and support for the CBC. We have maintained our campaign commitment.

The member talks about playing games. In the budget this year, we have increased the budget to the CBC to a record level of \$1.1 billion. Every year we have been in office, we have increased funding for the CBC. Every year we have been in office, the NDP has voted against those budgets to increase funding for the CBC. Now he says that he wants us to increase funding for the CBC. If we did that, he would vote against it again.

• (1455)

[Translation]

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr (Jeanne-Le Ber, BQ): Mr. Speaker, when I asked him about the right to proceed in French before the IRB in Montreal, the minister answered that "the government obviously expects all agencies and boards to comply with the letter and spirit of the Official Languages Act". Yet a month later, the Canada Border Services Agency has written a letter in which it categorically refuses to translate the documents pertaining to the case in question into French.

How can the minister explain such a disconnect between what he has said and his government's behaviour?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is clear that the IRB is an independent quasi-judicial government body that makes its own operational decisions. I cannot dictate procedures to the members of the IRB. It is up to them to decide.

However, we clearly stated that we expected all agencies and quasi-judicial bodies to comply with the Official Languages Act.

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr (Jeanne-Le Ber, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the minister cannot hide behind the IRB's autonomy, because it admitted in a March 16 decision that the request to proceed in French does not present a problem if the Canada Border Services Agency agrees. The agency is still refusing to translate these documents, however.

Is the minister aware that his government's behaviour is sending the wrong message to newcomers, that Canada's real language is English and French is just good for the minister's fine speeches?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for that compliment, but I must say that the Department of Citizenship and Immigration provides all its services in both official languages. We welcome immigrants in both official languages everywhere, and we are proud of that record.

As for the operations of the IRB and the procedures involved in the cases it hears, because it is a quasi-judicial body, I cannot tell the members of that organization what to do.

* * *

[English]

AGRICULTURE

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when will the Minister of Agriculture accept his responsibilities and take the issue of food safety seriously?

Oral Questions

After recognizing its past failures, CFIA, on February 27, implemented new control measures for listeria, however, now the agency has had to cancel the implementation of this new policy due to lack of trained personnel. Imagine government inspectors not fully trained.

Why did the government put inspectors to monitor listeria into plant operations without proper training?

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this whole problem arose because the Liberals cut that program in 2005.

We are reinventing that program. We have reinvested money into CFIA. We have hired more inspectors. They are getting the training they need. Listeria testing is still ongoing. In fact, the mandatory testing for environmental swabbing is being enhanced.

The member should applaud the results we are getting.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have heard enough of the old rhetoric about years ago. The fact of the matter is that I have the internal email—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Malpeque has the floor to put his question. The minister is aching to hear it and will not be able to with this noise.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, the members on that side of the floor think this is a joking matter, but 20 people have died.

I have the internal email here in my hand, and it states:

CFIA Inspectors are requested not to proceed with collection of environmental sampling under the sampling plan M205 for this fiscal year ending March 31, 2009.

Simply put, inspectors are not trained to do the job. After 20 deaths, how could the—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food.

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I cannot understand what the member for Malpeque is braying about. I hope someone has a set of paddles over there. He may need them one day.

We have mandatory environmental testing, which we are reinstating since the Liberals cut it in 2005.

Certainly inspectors who are new on the line require updated training. We have provided the funding for that and extra moneys to hire new inspectors. We are getting the job done.

There is more testing going on to make sure the food is safer than it has ever been. I wish the hon. member would get with the program.

* * *

• (1500)

TAXATION

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government has completely abandoned the innocent victims of this recession, and now, to add insult to injury, the Prime Minister has decided that this is the perfect time to link

arms with Dalton McGuinty to increase taxes on everything from children's shoes to electricity.

Conservative economic policies got us deeper into this mess, and now they are about to make it a whole lot worse.

Why is the Prime Minister scheming with Dalton McGuinty to increase the financial burden on seniors and on Ontario's shrinking middle class?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the decision by any non-harmonized province as to whether or not to become harmonized with the GST is up to that province, as it is for the province of Ontario.

We will have to wait for its budget, which I understand is tomorrow, around 4 o'clock.

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that answer is cold comfort for Ontario families who are already facing the prospect of more layoffs and losing their homes.

Adding taxes to electricity and home heating bills will not make it easier for families to make ends meet.

Will the Minister of Finance admit that he is grasping at straws during this economic crisis, and end the tax grab that he has cooked up with the McGuinty Liberals at Queen's Park?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, whether or not to harmonize provincial sales tax with GST in a non-harmonized province is up to that province, as it is for the government of the province of Ontario.

With respect to this government, we have an economic action plan. We are implementing the action plan. It is working in Canada. It is providing stimulus as we go forward. It is what Canada needs now. That is what this government is doing.

* * *

CANADA ELECTIONS ACT

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today media outlets reported on the Canada Elections Act.

Can the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister inform the House of the details?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, donation limits exist in Canada to protect the political interests of the broad middle class so that never again will the powerful, wealthy elite own politicians, as they did under the previous Liberal government.

However, the Liberal leader is now holding a royal fundraiser where he is encouraging his members to funnel donations through his non-existent Liberal leadership campaign and bust through donation limits.

I am filing a complaint with Elections Canada to protect the political interests of the people who work hard, pay their taxes and play by the rules, not just limousine Liberals.

*Routine Proceedings***PUBLIC SAFETY**

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Red River is rising rapidly in Manitoba and even more rapidly south of the border.

Flood preparations are under way in Manitoba. The river will reach its highest levels since the flood of 1997. At that time, the federal government provided a full-scale response.

Can the government advise the House and Manitobans what it is prepared to do in this potential emergency?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have met with Minister Ashton of Manitoba to discuss this matter already. He is of course taking a close interest in it, as are we.

The good news is that since 1997 a lot of good work has been done to improve the flood-proofing situation in Manitoba.

We will continue to work together with the province to monitor the situation and assess what support will be needed. We are hoping it will not come to that, but we are keeping a close eye on it.

* * *

[*Translation*]

JUSTICE

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we are pleased to see that the government has adopted the Bloc Québécois recommendation, made in June 2007, to abolish the practice of two-for-one jail credit. Another practice condemned by the Bloc Québécois is the conditional release of inmates who have served only one-sixth of their sentence.

Does the government also intend to put an end to that practice, which plays a role in discrediting the administration of justice?

[*English*]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased that the Bloc is endorsing our position. I hope that when we introduce the legislation, those members will be the first ones on their feet to say they want to make it unanimous to get this matter before the House of Commons, get it passed, and get it over to the Senate.

That is exactly what this country needs, and the hon. member's constituents will thank him for it.

* * *

•(1505)

CAMPAIGN ADVERTISING

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister.

Given the serious allegations made regarding campaign spending in the riding of Saanich—Gulf Islands, does the Prime Minister agree that the Minister of State for Sport should do the right thing and step aside from his ministerial responsibilities until the matter is fully resolved?

Hon. Jay Hill (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member can try to redraft the question any which way he wants, but as you ruled yesterday,

this is an issue that is more applicable to Elections Canada than to the government. It has nothing to do with government business.

My colleague, the minister, has had nothing to do with the third party advertising. Therefore, the hon. member should ask his question of Elections Canada or of the third parties themselves.

* * *

HEALTH

Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are concerned about where medical marijuana can be used, about the potential health effects it can have on those exposed to it when it is smoked in public.

Will the Minister of Health instruct her officials to examine this issue and provide further legislation?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am concerned about the issue of smoking medical marijuana in public places. That is why I have instructed my officials to examine the issue and develop some options.

I agree with the hon. member that further regulation is required. Canadians can have confidence that we are taking action on this issue.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[*English*]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

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

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[*Translation*]

TROPICAL TUNA COMMISSION

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with leave of the House and pursuant to Standing Order 32(2), I would like to present, in both official languages, the treaty known as the Convention between the United States of America and the Republic of Costa Rica for the Establishment of an Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission, signed at Washington, May 31, 1949.

Mr. Speaker, with leave of the House and pursuant to Standing Order 32(2), I would like to present, in both official languages, the treaty known as the Convention for the Strengthening of the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission established by the 1949 Convention between the United States of America and the Republic of Costa Rica, signed at Washington on November 14, 2003.

Routine Proceedings

[English]

INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1) I am pleased to present to the House, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association respecting its participation in the visit to Rome, Italy, by the Mediterranean Special Group, July 4 and 5, 2008.

Pursuant to Standing Order 34(1) I also have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association respecting its participation in the 68th Rose-Roth Seminar held in Baku, Azerbaijan, March 6 to 8, 2008.

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●(1510)

[Translation]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS AND NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour of presenting, in both official languages, the first report of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development.

[English]

This is in relation to Bill C-5, An Act to amend the Indian Oil and Gas Act.

STATUS OF WOMEN

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the third report of the Standing Committee on Status of Women in relation to pay equity.

[Translation]

Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to the report within 45 days of the presentation of the report in the House, even though Standing Order 109 provides for a period of 120 days.

* * *

CANADA LABOUR CODE

Ms. France Bonsant (Compton—Stanstead, BQ) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-343, An Act to amend the Canada Labour Code and the Employment Insurance Act (family leave).

She said: Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to introduce this bill at first reading. This bill would amend the Canada Labour Code to allow employees to take unpaid leave from work for the following family-related reasons: the inability of their minor child to carry on regular activities because the child suffers a serious physical injury during the commission or as the direct result of a criminal offence; the disappearance of their minor child; the suicide of their spouse, common-law partner or child; or the death of their spouse, common-law partner or child during the commission or as the direct result of a criminal offence.

It would also amend the Employment Insurance Act to allow these employees to receive benefits while on leave.

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

* * *

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE ACT

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.) moved to introduce Bill C-344, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act (elimination of waiting period).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to introduce this private member's bill in the House. I would like to thank my colleague from Labrador, who is seconding this bill to eliminate the employment insurance waiting period.

We know that the Conservative government does not have what it takes to stimulate the economy. Worse still, it cannot even ensure that families and workers receive their employment insurance cheques. These families are going through a very tough crisis.

The waiting period also hurts workers because they have to wait two weeks before receiving any income, and then additional weeks before they get their first employment insurance cheque.

That is why I think that now is the time to bring this bill before the House. I hope that the government will take the time to consider the bill and read it thoroughly because it is so important to our workers. Not only will it improve their quality of life, it will ensure a better future for their families.

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

* * *

[English]

WAR VETERANS ALLOWANCE ACT

Mr. Bill Casey (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, Ind.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-345, An Act to amend the War Veterans Allowance Act (allied veterans).

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me to table this bill today. The purpose of the bill is to amend the War Veterans Allowance Act to restore access to war veterans allowance benefits to allied veterans who did not reside in Canada when they began serving with an allied force or at any during their service or who resided outside of Canada for any time after 1996.

Routine Proceedings

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

* * *

• (1515)

**CANADA—EFTA FREE TRADE AGREEMENT
IMPLEMENTATION ACT**

Hon. Jay Hill (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there have been rather extensive consultations between all parties and I think if you were to seek it you would find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House, on Monday, March 30, 2009 at 2 p.m., or when no member rises to speak to the third reading stage of Bill C-2, An Act to implement the Free Trade Agreement between Canada and the States of the European Free Trade Association (Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Switzerland), the Agreement on Agriculture between Canada and the Republic of Iceland, the Agreement on Agriculture between Canada and the Kingdom of Norway and the Agreement on Agriculture between Canada and the Swiss Confederation, whichever comes first, the Speaker shall put all questions necessary to dispose of the third reading stage of this bill; If a recorded division is requested, it shall be deemed deferred to the expiry of the time provided for government orders on that day.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

AFGHANISTAN

Hon. Jay Hill (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I also move:

That a take-note debate on the International Conference on Afghanistan hosted by The Hague be deemed to have been designated pursuant to Standing Order 53.1 for Thursday, March 26, provided that during the take-note debate no quorum calls, dilatory motions or requests for unanimous consent shall be received by the Speaker.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

STANDING COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of State and Chief Government Whip, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there have been consultations and I believe you would find unanimous consent for the following motions. I move:

That, in relation to its study on the comparison of veterans services offered by members of the Commonwealth and the G8, 12 members of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs be authorized to travel to Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island in April 2009, and that the necessary staff accompany the committee.

The Speaker: Does the chief government whip have the unanimous consent of the House to propose this motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of State and Chief Government Whip, CPC): I move:

That, in relation to its study on the comparison of veterans services offered by members of the Commonwealth and the G8, 12 members of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs be authorized to travel to Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue, Quebec in spring 2009, and that the necessary staff accompany the committee.

The Speaker: Does the chief government whip have the unanimous consent of the House to propose this motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

STANDING COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of State and Chief Government Whip, CPC): I move:

That, in relation to its review of key elements of Canadian foreign policy, 12 members of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development be authorized to travel to Washington, D.C. in April 2009, and that the necessary staff accompany the committee.

The Speaker: Does the chief government whip have the unanimous consent of the House to propose this motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions between the parties and I believe you should find unanimous consent for the following motion: that in the opinion of the House the government should provide the same level of financial support to the 2009 World Police & Fire Games which are to be held in the Lower Mainland in British Columbia that it provided to the World Police & Fire Games in 2005.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster have the unanimous consent of the House to propose this motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

*Routine Proceedings***PETITIONS**

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Todd Russell (Labrador, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition signed by a number of my constituents in Black and Tickle and Cartwright, Labrador concerning the taxation of the Atlantic groundfish strategy lump sum payments to fishers who sold their fishing enterprises. They are concerned about the unequal treatment that many of the recipients of those payments received under the Income Tax Act.

The petitioners call for a full review of the situation and for fairness for those fishers whose lives were so dramatically impacted.

• (1520)

HOUSING

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present today a petition in support of private member's bill, Bill C-304, An Act to ensure secure, adequate, accessible and affordable housing for Canadians, due for debate in this honourable place in the coming weeks.

The petition contains 42 signatures and they were gathered by community activist, James Chant, who works in the health care industry in my riding of Halifax.

The petitioners call for an increased federal role in housing through investments in not-for-profit housing, housing for the homeless, access to housing for those with different needs, including seniors and persons with disabilities, and sustainable and environmentally sound design standards for new housing.

They ask that this support extend beyond the one-time stimulus investment contained in budget 2009.

RIGHTS OF THE UNBORN

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to present a petition wherein constituents have noted that, under current federal law, an unborn child is not recognized as a victim with respect to violent crimes.

They have noted that a vast majority of the public supports laws that protect unborn children from acts of violence against their mother that also injure or kill the child in her womb and that forcing upon a pregnant woman the death or injury of an unborn child is a violation of the woman's right to give life to her child and to protect her child.

Therefore, the petitioners have called upon Parliament to enact legislation that would recognize unborn children as separate victims when they are injured or killed during the commission of an offence against their mothers, allowing two charges to be laid against the offender instead of just one.

CANADA-COLOMBIA FREE TRADE AGREEMENT

Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition signed by hundreds of Canadians who oppose the Conservative government's proposed Canada-Colombia free trade agreement. This agreement is between Canada and a government that has permitted violence against workers, members of civil society, indigenous people, Afro-Colombians, farmers, human rights activists, labour leaders and journalists.

This so-called free trade agreement, like NAFTA before it, benefits large multi-national corporations without providing real benefits to working families. This trade agreement undermines our credibility as a nation that supports human rights.

The petitioners call upon the Parliament of Canada to reject the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement until an independent human rights impact assessment is completed.

TRAFFICKING OF CHILDREN

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I am submitting petitions that are starting to come in, in support of Bill C-268 which calls for mandatory minimums for traffickers of children under the age of 18.

Canadians are asking that these traffickers have consequences for their actions and that the message be set here in Canada that we do not traffic our children on Canadian soil.

ANIMAL WELFARE

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition on behalf of hundreds of my constituents who are concerned that our laws with regard to the treatment of animals, and particularly their transportation, have not evolved with Canadian society's values.

They ask that the government amend the animal transportation regulations under Canada's Health of Animals Act to be consistent with the findings of the EU scientific community on animal transportation, reduce the transport time and, in particular, enforce the regulations.

CANADA-COLOMBIA FREE TRADE AGREEMENT

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition signed by several hundred Canadians from the city of Vancouver, the beautiful city of Burnaby and the proud cities of New Westminster, Delta, Richmond and Maple Ridge. In short, it is from Canadians throughout the Lower Mainland of British Columbia.

These hundreds of Canadians are adding their voices to the tens of thousands of other Canadians who are writing to Parliament to ask it not to push forward on an agreement between Canada and Colombia.

A free trade agreement would be entirely irresponsible at a time when there is more violence against trade unionists in Colombia than in any other country on the planet.

These petitioners add their names to the tens of thousands of other Canadians to say stop the Canada-Colombia free trade deal.

Mr. Don Davies: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order to seek the unanimous consent of the House to revert back to the introduction of private members' bills.

Points of Order

● (1525)

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent to revert to the introduction of private members' bills?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, may I just say, in defence of my hon. colleague from the NDP, I believe he was standing during the introduction of private members' bills. We saw him quite clearly stand during that portion of routine proceedings but, unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, you did not recognize him.

I am not sure if the members from the Bloc Québécois understood that the member was standing. I would wonder if now we could get unanimous consent to revert to the introduction of private members' bills to accommodate the hon. member from the NDP.

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent to revert to the introduction of private members' bills?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN LABELLING ACT

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-346, An Act respecting Country of Origin Labelling.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I want to deeply thank my hon. colleague from across the floor for his demonstration of grace and collegiality. I appreciate that.

I am honoured to rise today to introduce a bill that would mandate the labelling of country of origin on all food products.

Currently, the system of labelling is haphazard and unclear. Country of origin does not always mean that. It could mean the country of assembly or the country of origin of some ingredients. Families cannot make informed choices about the foods they buy. Perhaps they want to buy Canadian or perhaps they want to avoid food from a certain country for ethical or health reasons or even buy food from a particular country to support producers there. They may wish to buy fair trade or support locally grown products but they currently are unable to make these choices. My bill would give consumers a voice and that is something that all members should support.

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

* * *

FISH LABELLING ACT

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-347, An Act respecting the Labelling of Fish.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to introduce a bill concerning the labelling of seafood products.

My bill would mandate producers and importers to place a label on all seafood products identifying them as either farmed or wild. This is particularly important with respect to salmon on the west coast of our country. Many of us want to make health conscious choices but, when it comes to seafood and salmon, there is little

information available for us to make an informed choice. In many cases, farmed shellfish have a large environmental impact and wild fish is often better for the environment.

This bill is a major step in allowing families to choose what they eat and what they feed their children. Many people want to choose wild fish but are unable to make an informed decision.

A number of organizations, such as Living Oceans Society, which is a great advocate of healthy and sustainable seas, have called for legislation like this. I support their calls and urge all members to vote in favour of my bill.

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

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

MOTIONS FOR PAPERS

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

BILL C-201—CANADIAN FORCES SUPERANNUATION ACT

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. On February 25, 2009, you invited members to comment on whether Bill C-201 would require a royal recommendation. Without commenting on the merits of this private member's bill, it is the government's view that our constitutional provisions and parliamentary procedures require that this bill be accompanied by a royal recommendation.

Mr. Speaker, you have made numerous rulings that bills which change the criteria for a benefit payment or which increase the amount of a benefit payment must be accompanied by a royal recommendation. This is because the change or increase would modify Parliament's previous authorization for payment requiring new spending. Any bills which require new spending must be accompanied by a royal recommendation.

Government Orders

I will explain how these rulings apply to Bill C-201.

Because of the nature of their jobs, many Canadian Forces and RCMP members retire prior to reaching the age of 65. The acts governing their pension plans allow for the start of pension benefits before the age of 65. Pension benefits for members whose age is less than 65 include two parts: a lifetime benefit, which is consistent from the time of retirement through the member's lifetime; and a bridge benefit, which tops up the pension until a member reaches 65 and becomes eligible for Canada pension plan benefits. This is roughly equivalent to what the member will receive under the CPP when he or she reaches age 65.

At age 65, the bridge benefit is eliminated through a reduction formula in subsection 15(2) of the Canadian Forces Superannuation Act, for retired members of the Canadian Forces, and in subsection 10(2) of the RCMP Superannuation Act, for retired members of the RCMP.

At age 65, members are eligible for Canada pension plan payments, which offsets the elimination of the bridge benefit. The total pension amount remains essentially unchanged, but it is received from two sources: the Canadian Forces or RCMP pension plan itself, and the Canada pension plan.

Bill C-201 would repeal the subsections which eliminate the bridge benefit. This would mean that members age 65 and older would collect their lifetime pension benefits, the bridge benefits, and the Canada pension plan benefits. In other words, the bill would result in an increase in pension benefits for members age 65 and older.

By increasing the demand on the Canadian Forces and RCMP pension plans in order to continue paying the bridge benefit to those over age 65, the bill would require new spending.

For the Canadian Forces, this bill would create a one-time lump sum past service liability of \$5.5 billion and increase the ongoing annual cost of the plan, amounting to a \$74 million increase for the 2009-10 fiscal year.

For the RCMP, the bill would create a one-time past service liability of \$1.7 billion and increase the ongoing annual cost of a plan amounting to a \$36 million increase for the 2009-10 fiscal year.

There may be a suggestion that these increased costs could simply be paid out of the current pension account and therefore would not trigger the need for a royal recommendation; however, this would not be accurate. The Canadian Forces Superannuation Act and the RCMP Superannuation Act set out pension accounts and provide that benefits payable under the provisions of the acts are paid from the consolidated revenue fund and the respective pension funds on an ongoing basis. The acts also specify that the government must make up any shortfall.

The transactions and balances of the accounts are reported annually in the public accounts of Canada, and the obligation to pay accrued pension benefits is reported as a liability of the Government of Canada. Contribution rates were established for the Canadian Forces and RCMP pension plans to fund the current benefit arrangements and not the more generous benefit that would be created by Bill C-201.

If employee and employer contribution rates are increased in order to fund the more generous benefit, the increase to the employer's portion would necessarily increase demand on the consolidated revenue fund, and if contribution rates are not changed, demand on the consolidated revenue fund would increase since the acts specify the government must make up any shortfall.

In conclusion, the amendments in the Canadian Forces Superannuation Act and the RCMP Superannuation Act proposed by Bill C-201 would clearly require significant additional and distinct expenditures not authorized by the current acts. The bill therefore must be accompanied by a royal recommendation.

• (1530)

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we understand fully that the bill we have put forward does require a royal recommendation.

The reality is we are talking about citizens who serve and protect our nation overseas and within our borders. I think any allocation of the Queen's resources definitely could be well spent and allocated to the people who serve us. The men and women of our armed forces and RCMP are our greatest Canadian citizens. We should be doing everything we can to assist them, especially on their retirement.

Considering the positive nature of the bill, I look forward to the government following the issue of the royal recommendation quite closely.

• (1535)

The Speaker: I will of course examine the matter and come back with a definitive ruling on it. It sounds as though the proposer of the bill thinks it needs a royal recommendation. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons seems to think it does. I will examine the matter and give a ruling in due course.

In any event, the bill can proceed until the third reading stage. It is only at the third reading stage when there would not be a vote if I make the finding that has been suggested by both hon. members. I will examine it.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

TRANSPORTATION OF DANGEROUS GOODS ACT, 1992

The House resumed from March 23 consideration of the motion that Bill C-9, An Act to amend the Transportation of Dangerous Goods Act, 1992, be read the third time and passed.

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it gives me pleasure to rise today to speak to this bill. I want to mention the fine work that has been done by all members of the House but in particular by the hon. member for Western Arctic.

Government Orders

The NDP supports the general aim of this bill, which in short, aims to provide made in Canada regulations concerning the transportation and handling of dangerous goods. The New Democrats believe it is important to ensure the safety of the public, workers, and indeed all those involved in the transportation of dangerous goods. Once again, this bill brings to Canada an updated and made in Canada set of regulations to achieve that goal.

I also want to point out the excellent work done by several industry advocates and those knowledgeable about the transportation of dangerous goods, including those in the Teamsters union, who met extensively with members of the House to give their expert views in the area.

In the NDP's view, there is one major and serious flaw with the bill, which is that the bill requires everyone in Canada who handles dangerous goods to obtain a security clearance, the details of which unfortunately are not spelled out in the text of the statute. Instead, the criteria that would go into a security clearance are left undefined and are left to regulations. In other words, these are matters that will not be debated and passed in the House and Parliament. We have no idea what these criteria will be.

In the NDP's respectful view, it means the criteria that go into deciding whether someone in the country obtains a security clearance, which will be necessary for the individual to obtain and maybe retain his or her employment, are left to the discretion of the minister and are subject to change. That leads to a very real concern. The criteria that ultimately will be discerned and applied in the security clearance certificates will violate Canadians' long-standing privacy and constitutional rights.

Because of this flaw, the NDP tried to refer the bill back to committee, to get the committee to work on the matter to improve the bill and put it in a position that would address our party's concerns. Unfortunately, that has not been the will of the House. I want to elaborate on why we think this is such an important feature of an otherwise sound bill.

Prior to being elected, I worked for 16 years with a union that represented many workers involved in the transportation industry, many of whom were involved in the transportation and handling of dangerous goods.

I also did a lot of research on the drive to inculcate security requirements in this field. In particular, I became aware of the security and prosperity partnership process which began in 2005 under the previous Liberal government and championed by then Prime Minister Paul Martin. This process was carried on by Prime Minister Harper, and continues to this day.

• (1540)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order. I would remind the member that he is not to use the given names of members of the House of Commons.

Mr. Don Davies: Mr. Speaker, I will gladly strike those references and refer to them as the previous Liberal prime minister and the current Prime Minister.

The SPP essentially comprised executive level and bureaucratic discussions among Canada, the United States and Mexico. These discussions have been conducted outside Parliament and have been

conducted in secret. We have found that in these discussions over 300 separate areas of government involvement have been under discussion with a view to harmonizing these standards, things that involve food safety, consumer protection, water. Almost every aspect of our country's sovereignty has been up for discussion in these talks.

One of our concerns is regarding the essence of the matter before the House right now and of which I am speaking, which is, the criteria that go into security clearance for workers. The United States has imposed draconian requirements upon workers in the United States ever since 9/11. Many of these violate long-standing principles of Canadian jurisprudence and law, including our human rights, our rights to privacy and our rights under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

For example, in the United States it is considered lawful and there is legislation to require workers who are not only involved in the transportation and handling of dangerous goods but in all sorts of areas to provide things like biometric information, retinal scans, fingerprints, hand shapes, and DNA samples. They have been asked and, at the risk of losing their jobs, are required to provide invasive information, such as their sexual orientation, the ports of entry when they immigrated, notwithstanding that they may have been citizens for decades, criminal records, marital status, and educational institutions they attended. This information has also been required of their spouses.

In the United States this information is not only required of these workers but they are required to sign forms that authorize the United States to share that information with any other country in the world. In many countries these workers do not have the same protection and many countries do not have the same respect for human rights that Canada has.

Those of us who have been following the SPP talks for the last three years are very concerned that Canada has tacitly agreed to follow the standards set by the United States in these areas. Because the criteria that will go into the granting of a security clearance are not specified in the legislation, we have grave concerns that these criteria will drop to those invasive standards that have been imposed by the United States.

One might ask what the difference is, that this is about the transportation and handling of dangerous goods, and people who have to cross the border into the United States should be subject to these standards. Here is where there is a major problem. It may be justifiable for these standards to be imposed on workers who transport dangerous goods across the border. That may be reasonable, but it is not reasonable to impose those standards on workers who never leave this country, those workers who work in warehouses and storage facilities in the body of our country. For them to be subjected to the extraterritorial application of American law when they may choose never to leave our country is wrong. It leads to concerns about people's democratic rights where Canadian citizens are subjected essentially to American-made requirements when they have no democratic right or means to influence those standards.

Government Orders

There have been cases where workers in the United States have lost their jobs when they decided to enforce their privacy rights, or they have lost their jobs when some aspect of the information that they have provided has caused concern.

If this were to happen in Canada, if someone were denied a security clearance certificate, how would the individual be able to challenge that?

In this case, we in the New Democratic Party are concerned. Canadian workers should have their right to privacy and their human rights respected.

• (1545)

We do not, in any manner, dispute the requirement to impose standards that ensure Canadians are safe and that the transportation of dangerous goods is conducted by people to protect the safety of the public. However, I would point out that there has not been one instance, not one in this country, where anybody who has transported goods in the transportation industry has been charged with any offence.

It is a great price to pay for Canadian workers to subject collectively the potential loss of their civil liberties when there has not been demonstrated in even one instance across this land, a need for same.

We must jealously and sedulously guard our civil rights at all times. It is easy in a time of peace to stand up for those rights, but it is harder when we are under threat. It becomes even more incumbent upon us as parliamentarians, I would respectfully submit, to stand up for those civil rights, those rights that our forefathers have fought for and that people are currently fighting for across this globe, to make sure that our rights are protected at all times and are only deprived of those rights for good and sufficient reason.

The bill would be an excellent bill, were it to include in the legislation, now debated in the House for all parliamentarians to see, the criteria Canadian workers would have to satisfy in order to get security clearance. Unfortunately, once again, the bill does not have that measure, and therefore, we are unable to support the bill because of that one aspect.

I would encourage and implore the members opposite who have done fine work on the bill, in many aspects, to look at this section. I am sure it is not their intent to violate the privacy and civil rights of Canadian workers, but they should be vigilant to ensure that the bill does not have that effect, even inadvertently.

I want to congratulate the fine work of my colleague from Western Arctic who has been such a strong supporter and protector of Canadian workers, and vigilant in making sure that their rights are taken into account, so that we can ensure not only the safety of dangerous goods in this country, and the transportation and storing of same, but also the civil and privacy rights of Canadian workers.

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

Some hon. members: Question.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

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

Some hon. members: Nay.

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

And five or more members having risen:

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

And the bells having rung:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Accordingly, the vote is deferred.

* * *

[*Translation*]

ENVIRONMENTAL ENFORCEMENT ACT

The House resumed from March 23 consideration of the motion that Bill C-16, An Act to amend certain Acts that relate to the environment and to enact provisions respecting the enforcement of certain Acts that relate to the environment, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to speak today on Bill C-16.

This bill was introduced by the government on March 4, 2009. It is what I would term an omnibus bill, because it amends a number of environmental statutes. It runs to close to 190 pages and beefs up the enforcement, fines, penalty and sentencing provisions relating to offences against an environmental act. Nine pieces of legislation are amended, including the Canadian Environmental Protection Act (1999), the Migratory Birds Convention Act, 1994, the Wild Animal and Plant Protection and Regulation of International and Interprovincial Trade Act, the Antarctic Environmental Protection Act, the International River Improvements Act, the Canada National Parks Act and the National Marine Conservation Areas Act.

Government Orders

We were somewhat surprised when the government introduced this omnibus bill on March 4. What we were expecting from them was not an omnibus bill beefing up the enforcement, penalties and fines relating to offences against the environmental acts, but rather a regulatory framework such as the government had announced with great pomp and circumstance in 1997. Here on Parliament Hill, people were expecting an announcement from the government about regulations and legislation on climate change, an act that would make Canada a contributor to the international efforts to reduce greenhouse gases, particularly as we are leading up to the important conference on climate change to be held in Copenhagen in December 2009. Everyone was expecting the government to come up with a response to this regulatory framework that has been promised since 2007, particularly with a new administration in place south of the border, one that has made a commitment to come to the conference on climate change with legislation aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Also, given the rumours that were circulating in recent weeks, we would have expected the government to announce changes to the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act in order to exempt certain projects from Canadian environmental assessment. However, no climate change bill was introduced. The regulations that were presented to us were hastily introduced last Friday, in a document that was not even published in the *Canada Gazette* for consultation for 30 days, which is normally what happens. No, instead the government used the fast tracking approach to pass regulations directly by cabinet order.

All this at a time when this government prides itself on balancing economic and environmental concerns. It is extremely disappointing to see that the government refuses to honour the formal commitment made by the Minister of the Environment just a few months ago in Poznan, Poland. There, in front of the entire international community, this government said that an economic crisis should not hamper Canadian and international efforts to protect the environment. Furthermore, I would remind this House what the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon, said. He told the international community that one crisis is not an excuse for failing to take action on another crisis. The fact is, measures to fight climate change, or the absence thereof, demonstrate that this government has chosen to favour accelerated economic development, to the detriment of protecting the environment.

• (1550)

This flies in the face of an international principle recognized in Rio in the early 1990s: sustainable development. What has this government done instead? It has decided to go the old “law and order” route by upping the penalties for those who commit environmental offences and bringing in tougher sentences for those who violate the nine environmental acts.

How? A thorough study of the bill reveals that the government has decided to create a new fine structure and add it to each of the nine acts to set different fines for individuals, corporations, and ships.

Under the new structure, minimum fines would be stipulated for serious offences, and maximum fines would be increased. Fines would be doubled for subsequent offences. The bill would also direct

all fines to the environmental damages fund so they may be used to repair the harm done by offences.

Can environmental catastrophes be avoided by increasing fines, sanctions and penalties? Wealthy companies will just end up buying pollution rights because of the government's new structure.

For example, in one particular sector, the oil sands in the west, as recently as February 2009—not so very long ago—SynCrude was charged under the federal Migratory Birds Convention Act and subject to a \$300,000 fine or a maximum prison term of six months for dumping toxic substances into tailing ponds used in oil sands exploitation north of Fort McMurray.

This practice is common in Canada's oil industry, particularly in oil sands operations. As a result, 500 ducks died, and the company was formally charged under federal legislation and provincial legislation in Alberta.

Even if the government increases fines for super-rich companies that make hundreds of millions of dollars a year, what is to stop them from buying pollution rights thanks to the new structure?

The government needs to understand that increasing fines and penalties will not fix the problem. Structural changes to the industry are needed. We have to stop giving tax breaks that help polluting industries.

On the one hand, tax advantages are being given to the tar sands industry via a system of accelerated capital cost allowances. Our tax dollars—we cannot call these subsidies because they are clearly the tax dollars of the people of Quebec and Canada—are subsidizing the operations of a polluting industry. On the other hand, fines are being increased.

• (1555)

Penalties need not necessarily be increased; what is needed instead is to engage in an industrial repositioning so that Canada will be responding to the call by the United Nations to be part of the “green new deal”, which recommends that nations reinvest in sectors of activity that will contribute to repositioning the global economy at a time when an economic stimulus is needed. Rather than continuing to subsidize the oil and gas industry and to provide it with tax incentives, what we need is to follow the example of the economic stimulus program presented by our neighbours to the south. The incentive plan that President Obama has presented includes six times more investment per capita in energy efficiency and renewable energies. That is the example to follow.

But the approach the federal government has chosen instead is to increase fines for major polluters, while at the same time continuing to fund them. Basically, the big winner in the end is that industry, which Canada is helping out. The big losers are Canada's ecosystems and its taxpayers.

Government Orders

It is somewhat distressing as well that we are holding this debate today, 20 years after an event that led to a real human drama: the wreck of the *Exxon Valdez*. Twenty years ago, in 1989, a ship whose hull was breached spilled more than 80,000 barrels of oil into the northern waters off Alaska.

We realize today that penalties and fines are not the way to avoid this kind of environmental damage. We are also aware that environmental damage also creates human dramas, from the experience of the northern communities around Alaska after that oil spill 20 years ago.

Some might say it is time to forget something that happened 20 years ago. But we must not forget it. Why not? Because if there was a very slim chance of such a thing happening 20 years ago, and yet it did, the risk will be greater in a few years, particularly with the development of this northwestern corridor. This northwest passage from Europe to Asia will see far more traffic, given the climate changes that are opening up a new passage to the north. As a result, the fragile ecosystems of the Arctic, pristine as they are today, will be at increasing risk in the years to come.

Some people believe that the *Exxon Valdez* disaster that took place 20 years ago could not happen again. But the truth is that the risk of such a disaster is greater than ever. The Government of Canada wants to extend its sovereignty in the north by extending the 200-mile limit, with these navigable waters and environmental legislation enforcement zones. I have nothing against that, but at the same time, what does this government really want? It wants to make sure that Canadian companies that want to can develop the huge global reserves of natural resources in that extended area. What does that mean for the north? It means that there will be more and more marine activity, more and more oil exploration and development and greater risks to our northern ecosystems.

Will heavier sentences and fines reduce these risks? Penalties are not a bad thing, but we have to work on prevention. We have to make sure that this area of the north can be protected. We have to make sure that the wildlife in our ecosystems can be protected.

• (1600)

That brings us to the sort of enforcement we want to see put in place here in Canada. It is all well and good to want to change the fine structure, but the current laws must be enforced.

I have been a member of this House since 1997, and I have seen a number of environmental laws enacted in Canada, including the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act and the Species at Risk Act. But the fact is that we lack the resources to enforce these acts. We can give officers more power, but there are very few officers on the ground to enforce the law.

Let us look at the enforcement record in Canada. Officials with the Department of the Environment admitted that, on average, they had laid three to 14 charges and obtained one to five convictions a year since 2000 and that the maximum fine of \$1 million provided by law had been imposed only once in 20 years. We are not the ones saying that.

What does that mean? We can increase fines, but if the maximum fine has been imposed only once in 20 years, there is a good chance the system and the new structure will not be enforced in Canada.

Naturally we support the bill and are not opposed to it. However, it does not provide a structural solution to environmental issues here in Canada. What was required, as I mentioned earlier, was the tabling of long overdue regulations on climate change. We must establish greenhouse gas emissions ceilings that will make it possible to set up a true carbon market that we hope to have in future. Canada must go to Copenhagen in a few months with climate change legislation that establishes 1990 as the reference year for greenhouse gas emissions reductions. This country must acknowledge that we must limit the temperature increase to 2°C above pre-industrial levels. That is what scientists are telling us.

To reach this objective, we must put in place absolute targets resulting in a reduction of between 25% and 40% of greenhouse gas emissions from 1990 levels, by 2020. But wait. The government has decided to use 2005 as the reference year instead, ignoring all efforts made since 1990 and setting the counter to zero in Canada. In 2006, Quebec firms had managed to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions by 10% from 1990 levels.

What does that mean? It means that we are establishing a system that will ignore all past efforts and the increase in greenhouse gases in Canada generated by the Canadian oil industry. We must not adopt a polluter-paid approach; we must have a polluter-pay approach.

Therefore, we will support the bill before us even though it is clearly inadequate. We would really have liked a climate change bill that introduced structural changes for industrial commitments. That is how we will truly protect our ecosystems.

• (1605)

[English]

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I, too, rise in the House to speak in support of Bill C-16, but with serious reservations. I look forward to the opportunity to review the bill with the appropriate officials in committee so some of those reservations might be addressed and so I can fully support the bill.

I worked in the field of environmental enforcement for 35 years and had the opportunity to be the first chief of enforcement for Environment Canada. As a result of that work, I count as some of my best friends and most revered colleagues the former chiefs of investigation for each of the regions of Environment Canada, who deserve to be lauded as heroes of the planet. They often go unheralded in our move to protect the environment.

Government Orders

When I taught at Dalhousie Law School, I simultaneously did my master of law. The topic of it, which I would like to donate to the library for everybody's use, was "Effective Environmental Enforcement: the Missing Link to Sustainable Development". What does that mean? It essentially means there is no point of having laws and policies in place unless there is the political will of the government to actually abide by and enforce those laws and policies. The bill is supposed to be about that.

The bill provides for a much welcomed array of expanded tools for enforcement officers, long overdue tools, many of which I recommended to the Government of Canada in 1988. I applaud the government for finally bringing forward this massive bill of almost 200 pages, which is a compendium of amendments of eight bills and the addition of a new bill. However, I have some serious reservations on some of the provisions and the rationale for why those changes are being made, which I wish to address.

When the original Canadian Environmental Protection Act, or CEPA as it is called in short form, was first tabled by the then Hon. Tom McMillan, minister of the environment, he took very profound action and that set a change in environmental enforcement right across this country.

When Minister McMillan tabled the first CEPA, he also tabled in the House an enforcement and compliance policy. This was an historic step. When the minister tabled that policy, he stated to the House:

As strong as the Act is, it is not good enough to have only a sound piece of legislation; it must be enforced. To that end, I am releasing today, as a companion to the legislation itself, an Enforcement and Compliance Policy designed to prevent pollution, to encourage co-operation and to deal harshly with those who would violate the Act.

That simple action of the minister tabling the policy in the House set in motion a change across the country and necessitated all provincial jurisdictions and all provincial departments of the environment to do the same. In order for the provinces to claim equivalency under CEPA, which would mean that they could enforce their laws instead of the federal law, they also had to put in place an equivalent enforcement and compliance policy.

What did that do for Canadians, what did that do for Canadian industry and what did that do for enforcement officers? It basically made a clear statement saying: first, they were obligated to obey environmental law; and, second, if they violated this environmental law, then a number of things could happen. It set forth very clearly what the various enforcement measures were available in the legislation and in addition to the legislation so any violator would know what to anticipate. It also set out clearly the criteria for when each of those measures would be used.

There is one thing that I find missing, very sadly, in the hon. minister's tabling of this legislation. Even though it may include a lot of important measures, he has provided the House absolutely no clarity on how those various new tools will be used. When are we going to go to court? When are we going to use administrative penalties? When are we going to recommend that permits be withdrawn? I encourage the minister to come back to the House, before we finally deal with this bill, and bring forward a strategic document. What guidance will be provided to his officials and how they will exercise the various new powers under that law?

In general, I am rising in support of Bill C-16. There is no one more important in Canada right now for the protection of our environment than our enforcement officers. They are often forgotten and they are often at the bottom of the list for additional funds and tools. It is long overdue that they be lauded for the role they play in protecting the health of Canadians and the environment. I rise in the House as well to commend and honour them and the good work they have done for Canadians.

• (1610)

I have some reservations and I look forward to the opportunity in committee, as I have mentioned to my fellow members of the parliamentary committee, to bring forth the appropriate officials from the Department of the Environment, from Parks Canada, and from the Department of Justice, as well as independent environmental enforcement experts, to talk to us about what the implications are of the various measures in the bill, so that we can fully understand the bill before us.

If we deem it appropriate, we can rise and support the bill and it can be expeditiously put forward and made available to the enforcement officers.

First, as did the hon. member from the Bloc who spoke earlier, I want to speak to the irony of the minister tabling this bill claiming commitment to the enforcement of federal environmental laws.

The irony is that the government has issued a full frontal attack on environmental protection ever since it came to power. There are still no enforceable regulations for greenhouse gases or for the countless toxins or pollutants awaiting regulation under the Canadian Environmental Protection Act or the federal Fisheries Act. Therefore, while it is nice to have these enforcement powers, there is not much to enforce.

The government has opposed Kyoto as a socialist plot. When will it come forward with binding regulations, as my colleague said previously, so that the enforcement officers can actually inspect, validate and enforce those laws, even if they are emissions trading rules?

In the fall 2008 Speech from the Throne, the government brought forward basically the same principles it put forward in its *Turning the Corner* report. Those principles were that environmental laws are simply red tape.

We witnessed just last week the action by the Minister of the Environment to unilaterally change significant regulations that have been in place following in-depth consultation with regulated industry, members of the public, and provincial and territorial governments, to unilaterally amend regulations without even providing a *Canada Gazette* notice in advance, essentially violating its own regulation-making power.

This removal of red tape is going to have a profound effect on the people who live downwind or downstream of these projects that the government is fast-tracking without any environmental impact assessment.

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The concerns have been raised over and over in the House. The sad thing is that just when we finally get some strong environmental laws in place, including the Navigable Waters Protection Act, which has been in place for many decades, the federal Fisheries Act, which has been updated over time, and the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, the government moves forward and simply erases most of the laws that are in place to protect the public. Essentially the government is saying it has no interest in enforcing those important measures. Where is the real commitment of the federal government to enforce environmental law?

In its own *Turning the Corner* report, in its throne speech and in its budget, which has passed, there is absolutely no mention of support for clean energy or renewable power in its proposals for clean electricity. So where are the strong measures that in fact we will put in place to protect people's health and environment?

The 2009 budget was an assault on environmental protection, an assault on renewable power, an assault on scientific research, which was very critical to determining environmental cases, and an assault on the precautionary principle, which is exactly what the Navigable Waters Protection Act is all about and the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act.

What is even more important is that in bringing forward those measures, those changes to our critical environmental laws without providing the opportunity for advance notice and comment by either regulated industry or the public, the very government that says it is getting serious about environment enforcement has abrogated international agreements.

It has abrogated the North American Agreement on Environmental Cooperation. That is the sidebar agreement to NAFTA, between Canada, the United States and Mexico. Provisions of that agreement require, under article 2, that the government has committed not to downgrade any environmental law for an economic benefit.

In article 3, the government commits to advance notice and comment to any concerned party on any proposed environmental policy.

So the government, by doing that action without even gazetting its regulation, by passing it without any opportunity of advance notice or comment, has also abrogated an international agreement with the United States of America, which it claims to be in co-operation with.

What is in the bill? There are a number of good measures in the bill, and there are also a number of significant measures that are not in the bill. I took the time to look at previous reports of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development, which of course includes members from all parties.

● (1615)

The report from 1998 is very instructive. It provided almost 30 recommendations to improve the environmental enforcement system in Canada. There is something very profound and different about that particular parliamentary committee review. For the first time in history they actually brought in the regionally based enforcement officers to testify and to talk about what the real barriers were to effective enforcement of environmental law. Those recommenda-

tions are very instructive and I encourage members to reference that report by the parliamentary committee.

Some of those recommendations, to the credit of the government, have been acted on, some long overdue. The government has expanded the powers of enforcement officers, which is very appreciated by them. There is partial response to the recommendation to publish all enforcement data and to table that information in the House.

Provinces such as British Columbia have been doing that for quite some time. It regularly reports to the public online and provides written reports and tabling in the House so that all can know who is violating the law and what kind of action the government has been taking.

Unfortunately the government has chosen to implement only a very small part of that recommendation—the recommendation, by the way, that has been endorsed by many of the 100 member countries of the International Network for Environmental Compliance and Enforcement, which Canada participates in.

The government has agreed to table with the public and inform them of parties who are convicted. That is not really a great measure, because anyone can find out who is convicted, by looking at the court proceedings.

The measures it has not included are all violations, all warnings issued, all orders issued, all tickets issued, all agreements and all charges. Those are matters that the committee recommended and has not had action taken on.

The government has strengthened penalties, although there is no rationale for the minimum and maximum penalties, and I look forward to that description being provided in committee. I have yet to see the government table any kind of specific rationale from any kind of independent authority, or even its own government, explaining why it is that we have to shanghai the courts' powers to tell them what the minimum penalty and maximum penalty might be.

The maximum penalty has been increased to \$6 million, but who is to say that is sufficient if an entire watershed is destroyed, or perhaps in a situation such as the *Valdez*, if that should occur in the Arctic? Where the entire food source of people in the Arctic or their ability to continue activities would be completely annihilated, it could be more in the order of billions of dollars lost. So I look forward to elaboration of that in committee and later in the House.

There is a broader array of enforcement tools, and orders are a welcome tool. However, the suspension of licences and permits is a complete mystery to me, because that is generally understood as being a provincial-level power. Perhaps that is what the Liberal critic was speaking to, that his party questions some of the constitutionality of the measures. I suppose the minister and the officials will come and defend that in committee.

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The one really critical issue is fettering the discretion of the court. One of the measures in the bill actually fetters the discretion of the court. The court currently in the law has the power when it convicts a party to order that the convicted party actually compensate an affected community, or to actually award moneys to people who have been working to protect the environment and can further that cause. Regrettably, the government has decided that the court may only recommend to the minister those people it may compensate, which introduces some level of ministerial and political interference. It is basically recognized in the environmental enforcement profession as a completely inappropriate interference in the discretion of officers in enforcement. I look forward to the rationale for that provision.

What is not in the bill? A number of critical federal environmental laws are not mentioned, for some reason. The government has decided to consolidate and improve and provide a broader array of powers to a number of acts, but not the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, not the federal Fisheries Act, not the endangered species legislation, and not the Arctic Waters Pollution Prevention Act. It is a mystery to me why on earth those acts are not included. In particular, the federal Fisheries Act is known to be the strongest federal law in existence for the protection of the environment. I look forward to an explanation as to why that is not included.

Among the significant enforcement measures not included as well is a provision that is in the federal Fisheries Act, and that is the right of anyone who initiates a private prosecution or brings forward the charges to receive half of any penalty imposed.

● (1620)

The parliamentary committee had actually recommended that as far back as 1998. I look forward to an explanation as to why they did not carry forward that long overdue amendment.

Again, where is the compliance enforcement policy for all these acts that are included in the bill? We need to understand how these new, innovative tools will be used, in particular the proposed new Environmental Violations Administrative Monetary Penalties Act, which has never been used. There is actually no explanation of how that will work in the array of tools.

Where are the long-promised strengthened standards and regulations for air pollutants, toxins and greenhouse gases? Without having regulations in place, frankly there is nothing to enforce. While the Canadian Environmental Protection Act has been on the books now for almost three decades, very little action has been taken by any of the governments in power to actually promulgate the regulations so we have binding standards that can be enforced.

Where, finally, is the tool to require an assessment of the efficacy of the array of tools? The Government of Canada has participated for the last 15 years in the coming together of the International Network for Environmental Compliance and Enforcement. One of the most important discussions that the enforcement agencies across the world have discussed is the need for clear indicators of effective enforcement action.

Article 5 of the North American Agreement on Environmental Cooperation under NAFTA obligates Canada to effectively enforce its environmental laws. It has yet to come forward with the clear

criteria so that Canadians can determine whether we are effectively enforcing the environmental laws.

Those are essentially the comments I wish to make. I laud the government for bringing forward these improved measures, but I have also raised a number of serious questions that I look forward to having addressed either by the minister in the House on future readings of the bill or in committee.

● (1625)

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, notwithstanding the fact that this is an omnibus bill that amends nine statutes and creates a tenth, I do agree with my hon. colleague in the fact that the bill misses some important pieces of legislation such as the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act and also the Species at Risk Act.

However, we are supportive of the bill subject to, of course, a study by the committee. I also agree and concur that strengthening and standardizing the penalties for polluters across all federal government environmental laws is a good step for the government to take. Requiring that violators pay to repair environmental damage on top of paying fines is an important step to ensuring that polluting is not just part of the cost of doing business.

We have heard from stakeholder groups such as the Sierra Club, which is also in support of the bill, and that is a positive thing.

We believe it is not so much the content of the bill that is of concern, but also the enforcement. I think my hon. colleague also spoke about this issue.

While I am in support of the bill and we on this side support the bill, I agree with my colleague, and maybe she can comment further on the government's inability to enforce the provisions that is the real problem when it comes to the breach of environmental laws.

Ms. Linda Duncan: Mr. Speaker, the serious missing measure was the one that I mentioned at the beginning. It is now recognized in Canada in hopefully both federal agencies and provincial agencies that it is not enough simply to enact a law. We also have to table what our strategy and our policy will be and how we are going to use those tools.

Part of that strategy is, do we have sufficiently trained environmental prosecutors? Have they been assigned specifically to bring those cases to court? Is the Department of Justice giving priority to those cases the same as it is to criminal provisions? Have we given sufficient resources to our enforcement officers? Do we have sufficient officers in the field and are they properly trained? Also, have we trained and worked with our customs officers?

A lot of the federal laws deal with the transport back and forth of contaminated fuels, and so forth. What has happened is that, under NAFTA, greater priority has been given to expediting goods across the border, instead of 20 years ago, where attention was given to actually inspecting the goods to make sure that contaminated fuel did not come into Canada.

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There are many measures included. It is not enough simply to table a law. We need to know where is the political will to enforce that law and what is going to be happening with the Department of Justice.

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, first, I would like to thank the member for Edmonton—Strathcona thoughtful and very knowledgeable remarks. In her speech, she has shown from her years and decades of experience in dealing with environmental regulation and environmental law, both in a government setting and in an NGO setting, just how much she contributes to the bill and what lacks in the bill. I appreciate her forthrightness in establishing that the elements of the bill are important, but details and issues need to be looked at committee.

One of the points she made was about the lack of resources for enforcement officers. Clearly, if we have good enforcement regulations, that is one thing, but if we do not have the resources to carry it out, then that is a huge problem. She mentioned that this was a serious deficiency, given the years of cutbacks we have seen in enforcement and the resources.

Could she outline for us some of the measures she would like to see to provide the resources that would ensure enforcement takes place so it is not only the letter of the law, but we have the resources to deal with it?

• (1630)

Ms. Linda Duncan: Mr. Speaker, when we develop a new law, it is important that we think in tandem with what regulations we need to implement that law, what kind of staff we need to enforce that law and what kind of training they need. I look forward to the government explaining the process it has in place to move forward on these new provisions.

We have been told that moneys are being provided to hire and put forth a lot more enforcement officers, but there is some confusion in the materials provided as to whether that has already happened or if there will be additional enforcement officers.

What has not been clarified yet, and I know this from being within the department, is this. It is one thing to have further environmental investigators who go out to investigate and bring forth cases to go to court. It is another thing to call them enforcement officers when they are inspectors. What is not really clear is whether those inspectors are being hired to enforce the law as opposed to being free technical advisers to the industry.

We also do not know if the resources will be available as well to the Department of Justice to prosecute these cases. In past years there has been a problem where the Department of the Environment has been required to pay to bring forward the cases and did not have appropriate resources to do that and therefore did not proceed.

I look forward to further details on how the government is planning to proceed and financing, but also to give free rein to the regional enforcement officers without interference.

Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will ask the hon. member about two very minor components of the bill, but components nonetheless.

In more than one section of the bill there is a provision that the regulations involved are not statutory instruments. The effect of that

provision would be there would not be any pre-publication, any consultation, pre-enactment review of the regulations. We understand why that is the case in many respects because the order involved would have to be put in place quickly.

By saying in the bill that these orders, a compliance order, for example, would not be a statutory instrument, it precludes Parliament itself from reviewing these instruments after they are made and put in place, reviewing, as Parliament normally does for all regulations. That is the first thing.

Does the hon. member have any view about whether or not that is appropriate? I do not think it is. I think the Department of Justice, in drafting the bill, has either forgotten about Parliament or wishes to do an end run around Parliament.

Does she have any thought about the relatively new process in the bill where a fine for an infraction is not set out in the act? It is actually set out by way of a formula in the regulations, so in the end the government ends up setting the fine, not the statute.

Ms. Linda Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I can only answer the member's first question very generally because I have not had an opportunity to absorb it.

He points out that there are a lot of fine words or points in this proposed bill that are not yet described fully.

If there is a case where there is an order by an enforcement officer, I believe the enforcement officer should have the freedom to issue it. Those are usually being issued because time and circumstances require that action be taken immediately. The need to protect the environment and take precautionary action overrules any need for the House to review that order.

If there is a case of, perhaps, a ministerial order that is more broad-based, I fully agree with the member that there is great need to have it reviewed by the House and certainly at least by a committee or a regulations making committee.

• (1635)

The hon. member raises a very good point about inappropriate infusion of ministerial discretion. I am finding even more significant inappropriate interventions by the minister. I find it quite reprehensible that the government would propose a provision whereby a judge would make a recommendation to a minister, who will exercise political discretion to decide whether a community can have compensation. I have never heard of such a provision.

The measures the hon. member has suggested are exactly the provisions we need to have reviewed by the committee and to discuss whether it is appropriate that the bill go forward in its present form.

We have already seen the minister's propensity to short-circuit the regulations act, which requires there be gazetting, advance notice and opportunity to consult. If we are going to have that kind of procedure in making the regulations, I am very concerned. I share the hon. member's concern.

Government Orders

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for St. Paul's, Chalk River Nuclear Facilities; the hon. member for Brossard—La Prairie, Social Housing.

[English]

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Yukon.

A former Conservative premier addressed a crowd of reporters and residents in Walkerton, Ontario, where hundreds of people suffered from drinking E. coli. contaminated water and seven people died. He said, "We have a terrible tragedy here".

Unfortunately, all could have been prevented. Dr. Murray McQuigge, the local medical officer of health, revealed that the Walkerton Public Utilities Commission knew there was a problem with the water several days before it told the public. Illnesses could have been prevented, in part, if cuts to the environment ministry and deregulation of water testing had not occurred.

The environment minister reported that, "If there is something positive that can ever come out of an event like this, it is that changes be made to ensure that it doesn't ever happen again".

Bill C-16 is an important step to improving the health of Canada's environment. Specifically, it would help enhance and protect environmental health and human health by standardizing and strengthening penalties across all of the federal government's environmental laws and by requiring that violators pay to repair environmental damage beyond paying fines, ensuring that polluting was not just part of the cost of doing business.

The Conservative Minister of the Environment proudly reports:

In the election campaign, our government committed to bolster the protection of our water, air and land through tougher environmental enforcement that holds polluters accountable. Today we delivered...the new measures will provide a comprehensive, modern and effective enforcement regime for Canada.

What assurances can the government provide regarding its ability to implement the provisions? Also, will the newly hired and trained officers be sufficient to do the work that is required to enforce Canada's environmental laws? What accountability measures will be put in place to ensure enforcement? How truly comprehensive is the proposed bill if it fails to address our most pressing environmental issue, namely climate change?

Global warming will in fact impact the very items that Bill C-16 aims to safeguard. As a result of climate change, we are already seeing changes in caribou, polar bear and seal populations, changes in permafrost and impacts on traditional ways of life. In the future, climate change will potentially impact migratory birds, their flyways and possibly the spread of avian influenza.

Our country's current climate policies are widely criticized in Canada by external research bodies, parliamentarians, the public and the scientific community.

In contrast, President Obama is recognized for taking global warming seriously and is listening to scientists who tell us that the

situation is outdistancing our efforts to confront it. The President said:

We all believe what the scientists have been telling us for years now that this is a matter of urgency and national security and it has to be dealt with in a serious way.

President Obama has since called for hard caps on global warming, cleared the way for tougher clean car standards, declared an intention to play a constructive role in international climate negotiations and introduced a serious green stimulus package.

The Prime Minister, however, believes that the differences between the American and Canadian regimes are not near as stark as some would suggest. He said:

When I look at the President's platform the kind of targets that his administration has laid out for the reduction of greenhouse gases are very similar to ours.

Climate Action Network Canada and US Climate Action Network, representing 100 leading organizations in Canada and the United States that are working together to prevent catastrophic climate change and promote sustainable and equitable solutions, argue that Canada needs to overhaul its current approach and raise its level of ambition to have a credible climate change policy.

● (1640)

Today the issue of climate change is more pressing than ever as considerable time lags in the climate system mean that many impacts of climate change are already locked in over the coming decades. Today's buildings, power plants and transportation systems continue to produce increased emissions, meaning an even greater delay and increased warming in the future. Moreover, as some of the climate risks materialize, the economic costs will be much steeper than those from the current financial crisis.

Canadians want action on climate change, as recognized by a former Conservative environment minister who said back in 2007, "Canadians want action, they want it now".

As testament to this fact, during earth hour 2008, Canada had almost 10 million people participating in 150 cities from coast to coast. People in cities across Canada held candlelight dinners, enjoyed time with family and friends, and went on neighbourhood walks. In Toronto, electricity demand dropped by almost 9%, the equivalent of taking 260 megawatts off the grid or approximately 5.8 million light bulbs.

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This year earth hour falls on Saturday, March 28, with more than 1,500 cities across 80 countries committing to reduce electrical consumption, with more coming onboard every day. Canada currently ranks second for the most city sign ups at 258.

Canadians understand that earth hour will not reverse or reduce climate change but, rather, will raise awareness about the climate challenges the world is facing. Earth hour presents a good opportunity for people to show their federally elected representatives that they support actions to fight climate change.

However, it is worth noting that most Canadian provinces have emission reduction targets that are much more ambitious than that of the federal government. Canada's largest province, Ontario, is moving ahead with the cap and trade system based on absolute caps aimed at meeting its reduction target of 15% below 1990 levels by 2020, with an implementation date of January 1, 2010.

The Conservative government must protect our atmosphere. It must build partnerships with business, consumers, local authorities and the energy sector. It must find abatement solutions and reduce fossil fuel subsidies that currently put a premium rather than a penalty on CO₂ emissions.

Many policy instruments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions have significant implications for government revenues and expenditures. An OECD analysis provides examples of ambitious emission reductions that can be achieved through auctioned tradable emission permits, with estimates of fiscal revenues reaching over 5% of world GDP by 2050. Although we are talking about domestic policy, it is important to note that tackling climate change requires strong collective action worldwide.

Indications of climate change must be treated with the utmost seriousness and with the precautionary principle uppermost in parliamentarians' minds. Extensive climate changes may alter and threaten the living conditions of much of humankind. They may lead to greater competition for the earth's resources and induce large-scale migration. Such changes will place particularly heavy burdens on the world's most vulnerable countries.

In closing, my appeal to the government would be to please listen and reflect on the voices of science and Canadians regarding climate change and, most importantly, to act with determination and a sense of urgency.

• (1645)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, all the speakers have mentioned or questioned the government's ability to or interest in actually enforcing these new enforcement powers it is putting in.

There was a perfect example yesterday when the government was lambasted at the transport committee for adding 500,000 square kilometres, an area the size of Saskatchewan, in enforcement abilities, yet not a penny in the budget of the money needed to add the enforcement.

In fact, a submarine this summer was in the Canadian Arctic and sighted a few days after an explosion. The government was not there, but when officials went there, they did an investigation and they will not tell Canadians what they found out. I think that Canadians would want to know about that submarine and that explosion.

I would like to ask the member about these added enforcements in this bill and several other bills, but no actual boots on the ground to do them, no money for enforcement officers, nor the freedom and the will for those officers to actually make these enforcements.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Mr. Speaker, enforcement is key and these are the key questions we must ask the government. It talks about investing, I believe, \$43 million. It has newly hired and trained officers, but will they have the autonomy and the power to enforce Canada's environmental laws? A key question at committee will have to address the accountability measures that would be put in place to ensure enforcement.

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for her inspirational, rousing, accurate and fantastic speech in defence of doing something real about climate change.

As the hon. member will recall, in the last Parliament the Liberals supported and helped to incorporate and develop the amendments in committee to make that bill better. That bill is back in terms of the climate change accountability bill. The vote will be next Wednesday. I would like to ask the hon. member whether she and other members of the Liberal Party will be voting for the bill that they voted for in the last Parliament?

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Mr. Speaker, climate change is the most pressing environmental issue we have. I am proud of our party's record on climate change. We respect the science of climate change. We are the party that ratified Kyoto. I believe if there are questions regarding climate change and the actions taken, they must be addressed to that side of the House.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the question again. If the hon. member firmly believes in the need for binding regulations and binding laws, so that we can actually have laws enforced, will she stand and vote in favour of Bill C-311, which actually provides for accountability of the government in delivering a prescribed agenda for climate change?

• (1650)

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Mr. Speaker, it is really important to look at Bill C-311. It is important that Canada gets this right, that we look at the reductions in emissions. Do we go back to Kyoto? Do we get ahead of what is being done internationally? It is an incredibly important bill and it has to be looked at very carefully.

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We as a country have to get this right. We have to get it right for our people. We have to get it right for our various sectors. We have to get it right for agriculture, for forestry.

We are already seeing tremendous changes here in Canada. For example, our Great Lakes levels are going down. We have increasing drought on the Prairies. We have shifting migration in fish. We are seeing an increase in heat waves, for example. Currently, about 200 people die each summer as a result of heat waves. By 2050, 1,200 people may die as a result of a heat in Toronto alone.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to discuss Bill C-16, an omnibus bill we are referring to as the environmental enforcement act. I need not tell members in the House that omnibus bills are sweeping in scope. This bill touches on almost any legislation dealing with environmental protection that has a regime for enforcement and levying fines.

The announcement of this bill seemed to be more about re-announcing old funding commitments from budgets 2007 and 2008, including \$22 million for hiring 106 new enforcement officers and \$21 million to implement environmental enforcement measures, than about the legislation itself.

As I mentioned earlier, I have concerns with the government's commitment to making sure these new enforcement officers will have the capacity to find infractions and enforce environmental regulations. However, I know these will be brought up by fellow members in this debate.

I am here to discuss the provisions of this bill that alter the Antarctic Environmental Protection Act. I am certain that some Canadians will wonder why legislation originating in Ottawa features any mention of the Antarctic. The reason is our commitment to international law.

Since December 2003, people visiting the Antarctic through Canadian expeditions or tours and those operating Canadian aircraft and vessels are required to apply for a permit from the Government of Canada except when granted permission by another country that is party to the Madrid protocol.

The Madrid protocol came into force in 1998, designating the Antarctic as a natural reserve devoted to science and peace. It is also known as the Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty and its purpose is to ensure that countries regulate the activities of their nationals in the Antarctic. The protocol has been ratified by 30 countries. The amendments proposed in this bill update, clarify and strengthen regulations put in place six years ago when the Liberals were on the other side of the House.

This is truly international legislation. One can review the equivalent Antarctic environmental protection legislation of other Madrid protocol countries, including the U.K., Australia and New Zealand, and note they share many similarities. Much can be learned about Canada's own Arctic through the study of the Antarctic. Recent discoveries indicate there are species that inhabit both northern and southern polar regions. Arctic seas share at least 235 species in common. These include migrating birds and grey whales, but more commonly small and elusive sea life including crustaceans, snails and worms.

In order to learn all we must learn about the effects of climate change on polar regions. We must study both poles and as legislators do all we can to facilitate scientific cooperation between the people who have a passion to carry out this research. Last month, I was pleased to see the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development announce a memorandum of understanding between Canada and the United Kingdom that will see Canadian researchers gain access to British research stations in the Antarctic in exchange for our granting access to British researchers to our stations in the far North.

These opportunities for international cooperation through science provide our researchers with venues to share their knowledge and learn from their colleagues while gaining critical data needed to understand climate change. The Antarctic blocks up about 90% of the world's freshwater. We continue to learn of studies indicating that Antarctic ice sheets are even more sensitive to subtle elevations in greenhouse gases and temperatures than we originally thought they were. We have all seen the maps and models illustrating the dramatic effects that higher sea levels will have on the coastlines and even on the earth's rotational axis.

That is one of the reasons for my private member's bill. The government should look at providing a provision in the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act to allow for environmental refugees because the predictions are that there will be over 50 million refugees coming as a result of climate change. This is all to say that going to the Antarctic to research is not about romantic adventure. It is about the research that humanity's future depends on.

I would also like to note at this time that a Yukon company won a world contract put out by the British to build an airport in the Antarctic and did an excellent job if anyone is looking for further work in the Antarctic. I hope this will serve as an incentive to the government to follow through with its commitments to building research capacity in the Arctic and to do all it can to expedite the creation of the much-discussed new high Arctic research centre.

I noticed that the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development was in Iqaluit last month and that he announced that the federal government will spend \$2 million on a feasibility study to help the government figure out where to build the research station: Pond Inlet, Cambridge Bay or Resolute Bay. I understand the study will take a year and a half to complete.

• (1655)

All I can say is that I hope the three communities, along with all the other northern communities, will receive their share of attention and support from the government regardless of which is selected for the research centre.

I also appreciate the money to upgrade existing northern research infrastructure, which I and my colleagues pushed very hard in the House for the government to come up with.

Government Orders

What the government has been harshly criticized for are the dramatic cutbacks in funds for the researchers themselves. As has been stated in the House, we will have a bunch of research facilities in the north that will be empty because they do not have access to sufficient government funds to continue their research.

As I have already noted in this House, the PEARL research centre in Eureka is in jeopardy. The Canadian Foundation for Climate and Atmospheric Sciences received no new funding from the Government of Canada in the last budget. Without new funding, CFCAS will be shut down by this time next year taking 24 research networks that are focused on climate change with it. This is insanity.

Does the government not see money spent on climate change research as money well spent? Do we want the opposite of what common sense says we should do? Does the government believe that drought is an important issue facing Canada?

If so, how can the government cut the funding for the Canadian Foundation for Climate and Atmospheric Sciences that funds the only comprehensive drought study ever conducted in Canada? The drought research initiative, DRI, is focusing on drought in Canada, on the prairies, and, in particular, is contributing to the better prediction and adaptation to this crisis.

Does the government support greater resiliency to natural disasters in Canada? How can the government cut funding for CFCAS projects that examine a range of extreme events, such as storms, floods and droughts, over many parts of the country? These projects include DRI and the storm studies in the Arctic, STAR, research networks. DRI was discussed above and STAR is the first ever research project to examine eastern Canadian storms.

Both STAR and DRI are working closely with those affected by natural disasters to increase their resiliency. This includes farmers, water managers, Arctic communities, et cetera. I implore the government to reinstate this critical funding for Arctic and other climate change research.

I find the government all too willing to announce initiatives in support of the north through highly visible events that capture the attention of the media for a day or two and raise the hopes of the people in the north only to go silent for months with no news of progress. We can take our pick, whether it is the deep-sea port at Nanisivik, three icebreakers or supply ships with reinforced hulls or enacting a respectable climate change policy, members of the government are experts at staging photo ops but it is too slow to deliver.

For the benefit of my colleagues and those Canadians with direct interests in Antarctic research, I would like to take some time to outline a few of the changes this bill would bring.

The provisions would ensure that any polluter, whether the person is Canadian or the person is in the Antarctic under a Canadian licence, would be held responsible under Canadian law. This demonstrates that Canada is capable of meeting its international treaty commitments.

Of course, it is not only Canadian scientists who travel to the Antarctic but increasingly large tour groups organized in Canada and elsewhere.

The reasons for the legislation and amendments are summed up well in clause 50.9, which states:

The fundamental purpose of sentencing for offences under this Act is to contribute to respect for the law protecting the Antarctic environment and dependent and associated ecosystems in light of the global significance of the Antarctic and the Treaty....

The section goes on to state that the sentencing measures within the act exist to deter the offender, denounce unlawful conduct that puts the environment at risk and to reinforce the "polluter pays" principle by ensuring the offenders are held responsible for effective cleanup and restoration. These were always the objective of the legislation but they are now spelled out in their own section.

I also would point out that sections 30, 32 and 37 would now offer enforcement officers more discretionary powers to compel potentially offending vessels to follow instruction and allow the officer to seize a vessel, regardless of whether or not it is Canadian, if there are reasonable grounds to believe an offence has been committed.

Section 37 states that a foreign state must be notified that a detention order against a vessel registered in that state was made.

Section 44 states that the offending party shall be held liable for the costs of the seizure, so no need to worry our friends at Treasury Board.

Finally, the last amendment of note is clause 51(2), which states:

If a Canadian vessel or other vessel commits an offence under this Act, every director or officer of a corporation that is an owner or an operator of the vessel who directed or influenced the corporation's policies or activities...is a party to and guilty of the offence.....

I am pleased to see the legislation take a strong stand on corporate responsibility.

● (1700)

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Yukon for the excellent work he has done on the north. I carefully listened to his words on climate change and how it is affecting the north. We need to hear more about what he had to say because those were important issues that he raised. I would like to hear his further comments on this important issue.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, before I do that, it is my sincere hope that the discussion on Bill C-16 and its Antarctic provisions and the recent announcement of research and cooperation with the United Kingdom will help all members of the House keep in mind that Arctic issues and Arctic sovereignty are about more than sensational press releases, such as those sharing the details of Russian bomber flights that did not even come into Canadian airspace.

Government Orders

The best way for Canadians to defend the north is to support and feel kinship to the people of the north and to seek and understand our Arctic through many possible means.

As the member said, living in the north, I mentioned years before it became a hot issue that it was accelerating faster than anyone believed. Those of us who live in the north see the permafrost melting, the species moving, new species coming up, the ice melting a lot quicker and the terribly expensive effects on our infrastructure with ice bridges melting, sewers crumbling and roads crumbling that are not frozen. We are depending on winter ice roads. As an example, we had to rent the biggest helicopter in Russia for one of our diamond mines at a huge expense because the ice bridge melted too quickly.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the comments by the hon. member for Yukon and I share his love of the north. I had the pleasure of living and working in Yukon for three years. I share his concern with what will happen to the way of life up there because of the lack of action in addressing climate change.

I, therefore, put the same question for the hon. member. Will he be supporting the private member's bill, Bill C-311, so that we may actually hold the government accountable for the next actions necessary to address climate change?

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, that is the second member of the NDP to ask that question. I have not yet read the debate to see the pros and cons but I think it is the same as the bill that was there before. If that is the case, we passed the bill before and the government has done nothing about it.

What I would like to see from members on this side of the House, the NDP and all the other members, is what we can do when we pass bills and the government refuses to acknowledge that. When the government members were in opposition they called it an affront to democracy and an insult to Parliament that we would pass certain bills, like enforcing Kyoto provisions or the one we did on the Kelowna accord which was so important for aboriginal people.

We pass motions or bills and there is no reasonable respect for the democracy in the House for those bills. I look forward to various strategic solutions to this problem that we have with the government.

• (1705)

Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do know that the hon. member comes from Yukon, which is, in a relative sense, sparsely populated. However, as I listened to his remarks and to the questions and comments, I could not help but think that even though we are dealing with a bill that deals with insult to the environment, environmental degradation and offences against Canada related to environmental degradation, the biggest villain might be climate change.

I represent a riding in Toronto. Could the member comment on the relative weight that we perhaps should be attaching to these threats, one being the environmental degradation from people relative to the environmental change or degradation that is threatened by climate change? Which is more important in Yukon?

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Mr. Speaker, the member makes a good point. If there is no law that allows us to deal with something, what

is the use of having enforcement? In the north, in particular, the damage caused by climate change is four or five times worse than what is happening in the rest of the world. Therefore, it is very significant for us.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to stand in the House to speak to Bill C-16, an act to amend the Environmental Enforcement Act.

This bill, as has been stated previously, would amend environment bills and create one new act. The purpose of the bill is to stiffen penalties for environmental offences. This is the first step in the right direction.

In the past, the effectiveness of Canada's environmental legislation and regulations has been hampered by the lack of an adequate enforcement regime.

Mr. Speaker, before I go forward, I will be sharing my time with the member for Scarborough—Rouge River.

Bill C-16 attempts to address the shortcomings of the current laws and puts in a stronger enforcement regime. It introduces stiffer fines, penalties and new sentencing powers, and strengthens the government's ability to investigate and prosecute infractions. Canadians do need to know that there is an effective environmental enforcement regime. They need to know that polluters, poachers and wild life smugglers will be punished or will be fined and will pay for it.

Bill C-16 would not only introduce enforcement tools like fines but also sentencing. The drafting and architecture of the environmental enforcement was accomplished in many stages during three successive Liberal governments, and I am glad to see that this has been carried forward.

Climate change and its impact on the population is a well-known fact. Climate change is a global phenomena and is affecting every country.

Today I was at a breakfast meeting with the deputy minister of Jamaica. He stated that the Caribbean Islands are facing the wrath of climate change. He stated that, as a young man, hurricanes were very rare, once in 10 years, and that now hurricanes hit the islands and surrounding area on a regular basis. This has had a devastating impact on their economy.

Countries that rely on agriculture have seen their crops fail badly or totally destroyed. We have seen devastating results in our own country. In Canada, we have had droughts on the prairies and rivers dry up or overflow. Our rivers are being polluted making the water undrinkable, unsuitable for swimming or anything else and for sea life as well. We have seen the impact of climate change on the northern communities. Their way of life is threatened. The snow is melting and the polar bears are in danger.

The elephant in the room, as we discuss environmental enforcement legislation, has to do with what the government is doing to address the issue of climate change. The government has no regulatory framework for climate change.

Government Orders

The government has made claims that its plan would reduce GHGs by 20% by 2020 but the C.D. Howe Institute, the RBC Dominion Securities and 11 independent groups stated that the government's plan will not work. In fact, at the public accounts meeting, the Commissioner of the Environment stated that the government had achieved nothing with some of its tax credits, for example, the TTC tax credit, which was a waste of \$635 million with zero reduction in GHGs, or the Eco-Fund, which is a \$1.5 billion boondoggle. There is no accountability, no help in reducing GHGs and nobody knows whether any of the provinces or territories have drawn down the money or have done anything to assist with the greenhouse gas reductions.

The government still does not have a plan. Its Clean Air Act, which was introduced in the last Parliament, was a disaster. The U.S., on the other hand, under President Obama, is moving forward with an aggressive climate change policy because they realize that the science of climate change is real.

We should just look at the desertification in the Sub-Sahara. In many parts of the world, the impact of climate change has led to a lack of water and lack of arable land which has led to conflict and human tragedies.

• (1710)

Therefore, my question is, where is the government's plan on climate change?

With the evaporation of the clean air act from the last Parliament and its being rewritten and greatly strengthened, the government did not like it and therefore, it censored debate. Now the government is waiting for the U.S., but Canada is a sovereign state. Is there an envoy or timeline?

If we are desperately in need of environmental enforcement, we are desperately in need of a climate change plan. What will we do when the temperature increases? What are the crises that will occur?

The line of questioning that I hope will be pursued when the bill is sent to committee is: what about climate change? Where is the government's plan? What has motivated the government to move in the direction of environmental enforcement without moving to put in a proper climate change plan?

The government has put in an aggressive agenda. We would like to ensure that all parties send the bill to committee for better study.

There are 38,000 to 40,000 contaminated sites at the moment. How will environmental enforcement deal with the pre-existing liabilities for the municipalities, cities, towns and regions across the country that have these toxic sites? Who will clean up those toxic sites? How will they clean up brownfields, blackfields, et cetera? It is a troubling issue and therefore it is important that the government work with the provinces, territories and municipalities to come up with a strategy on how to compensate and restore these sites. Those questions have to be answered.

The registry of environmental offenders, which was referred to previously, is a good idea, but how will the government move forward with it? I hope the government takes its time to do a deeper study.

This bill, which relates to environmental enforcement, will bring in specific improvements to the previous legislation. A new structure of fines will be added, and nine acts will be brought under one act. The bill will bring in minimum sentences. Those are some of the positive things about the bill.

It will consolidate nine acts, bring in new enforcement regimes, new sentencing regimes. We need those regimes, but the root question which still remains is, what are we going to do about the climate change crisis? How is the government going to address these issues in the environmental enforcement bill? How will it ensure that we have in place the proper regimes, compensation and methods to clean up our contaminated sites?

With that, I would suggest that the bill be sent to committee for review and sober second thought so that people can have a proper look at it.

• (1715)

Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member urged us not to be too distracted by the details of the bill so that we are not distracted from what is actually the big gorilla in the room, which is climate change. That is excellent advice.

I want to ask her, in relation to all of the increased penalties and enforcement in the bill, and the index of the bill reads like an environmental who's who because it covers over half a dozen separate environmental protection statutes, if we here in the House should not be too distracted by all of this enactment of new penalties. I have grown weary over the years of all of the shameless posturing and pretence that we as politicians go through whenever we see a problem. For example, on the criminal side of things, we see a criminal act take place in some part of the country and we say we are going to pass a law to increase the penalty and that will deal with it, when in fact I do not think there is a criminal out there who knows what the penalty for these crimes really is. The criminals actually do not know.

I could probably win a \$100 bet if I went around this House and asked what the penalty for an armed robbery is because there would not be a member in the House who would know. If we the legislators do not know what the penalty is for an armed robbery, how the heck do we think the criminal is going to know? In fact, the criminal could never know because the penalty is not known until the judge sentences the person in court well after the event, sometimes too long after the event.

Can we simply enact new penalties and new provisions and hope that it is going to make a difference? Do we not also have to invest in enforcement, in boots on the ground, in policing and regulatory authorities, people who will be there? Do we not have to do that—

The Deputy Speaker: Order. I have to cut off the hon. member because the hon. member for Don Valley East will have to respond to the question.

Government Orders

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Mr. Speaker, I will respond very quickly.

It is all very well to have fines and penalties, but the hon. member is right in that we have to have enforcement. Enforcement is very critical. Boots on the ground are what is required. That is why it is important to send the bill to committee for further study and further tightening.

Mr. Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened intently to the member's discourse with respect to the critique of what I would think is a rather robust approach our government is taking on the gigantic issue of climate change.

In light of her arguments, are she and her party still intending to use a carbon tax as the approach to try to bring some kind of redress to the situation that Canada faces?

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Mr. Speaker, the environmental enforcement bill, as I mentioned, has a lot of penalties. It brings together all the bills so that we have one bill that would make it easier for people to understand. We need to have boots on the ground.

With regard to the clean air act which the government had proposed but which evaporated, the committee, which is what a democracy requires, decided that the clean air act needed to be strengthened. Once it was strengthened it was the responsibility of the government to enforce it, but it did not.

If one does not believe in the science of climate change and if one brings about enforcement in an environmental act, it is critical, in order to be taken seriously that one has to take climate change seriously. It is important to understand the science of climate change.

• (1720)

Mr. Alan Tonks (York South—Weston, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member has talked about climate change, but I would like to get back to the actual bill.

This bill introduces a fine regime, a penalty regime that is designed to impact very strongly on those who pollute. However, fines have been the price of doing business. Is there anything else in the bill that would make those who pollute pay and it would not just be written off as a matter of being the price of doing business?

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Mr. Speaker, we need to understand that the key message here is that we are trying to strengthen and standardize the penalties that polluters will have to pay. It is not only fines; it is sentencing. What is important when we talk about sentencing is that the criminals need to know that all offenders who pollute or aggravate the environment will have to pay.

The Deputy Speaker: Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Deputy Speaker: The question is on the motion.

[*Translation*]

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

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

Some hon. members: Nay.

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

And five or more members having risen:

The Deputy Speaker: Call in the members.

And the bells having rung:

The Deputy Speaker: Accordingly the vote is deferred until later this day.

[*English*]

SUSPENSION OF SITTING

The Deputy Speaker: Is it agreed that we suspend the sitting until 5:30 p.m.?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(The sitting of the House was suspended at 5:24 p.m.)

SITTING RESUMED

(The House resumed at 5:30 p.m.)

* * *

• (1730)

TRANSPORTATION OF DANGEROUS GOODS ACT, 1992

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-9, An Act to amend the Transportation of Dangerous Goods Act, 1992, be read the third time and passed.

The Deputy Speaker: It now being 5:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at the third reading stage of Bill C-9.

Call in the members.

• (1750)

Before the taking of the vote:

The Deputy Speaker: Before I put the question to the House, I would like to draw the attention of the House to some of the honourable veterans from the Canadian Armed Forces who are with us this evening. I would like to welcome them to the House of Commons.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

• (1755)

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

(*Division No. 41*)

YEAS

Members

Abbott
Aglukkaq
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Ambrose

Ablonczy
Albrecht
Allison
Anders

Government Orders

Anderson
 Andrews
 Asselin
 Bagnell
 Beaudin
 Bellavance
 Benoit
 Bevilacqua
 Bigras
 Blaney
 Bonsant
 Boucher
 Bourgeois
 Breitzkreuz
 Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
 Brown (Barrie)
 Brunelle
 Cadman
 Calkins
 Cannis
 Cardin
 Carrier
 Casson
 Clarke
 Cotler
 Cummins
 D'Amours
 Day
 Dechert
 Demers
 Desnoyers
 Dhalla
 Dorion
 Dreeshen
 Duceppe
 Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
 Dykstra
 Eyking
 Fast
 Flaherty
 Folco
 Fry
 Galipeau
 Garneau
 Glover
 Goodale
 Gourde
 Guarnieri
 Guimond (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)
 Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord)
 Hall Findlay
 Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
 Hiebert
 Hoepfner
 Jean
 Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
 Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
 Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
 Kerr
 Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
 Laframboise
 Lalonde
 Lavallée
 LeBlanc
 Lemay
 Lessard
 Lobb
 Lunn
 MacKay (Central Nova)
 Malhi
 Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)
 McCallum
 McGuinty
 McLeod
 Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)
 Menzies
 Minna
 Moore (Fundy Royal)
 Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)
 Murray
 Nicholson
 O'Connor
 Ohrai
 Oliphant

André
 Ashfield
 Bachand
 Bains
 Bélanger
 Bennett
 Bernier
 Bezan
 Blackburn
 Block
 Bouchard
 Boughen
 Braid
 Brison
 Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
 Bruinooogé
 Byrne
 Calandra
 Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)
 Cannon (Pontiac)
 Carrie
 Casey
 Chong
 Clement
 Crombie
 Cuzner
 Davidson
 DeBellefeuille
 Del Mastro
 Deschamps
 Devolin
 Dion
 Dosanjh
 Dryden
 Dufour
 Duncan (Etobicoke North)
 Easter
 Faille
 Finley
 Fletcher
 Foote
 Gagnon
 Gallant
 Gaudet
 Goldring
 Goodyear
 Grewal
 Guay
 Harper
 Hawn
 Hill
 Holland
 Jennings
 Kania
 Kennedy
 Kent
 Komarnicki
 Laforest
 Lake
 Lauzon
 Lebel
 Lee
 Lemieux
 Lévesque
 Lukiwski
 Lunney
 MacKenzie
 Malo
 Mayes
 McColeman
 McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
 Ménard (Hochelaga)
 Mendes
 Miller
 Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
 Mourani
 Murphy (Charlottetown)
 Nadeau
 Norlock
 O'Neill-Gordon
 Oda
 Ouellet

Paillé
 Patry
 Pearson
 Plamondon
 Pomerleau
 Preston
 Rae
 Rajotte
 Rathgeber
 Reid
 Richardson
 Ritz
 Roy
 Savage
 Schellenberger
 Shea
 Shory
 Simms
 Smith
 St-Cyr
 Storseth
 Sweet
 Thompson
 Toews
 Trost
 Tweed
 Valeriote
 Van Loan
 Verner
 Wallace
 Warkentin
 Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)
 Weston (Saint John)
 Wilfert
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Paradis
 Payne
 Petit
 Poilievre
 Prentice
 Proulx
 Raitt
 Ratansi
 Regan
 Richards
 Rickford
 Rodrigue
 Russell
 Saxton
 Sgro
 Shipley
 Silva
 Simson
 Sorenson
 Stanton
 Strahl
 Szabo
 Tilson
 Tonks
 Trudeau
 Uppal
 Van Kesteren
 Vellacott
 Vincent
 Warawa
 Watson
 Wong
 Wrzesniewski
 Young

NAYS

Members

Allen (Welland)
 Ashton
 Bevington
 Charlton
 Comartin
 Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
 Dewar
 Godin
 Harris (St. John's East)
 Hyer
 Leslie
 Marston
 Mathysen
 Rafferty
 Siksay
 Thibeault

Angus
 Atamanenko
 Black
 Christopherson
 Cullen
 Davies (Vancouver East)
 Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
 Gravelle
 Hughes
 Julian
 Maloway
 Masse
 Mulcair
 Savoie
 Stoffer
 Wasylycia-Leis — 32

PAIRED

Members

Baird
 Crête
 Guergis
 Holder
 Paquette

Blais
 Freeman
 Hoback
 Mark
 Thi Lac — 10

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion carried.
 (Bill read the third time and passed)

* * *

ENVIRONMENTAL ENFORCEMENT ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-16, An Act to amend certain Acts that relate to the environment and to enact provisions respecting the enforcement of certain Acts that relate to the environment, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Private Members' Business

The Deputy Speaker: The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at the second reading stage of Bill C-16. The question is on the motion.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Speaker, I believe that if you were to seek it, you would find that this motion has unanimous support.

The Deputy Speaker: Is there unanimous support for this motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

● (1800)

The Deputy Speaker: Accordingly the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development.

(Motion agreed to, bill read the second time and referred to a committee)

The Deputy Speaker: It being 6:01 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*English*]

CANADIAN FORCES SUPERANNUATION ACT

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP) moved that Bill C-201, An Act to amend the Canadian Forces Superannuation Act and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Superannuation Act (deletion of deduction from annuity), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, in my almost 12 years as a member of Parliament, this has to be one of the proudest days on which I am able to speak as a member of Parliament in the hallowed chamber of comrades.

As many know, I was born in Holland. My parents were liberated by the Canadian military and her allies in the liberation of the Netherlands in 1944-45. Some of those liberators are with us today, and we thank them very much for that.

Thousands of military personnel and veterans and their families from across the country, from coast to coast to coast, are watching CPAC today on this very important debate.

Four years ago, three gentlemen came to my office, Mr. John Labelle, Mr. Roger Boutin and Mr. Mel Pittman. These three men served their country with pride, distinction and honour. They came to talk to me about a problem they had for many years. They called it the clawback of their pensions at age 65 and the clawback of deductions of Canada pension disability. When a person is retired or released from the RCMP or military and they collect Canada pension disability, that amount of money is deducted from their force's pension.

The deduction stops today. There is no way we will keep that going.

These men and women are our greatest Canadians. They serve our country, either domestically or overseas. Those who have served in the military and in the Royal Canadian Mounted Police have paid the

ultimate sacrifice as have their families. They deserve to have the respect of the House of Commons. Unquestionably, they serve with honour, dignity and pride.

When they wear their medals, it is with the greatest of distinction. They wear them because many of their colleagues never had the chance since they had paid the ultimate sacrifice. They are here today in spirit to honour this concern. They are asking for financial dignity when they retire at age 65, or become permanently disabled, or can no longer work again.

This happened in 1965-66 with the invention of the Canada pension plan. The government came up with what was called a blended program, which meant the folks at that time were paying into superannuation. When CPP came along, the government indicated it did not want to up the deductions of military men and women as well as all federal and provincial public servants. The government blended the package and said that they would pay so much into the Canada pension plan and into superannuation.

The men and women of the military and the RCMP at that time had no idea this was happening to them. It was done without their consent and without much public debate at that time. They have been arguing since then to correct the deficiency.

There is no question that every federal and provincial public servant in the country suffers what we call the clawback of their pension, except for Senators, judges and the friendly members of Parliament. It is amazing how we managed to escape that in 1966. Members serve six years and can get a pension. These men and women now have to serve 25 years and pay the unlimited liability in order to get that pension when they sign up.

There are two members of the Conservative Party, one from Edmonton and one from the Ottawa area, who have both served their country with distinction, with over 30 years of service. I congratulate those two gentlemen for their great service to our country and thank them very much for being in the House of Commons, as well.

What happened to these men and women is simply not right, and we want to change it. The government has asked why the bill does not include everyone. The men and women of the armed forces and the RCMP have a completely different public service role from all other public servants in the country. I have repeated this before: they have unlimited liability. That means when they sign on the bottom line, they are willing to risk their lives so we and our families can have a good night's sleep. We want to ensure that when they serve us, and after their service, we serve them. It is that simple.

● (1805)

The amount of service these men and women have put in is incredible. I spoke to some of them today who have moved over 20 times in their careers, across the country and around the world. What that meant was their spouses, in many cases, were unable to get a secure job. This meant they were unable to contribute to their own pension plan, which put them financially behind the eight ball.

Private Members' Business

Many of them could not secure the opportunity to buy a home, because they would be gone in another couple of years. Therefore, they lost the proper opportunity to build equity in their homes. They lost that financial ability, and they did it willingly. This was not a surprise to them. They did this knowing that this was part of their service. For that, we thank them because they did it without question. They followed the orders to the letter.

The number one role of government or opposition is to maintain the security and protection of its citizens within our borders. Our number one role is to ensure that when we say we support the troops, we support them long after their uniforms come off.

We heard today that it would require a royal recommendation in order to get this passed. I know we have the support of the opposition Liberals and the Bloc Québécois and my colleague from Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, who has moved a motion on this very same bill and I thank him very much for that.

We believe, if the government is serious about supporting its troops long after their uniforms come off, then that royal recommendation should be automatic. However, if the government is concerned about the cost of this, I have broken it down. I have looked at this for over four years and I have discussed this with pension experts across the country.

There other thing the men and women pay into, which they do not get to collect afterwards, is the employment insurance program. These men and women pay for 20, 30 years into a plan that it is legislated but they cannot collect. Guess what? Members of Parliament do not pay into EI. Why? Because we do not get to collect it. The men and women of the armed forces and the RCMP have to pay into EI, but they do not get to collect it. That is going to stop today. It is unfortunate they have to keep doing that.

The financial solution is quite simple. The government is worried about the additional cost to the taxpayer. There would be no additional cost. If they are allowed to keep both of their moneys at age 65 or on disability, they would receive less OAS and GIS. Including OAS and GIS in the argument that they do not lose any money is simply incorrect. Those payments come from their general revenues, not from their defined benefit pension plans.

We know if they receive both CPP and their regular pension at age 65, they would get less OAS and GIS. The government would save there. There is nothing stopping the government from cancelling the EI deduction, taking that amount and putting it in the superannuation. That would cover it off.

These men and women have done yeoman's work, if I may use the military term, in serving their country. Again it is time for us to serve them. They deserve to know that our troops and the RCMP have the respect of this House of Commons. I know that individually, per person in the House, regardless of where one sits, there is not one person who does not support the troops.

For those who do not support the troops, if you cannot get behind them, try standing in front of them. That is a bumper sticker we have seen. They deserve financial dignity and respect when they turn 65.

I have asked of the government many times if they have received everything they have paid into and it has argued that they have. I

have seen the various emails from various members of Parliament to their constituents. However, that is not true. They pay EI but cannot collect. Also, when they become disabled and collect Canada Pension Disability at an age in their 40s or 50s, that money is deducted right away. They are paying with life and limb, and psychologically in many cases, and they do not receive a benefit if they become permanently disabled and can no longer work.

No veteran and no RCMP officer or their family should ever have to dip into poverty after having served their country. We are going to put a stop to that today.

There is one question I ask bureaucratic officials time and time again and they have yet to answer this very simple question. They tell me there is no clawback, that it is a myth, that what I am doing is wrong. I have a question for them. Everybody in the country who has paid into CPP can take it early, at age 60 instead of age 65, but they automatically lose one-third. They know that.

● (1810)

For example, if RCMP or military personnel are receiving a pension of, say, \$2,500 in superannuation and they take their CPP early, say they would get about \$500, they would get them both. There is no deduction at age 60 from the superannuation. However, when they hit 65, the amount of money they could have collected is deducted from the superannuation.

I ask myself, I ask the government, and I ask everybody, if they did not pay enough in then to merit both of them, why is there no deduction at age 60, but there is at age 65? I still have not received the answer to that, and we are waiting for it, because I would love to hear the argument on that point.

This is the first hour of debate. There is no vote on it now. The bill will be returned to the order paper and then come back within 30 to 35 days.

Members of Parliament should not just take my word for it, they should visit their local Legion, visit the air force and peacekeeping organizations, visit the army, navy, air force, visit the hospitals where veterans are, visit their families, talk to them, and ask them what they want. They should come back in 30 days and tell me and the House what they heard. I am sure they will hear over and over again that the overwhelming majority of military and RCMP officials and their families want the clawback to stop, and stop now. If everybody goes out to their ridings afterwards in our two week break, they will hear very loudly and very clearly that this is what has to happen.

We have already outlined how it could be handled. We have outlined how it could be revenue neutral. We have outlined the respect it would give along with financial dignity, and how it would do that.

Private Members' Business

We do this to the men and women of the armed forces and the RCMP, but we do not do it to ourselves. It does not look good when members of Parliament, senators and judges can escape the clawback, and the men and women who sign on the bottom line to protect us, get the clawback. There is something very seriously wrong with that. We hope to change that very quickly.

I would like to focus on the RCMP, the men and women and what they have done. Anybody who read the book about the RCMP in the thirties, forties and fifties in this country knows that many of those officers served in isolated posts. They were not allowed to marry for the first five years. They were restricted from marriage. After they did get married, their wives, in most cases, were actually asked to perform an awful lot of duties unpaid: cook the prisoners' meals, take the phone calls, take the messages, stand guard in many cases, and never given a penny for their work. In fact, they can never collect it.

The pensions that many of them received from the widows and orphans fund, which is out there right now, was a mere pittance. Many of those wives went into desperate poverty after the death of their RCMP spouse. That was wrong. We want to change that because we know that the men and women who serve our country do not do it alone. They have a partner behind them. No, let me correct that, they have a partner beside them. When death comes to these individuals, we have to make sure that the spouses who looked after them, the spouses who were their partners, the spouses who allowed them to do their duties and responsibilities that we as a government, as an opposition party, and as a country, asked them to do are also well taken care of.

In November 2006 members of the House proudly stood up and voted for our veterans first motion, which had the five elements in it which would have supported veterans and their families in the RCMP. It was voted for by the Liberals, the Bloc and the NDP. Unfortunately, the Conservatives at that time voted against it.

I have one minute left in my discussion. I just wanted to say in this regard, my parents were liberated by the men and women who wear the uniform. There are people being liberated today in Afghanistan, the Middle East and around the world, by brave men and women who wear the Canadian patch. Those people, who stand at ramp ceremonies, watching their fallen go by them will serve long careers in the military. We want to make sure that 30 or 40 years from now they do not have a clawback facing them.

If it were not for the men and women of the armed forces and the RCMP, we would not have a country today. I am asking for financial dignity for each and every one of them. We love every one of them and salute them, and God bless the memories of each and every one who served our country.

● (1815)

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Madam Speaker, no one respects and values the members of the Canadian Forces or the RCMP more than this government and I can appreciate that from both sides of that argument.

The member knows full well this requires a royal recommendation. He knows it is not votable. This is unfortunately largely for show. I do understand and appreciate the emotion behind it. It is very

real. I will not bring up his voting record on veterans because that is shameful in itself.

Members contribute between one-quarter and one-third to their pensions and this proposes to increase benefits beyond what members have actually paid for. The hon. member has alluded to costs, but he does not give a specific number. Does he have a specific number for the one-time cost and the annual increase, and who does he expect will pay for that? Taxpayers, members, or whom?

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Madam Speaker, I appreciate the hon. member's question and I will not say what I would like to say, but I will say that the men and women in the service already pay into employment insurance. We give out billions of dollars to various corporations and everything else, but we are saying to the men and women that we are worried about an additional amount. The average military person under our analysis would receive about \$200 extra a month at age 65 or from the CPP disability. That cost is not very great for the government.

The member is correct about the royal recommendation, but I would hope that members of the Conservative Party would stand and support the troops. I know that they do and will understand very clearly and very honestly that the royal recommendation should come with absolutely no problems at all from the Prime Minister and the Conservative Party of Canada.

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is indeed an honour for me to ask a question of my colleague from Sackville—Eastern Shore, who I am very proud of on this particular initiative. He has been working on it so long. There is a gentleman in my riding, Lindsay Fraser, who is a retired Mountie. He and his friends meet every Monday at the Country Kitchen and trust me, I know about this issue from them first and foremost.

I am proud to support this bill. I am proud to support the initiative by my colleague and I would like him to add a few more comments about the push back from the bureaucratic machine he described earlier. I would like to hear a few more details on what kind of difficulties he has been facing from the bureaucracy itself.

● (1820)

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Madam Speaker, there is no question that the bureaucracy is really, for whatever reason, against all of this. I can only assume that many members of the bureaucracy, who are against this, never put a uniform on, or served their country in the red serge.

If the government or anyone else thinks I am wrong, then 110,000 members of the military and veterans who have signed the petition, including Major Lewis MacKenzie, Senator Roméo Dallaire, the Royal Canadian Legion, the army, navy, air force, and the peacekeepers associations, are also wrong. If they are all wrong, then fine, let us get it to committee and let us bring in the experts and have that honest and thorough debate. Bring in the bureaucrats to explain what happened in 1966. Why them and not us when it came to the clawback?

Private Members' Business

[*Translation*]

Mr. Roger Gaudet (Montcalm, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore on introducing this bill in order to spark a substantive debate on this issue.

The Bloc will support this bill at second reading so that the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs can examine the bill in detail and do justice to veterans.

However, I would like to ask my learned friend whether the department has conducted a comparative study with other western countries to get a big picture of veterans' benefits.

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Madam Speaker, the comparison with other countries is very different because our benefit packages for veterans and their families are different. The member knows very well that we have conducted studies with Britain and the United States on the various packages. Comparing apples to oranges in many cases. But I would hope if it gets to committee, that we can bring in those other examples to see where we can improve on this action.

I say this very clearly. Depending on which way we go on this, someone is going to have to tell Andre Daoust of Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, who served his country, can no longer work again because of his injuries, and gets a Canada pension disability dollar for dollar clawed back from his forces pension. I would like someone to tell him why that happens.

Mr. Paul Szabo: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I believe it would be helpful for those watching to clarify or correct a statement that was made that this bill is not votable. That, in fact, is not the case. It will be voted on at second reading, committee stage, report stage, and even up to third reading if a royal recommendation comes forward. We will see this voted on by this place. I will be supporting it and I know the Liberals will, too.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The hon. member has made his point, but it is not really a point of order.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Wild Rose.

Mr. Blake Richards (Wild Rose, CPC): Madam Speaker, I rise to address the House today on Bill C-201, which proposes to amend the Canadian Forces Superannuation Act and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Superannuation Act. I would like to focus my remarks today primarily on how the changes would affect the RCMP.

Let me begin by saying that I have a tremendous respect for the people who serve this country in uniform. In the House, on the public safety committee, in my riding of Wild Rose and, indeed, on every occasion that I can, I work hard to advocate for the people in law enforcement and to understand and address their needs and concerns. The record will certainly show this.

I fully support them in the great job that they do and join with all Canadians in giving them the respect and support they deserve. I have always been a vocal champion of the RCMP and nothing will ever change my steadfast support for the men and women who proudly wear the Mountie uniform in the service of Canada.

It is therefore important to note that Bill C-201 has nothing to do with how we value the work of the RCMP or that of our brave men and women of the Canadian armed forces. Bill C-201 simply proposes to eliminate the reduction in pensions to retired members of the RCMP and Canadian Forces once they begin receiving Canada pension plan benefits normally at the age of 65.

Some retirees argue that this is a clawback and that they are being denied benefits that they have paid for throughout their careers, but this is simply not the case.

I want to assure the House that retired RCMP officers are in fact receiving the full pension benefits to which they are entitled based on their plan design and the contributions they have made. No money is being clawed back. Statements that retired members paid full contributions to both the CPP and their employer-sponsored pension plan are factually incorrect.

This is a complicated issue, but the problem appears to lie in a basic misunderstanding of how the RCMP pension contributions and benefits are calculated.

When the Canada pension plan was introduced in 1966, most Canadian employers, including the federal government, decided to integrate their pension plans with the CPP rather than stacking the two plans. Integration ensures that retirees would have an acceptable level of retirement income without the burden of paying full contributions to both plans throughout their working lives.

For members of the RCMP, as well as Canadian Forces personnel and other federal employees, this means paying a reduced contribution rate on the portion of their salary that is subject to CPP contributions and with reduced contributions comes reduced benefits. It is that simple.

At age 65, the normal age at which CPP retirement pensions are payable, or earlier if CPP disability benefits are received, the bridge pension paid to former RCMP members from the time they retire to when they become eligible for the CPP is eliminated. In most cases, the total pension income available to a retiree after age 65 is essentially unchanged. The only difference is that the income is now received from two sources rather than the previous one source. It is coming now from the employer-sponsored pension plan and the CPP.

By proposing that the bridge pension be made a lifetime benefit, Bill C-201 would fundamentally change the design of the plan with prohibitive long-term financial implications. Adopting these proposed amendments for all RCMP pensioners would increase the past service liability for the RCMP pension plan by more than \$1 billion and would result in additional ongoing costs of tens of millions of dollars per year.

Private Members' Business

I would remind all hon. members that the RCMP pension plan is the smallest of the three federal plans. The Canadian Forces pension plan would incur a one-time past service liability of several billion dollars if Bill C-201 becomes law and ongoing costs would certainly approach around \$100 million per year. The legislation is silent on how this increase in liabilities would be paid.

These costs cannot be borne by the taxpayer alone, so the only other solution is to increase pension contribution rates for working members of the RCMP and Canadian Forces. Pension contributions would then jump by as much as 30% for current and future plan members. There is no evidence to suggest that current working members would agree to such an increase.

Again, the potential costs of such a measure are sobering. Converting the bridge benefit to a lifetime benefit for all members of the Public Service Pension Plan could cost the government three and a half times more than the cost of providing this change to both the RCMP and the Canadian Forces pension plans.

• (1825)

All members of the RCMP on their retirement are provided with an estimate of how much their RCMP pension will change when they turn 65 and start receiving CPP benefits. Moreover, the RCMP has gone to great lengths to make sure its employees are aware of how their pension plan is integrated with the CPP through written explanations and pension newsletters and bulletins, through information provided on websites and through the annual benefit statements sent to all pensioners and serving members.

The pensions paid to retired RCMP officers and military personnel are already generous by Canadian standards, and the level of taxpayer support for them is certainly substantial.

I have the utmost respect for the great work that our men and women in uniform perform on behalf of all Canadians. They are the people who keep our communities safe and secure, even at the risk of their own lives. Therefore, if there are other ways to recognize the contributions to Canadians and to Canada without taking on an enormous financial burden, I would be most pleased to consider them.

• (1830)

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to be the critic for veterans affairs and to have an opportunity to welcome the many men and women who are here to observe this debate this evening.

Speaking to Bill C-201 is an honour. It is an issue that is important to all of us, but we do have to make it very clear to the Canadian public what we are talking about. The bill has been put forward by my friend from Sackville—Eastern Shore, who has worked on this issue for a very long time. He has talked to a lot of us about it.

Bill C-201 would call for the elimination of the deduction from the annuity for retired and disabled CF members' pensions paid under the Canadian Forces Superannuation Act. They are adjusted at age 65 when the person becomes entitled to a pension under the Canada Pension Plan, as my colleagues have indicated in their comments. It is often referred to as a clawback. However, it is important to note that this adjustment is not a clawback. Rather, the reduction results from the fact that the Canadian Forces Super-

annuation Act is integrated with the Canada pension plan, a feature common to all federal public sector pension plans as well as many private sector plans. As my colleagues indicated, there was an agreement back in 1965 and 1966 to have an integrated plan rather than two separate plans. Bill C-201 attempts to change that.

I think all of us are certainly very much in favour of our veterans and to suggest that any of us would not want to see that they get the maximum amount of benefits possible would be dishonest. We all appreciate and care very much about what our veterans have done for each and every one of us. We want to make sure that we are fair and that they get the maximum amount of benefits to ensure their security, dignity and quality of life. This bill, however, is not a magic solution for our brave veterans, and I think it is important to be honest about it.

As indicated earlier, Bill C-201 in its current state will need a royal recommendation. At the moment, this is an intent. It is putting our issues and the fact that we care about them on the record, but let us be honest about the fact that this bill would be unlikely to get a royal recommendation. I do not want to mislead anyone into thinking that we are being dishonest here. This bill does not compel the government to do anything. It is an intent saying that we care about this issue. Let us look at it and see if we cannot clear up some of the disparities and issues and remedy the situation once and for all. Let us look at what we can do in the future.

It is important that we be honest with the veterans and with anyone who is watching who thinks that Bill C-201 would pass and suddenly everything would be fixed. It does not quite work that easily. We do not know if the specifics of this could be implemented in the tough economic times ahead of us. Everybody has to be concerned about that. That being said, I clearly support the intent of the bill and I will be voting along with many of my colleagues. It is a private member's bill, so we are free to vote as we see fit. I know that many of my colleagues will be voting in favour of Bill C-201 going to committee.

It needs a full costing so that we know what kinds of resources will be required to correct the situation. Hopefully, some of the questions can be answered during the committee process and we can get a better understanding of the agreements that were made back in 1965 and 1966, knowing what the implications are so that Parliament can make a full decision on this. If the choice is to make some corrections, let us do it the proper way. Let us do it through Parliament so that things are dealt with honestly and up front.

Private Members' Business

The Liberals for many years have been steadfast in support of our veterans. We would have liked to see the Conservatives demonstrate more support for veterans in their recent budget, but unfortunately, there was nothing there. The government has had no problem spending billions of dollars on military hardware but it has not seen the opportunity to provide extra resources to our veterans. Veterans across Canada need our help to ensure their dignity and quality of life, especially in the tough economic times that everybody is facing.

My colleagues and I are committed to working very hard on behalf of Canada's veterans and we will strive to protect their pensions and invest in their well-being. There is so much more that I and many in the House would love to do to increase the quality of life of those who fought for our lives. In the future a new Liberal government will take steps forward to protect the most vulnerable.

• (1835)

One of the priorities is the veterans independence program, a fabulous program. In fact, it would be great if we could offer it to all of our seniors. It is a national home care program established in 1981 by Veterans Affairs Canada. It provides clients a way to remain healthy and independent in their own homes or communities. The VIP, as it is referred to, complements other federal, provincial and municipal programs. Services included in the program are grounds maintenance, housekeeping, personal care services, access to nutrition services and health and support services. It is an ideal program to assist our veterans as they get older.

We are calling on the Conservative government to keep its promise to immediately extend the veterans independence program to the widows of all second world war and Korean war veterans regardless of when the veteran died. The Prime Minister made a commitment to do that during the election, but to date there has been no action on that file. I have raised this matter at the veterans affairs committee and will continue to do that.

Another issue that we need to address is post-traumatic stress disorder. The intensity of the compact operation is taking its toll on front line soldiers both in the field and on their return home. The government needs to be proactive in regard to the mental health of Canadian soldiers and veterans. More help is required for veterans making the transition to work outside the military as well as support for caregivers and other family members.

Follow-up with our veterans is needed following their service since post-traumatic stress disorder and other operational stress injuries may manifest themselves many years after their period of brave combat service. We are very concerned about this issue and we will continue to work to ensure that proper services are made available to Canada's brave soldiers.

We will continue to demonstrate our support for our veterans in many ways. After all, it was a Liberal government that drafted the veterans charter which received all-party endorsement in this House. The veterans charter passed in April 2005 under the great leadership of our previous minister. It represents the most comprehensive modernization of programs and services for Canada's veterans since the second world war, and the Korean war veterans were helped to successfully complete their transition to civilian life.

In closing, even though this bill is short on specifics and costing, many of us will be supporting Bill C-201. We encourage our colleagues to do the same. Let us send it to committee. Let us be honest, do a true examination of it, see what the cost implications are, and if we cannot change it for the past, let us make sure we change it for the future.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to speak today on Bill C-201, An Act to amend the Canadian Forces Superannuation Act and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Superannuation Act (deletion of deduction from annuity).

I would like to thank the veterans who are with us today in the House.

First of all, as the Bloc critic for veterans affairs, I would like to thank the hon. member for Sackville—Eastern Shore for introducing this bill.

I have had the pleasure of working with that colleague for several months and I know how committed he is to this cause. I must also mention my colleague from Montcalm, who has sat on the veterans affairs committee for some years and is also greatly committed and dedicated to improving the situation of our veterans.

As parliamentarians, we all have a responsibility to devote our time and effort to ensure that the services provided are top notch as well as tailored to the needs of veterans and their family members, in acknowledgment of their service, accomplishments and sacrifices. They deserve all our support and devotion, for having put their lives on the line to defend values that are important to our democracies.

Unfortunately, we sometimes find our veterans being neglected by the federal government, which seems to have a tendency to mainly think about them once a year, in November. But life goes on 12 months a year and they need our thoughts more often than just in November. It is too easy to give lip service to honouring our veterans and yet not provide them with the services they richly deserve.

The federal government is slow to act and to make decisions that can affect the various services provided. For example, in the 2009 budget the minister submitted to us in committee, the Conservatives have announced various measures, such as maintaining the \$30 million annual investment set out in the 2007 budget, that is for the period 2007-12.

Yet the 2009 budget announces that it will be saving \$24 million by rationalizing internal and administrative resources. What is more, we learned in committee that Saint Anne's hospital will have \$2.3 million cut from its operating budget for the fiscal year 2009-10. Given the scope of the Afghanistan mission, we feel that the Conservative government's decision to downsize is inappropriate and ill suited to the current context.

Private Members' Business

When he appeared before the committee, the Minister of Veterans Affairs said that services to those who use them would not be affected. So, a hospital is being cut \$2.3 million and they are saying that services to its clientele will not be affected. I worked in health care for 20 years, and I know what cuts mean. When money is cut, services are indirectly cut. As a former social worker at an CLSC, I was surprised to see the number of cases and the number of caseloads taken on by people who work with veterans. They have caseloads of approximately 600 clients. That is incredible. I worked in this field, and when we had a caseload of 40 or 50 clients, that was huge. We are talking about 600 clients here. These budgets are being cut, which will also affect our veterans' quality of life and the care they receive.

We know that hospital staff is worried at this time and we will therefore follow this file very closely—I am making it my priority—in order to ensure that veterans do not find it more difficult to obtain the services they so desperately need.

The Bloc Québécois has always defended the principle that we must not abandon our veterans when they return from difficult missions and we will continue to ensure that they have all the assistance and support they need.

● (1840)

The Bloc Québécois is concerned not only about the physical and psychological effects of their years of service, but also about how veterans' compensation is affected when they reach retirement age.

The bill we are studying today is designed to put an end to the reduction of pensions for retired members of the Canadian Forces and the RCMP when they reach age 65.

Because it is always concerned about and sensitive to veterans affairs and wants to see veterans treated fairly, the Bloc Québécois will support the bill at second reading so that it is referred to the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs.

That way, we will be able to hear from knowledgeable witnesses and look in more detail at the various aspects of this important bill we are studying today.

The testimony we hear will give us a good understanding of the provisions of this bill and allow us to look more closely at the problems facing veterans and possible solutions to those problems.

Lastly, the committee study will give us an opportunity to thoroughly examine the potential financial repercussions of this bill on the government.

As everyone in the House knows, the Bloc Québécois has always and will always act responsibly to ensure that the amendments in Bill C-201 meet the criteria for fairness and sound management of public funds.

A committee review of Bill C-201, as introduced by my colleague, would be a logical follow-up to the report adopted by the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs in May 2008.

After several weeks of consultations and hard work, the committee members drafted a report on medical and psychological care for veterans.

The committee's report did have a lot to say about medical and psychological care, but I think that it is important for members of Parliament to bear in mind the seventh recommendation:

The Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of National Defence must continue to enhance their work together to ensure as much as possible a seamless transition process from the military to civilian life when a member of the Canadian Forces leaves the military so that the individual, now a veteran, can have access without delay to the veterans benefits and services to which they are entitled.

This is important, but as far as I can tell from various meetings with the committee, it is not necessarily what is happening.

This recommendation suggests that nobody should have 600 names on their caseload.

We think that the committee should study Bill C-201 in light of this recommendation.

The goal of the bill we are considering today is in line with the seventh recommendation in the committee's report. As such, changes to pensions could be one way for Veterans Affairs and National Defence to ensure a seamless transition from the military to civilian life.

I believe that once we have conducted numerous consultations as part of the committee's review of this bill, we will be in a better position to understand the various issues veterans have to deal with. We will then be able to work with them more efficiently to ensure that they receive the kind of retirement they deserve because of the sacrifices made during their terms of service.

● (1845)

[English]

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Madam Speaker, I proudly second the bill introduced by the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore, an act to amend the Canadian Forces Superannuation Act and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Superannuation Act, that would eliminate the Canada pension plan and Canada pension plan disability benefits clawbacks from the pensions of retired or disabled Canadian Forces and RCMP members.

I would like to commend my hon. colleague, the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore, who first introduced the bill in 2005. He has been a tireless advocate for the rights of veterans. He is an example for us all on what it means to really support our troops.

I think many Canadians would be shocked to find out that when retired Canadian Forces or RCMP members reach 65 years of age, their pensions are greatly reduced by CPP clawbacks.

Members of the Canadian Forces and the RCMP put their lives at risk for us on a daily basis. They protect our communities and our country. They proudly serve, and we owe them a debt of gratitude when they complete their service or become disabled.

Private Members' Business

One way that we can show them how much we appreciate their service is to end the awful practice of the clawback of CPP and CPP disability amounts from their pensions. The service pensions of retired CF and RCMP personnel are reduced significantly when the pensioners receive the Canada pension plan at age 65, or when disabled CF or RCMP personnel receive Canada pension plan disability benefits.

In 1966, when the Canadian pension plan was introduced and integrated with the Canadian Forces Superannuation Act and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Superannuation Act, it included a reduction formula. That formula is still being used today and has not been reviewed in 40 years.

At the time these plans were integrated, members were not given options or choices as to how they wished to fund their contribution obligations. A unilateral decision was made to integrate the CFSA-CPP contributions, instead of stacking the plan or increasing their CFSA contributions. At the time, members were unaware of the reductions to their pensions in their retirement years.

• (1850)

[Translation]

Eliminating this clawback will serve to recognize the important contribution these people make to our country. Canadian Forces and RCMP personnel have had to play roles—and lead lives—that are different from those of the rest of the population.

In the course of their work, they had to face danger, go through long separations from their families, put their health and safety on the line, work long hours and begin their family life over again with each transfer, throughout their entire careers.

Because of frequent postings and transfers, the spouses of Canadian Forces members often have difficulty finding and keeping a job, and it is difficult for the spouses to pay into their own pension plan.

[English]

This significant reduction in the service pensions of retired Canadian Forces and RCMP personnel when the pensioners receive the Canada pension plan at age 65 or when disabled Canadian Forces or RCMP personnel receive Canada pension plan disability benefits should not be happening. It is shameful that, for years, both Liberal and Conservative governments have refused to end it.

This is not the message we want to send to the men and women who stand up for Canada and put their lives on the line every day. We want them to know that we are behind them and that their pension plans will no longer be nicked and dimed.

[Translation]

Over 110,000 people from coast to coast to coast signed a petition supporting the initiative, including many retired colonels and generals. The petition was prepared by veterans of the Canadian Forces and the RCMP.

[English]

Several veterans groups, including the Royal Canadian Legion, the Army, Navy & Air Force Veterans in Canada Association and the

Air Force Association of Canada, have unanimously adopted resolutions three years ago supporting this initiative.

As well, the national chairman of The Armed Forces Pensioners'/Annuitants' Association of Canada and Canada's Association for the 50Plus also support this initiative. Despite this, the Conservative government is still denying that this is even a problem. Over the past few years, both provincial and territorial governments have called on the federal government to end this awful practice of clawbacks to RCMP and Canadian Forces pensioners.

[Translation]

Wayne Wannamaker, a retired veteran from Whitehorse, encouraged MLAs in the Yukon Legislative Assembly to pass a motion recently urging the Government of Canada to recognize that the unilateral decision made in 1966 to integrate Canadian Forces and RCMP pension plans into the CPP was unfair and inequitable for retired members of the Canadian Forces and the RCMP, and to remedy this injustice.

In Nova Scotia, a resolution was passed in 2006 calling on the Government of Canada to investigate the issue immediately and put an end to the unfair practice of reducing the benefits paid to Canadian Forces and RCMP veterans.

[English]

Our veterans and retired RCMP members deserve to live out their golden years in financial dignity. I am asking all members of the House to stand up for the troops and members of the RCMP and support this bill.

Mr. Ray Boughen (Palliser, CPC): Madam Speaker, the bill before the House today touches upon an issue that is very important to our government: supporting our men and women in the Canadian Forces and the RCMP.

My remarks today will focus on the Canadian Forces. Our military serves our country proudly and with honour. Many risk their lives daily, whether it is on a search and rescue operation, such as we saw off the coast of Newfoundland, or in the theatre of war in Afghanistan or in the skies above Canada. They are called upon to face situations and make sacrifices that most of us can only imagine. They do what the government asks of them, carrying out their duties with the utmost professionalism and skill.

Our government supports them. In return, we have a responsibility to take care of those who risk so much for us, a responsibility to support members of the Canadian Forces and their families at all stages of their careers. We have recognized the unique stress on military families and have pledged to do more.

Adjournment Proceedings

The Canadian Forces family covenant unveiled last fall makes good use of this promise to enhance family services. We recently announced the establishment of joint personnel support units across the country. These units will give current and former Canadian Forces members a one-stop shop when accessing National Defence and Veterans Affairs programs and services, including pensions.

Our government has also rectified long-standing issues, including agent orange compensation and atomic veterans recognition. Our support is also reflected in the provisions of a generous pension plan offered to retirees, the Canadian Forces pension plan.

I will take a minute to look at that pension plan. This pension plan is tailored to the needs of the military forces and the military members it serves. For instance, the plan features low contribution rates for Canadian Forces members. Canadian Forces members contribute about one-quarter of the cost of the pension plan while the government covers the remaining 75%. The plan is available to reserve members, as well as regular forces members.

It also ensures a predictable and stable pension for the entire duration of retirement. It is a plan that accommodates the career patterns of our sailors, soldiers, airmen and airwomen. Members who often suffer long separations from their families, who are uprooted from their home towns and communities and whose jobs are demanding, both physically and emotionally, not surprisingly then, these military members often retire earlier than we on civilian street.

The Canadian Forces pension plan has features that recognize and facilitate early retirement. It is important to note that pensions are also indexed to the cost of living, maintaining their worth over the decades our veterans may rely on them. Provisions have been made that is a bridge benefit to cover the period from the time of retirement until the age of 65 when members normally begin to draw on their benefits from the Canadian pension plan.

Let us look at those bridge benefits. The bridge effect acts as a link to ensure our veterans receive a relatively stable income prior to the income of their CPP payments. It is not, however, intended to continue after the age of 65 when CPP generally begins. In effect, the CPP takes over from the bridge benefit. There is a transition from source of income, the Canadian Forces pension plan to the CPP and Canadian Forces pension plan.

In many cases, a veteran's pension income will remain essentially the same prior to and after the transition. However, there are two primary reasons why the pension amount could change when the retiree reaches 65.

● (1855)

First, the individual may have chosen to continue working after retiring from the Canadian Forces. This would actually result in higher pension benefits starting at age 65 because of the additional CPP contributions that had been made.

Second, the CPP allowance paid would be less if the retiree chose to draw on it at age 60 rather than at age 65. When the bridge benefit ends at age 65, the veteran who was already receiving a CPP allowance would notice a drop in income.

It is important to note that the decision to start drawing CPP early is a voluntary one on the part of the individual. Either way, Canadian Forces members can rest assured that they are receiving the full benefits that they are entitled to and that they have paid for. There is no deduction.

Veterans receive the generous pensions they deserve. The cessation of the bridge benefit is not unfair or unjust. Rather, it marks a change in the source of pension benefits from CP pension to CPP.

Let us turn for a minute to the government-assisted clarification pension issues. The government realizes that the provision laid out in the pension plan and its interaction with CPP are complex. That is why the government is being proactive in explaining pension provisions. Information about the pension plan and, in particular, the bridge benefit, is available to all members of the Canadian Forces.

For example, second career assisted network seminars are held on bases across the country. These seminars include information about pensions and are offered to the men and women of the Canadian Forces throughout their careers.

● (1900)

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): I regret interrupting the hon. member but 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.

The hon. member will have two and a half minutes remaining to end his debate properly when it resumes.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

[English]

CHALK RIVER NUCLEAR FACILITIES

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Madam Speaker, on March 2, I asked the Minister of Natural Resources whether the government had a plan to ensure a secure supply of medical radioisotopes. This was in the wake of another report coming out of the Chalk River Nuclear Facility, saying that there would be another medical radioisotope shortage. This report came just after the minister had assured the House that Canada's supply of medical radioisotopes was secure.

It is clear that the government has failed to act upon the recommendations of the lessons learned panel to ensure that there is a plan to protect the health and safety of Canadians. Instead, since the beginning of the Chalk River fiasco, the government has sought to cover up its own incompetence. It has interfered with the work of the independent tribunal, which was seeking to get to the bottom of the issue and make recommendations on how to prevent a similar crisis in the future, to protect the health and safety of Canadians and to invest in the research necessary for a truly made in Canada solution.

Adjournment Proceedings

Unfortunately the world has lost confidence in Canada's supply. Other countries are now making plans for their other sources. We clearly have no plan.

The dichotomy between the government and the Obama administration is striking. While President Obama has guaranteed scientific integrity in federal policy-making and made huge investments to science and technology research as a part of the stimulus package, the Conservative government picks its scientific advisers on the basis of ideology rather than evidence, fails to fund innovation and threatens our competitive advantage in the field of cutting edge research.

Rather than examining how lax regulatory regimes lead to a crisis, as we have seen in the debates regarding the banking sector south of the border, the government prefers to dismantle the regulations intended to protect Canadians. Rather than offering whistleblower protection to employees who expose the misuse or suppression of scientific information, the government has threatened the reputation and integrity of scientists and regulators who are simply doing their jobs in seeking to protect the health and safety of Canadians.

As President Obama stated earlier this month, medical miracles do not happen simply by accident. Rather they result from years of painstaking and costly research, from years of lonely trial and error and from a government willing to support its work. By the same token, medical fiascos do not happen by accident either. They result from governments that refuse to support research, refuse to create contingency plans to prepare for and prevent crisis and governments that do not see a role for science, innovation and research in federal policy-making. Therefore, there is no plan for a long-term Canadian innovation solution.

I draw to the attention of the government an article in the *Ottawa Citizen*, on November 17, 2008, by Margaret Munro, which said:

Scientists believe they have hit on a "uniquely Canadian solution" to the world's medical isotope woes.

They say intense beams of light should be able to generate isotopes for nuclear medicine, and eliminate the security risks associated with making the medicines with weapons-grade uranium at the aging nuclear reactor in Chalk River.

They lament that the 58-page report that was released that day recommended the federal government back a "strong and focused" research program to "support proof-of-principle demonstrations" for this exciting photofission solution. It says that half a dozen accelerators would cost "upwards of \$50 million each" to supply isotopes across North America. The 51-year-old Chalk River reactor produces almost half the isotopes in the world and we know it will not last.

The article goes on to say:

It was a short-term fix, say the scientists and nuclear medical specialists, who see photo-fission as a possible long-term solution.

I urge the government to look at this and to spend some money on the research.

• (1905)

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Madam Speaker, the member really needs to work hard to put reality ahead of rhetoric and fiction. We can assure the House and the member for St. Paul's that the health and safety of Canadians is our

government's top priority, and she is well aware of that. We had a discussion earlier this afternoon about health and safety issues and she knows that we put the health and safety of Canadians ahead of everything else.

All members know that AECL's Chalk River reactor plays a vital role in supplying medical isotopes worldwide. Our government has taken decisive steps to assist AECL in meeting these important obligations.

However, we are also aware that a coordinated international approach is required to improve the global system for producing and distributing medical isotopes. That is why, at Canada's request, all the key players in medical isotopes production and distribution met in Paris in January to discuss our common challenges and responsibilities. Eighty participants from 16 countries answered Canada's request and participated in a global dialogue to find global solutions to secure the safe and reliable supply of medical isotopes over both the short and the long term.

Our government was proud to initiate this international forum and our government worked to ensure its success.

I am proud to report that the participants at the Paris meeting agreed to a number of things. They agreed to work collaboratively to foster contingency plans for dealing with disruptions of supply of medical isotopes and to share information about its production. They agreed to coordinate reactor maintenance schedules in order to ensure that facilities are not taken out of service simultaneously so as to not compromise supply.

They agreed to explore options for using existing reactors to increase production of medical isotopes during global shortages; to address impediments to the distribution of isotopes, such as transport restrictions; to increase the transparency of the isotope supply chain and improve the efficiency of the distribution system; and to work closely with the medical community to explore options for efficient patient scheduling and the best utilization of the available isotope supply.

In addition, participants agreed to support the creation of a new working group under the leadership of the Nuclear Energy Association to carry forward this important agenda.

AECL Chalk River is responding to global demand by ramping up production of medical isotopes by nearly 20% to help alleviate an isotope shortfall, mainly in Europe, due to reactor maintenance issues.

At the same time, AECL is providing MDS Nordion with sufficient supplies of isotopes to meet nearly all of the company's North American demand.

Adjournment Proceedings

As well, Natural Resources Canada, in partnership with Health Canada, is continuing to monitor the distribution of isotope supplies to ensure that AECL and isotope distributors continue to meet the needs of Canadians and Canada's medical community.

As all members can see, the health and safety of Canadians is a top priority of this government.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Madam Speaker, I fail to hear anything new and exciting about the future.

We know that the task force said that photofission will eliminate the need for a highly enriched uranium, or HEU. The weapons grade uranium is now imported to Chalk River, and the licence will expire in 2011, under tight security from Tennessee. The U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission licensed the export but is under huge pressure to halt these shipments because of the proliferation and terrorism concerns.

I ask the government to look to the future for a change and to fund the absolutely necessary research that would allow the support of proof of principle demonstration of this photofission.

• (1910)

Mr. David Anderson: Madam Speaker, I do not know why the member opposite cannot celebrate Canadian success. We talked to her about the fact that we did initiate an international forum to discuss these very issues. I will go through again what happened there. It was very successful.

We worked collaboratively to foster contingency plans to deal with disruptions in supply of medical isotopes. She asked about that. We coordinated reactor maintenance schedules around the world to ensure that facilities would not be taken out of service so the supply would not be compromised. We explored options for using existing reactors to increase the production of medical isotopes around the world. That should make her much happier than she is. We talked about addressing impediments to the distribution of isotopes in order to ensure there is a steady supply.

Those are the kinds of things we have done and we are proud of them.

[*Translation*]

SOCIAL HOUSING

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes (Brossard—La Prairie, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to clarify my question about the housing crisis in our country.

The Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation announced a significant decrease in housing starts in January 2009, compared to January 2008. This trend is continuing, especially in urban areas. The slowdown has led to major job losses in the construction industry.

In responding to my question, the minister hid behind his government's recent economic action plan and said that the money would flow. The government actually had the means and the money to take action earlier, but did nothing to prevent the collapse of the housing market. The current government makes repeated announcements about funding for infrastructure projects. However, in reality, it has not lived up to its commitments and has not provided the funding for tangible assistance to the housing sector.

This is confirmed by the federal government's public accounts records, which indicate that there is more than \$2 billion in unused infrastructure money. This unused amount will undoubtedly increase during the 2008-09 fiscal year. Only a fraction of the \$926 million earmarked for infrastructure programs under the building Canada fund for the current year has been allocated. An additional \$1,141 billion in funding for infrastructure programs from previous Liberal budgets will expire.

[*English*]

In 2007 the Conservative government launched its \$8.8 billion building Canada fund. In its first year however, the building Canada fund flowed zero funding to infrastructure projects. The Federation of Canadian Municipalities estimates that the BCF has flowed less than \$300 million of the \$1.5 billion announced in its first two years of budgeted spending.

The money is in the bank and the housing industry is in crisis, yet the government will not let the money be spent. Why?

[*Translation*]

Since coming to power in 2006, and up to March 31, 2008, the Conservatives' chronic inability to keep their word when it comes to helping our economy resulted in the disappearance of \$3 billion in economic stimulus that was wholly financed and has prevented the creation of jobs.

Job losses continue to mount in the construction sector. In early November 2008, when the Conservatives finally realized that there was an economic slowdown and that our stock market was in a free fall, they began to speed up funding for infrastructure, particularly the housing sector. Their promises have not resulted in spending or assistance for the housing industry.

[*English*]

Furthermore, the government has done nothing to address its own ongoing mismanagement of previously allocated funds. Conservatives have committed to throwing more money at this problem in budget 2009, but will the money ever get spent or will we simply see more mismanagement on behalf of the government?

[*Translation*]

Why is this government not spending the money? We know that there was money for housing in the last budget. Why is this money, already approved by this Parliament, not being immediately turned over to a housing industry in serious trouble?

Adjournment Proceedings

[English]

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Madam Speaker, I certainly welcome the member's remarks, although at the same time, her party has been long on rhetoric and short on action. She says that nothing has been done. That is not quite correct. The facts show that a lot has been done and a number of initiatives have been taken not only through the budget but through funding.

Having a safe and affordable place to call home is important to all Canadians. It is fundamental to Canadians' well-being and it is important to communities. Our government has taken a multi-pronged approach with the specific purpose of providing housing for all Canadians from all walks of life in all parts of our country while at the same time stimulating our economy and ensuring that jobs are created. In Canada the housing needs of 80% of Canadians are met through the marketplace. Canadians use their own resources either by obtaining a mortgage and buying a home or by renting.

For those Canadians who need some help to find housing they can afford, our government provides \$1.7 billion each and every year in support of some 630,000 existing social housing households. In September 2008, our government committed more than \$1.9 billion over five years to improve and build new affordable housing and to help the homeless. Building on this, Canada's economic action plan will provide a significant investment of \$2 billion over two years to build new social housing and to repair and energy retrofit existing social housing.

These investments will improve the quality of life for low-income families, aboriginal Canadians, seniors, persons with disabilities and people living in the north. These are real actions and real help for those who most need it. This new funding will also help the economy. Building and renovating homes is a good way to get people working quickly. Most of the materials and supplies for these activities are made right here in Canada. In order to ensure quick implementation of our action plan respecting these measures, we will use existing programs and agreements. In this way, funding for social housing projects will flow quickly to those who need the help most.

I am especially pleased that Bill C-10, the Budget Implementation Act, was passed and received royal assent recently. It was not without some opposition in the other house and members of the opposition stalling its passage. However, its passage means that these funds will begin to flow very soon and that will provide help to Canadians who need it the most and who live in social housing.

We know that housing builds strong communities. These communities need strong infrastructure to thrive. In addition, Canada's economic action plan will provide up to \$2 billion in direct low-cost loans to municipalities over two years through CMHC for housing related infrastructure projects in towns and cities across the country. There will be a focus on funding projects that are shovel ready. As this is a targeted, short-term, temporary measure intended to create jobs quickly, it will happen as the funds begin to flow. The types of eligible projects include sewers, water lines and neighbourhood regeneration projects.

Our economic action plan also includes measures that support home ownership in the housing sector. Through the insured mortgage purchase program, CMHC will take further steps to ensure there is stable long-term funding to lenders, allowing them to continue lending to Canadian consumers and businesses.

In addition, both the housing sector and homeowners will benefit from several important measures our government is taking. These measures include the home renovation tax credit that will provide up to \$1,350 in tax relief, the first-time home buyers' tax credit, funds to enhance the energy efficiency of our homes, and increases to the withdrawal limits under the home buyers' plan. These are very positive, concrete steps that our government is taking.

• (1915)

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes: Madam Speaker, the problem is that the money has not been flowing. That is the whole point. We are asking the minister why the funds budgeted in previous budgets have not been allocated and actually spent. That is the question. The three previous budgets already allocated this money. Why has it not been used? More specifically, the building Canada fund has not in any way been spent the way it was meant to be spent.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Madam Speaker, it is rather interesting that the member has said that the money has not been flowing. When we asked that \$3 billion actually flow between now and the beginning of June, members of her party were opposed to that happening. They were blowing hot and cold at the same.

We have not only allocated funds but they are in significant numbers. When one looks at the economic action plan, there is \$7.8 billion in total to build quality housing for Canadians. In addition, about \$400 million of that is specifically targeted to seniors and \$75 million to those with disabilities. In two years—

Adjournment Proceedings

•(1920)

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Order. The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted.

Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:20 p.m.)

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